COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

THE PRINCIPLE
Some words and phrases seem to give all writers trouble, mainly because they sound similar. Here is a short list of the most commonly confused words.

Accept/Except - Accept is a verb meaning to receive willingly. Except is a preposition that means excluding.

- I accept your invitation. Please invite everyone except your mother.

Affect/Effect – Affect is a verb meaning to influence or change. Effect is generally a noun meaning the result.

- How does sunbathing affect your skin? Looking at your shriveled up skin, I can see you have suffered the effect of too much sunbathing.

All ready/Already – All ready is a phrase that means completely prepared. Already is an adverb that means something has happened previously.

- Dad shouted, “Are we all ready?” but we had already left the house and were sitting in the car.

All right/Alright – All right is the correct spelling of the phrase that means satisfactory or in good condition. Alright, although it is listed in the dictionary, is not a preferred spelling.

- It’s all right to use ‘alright’ in an informal letter to a friend, but not in academic writing.

Are/Our – Are is the plural present tense of the verb to be. Our is a pronoun that indicates ownership by more than one person.

- If we stay up all night doing our homework, we are likely to fall asleep in class.

Choose/Chose – Choose is the present tense of the verb “to choose” and chose is the past tense.

- I chose go to the gym yesterday, so I can choose to eat ice cream today.

Could have/Could of – Could have is the correct way to write this phrase. “Have” also should follow “would,” “should,” and “might.” Could of is incorrect.

- He could have and should have and would have and might have done it better had he practiced.

Good/Well – Good is an adjective used to modify a noun. Well is an adverb used to modify a verb.

- She swam, ran, and biked well in the triathlon because of her good training habits.

It’s/Its – It’s is a contraction of “it” and “is.” Its is the possessive form of the pronoun “it.”

- It’s crazy to think that people care about grammar, but grammar rears its ugly head every day.

Loose/Lose – Loose means not confined. Lose is the verb that means failing to keep.

- Loose change always sticks to the bottom of my shoe. Consequently, I lose a lot of time retrieving my money.

Lead/Led – Lead is a metallic element; lead is also a verb meaning to direct or to cause to follow. Led is the past tense form of the verb to lead.
With great ability to **lead**, he **led** them into battle where, moments before, **lead** had been flying.

**Lie/Lay** – **Lie** is a verb that means to recline. Its main forms are **lie**, **lay**, **lain**, and it does not usually take a direct object. **Lay** means to place or put. Its main forms are **lay**, **laid**, **laid**, and it is usually followed by a direct object.

I usually **lie** in bed for hours thinking about what topic to choose for my essay. Maybe I should **lay** a stack of books ["stack of books" is the direct object] next to my bed for inspiration.

**Passed/Past** – **Passed** is the past tense of the verb to pass. **Past** can be a noun or an adjective signifying that something has happened previously.

He frequently **passed** me when we raced against each other. That is in the **past**; I’m faster now, and I’m trying to forget my **past** failures.

**Site/Cite** – **Site** is a noun that means a particular place. **Cite** is a verb that means to quote or give credit.

If you are going to **cite** that passage, you have to know the URL of the Web **site** where it is used.

**Than/Then** – **Than** is used in comparative statements. **Then** is a reference to time or a sequence of events.

I would rather bike or run **than** swim today. Would you like to bike first and **then** go for a run?

**There/Their/They’re** – **There** is an adverb meaning in that place. **Their** is a pronoun indicating ownership by more than one person or thing. **They’re** is a contraction of the words they and are.

**There** were too many kittens running around my house, and **their** claws destroyed my furniture. Now that the kittens are scratch-proof, **they’re** no longer banished to the basement.

**To/Too/Two** – **To** either indicates direction or comes before a verb to make an infinitive. **Too** means also or very. **Two** is a number.

I am going **to** the store. I am going **to go** to the store **too**. So it seems that **two** of us are going **to** the store. Let’s hope we don’t spend **too** much money.

**Used to and Supposed to** – The final “d” is necessary when using these phrases. “Use to” and “suppose to” are incorrect.

I **used to** ride my bike against traffic, but I found out that you are **supposed to** ride with traffic.

**Weather/Whether** – **Weather** is a noun that describes the state of the atmosphere. **Whether** is a conjunction that introduces the first or both of alternative possibilities.

**Whether** we have good **weather** or not, we’re going to race this weekend.

**Where/Wear/Were** - **Where** indicates location. To **wear** is a verb meaning to be clothed in. **Were** is the plural past tense of the verb to be.

**Where** are your clothes? Usually we **wear** clothes. They **were** all missing their clothes.

**Who/Whom** – **Who** is the subjective pronoun, and **whom** is the objective pronoun. **Who** is used in the same way as other subject pronouns such as he, she, or they; it does the action. **Whom** is used in the same way as other object pronouns such as him, her, and them; it receives the action or follows a preposition.

**Who** wrote the novel For **Whom** the Bell Tolls?

**Who’s/Whose** – **Who’s** is a contraction of the words who and is. **Whose** is a possessive pronoun.

**Who’s** going to care if we work on grammar? **Whose** grammar book is this?

**Your/You’re** – **Your** is a pronoun that indicates ownership by one person. **You’re** is a contraction of you and are.

**Your** mother called to say you’re expected home by 9:00.