Commonly Confused Words

Below you will find a list of words that we often see writers confuse due to their similar spellings and pronunciations. Checking that you have the correct form and spelling of these words is a great practice when proofreading. If you ever have any confusion about what the right word to use is, look it up! Checking the definition and synonyms will tell you immediately if the word you’re using makes sense with the context or not.

List of Commonly Confused Words

Accept and except
I cannot accept this gift, it is too expensive.
I would like one of each color, except the red.

Advice and advise
Can I offer you some advice?
I would advise against it.

Affect and effect
Think of how your words can affect another person’s mood.
Being tired is an effect of working a long shift.

Assure, ensure, and insure
I can assure you, everything will be alright.
I can ensure that the package arrives safely.
I will insure this car.

Breath and breathe
You have minty breath.
Breathe in and out.

Cite, sight, and site
Be sure to cite your sources.
I went sight-seeing around town.
That social media site is popular.

Complement and compliment
That wine will complement dinner nicely.
I gave him a compliment about his smile.

Do and Due
Do your homework.
The assignment is due at midnight.

Elicit and illicit
It is hard to elicit sympathy for someone behaving irrationally.
Illicit drugs are forbidden by law.

Hear and here
I hear what you are saying.
Come here when you are free.
Its and it’s
   Its job is to protect her. (Its is the possessive form of it.)
   It’s a hard not life, for us. (It’s is a contraction of it is.)

Lay and lie
   I lay down to take a nap.
   I told a lie to my sister.

Loose and lose
   This plan has no loose ends.
   I lose my keys regularly.

Passed and past
   He passed the salt to his father.
   What happened is in the past.

Peak and peek
   Look at the mountain’s peak.
   The plumber took a peek at the pipes.

Principal and principle
   The principal of the high school is a leader.
   The principle is to serve as a guide.

Than and then
   I would rather swim than jog.
   Then, I would like to eat a big meal.

Their, there, and they’re
   Their temperatures vary.
   There are four seasons.
   They’re spring, summer, fall and winter.

Thorough, though
   Do a thorough job investigating.
   Though, you do make a solid point.

Threw, and through
   He threw the ball for the dog.
   The ball went through the wall.

Who’s and whose
   Whose jacket is this?
   Who’s the guy in the corner?

Your and you’re
   Your friend is hilarious.
   You’re more funny though.

Conclusion
Keep in mind that this list is not comprehensive, so be sure to add any words that you personally find confusing. Adding those words that you have difficulty with will make the checklist more helpful when proofreading.