



SANGFORD SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS



Words that sound alike or look alike (moral/morale) often confuse students, especially those using spell checkers. This lengthy list of commonly confused words with simple definitions will help you decide which spelling fits your sentence.

accept	to receive
except	with the exclusion of
advice	recommendation (noun)
advise	to recommend (verb)
adverse	unfavorable
averse	opposed to
affect	to influence (verb); emotional response (noun)
effect	result (noun); to cause (verb)
aisle	space between rows
isle	island
allude	to make indirect reference to
elude	to avoid
allusion	indirect reference
illusion	false idea, misleading appearance
already	by this time
all ready	fully prepared
altar	sacred platform or place
alter	to change
altogether	thoroughly
all together	everyone/everything in one place
a lot	a quantity; many of something
allot	to divide or portion out
angel	supernatural being, good person
angle	shape made by joining 2 straight lines
are	plural form of "to be"
our	plural form of "my"
accent	pronunciation common to a region
ascent	the act of rising or climbing
assent	consent, agreement
assistance	help
assistants	helpers

bare	nude, unadorned
bear	to carry; an animal
beside	close to; next to
besides	except for; in addition
boar	a wild male pig
bore	to drill a hole through
board	piece of wood
bored	uninterested
born	brought into life
borne	past participle of "to bear" (carry)
breath	air taken in (noun)
breathe	to take in air (verb)
brake	device for stopping
break	destroy; make into pieces
buy	to purchase
by	next to; through the agency of
canvas	heavy cloth
canvass	to take a survey; a survey
capital	major city
capitol	government building
choose	to pick
chose	past tense of "to choose"
clothes	garments
cloths	pieces of fabric
coarse	rough
course	path; series of lectures
complement	something that completes
compliment	praise, flattery
conscience	sense of morality
conscious	awake, aware
corps	regulated group
corpse	dead body
council	governing body
counsel	advice; to give advice

dairy	place where milk products are processed
diary	personal journal
descent	downward movement
dissent	disagreement
dessert	final, sweet course in a meal
desert	to abandon; dry, sandy area
device	a plan; a tool or utensil
devise	to create
discreet	modest, prudent behavior
discrete	a separate thing, distinct
do	a verb indicating performance or execution of a task
dew	water droplets condensed from air
due	as a result of
dominant	commanding, controlling
dominate	to control
die	to lose life; one of a pair of dice
dye	to change or add color
dyeing	changing or adding color
dying	losing life
elicit	to draw out
illicit	illegal, forbidden
eminent	prominent
imminent	about to happen
envelop	to surround (verb)
envelope	container for a letter (noun)
everyday	routine, commonplace, ordinary (adj.)
every day	each day, succession (adj. + noun)
fair	light skinned; just, honest; a carnival
fare	money for transportation; food
farther	at a greater(measurable) distance
further	in greater(non-measurable) depth
formally	conventionally, with ceremony
formerly	previously
forth	forward
fourth	number four in a list

gorilla	animal in ape family
guerrilla	soldier specializing in surprise attacks
hear	to sense sound by ear
here	in this place
heard	past tense of "to hear"
herd	group of animals
hoard	a hidden fund or supply, a cache
horde	a large group or crowd, swarm
hole	opening
whole	complete; an entire thing
human	relating to the species <i>homo sapiens</i>
humane	compassionate
its	possessive form of "it"
it's	contraction for "it is"
knew	past tense of "know"
new	fresh, not yet old
know	to comprehend
no	negative
later	after a time
latter	second one of two things
lead	heavy metal substance; to guide
led	past tense of "to lead"
lessen	to decrease
lesson	something learned and/or taught
lightning	storm-related electricity
lightening	making lighter
loose	unbound, not tightly fastened
lose	to misplace
maybe	perhaps (adv.)
may be	might be (verb)
meat	animal flesh
meet	to encounter
mete	to measure; to distribute
metal	a hard organic substance
medal	a flat disk stamped with a design
mettle	courage, spirit, energy

