

Commonly Confused Words

affect/effect

Usually *affect* is a verb, meaning "to influence," and *effect* is a noun, meaning "result."

Social activities may **affect** your grades, but the **effect** had better be small!

its/it's

It's means 'it is.' *Its*, on the other hand, indicates possession.

"**It's** a wise dog that scratches **its** own fleas"(Strunk and White, 1).

farther/further

Farther refers to additional distance, and *further* refers to additional time, amount, or other abstract matters.

You may be **further** from an "A" than you think, so when you study, go no **farther** than the best place to concentrate.

less/fewer

Less refers to bulk amounts, whereas *fewer* refers to separate (countable) items.

Those with **less** knowledge receive **fewer** high grades.

feel/think

In common usage, *feel* means to sense, to be emotionally affected by something, or to have a general or thorough conviction of something. *Think* means to use reason or to examine with the intellect.

I **think** that you can write better than you have, but I **feel** encouraged by the improvements in your writing.

between/among

Between is used when two are concerned, whereas *among* is used when more than two are concerned.

Between you and me, these mistakes are common **among** all of us.

which/that

Use *that* in restrictive clauses, clauses that provide essential, identifying information. Use *which* in non-restrictive clauses, clauses that provide non-essential, parenthetical information. A non-restrictive *which* clause has commas around it; a *that* clause has none.

Assume you own two cars; the green one runs, the blue one doesn't, and you wish to differentiate between the two. You write, "My car that works is a great car"; "that works" is essential, restrictive information because it identifies a specific car. You might also write, "My car that works, which is green, is a great car"; "which is green" is nonessential, non-restrictive information.

If unsure whether a clause is restrictive or not, try omitting it. Omitting a restrictive clause will change the core meaning of your sentence.

A technique **that** can improve your writing is proofreading, **which** can show you unintentional errors.

since/because

Since is often used to mean *because*: "*Since* you ask, I'll tell you." Its primary meaning, however, relates to time: "I've been waiting *since* Tuesday for the letter." Most people now accept *since* in place of *because*; however, when *since* is ambiguous and may also refer to time ("*Since* she went to college, he found another girlfriend"), it is better to say *because* or *after*, depending on which you mean.

Because you are intelligent and careful, your writing has improved **since** the beginning of this course.

Works Cited

Strunk, William, Jr., and E.B. White. The Elements of Style. Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon, 2000.

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