

Commonly

Used &

Misused

Words and

Phrases

A helpful reference
provided by:

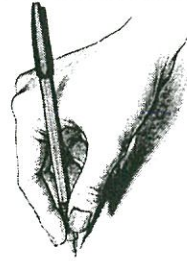
Marden

Center

for

Student

Success



a – used before words which begin with a consonant sound
an – used before words which begin with a vowel sound

accept – a verb which means "to receive". *I will accept all the packages except that one.*

except – a verb which means "to leave out"; or a preposition which means "other than"

affect – means "to influence". *The drug did not affect the disease, and it had several adverse side effects.*

effect – a verb which means "to produce"; or a noun which means "the result"

a lot – correctly used, it is two words

all right – correctly used, it is two words

allusion – an indirect reference. *Did you catch my allusion to Shakespeare?*

illusion – a misconception or false impression. *Mirrors give the room an illusion of depth.*

ant – an insect

aunt – a relative

be – a verb

bee – an insect

by – a preposition

buy – a verb meaning "to purchase"

can – suggests the ability to do something

may – suggests permission

capital – (noun) refers to a city serving as a seat of government.

Augusta is the capital of Maine.

capital – (adjective) punishable by death. *Murder is a capital offense and may be punishable by death*

capitol – refers to buildings in which functions of government are carried

out. *The legislators were called to the capitol for an emergency session.*

cent – a coin (one penny)

sent – the past tense of the verb *to send*

scent – an odor or smell

coarse – means rough or crude

course – means a path or direction; also means a class or series of studies

deer – animals

dear – means loved or valued

desert – a barren wilderness

dessert – a food served at the end of a meal

elicit - verb meaning to bring out or to evoke

illicit – adjective meaning unlawful.

The reporter was unable to elicit information from the police about illicit drug traffic.

emigrate - means to leave one country or region to settle in another. *In 1900, my grandfather emigrated from Russia.*

immigrate - means to enter another country and reside there. *Many*

Mexicans immigrate to the U.S. to find work. Hints: **Emigrate** begins with the

letter E, as does Exit. When you

emigrate, you exit a country.

Immigrate begins with the letter I, as does In. When you **immigrate**, you go into a country.

eminent – means strong, distinguished, prominent

imminent – means close or near

farther – refers to physical distance

further – refers to additional time, quantity, or degree

good – is an adjective

well – nearly always an adverb

heal – means "to mend" or "to restore to health"

heel – the back part of a human foot

hear – what one does with one's ears
here – the area close by

heard – the past tense of "to hear"

herd – a large group of animals

heir – one who inherits something
air – a gas

hole – a cavity or hollow place

whole – means entire or complete

inter – means between

intra – means within or among

it's – the contraction of "it is"

its – the possessive form of "it"

knew – past tense of the verb "to know"

new – means recent or novel

Lie - an intransitive verb meaning to recline or rest on a surface. Its principal parts are *lie, lay, lain. I lie down when I am tired.*

Lay - a transitive verb meaning to put or place. Its principal parts are *lay, laid. Chickens lay eggs.*

loose – (loos) means free, intied, unrestricted

lose – (looz) means "to misplace" or "fail to find or to control"

loss – means "a losing" or an amount that is lost

mail – letters or packages handled by the postal service

male – the masculine gender

meat – food or flesh

meet – "to come upon" or "to encounter"

miner – one who digs in the ground for valuable ore
minor – a person not legally an adult; a problem of no great importance
moral – refers to what is right or wrong
morale – refers to a person's mental condition
of, have – *Of* should not be used in place of *have*. "I should have (not should of) known that."
off of – Drop the *of*. "Please stay off (not off of) the wet cement."
orientate – the correct word is "orient"
peace – tranquility or freedom from war
piece – a part or fragment
personal – means "private"
personnel – people working at a particular job
pore – an opening in the skin
pour – a constant flow or stream
poor – needy or pitiable; in poverty
principal – as an adjective, means primary. As a noun, it can mean a sum of money or a school administrator
principle – noun meaning a basic truth or law *The principal taught us many important life principles.* Hint: You definitely would want to be a pal of anyone who is in a position of power or anything to do with money. This **principal** has pal in it.
right – correct or proper; that which a person has a legal claim; a direction (the opposite of left)
write – to inscribe or record
wright – a person who makes or builds something
rite – a ritual or ceremonial act

scene – the setting or location where something happens; a sight or spectacle
seen – part of the verb "to see"
seam – a line formed by connecting two pieces
seem – means "to appear to exist"
Set – a transitive verb meaning to put or to place. Its principal parts are *set, set, set.* *She set the dough in a warm corner of the kitchen.*
Sit – an intransitive verb meaning to be seated. Its principal parts are *sit, sat, sat.* *The cat sat in the warmest part of the room.*
sight – the act of seeing
cite – to quote or refer to
site – location or position
sum – an amount
some – a certain unknown number or part
stationery – paper and envelopes used to write letters
stationary – not moveable
than – used in comparison. *That pizza is more than I can eat.*
then – an adverb denoting time. *Tom laughed, and then we recognized him.*
Hints: Than is used to compare; both words have the letter a in them.
Then tells when; both are spelled the same, except for the first letter.
their – possessive personal pronoun *Fred and Jane finally washed their car.*
there – an adverb used to point out location. *The books are over there on the bookshelf.*
they're – the contraction of "they are"
They're *later than usual today.*
threw – past tense of "throw"
through – passing from one side of something to the other

to – the preposition which can mean "in the direction of"; also used to form the infinitive
too – means "also"
two – the number
Too many of your shots slice to the left, but the last two were right on the mark.
vain – valueless or fruitless; also, holding a high regard for oneself
vane – a flat piece of material set up to show which way the wind blows
vein – a blood vessel; a mineral deposit
verbal – anything in words
oral – anything spoken
waist – the part of the body just above the hips
waste – as a verb, means "to wear away or decay"; as a noun, refers to material which is unused or useless
wait – to stay somewhere expecting something
weight – a unit or degree of heaviness
ware – refers to a product which is sold
wear – to have on or to carry on one's body
where – asks the question "in what place?" or "in what situation?"
way – path or route
weigh – to measure heaviness
weather – the condition of the atmosphere
whether – refers to a possibility
which – the relative pronoun used to refer to something
witch – one who is believed to cast spells
who – is the subject of a verb
whom – the object of a preposition or a direct object

who's – the contraction of "who is"
whose – a possessive pronoun
wood – the stuff trees are made of
would – part of the verb "to will"
your – a possessive pronoun
you're – the contraction of "you are"
You're going to catch a cold if you don't wear your coat.
who – used in reference to people. *I just saw a boy who was wearing a yellow banana costume.*
which – refers to nonliving objects or to animals; should never be used when referring to people *I have to go to math next, which is my hardest class.*
that – may refer to animals, people or non-living objects *Where is the book that I was reading?*
Problem phrases:
Supposed to: Do not omit the 'd'. *Suppose to* is incorrect.
Used to: Same as above. Do not write use to.
Toward: There is no 's' at the end of the word.
Anyway: Also has no ending 's'. Anyways is nonstandard.
Couldn't care less: Be sure to make it negative. (Not I could care less.)
All walks of life: Not 'all woks of life'. This phrase does not apply to oriental cooking.
Chest of drawers: Not chester drawers.
For all intents and purposes: Not intensive purposes.
Source: A Writer's Reference, Diana Hacker, Commonly Confused Words <http://wsvisionline.weber.edu/wrh/words.htm> Common Errors in English