miner	a worker in a mine
minor	underage person (noun); less important (adj.)
moral	distinguishing right from wrong; lesson of a fable or story
morale	attitude or outlook usually of a group
passed	past tense of "to pass"
past	at a previous time
patience	putting up with annoyances
patients	people under medical care
peace	absence of war
piece	part of a whole; musical arrangement
peak	point, pinnacle, maximum
peek	to peer through or look furtively
perch	fit of resentment, feeling of wounded vanity
pedal	the foot lever of a bicycle or car
petal	a flower segment
peddle	to sell
personal	intimate; owned by a person
personnel	employees
plain	simple, unadorned
plane	to shave wood; aircraft (noun)
precede	to come before
proceed	to continue
presence	attendance; being at hand
presents	gifts
principal	foremost (adj.); administrator of a school (noun)
principle	moral conviction, basic truth
quiet	silent, calm
quite	very
rain	water drops falling; to fall like rain
reign	to rule
rein	strap to control an animal (noun); to guide or control (verb)
raise	to lift up
raze	to tear down
rational	having reason or understanding
rationale	principles of opinion, beliefs

respectfully	with respect
respectively	in that order
reverend	title given to clergy; deserving respect
reverent	worshipful
right	correct; opposite of left
rite	ritual or ceremony
write	to put words on paper
road	path
rode	past tense of "to ride"
scene	place of an action; segment of a play
seen	viewed; past participle of "to see"
sense	perception, understanding
since	measurement of past time; because
sight	scene, view, picture
site	place, location
cite	to document or quote (verb)
stationary	standing still
stationery	writing paper
straight	unbending
strait	narrow or confining; a waterway
taught	past tense of "to teach"
taut	tight
than	besides
then	at that time; next
their	possessive form of "they"
there	in that place
they're	contraction for "they are"
through	finished; into and out of
threw	past tense of "to throw"
thorough	complete
to	toward
too	also; very (used to show emphasis)
two	number following one
track	course, road
tract	pamphlet; plot of ground
waist	midsection of the body
waste	discarded material; to squander

waive	forgo, renounce
wave	flutter, move back and forth
weak	not strong
week	seven days
weather	climatic condition
whether	if
wether	a neutered male sheep
where	in which place
were	past tense of "to be"
which	one of a group
witch	female sorcerer
whose	possessive for "of who"
who's	contraction for "who is"
your	possessive for "of you"
you're	contraction for "you are"
yore	time long past

Top 30 Commonly Confused Words in English

Everyone knows the problem with spell-check: your word might be spelled right, but it may be the wrong word. English is full of confusing words that sound alike but are spelled differently. It's also full of words that share similar (but not identical) meanings that are easy to misuse. Below are some of the most commonly confused and misused words in English.

Advice/Advise *Advice* is a noun: Chester gave Posey good advice. *Advise* is a verb: Chester advised Posey to avoid the questionable chicken salad.

Affect/Effect *Affect* is usually a verb: Chester's humming affected Posey's ability to concentrate. *Effect* is usually a noun: Chester was sorry for the effect his humming had. If you find yourself stumped about which one to use in a sentence, try substituting the word "alter" or "result." If "alter" fits (Chester's humming altered Posey's ability to concentrate), use *affect*. If "result" fits (Chester was sorry for the result his humming had), use *effect*.

Among/Amongst *Among* is the preferred and most common variant of this word in American English. *Amongst* is more common in British English. Neither version is wrong, but *amongst* may seem fussy to American readers.

Among/Between *Among* expresses a collective or loose relationship of several items: Chester found a letter hidden among the papers on the desk. *Between* expresses the relationship of one thing to another thing or to many other things: Posey spent all day carrying messages between Chester and the other students. The idea that *between* can be used only when talking about two things is a myth—it's perfectly correct to use *between* if you are talking about multiple binary relationships.

Assure/Ensure/Insure *Assure* means to tell someone that something will definitely happen or is definitely true: Posey assured Chester that no one would cheat at Bingo. *Ensure* means to guarantee or make sure of something: Posey took steps to ensure that no one cheated at Bingo. *Insure* means to take out an insurance policy: Posey was glad the Bingo hall was insured against damage caused by rowdy Bingo players.

Breath/Breathe *Breath* is a noun; it's the air that goes in and out of your lungs: Chester held his breath while Posey skateboarded down the stairs. *Breathe* is a verb; it means to exhale or inhale: After Posey's spectacular landing, Chester had to remind himself to breathe again.

Capital/Capitol *Capital* has several meanings. It can refer to an uppercase letter, money, or a city where a seat of government is located: Chester visited Brasília, the capital of Brazil. *Capitol* means the building where a legislature meets: Posey visited the cafe in the basement of the capitol after watching a bill become a law.

Complement/Compliment A *complement* is something that completes something else. It's often used to describe things that go well together: Chester's lime green boots were a perfect complement to his jacket. A *compliment* is a nice thing to say: Posey received many compliments on her purple fedora.

Disinterested/Uninterested *Disinterested* means impartial: A panel of disinterested judges who had never met the contestants before judged the singing contest. *Uninterested* means bored or not wanting to be involved with something: Posey was uninterested in attending Chester's singing class.

Defence/Defense *Defense* is standard in American English. *Defence* is found mainly in British English.

Emigrate/Immigrate *Emigrate* means to move away from a city or country to live somewhere else: Chester's grandfather emigrated from Canada sixty years ago. *Immigrate* means to move into a country from somewhere else: Posey's sister immigrated to Ireland in 2004.

E.g./I.e. These two Latin abbreviations are often mixed up, but *e.g.* means "for example," while *i.e.* means "that is."

Empathy/Sympathy *Empathy* is the ability to understand another person's perspective or feelings. *Sympathy* is a feeling of sorrow for someone else's suffering. A *sympathizer* is someone who agrees with a particular ideal or cause.

Farther/Further *Farther* refers to physical distance: Posey can run farther than Chester. *Further* refers to metaphorical distance: Chester is further away from finishing his project than Posey is.

Flaunt/Flout *Flaunt* means to show off: Chester flaunted his stylish new outfit. *Flout* means to defy, especially in a way that shows scorn: Posey flouted the business-casual dress code by wearing a tiara and flip-flops.

Gaff/Gaffe A *gaff* is a type of spear or hook with a long handle: Chester completed his sailor costume with a gaff borrowed from his uncle's fishing boat. A *gaffe* is a faux pas or social misstep: Posey made a gaffe when she accidentally called Chester by the wrong name.

Gray/Grey *Gray* is the standard American English spelling. *Grey* is the standard British English spelling.

Historic/Historical *Historic* means famous, important, and influential: Chester visited the beach in Kitty Hawk where the Wright brothers made their historic first airplane flight. *Historical* means related to history: Posey donned a historical bonnet for the renaissance fair.

Imply/Infer *Imply* means to hint at something without saying it directly: Chester implied that Posey was in trouble, but he wouldn't tell her why. *Infer* means to deduce something that hasn't been stated directly: Posey inferred that Chester was nervous about something from the way he kept looking over his shoulder.

It's/Its *It's* is a contraction of “it is”: Posey needs to pack for her trip because it's only two days away. *Its* is a possessive pronoun that means “belonging to it”: Chester is obsessed with both the book and its author.

Lay/Lie *To lay* means to put or to place. One way to remember this is that there is an a in both *to lay* and *to place*: Posey will lay out her outfit before she goes to bed. *To lie* means to recline. One way to remember this is that there is an e in both *to lie* and *to recline*: Chester will lie down for a nap. Be careful, though. The past tense of *to lay* is *laid*: Posey laid out her outfit. The past tense of *to lie* is *lay*: Chester lay down for a nap over an hour ago.

Lead/Led *Lead*, when it rhymes with “bed,” refers to a type of metal: Posey wore a lead apron while the dentist X-rayed her teeth. *Led* is the past tense of the verb *to lead*, which means to guide or to be first: Chester led the way.

Learned/Learnt *Learned* is standard in American English. *Learnt* is standard in British English.

Loose/Lose *Loose* is usually an adjective: Posey discovered that the cows were loose. *Lose* is always a verb. It means to misplace something or to be unvictorious in a game or contest: Chester was careful not to lose his ticket.

Principal/Principle *Principal* can be a noun or adjective. As a noun, it refers to the person in charge of a school or organization: Posey was called into the principal's office. As an adjective, it means most important: The principal reason for this meeting is to brainstorm ideas for the theme of Chester's birthday party. A *principle* (always a noun) is a firmly held belief or ideal: Posey doesn't like surprise parties as a matter of principle.

Inquiry/Enquiry *Inquiry* and *enquiry* both mean “a request for information.” *Inquiry* is the standard American English spelling. *Enquiry* is the British spelling.

Stationary/Stationery *Stationary* means unmoving: The revolving door remained stationary because Posey was pushing on it the wrong way. *Stationery* refers to letter writing materials and especially to high quality paper: Chester printed his résumé on his best stationery.

Than/Then *Than* is used for comparisons: Posey runs faster than Chester. *Then* is used to indicate time or sequence: Posey took off running, and then Chester came along and finished her breakfast.

Their/There/They're *Their* is the possessive form of “they”: Chester and Posey took their time. *There* indicates a place: It took them an hour to get there. *They're* is a contraction of “they are”: Are Chester and Posey coming? They're almost here.

