



Avoiding confusing similar sounding words

Introduction

Sometimes students make mistakes because they confuse words that sound alike. This guide explains how to correctly use some of the most commonly confused words.

To, Too or Two

'to' can be used as part of an infinitive or a preposition

- This is the road **to** New York. (preposition)
- She wants **to** study science. (part of the infinitive)

'too' is an adverb.

- The food is not **too** bad.
- There is **too** much noise in the city.

'two' is a number (2).

- You need **two** books.
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Its or It's

'its' is a possessive pronoun.

- The university has **its** own gym.

'it's' is the contraction of 'it is'.

- **It's** difficult.

There, Their or They're

'**there**' can be used as a pronoun or adverb.

- **There** are 20 computers in the room. (pronoun)
- We need to get **there** on time. (adverb)

'**their**' is a possessive pronoun.

- Students can access **their** handbooks through BREO.

'**they're**' is the contraction of 'they are'.

- **They're** new students.
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You, Your or You're

'**you**' is a pronoun.

- **You** should talk to your lecturer.

'**your**' is a possessive pronoun.

- This is **your** lecturer.

'**you're**' is the contraction of 'you are'.

- **You're** one of the nominees this year.
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Accept or Except

'**accept**' is a verb and means taking or receiving something offered by other people, or to agree to do something, such as taking a job or responsibility.

- He **accepted** the offer letter from the University of Bedfordshire.
- John **accepted** to work as an assistant manager.

'**except**' 1) can be used as a verb and means to exclude something

- They admitted several candidates, but **excepted** those under age 18.

'**except**' 2) can also be used as a preposition and means excluding something

- Everyone submitted a report **except** John.

Than or Then

‘**than**’ is a conjunction used in a comparison.

- My garden is bigger **than** yours.

‘**then**’ is an adverb indicating at that time or consequence.

- I was still in university **then**.
- Students need to register, pay their fees, and **then** get their ID cards.

Affect or Effect

‘**affect**’ is a verb and means to influence someone emotionally; or to cause change.

- They were deeply **affected** by their mother’s death.
- Cold weather **affected** the crops.

‘**effect**’ 1) can be used as a noun and means something that cause changes or consequence. It is commonly used as ‘**have an effect on...**’

- His lecturer’s feedback had a great **effect** on him.
- The main **effect** of cold weather was loss of crops.

‘**effect**’ 2) can also be used as a verb, but it is less common. It means make something happen.

Find out more

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