

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

| Confused Words | How to Use Them |
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| <i>affect vs. effect</i> | Usually affect is a verb meaning "to influence," and effect is a noun meaning "result." But effect occasionally is used as a verb meaning "to bring about." Example: Social activities may affect your grades, but the effect should be small! |
| <i>than vs. then</i> | Than is used to indicate a difference between two things and is usually used in the phrases "more than" or "less than." Then indicates a sequence of events or items. Example: The data indicates that Americans work more hours than Europeans. Example: Add the butter then the sugar to make the cookie dough. |
| <i>farther vs. further</i> | Farther refers to additional distance, and further refers to additional time, amount, or other abstract matters. Example: You may be further from an "A" than you think, so when you study, go no farther than the best place to concentrate. |
| <i>loose vs. lose</i> | Loose means that something is not firmly in place or could be removed easily. Lose means to no longer have something or to have misplaced it. Example: This bracelet is loose on my wrist; I hope I don't lose it again. |
| <i>its vs. it's</i> | Its is the possessive of "it," and unlike other possessives, does not use an apostrophe. It's is the contraction of "it is" or "it has" and is never used to mark the possessive. See our handout Using the Apostrophe to learn more. Example: It's been many decades since the college changed its graduation requirements. |
| <i>less vs. fewer</i> | Less refers to bulk amounts and uncountable items, or nouns that can't be quantified by just putting a number in front of them. Fewer refers to countable items, or nouns that can be quantified just using a number. Example: After inventory, there are fewer guavas and less flour than we ordered. |
| <i>entitled vs. titled</i> | Entitled means to have a right to do or have something. Titled refers to the name or label of something. Example: I feel entitled to own this book, because it is titled "Dimitri" and that's my name also. |
| <i>between vs. among</i> | Between is used when two things are concerned (the word comes from "by twain" in Middle English), while among is used when more than two things are concerned. Example: Between you and me, these mistakes are common among all of us. |
| <i>feel vs. think</i> | In common usage, feel means to sense, to be emotionally affected by something, or to have a general or thorough conviction. Think means to use reason or to examine with the intellect. Example: I think that you can write better than you have, though I feel encouraged by the improvements in your writing. |

which vs. that

Use **that** in restricting (limiting) clauses: "The rocking chair **that** creaks is on the porch." In this sentence, one rocking chair is singled out from several – the one that creaks.

Use **which** in nonrestrictive (in effect, parenthetical) clauses: "The rocking chair, **which** creaks, is on the porch." In this sentence, the fact that the rocking chair creaks is tossed in; it is not added for the purpose of identifying the one chair out of several.

Important Note: Use **who** for people, in both restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses.

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

since vs. 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 noon." Most people now accept **since** in place of **because**; however, when **since** is ambiguous and may also refer to time ("**Since** he joined the navy, she found another boyfriend"), it is better to say **because** or after, depending on which you mean.

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

Parts of this resource were adapted from:

Barnet, S., & M. Stubbs. 1980. *Practical guide to writing*. Little, Brown and Co., Boston.

Fowler, H.R. 1983. *The Little, Brown Handbook*. Little, Brown and Co., Boston.

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