Some words are frequently used incorrectly in academic writing because the words are often confused with similar-sounding and/or similar-looking words. Listed below are words that are often confused (affect/effect, precede/proceed, than/then), misspelled (it’s/its, their/there/they’re, whose/who’s), or misused (farther/further, less/fewer, who/whom/which/that) followed by a sentence with the correct usage. It is important to note that confused or misused words are often different parts of speech.

### a
is an article used before a word that begins with a consonant sound

He owns a horse, a car, and a boat.

### an
is an article used before a word that begins with a vowel sound

In an hour, Sue will eat an egg for breakfast. (the h is silent in hour, so the first sound you hear is a vowel)

### and
is a conjunction joining words, phrases, or clauses

John and Mary went for a ride in a buggy.

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### accept
is a verb that means "to receive" or "to get"

She accepted his token of appreciation.

### except
is a preposition that means "not included" or "excluded"

Everyone went skiing except Bertha.

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### advice
is a noun that means "counsel" or "opinion"

Don't accept your mother-in-law's advice.

### advise
is a verb that means "to offer an opinion" or "to offer counsel"

In-laws often try to advise newlyweds.

### affect
is a verb that means "to influence"

Children can be deeply affected by the death of a pet.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>effect</td>
<td>as a noun means &quot;result&quot; or &quot;consequence&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smoking has many bad side <strong>effects</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as a verb means &quot;to cause&quot; or &quot;to bring about&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The negotiators labored all night to <strong>effect</strong> a compromise between the opposing unions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all ready</td>
<td>means &quot;everyone (or everything) is ready&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The foreman told the judge, &quot;We're <strong>all ready</strong> to give our verdict, sir.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>already</td>
<td>means &quot;previously, before, or by a specific time&quot;; it is an adverb</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The paramedics were <strong>already</strong> at the scene of the accident.</td>
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<tr>
<td>allot</td>
<td>means &quot;to distribute, assign, or give&quot;; it is a verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The camp director <strong>allotted</strong> one bowl of rice and one cup of milk to each refugee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td>means &quot;plenty of, much of&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He received <strong>a lot</strong> of money for his bar mitzvah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Note</strong>: <strong>a lot</strong> is never spelled as one word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>among</td>
<td>is a preposition used when discussing at least three ideas or concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The budget is divided <strong>among</strong> many competing claimants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between</td>
<td>is a preposition used when discussing two concepts or ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let's decide <strong>between</strong> the movies and the party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>also means&quot;in the middle&quot;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hunter College is <strong>between</strong> Park and Lexington on 68th Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>borrow</td>
<td>means &quot;to take something with the intention of returning it&quot;; it is a verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many students have to <strong>borrow</strong> money from the government to pay their tuition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**lend** means "to allow someone to use something, on the condition that it is returned"; it is a verb

Many parents lend their children the down payment for their first house.

**bought** means "purchased"; it is the past tense of the verb to buy

They bought a new house.

**brought** means "to take from here to there"; it is the past tense of the verb to bring

They brought flowers to their mother's house.

**breathe** is a verb; it means "to inhale and exhale"

When she has an asthma attack, she can't breathe.

**breath** is a noun; it means "air that is inhaled or exhaled"

You need to hold your breath when swimming underwater.

**buy** means "to purchase"; it is a verb

She wants to buy a new dress for the party.

**by** is a preposition; it has several meanings, including "next to," "near," or "through some means or agency"

We live by the seashore.

The accident was seen by many people.

**capital** means "chief," "most important," or "money"

Murder is a capital crime.

It takes a lot of capital to open a new business.

**capitol** means "the building in which a legislative body meets"; it is a noun

The state assembly met at the capitol last night.

When the word is capitalized, it refers to the building in Washington in which Congress meets.
The President delivered his State of the Union address at the **Capitol** last night.

**choose** means "to make a choice"; it is the present-tense form of the verb *to choose*.  
She must **choose** a major.

**chose** has the same meaning, but is the past-tense form  
She finally **chose** architectural engineering.

**complement** is a verb, it means "goes well with" or "to complete or bring to perfection"  
A good wine **complements** the meal.

**compliment** as a verb, means "to praise"  
She **complimented** him on his new tie.  
as a noun, it means "an act or instance of praise"  
An actor loves to receive **compliments** after a performance.

**desert** is a verb, it means "to abandon"  
Soldiers are trained never to **desert** their unit.  
as a noun, it means "arid land"  
The Sahara **Desert** is considered inhospitable to life.

