Commonly Confused Words

Many words in the English language sound or appear the same but differ in spelling and meaning. These words must be used with caution because spell check software can identify errors only in spelling but not in usage. To avoid making these errors, students should use a dictionary as a reference while writing.

This worksheet is a list of commonly confused words with their simple definitions. For complete definitions and for usage examples, refer to a dictionary.

Commonly Confused Words with their Simple Definitions

**accept**-v. to agree, to take (something)
**except**-v. to leave out (someone or something)
   prep. not including

**advice**-n. an opinion or suggestion of what someone should do
**advise**-v. to give an opinion or suggestion of what someone should do

**affect**-n. an emotional response
   v. to influence
**effect**-n. a result
   v. to cause

**aisle**-n. a space between rows
**isle**-n. island

**all together**- everyone or everything is in one place
**altogether**-adv. completely and fully

**allowed**-v. to permit (something)
**aloud**-adv. In a way that can be heard clearly

**allot**-v. to assign (an amount of something) to use or have
**a lot**-n. a large quantity of something

**allusion**-n. a brief or indirect reference
**illusion**-n. an idea or a belief that is not true.

**altar**-n. a sacred table in a church
**alter**-v. to change

**amoral**-adj. not concerned with right or wrong
**immoral**-adj. not conforming to accepted standards of morality
bare-adj. not covered
bear-v. to endure
   n. animal

bait-v. to entice or lure
   n. food in a trap, hook, or net, to catch an animal
bate-v. to reduce the intensity

brake-n. a device to slow and stop a moving vehicle
break-v. separate into pieces

capital-n. money
   n. city that is the center of government
capitol-n. building where the U.S. Congress meets

cereal-n. a breakfast food made of grain
serial-adj. arranged or happening in a sequence

chord-n. a group of (typically three or more) notes sounded together, as a basis of harmony
cord-n. thin, flexible string or rope made from several twisted strands

cite-v. to speak or write words taken from a written work
   v. to praise (someone) publicly

sight-n. the ability to see
site-n. a place where something is, was, or will be

complement-n. something that completes
   v. to help make someone or something more complete
compliment-n. a remark or action that expresses approval, admiration, or respect

conscience-n. sense of morality
conscious-adj. awake, aware

council-n. governing body
counsel-v. to give advise

cue-n. a signal for someone to do something
queue-n. a long line of people or things waiting for something

defuse-v. to make a situation less tense or to remove the fuse from an explosive device to prevent it from exploding
diffuse-v. spread over a wide area or between a large number of people
desert-v. to abandon someone  
n. a waterless, empty area  
dessert-n. a sweet dish, usually eaten at the end of a meal  

discreet-adj. careful in one’s speech or actions especially to keep something confidential  
discrete-adj. individually separate and distinct  

disinterested-adj. not influenced by considerations of personal advantage  
uninterested-adj. not interested in or concerned about something or someone  

ensure-v. to make certain something happens  
insure-v. to secure receiving proper compensation in the event of damage, loss, injury, or death  

hoard-v. to accumulate something and store or hide it away  
horde-n. a large group of people  

imply-v. to suggest indirectly  
infer-v. to conclude something from evidence and reasoning  

its-adj. belonging to something (possessive form of it)  
it’s- contraction for “it is”  

loath-adj. unwilling to do something  
loathe-v. to hate  

loose-adj. not firmly tight or fixed  
lose-v. to fail to win something or to be unable to find something  

lie-v. to be or to stay at rest in a horizontal position  
lay-v. to place something on something  

passed-v. past tense of “to pass”  
past-n. at an earlier time  

pole-n. a long cylindrical piece of metal  
poll-n. the process of voting in an election  

pore-v. to read or study attentively  
pour-v. to make something flow rapidly in a steady stream  

precede-v. to go before something or someone  
proceed-v. to start or continue an action or process
principal-adj. most important
principle-n. a fundamental rule or belief

stationary-adj. not moving
stationery-n. writing materials

there-adv. place
their-pr. belonging to someone (possessive form of they)
they’re-contraction for they are

threw-v. to exert force and send something through the air
through-prep. to indicated movement from one side to another
   adv. from one side or end to the other

to-prep used as a function word to indicate movement toward something
too-adv. more than what is needed
two-adj. the written form of the number 2

weather-n. a condition in the air of an environment
whether-conj. Used to refer to one or more possibilities

were-v. past tense of “to be”
where-adv. at or in a place (used to ask a question about placement)
   conj. at or in the place that
we’re-contraction for we are

your-pr. belonging to someone (possessive form of you)
you’re- contraction for you are

Information courtesy of:


