

Frequently Misused Words

Accept/Except

Accept is a verb meaning to agree or receive willingly, to allow. **Except** is a preposition that means to exclude or omit, or (more rarely and usually in the past tense) a verb meaning to leave out.

I will ~~except~~ **accept** the job offer.

I like the new car, ~~accept~~ **except** for the color. I dislike my teammates, present company **excepted**.

Advise/Advice

Advise is a verb meaning to recommend or give an opinion. **Advice** is a noun meaning recommendation

The professor's job was to ~~advise~~ **advise** her.

My ~~advise~~ **advice** is that you eat green vegetables daily.

Affect/Effect

Affect is a verb meaning to influence. **Effect** is a noun meaning the result of an action or (more rarely) a verb meaning to bring about.

Your attitude will ~~effect~~ **affect** your performance in school.

Lack of sleep has a negative ~~affect~~ **effect** on test scores. Gathering signatures on a petition is one way to **effect** change.

All together/Altogether

All together means all in a group. **Altogether** is an adverb meaning completely or in all.

The team traveled ~~altogether~~ **all together** to the tournament.

He was ~~all together~~ **altogether** correct about the outcome of the game.

Beside/Besides

Beside is a preposition meaning next to. **Besides** is a preposition meaning in addition to or an adverb meaning moreover.

Are you comfortable sitting ~~besides~~ **beside** a bear?

~~Beside~~ **Besides** bees, hornets also sting.

Capitol/Capital

Capitol is a noun referring to a building where government offices are located. **Capital** is an adjective meaning the most important or a noun referring to a city or letter.

The Texas ~~capital~~ **Capitol** is taller than the ~~capital~~ **Capitol** building Washington D.C.

The Virginians emerged with the nation's ~~capitol~~ **capital**.

Device/Devise

Device is a noun meaning a machine that was invented to fulfill a particular purpose. **Devise** is a verb meaning to invent, design, or construct.

A cell phone is a useful ~~devise~~ **device**.

The labyrinth he was to ~~devise~~ **devise** would be inescapable.

Cite/Site/Sight

Cite is a verb meaning to quote or reference. **Site** is a noun referring to a particular location. **Sight** is both a noun and a verb relating to the ability to see.

Be sure to ~~site~~ **cite** your sources.

The ~~sight~~ **site** of the monument has yet to be approved.

The optometrist said that she had excellent ~~site~~ **sight**. Three months into the voyage, the sailors finally ~~cite~~ **sight** land.

Complement/Compliment

Complement is a verb (or, more rarely, a noun) referring to the act of completing or bringing to perfection.

Compliment is a verb or noun meaning to praise or flatter.

The light salad ~~complimented~~ **complemented** the heavy stew.

She received a ~~complement~~ **compliment** on her work. His date ~~complemented~~ **complimented** his tie.

Lose/Loose

Lose is a verb meaning to be unable to find or to be defeated. **Loose** is an adjective meaning not tight or, more rarely, a verb meaning to free or set loose.

Put the keys to the house in a safe place so you will not ~~lose~~ **lose** them.

Barbed wire can catch on ~~lose~~ **loose** clothing. ~~Lose~~ **Loose** the hounds!

Past/Passed

Past is a preposition meaning beyond or a noun/adjective referring to time gone by. **Passed** is the past tense of the verb “to pass.”

It is ~~passed~~ **past** midnight; you can’t change the ~~passed~~ **past**.

Congress ~~past~~ **passed** a new law yesterday.

Principal/Principle

Principal is an adjective meaning first in order of importance and a noun meaning the leader of a school or an amount of money invested, lent, or borrowed. **Principle** is a noun meaning a moral law or general truth.

The ~~principle~~ **principal** crop in 19th century Ireland was the potato; the ~~principle~~ **principal** lectured our whole class.

You’ve got to stick to your ~~principals~~ **principles**.

Stationary/Stationery

Stationary is an adjective meaning motionless. **Stationery** is a noun that refers to writing supplies.

He ordered us to move, but we remained ~~stationery~~ **stationary**.

I sent my grandmother a letter written on the ~~stationary~~ **stationery** she gave me.

Tenant/Tenet

Tenant is a person who pays rent to occupy a building. **Tenet** is a principle (see above) or doctrine.

The ~~tenets~~ **tenants** complained about the high rent.

Racial equality was one of the central ~~tenants~~ **tenets** of the Civil Rights Movement.

It’s/Its

It’s is a contraction of “it is.” **Its** is a possessive personal pronoun meaning belonging to it.

My Chihuahua wears a sweater when ~~its~~ **it’s** (it is) cold outside. ~~It’s~~ **Its** (the Chihuahua’s) sweater is green and pink.

Their/There/They’re

Their is the possessive form of they/them. **There** is an adverb meaning at. **They’re** is a contraction of “they are.”

~~Their~~ **There** they are! ~~There~~ **They’re** headed for the ~~they’re~~ **their** hideout in the canyon!

Whose/Who’s

Whose is the possessive form of who. **Who’s** is a contraction of “who is.”

~~Who’s~~ **Whose** birthday is it? ~~Whose~~ **Who’s** coming to the party?

Your/You’re

Your is a possessive pronoun meaning belonging to you. **You’re** is a contraction of “you are.”

Watch ~~you’re~~ **your** tone. I don’t like what ~~your~~ **you’re** implying.