To/Too *To* is a preposition that can indicate direction: Posey walked to school. She said hello to Chester when she saw him. *To* is also used in the infinitive form of verbs: Chester waited until the last minute to do his homework. *Too* is used as an intensifier, and also means “also”: Posey waited too long to do her homework, too.

Toward/Towards *Toward* is standard in American English. *Towards* is standard in British English.

Who's/Whose *Who's* is a contraction of “who is”: Who's calling Chester at this hour? *Whose* is a possessive pronoun that means “belonging to [someone]”: Chester, whose phone hadn't stopped ringing all morning, barely ate anything for breakfast.

Commonly Confused Words

Words that sound alike or nearly alike but have different meanings often cause writers trouble. Here are a few of the most common pairs with correct definitions and examples:

ACCEPT-to receive

ex: He accepts defeat well.

EXCEPT-to take or leave out

ex: Please take all the books off the shelf except for the red one.

AFFECT-to influence

ex: Lack of sleep affects the quality of your work.

EFFECT-n., result, v., to accomplish

ex: The subtle effect of the lighting made the room look ominous.

ex: Can the university effect such a change without disrupting classes?

A LOT (two words)-many.

ALOT (one word)-Not the correct form.

ALLUSION-an indirect reference

ex: The professor made an allusion to Virginia Woolf's work.

ILLUSION-a false perception of reality

ex: They saw a mirage: that is a type of illusion one sees in the desert.

ALL READY-prepared

ex: Dinner was all ready when the guests arrived.

ALREADY-by this time

ex: The turkey was already burned when the guests arrived.

ALTOGETHER-entirely

ex: Altogether, I thought that the student's presentation was well planned.

ALL TOGETHER-gathered, with everything in one place

ex: We were all together at the family reunion last spring.

APART-to be separated

ex: The chain-link fence kept the angry dogs apart. OR My old car fell apart before we reached California.

A PART-to be joined with

ex: The new course was a part of the new field of study at the university. OR A part of this plan involves getting started at dawn.

ASCENT- climb

ex: The plane's ascent made my ears pop.

ASSENT-agreement

ex: The martian assented to undergo experiments.

BREATH-noun, air inhaled or exhaled

ex: You could see his breath in the cold air.

BREATHE-verb, to inhale or exhale

ex: If you don't breathe, then you are dead.

CAPITAL-seat of government. Also financial resources.

ex: The capital of Virginia is Richmond.

ex: The firm had enough capital to build the new plant.

CAPITOL-the actual building in which the legislative body meets

ex: The governor announced his resignation in a speech given at the capitol today.

CITE-to quote or document

ex: I cited ten quotes from the same author in my paper.

SIGHT-vision

ex: The sight of the American flag arouses different emotions in different parts of the world.

SITE-position or place

ex: The new office building was built on the site of a cemetery.

COMPLEMENT-noun, something that completes; verb, to complete

ex: A nice dry white wine complements a seafood entree.

COMPLIMENT-noun, praise; verb, to praise

ex: The professor complimented Betty on her proper use of a comma.

CONSCIENCE-sense of right and wrong

ex: The student's conscience kept him from cheating on the exam.

CONSCIOUS-awake

ex: I was conscious when the burglar entered the house.

COUNCIL-a group that consults or advises

ex: The men and women on the council voted in favor of an outdoor concert in their town.

COUNSEL-to advise

ex: The parole officer counseled the convict before he was released.

ELICIT-to draw or bring out

ex: The teacher elicited the correct response from the student.

ILLICIT-illegal

ex: The Columbian drug lord was arrested for his illicit activities.

EMINENT-famous, respected

ex: The eminent podiatrist won the Physician of the Year award.

IMMANENT-inherent or intrinsic

ex: The meaning of the poem was immanent, and not easily recognized.

IMMINENT-ready to take place

ex: A fight between my sister and me is imminent from the moment I enter my house.

ITS-of or belonging to it

ex: The baby will scream as soon as its mother walks out of the room.

IT'S-contraction for it is

ex: It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

LEAD-noun, a type of metal

ex: Is that pipe made of lead?

LED-verb, past tense of the verb "to lead"

ex: She led the campers on an over-night hike.

LIE-to lie down (a person or animal. hint: people can tell lies)

ex: I have a headache, so I'm going to lie down for a while.