**dessert** means "a sweet dish at the end of a meal"  
I'll have chocolate cake for **dessert**.

**fewer** means "a smaller number of, not so many as"; it is an adjective used with countable nouns  
Since she quit her job, she has **fewer** friends than she used to have.

**less** means "a smaller portion or quantity"; it is an adjective used with uncountable nouns  
Nowadays, I have **less** trouble meeting people than I used to have.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hear</td>
<td>means &quot;to perceive by the ear&quot; or &quot;to pay attention to&quot;; it is a verb</td>
<td>The judge will <strong>hear</strong> closing arguments tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>here</td>
<td>is an adverb; it means &quot;in or at this place&quot;</td>
<td>The President will be <strong>here</strong> in New York next week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its</td>
<td>is the possessive form of the pronoun <strong>it</strong>, meaning &quot;belonging to it&quot;</td>
<td>The boat lost <strong>its</strong> motor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it's</td>
<td>is a contracted form of <strong>it is</strong> or <strong>it has</strong>.</td>
<td><strong>It's</strong> a nice day today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learn</td>
<td>means &quot;to gain knowledge or understanding&quot;; it is a verb</td>
<td>Each person must <strong>learn</strong> from his or her own mistake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teach</td>
<td>means &quot;to instruct,&quot; or &quot;to assist in the learning process&quot;; it is a verb</td>
<td>I can't <strong>teach</strong> you how to be responsible; you must learn it for yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loose</td>
<td>means &quot;not tight&quot;; it is an adjective</td>
<td>Babies should wear <strong>loose</strong> clothing, so they can move around easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lose</td>
<td>means &quot;to misplace&quot;; it is a verb</td>
<td>Johnny frequently <strong>loses</strong> his money on his way to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passed</td>
<td>means &quot;went by&quot;; it is the past-tense form of the verb <strong>to pass</strong></td>
<td>The parade <strong>passed</strong> this way an hour ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td>as a noun, it means &quot;in former times&quot;</td>
<td>History <strong>teaches</strong> us about the past.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
principal is an adjective, it means "chief, main or most important"

Freedom of speech is a principal right of all Americans.

principle means "a fundamental truth or rule"; it is a noun

We are governed in our actions by the principles of democracy.

quiet is a an adjective that means "not noisy"

Libraries are quiet places.

quiet may also be used as a noun to mean "absence of noise"

May I have quiet, please.

quite is an adverb meaning "very much so"

She is quite a good student.

stationary means "not moving"; it is an adjective

A security guard stands in a stationary position.

stationery means "writing paper"; it is a noun

People sometimes write love letters on scented stationery.

suppose means "to guess or assume"

I suppose he is coming to the wedding.

supposed implies an obligation; it is used as a passive verb to mean "have to"

She was supposed to babysit for me tonight.

than is a conjunction or preposition, used when comparing two items

She is taller than her brother.

then is an adverb that means "at that time" or "soon after"

I ate and then went to bed.
**their** is the possessive form of **they**, meaning "belonging to them"

Those poor people lost **their** homes in the hurricane.

**there** is an adverb that refers to a place or location

I distinctly remember putting the keys right **there**.

It is also used as a filler subject in some sentences

**There** are many reasons to get a college degree.

**they're** is a contraction, a shortened form of **they are**.

**They're** going on a long vacation to New Zealand.

**to** is a preposition; it means "toward" or "in the direction of"

They are going **to** the movies.

**too** is an adverb; it means "also," or "more than enough"

I ate **too** much cake yesterday.

I had cake yesterday **too**!

**two** is the number that is one more than one

The child has **two** dollars to spend on a gift for his mother.

**weather** refers to the climate; it is a noun

The **weather** today is sunny and warm.

**whether** is a conjunction that indicates an either/or situation

She can't decide **whether** to go to law school or graduate school.

**who's** is a contraction, a shortened form of "who is"

**Who's** on the phone?

**whose** is the possessive form of **who** meaning "belonging to whom"

She is the woman **whose** dog was lost.
use is a present tense verb; it means "to make use of, or to employ"

Do you know how to use a dictionary?

used is used as the past tense or passive participle form of the verb to use. It means "was accustomed to" or "was in the habit of"

I used to like pizza until I developed an allergy to cheese.

your is the possessive form of you, meaning "belonging to you"

Your mother called while you were out.

you're is a contraction, a shortened form of "you are"

You're supposed to call her right back.