



GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Glossary of Usage

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.

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.

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.

effect as a noun means "result" or "consequence"

Smoking has many bad side **effects**.

as a verb means "to cause" or "to bring about"

The negotiators labored all night to **effect** a compromise between the opposing unions.

all ready means "everyone (or everything) is ready"

The foreman told the judge, "We're **all ready** to give our verdict, sir."

already means "previously, before, or by a specific time"; it is an adverb

The paramedics were **already** at the scene of the accident.

allot means "to distribute, assign, or give"; it is a verb

The camp director **allotted** one bowl of rice and one cup of milk to each refugee.

a lot means "plenty of, much of"

He received **a lot** of money for his bar mitzvah.

Note: **a lot** is never spelled as one word

among is a preposition used when discussing at least three ideas or concepts

The budget is divided **among** many competing claimants.

between is a preposition used when discussing two concepts or ideas

Let's decide **between** the movies and the party.

also means "in the middle"

Hunter College is **between** Park and Lexington on 68th Street.

borrow means "to take something with the intention of returning it"; it is a verb

Many students have to **borrow** money from the government to pay their tuition.

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.

hear means "to perceive by the ear" or "to pay attention to"; it is a verb

The judge will **hear** closing arguments tomorrow.

here is an adverb; it means "in or at this place"

The President will be **here** in New York next week.

its is the possessive form of the pronoun **it**, meaning "belonging to it"

The boat lost **its** motor.

it's is a contracted form of **it is** or **it has**.

It's a nice day today.

It's been cold recently though.

learn means "to gain knowledge or understanding"; it is a verb

Each person must **learn** from his or her own mistake.

teach means "to instruct," or "to assist in the learning process"; it is a verb

I can't **teach** you how to be responsible; you must learn it for yourself.

loose means "not tight"; it is an adjective

Babies should wear **loose** clothing, so they can move around easily.

lose means "to misplace"; it is a verb

Johnny frequently **loses** his money on his way to school

passed means "went by"; it is the past-tense form of the verb **to pass**

The parade **passed** this way an hour ago.

past as a noun, it means "in former times"

History **teaches** us about the past.

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.