(also lying, lay, has/have lain--The dog has lain in the shade all day; yesterday, the dog lay there for twelve hours).

LAY-to lay an object down.

ex: "Lay down that shotgun, Pappy!" The sheriff demanded of the crazed moonshiner.

ex: The town lay at the foot of the mountain.

(also laying, laid, has/have laid--At that point, Pappy laid the shotgun on the ground).

LOSE--verb, to misplace or not win

ex: Mom glared at Mikey. "If you lose that new lunchbox, don't even think of coming home!"

LOOSE--adjective, to not be tight; verb (rarely used)--to release

ex: The burglar's pants were so loose that he was sure to lose the race with the cop chasing him.

ex: While awaiting trial, he was never set loose from jail because no one would post his bail.

NOVEL-noun, a book that is a work of fiction. Do not use "novel" for nonfiction; use "book" or "work."

ex: Mark Twain wrote his novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* when he was already well known, but before he published many other works of fiction and nonfiction.

PASSED-verb, past tense of "to pass," to have moved

ex: The tornado passed through the city quickly, but it caused great damage.

PAST-belonging to a former time or place

ex: Who was the past president of Microsquish Computers?

ex: Go past the fire station and turn right.

PRECEDE-to come before

ex: Pre-writing precedes the rough draft of good papers.

PROCEED-to go forward

ex: He proceeded to pass back the failing grades on the exam/

Thanks to Shelley for showing us we had "proceed" misspelled as "procede" in one spot!

PRINCIPAL-adjective, most important; noun, a person who has authority

ex: The principal ingredient in chocolate chip cookies is chocolate chips.

ex: The principal of the school does the announcements each morning.

PRINCIPLE-a general or fundamental truth

ex: The study was based on the principle of gravity.

QUOTE-verb, to cite

ex: I would like to quote Dickens in my next paper.

QUOTATION-noun, the act of citing

ex: The book of famous quotations inspired us all.

RELUCTANT-to hesitate or feel unwilling

ex: We became reluctant to drive further and eventually turned back when the road became icy.

RETICENT-to be reluctant to speak; to be reserved in manner. Note that *The American Heritage Dictionary* lists "reluctant" as a synonym for "reticent," as the third definition. For nuance and variety, we recommend "reticent" for reluctance when speaking or showing emotion (after all, even extroverts can become reluctant).

ex: They called him reticent, because he rarely spoke. But he listened carefully and only spoke when he had something important to say.

STATIONARY-standing still

ex: The accident was my fault because I ran into a stationary object.

STATIONERY-writing paper

ex: My mother bought me stationery that was on recycled paper.

SUPPOSED TO-correct form for "to be obligated to" or "presumed to" NOT "suppose to"

SUPPOSE-to guess or make a conjecture

ex: Do you suppose we will get to the airport on time? When is our plane supposed to arrive? We are supposed to check our bags before we board, but I suppose we could do that at the curb and save time.

THAN-use with comparisons

ex: I would rather go out to eat than eat at the dining hall.

THEN-at that time, or next

ex: I studied for my exam for seven hours, and then I went to bed.

THEIR-possessive form of they

ex: Their house is at the end of the block.

THERE-indicates location (hint: think of "here and there")

ex: There goes my chance of winning the lottery!

THEY'RE-contraction for "they are"

ex: They're in Europe for the summer--again!

THROUGH-by means of; finished; into or out of

ex: He plowed right through the other team's defensive line.

THREW-past tense of throw

ex: She threw away his love letters.

THOROUGH-careful or complete

ex: John thoroughly cleaned his room; there was not even a speck of dust when he finished.

THOUGH-however; nevertheless

ex: He's really a sweetheart though he looks tough on the outside.

THRU-abbreviated slang for through; not appropriate in standard writing

ex: We're thru for the day!

TO-toward

ex: I went to the University of Richmond.

TOO-also, or excessively

ex: He drank too many screwdrivers and was unable to drive home.

TWO-a number

ex: Only two students did not turn in the assignment.

WHO-pronoun, referring to a person or persons

ex: Jane wondered how Jack, who is so smart, could be having difficulties in Calculus.

WHICH-pronoun, replacing a singular or plural thing(s);not used to refer to persons

ex: Which section of history did you get into?

THAT-used to refer to things or a group or class of people

ex: I lost the book that I bought last week.

WHO-used as a subject or as a subject complement (see above)

ex: John is the man who can get the job done.

WHOM-used as an object

ex: Whom did Sarah choose as her replacement?