

What, Why, and How?

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STYLE:

Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words

WHAT ARE SOME COMMONLY MISUSED AND MISSPELLED WORDS?

As English teachers who read a lot of essays, we see some words that are regularly used incorrectly, and we see some words that are commonly misspelled. Here are lists to help you avoid these errors.

COMMONLY MISUSED WORDS

accept and except - *Accept* means to receive while *except* means to exclude.

affect and effect - *Affect* is usually a verb meaning to influence. *Effect* is usually a noun meaning result. *Effect* can also be a verb meaning to bring about.

a lot and allot. *A lot* means many; *allot* means to distribute something.

cite, sight and site. A *sight* is something seen; a *site* is a place. To *cite* is to quote or list as a source.

it's and its. *It's* is a contraction that replaces *it is*. *Its* is the possessive determiner corresponding to *it*, meaning "belonging to it."

lose and loose. *Lose* can mean "fail to win," "misplace," or "cease to be in possession." *Loose* can mean the opposite of tight, or the opposite of tighten.

of and have. In some dialects of spoken English, *of* and the contracted form of *have*, 've, sound alike. However, in standard written English, they are not interchangeable. Could of, would of, should of is non-standard English. Instead use *could have*, *would have*, *should have*.

past and passed. *Past* refers to events that have previously occurred while *passed* is the past tense of "to pass."

than, then - *Than* is used for comparisons; *then* means it came next.

there, their, they're - *There* refers to the location of something. *Their* means "belonging to them." *They're* is a contraction of "they are."

to, two, too - *Two* is a number, *too* means also, *to* is used with verbs (going to) or as a preposition.

weather, whether - *Weather* is what the meteorologist always predicts wrong; *whether* is used when making a choice.

who's, whose - *Whose* is possessive; *who's* is short for *who is*.

who, which, that: Do not use *which* to refer to persons. Use *who* instead. *That*, though generally used to refer to things, may be used to refer to a group or class of people.

your, you're - *Your* is something that belongs to you; *you're* is a contraction for *you are*.

COMMONLY MISSPELLED WORDS

a lot - Two words! We know this is listed under misused words as well but it is misspelled a lot!

accommodate - This word is large enough to accommodate both a double "c" AND a double "m."

argument - Let's not argue about the loss of this verb's silent [e] before the suffix -ment.

committed - If you are committed to correct spelling, you will remember that this word doubles its final [t] from "commit" to "committed."

conscience - Don't let misspelling this word weigh on your conscience.

conscientious - Work on your spelling conscientiously.

conscious - Try to be conscious of all the vowels after the "sc" in this word's ending.

definite (ly) - This word definitely gets confused as having an "a" in the middle but there are e's on the ends and i's in the middle.

grammar - If you're pointing out errors in grammar, then be sure not to end this word in "er."

independent - Please be independent but not in your spelling of this word. It ends in -ent.

indispensable - Knowing that this word ends on -able is indispensable to good writing.

mischievous - This mischievous word holds two traps: [i] before [e] and [o] before [u]. Four of the five vowels in English reside here.

misspell - What is more embarrassing than to misspell the name of the problem? Just remember that it is mis + spell and that will dispel your worry about spelling "misspell."

noticeable - The [e] is noticeably retained in this word to indicate the [c] is "soft," pronounced like [s]. Without the [e], it would be pronounced "hard," like [k], as in "applicable."

occasionally - Writers occasionally tire of doubling so many consonants and omit one but this word has 2 c's in the front and 2 l's in the back.

occurrence - Remember not only the occurrence of double double consonants in this word, but that the suffix is -ence, not -ance. No reason, just the English language keeping us on our toes.

perseverance - All it takes is perseverance and you, too, can be a (near-) perfect speller. The suffix is -ance for no reason at all.

playwright - Since they write plays, they should be "play-writes," right? Wrong. Remember that a play writer in Old English was called a "play worker" and "wright" is from an old form of "work" (wrought iron, etc.)

weird - This word is an exception to the rule about [i] before [e] except after...? So, rules can be broken!