COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS (PART 2)
Improving Your Style

HISTORIC VS. HISTORICAL:

- **Historic**: Adjective—Well-known, or important in history, monumental
  
  The Eiffel Tower is one of the most historic landmarks in France.

- **Historical**: Adjective—Relating to the past or to history, but not necessarily of great significance
  
  The textbook was full of historical facts.

IMITATED VS. INTIMATED:

- **Imitated**: Verb—Copied or mimicked something
  
  The unoriginal artist’s style imitated Van Gogh’s.

- **Intimated**: Verb—Hinted at, implied, or made known in an indirect manner
  
  The CEO intimated that there would be layoffs when he said that the company was going to have to make difficult budget cuts.

IMPLY VS. INFERENCE:

- **Imply**: Verb—To suggest or indicate (without being stated outright)
  
  She implied that she wasn’t planning on taking the job when she said she was keeping her options open.

- **Infer**: Verb—To conclude or guess something based on reasoning
  
  He inferred that his friend wasn’t going to come to the party based on his uninterested response.

ITS VS. IT’S:

- **Its**: The possessive form of it, belonging to it.
  
  Polishing the silverware gave it back its shine.

- **It’s**: The contraction of it is
  
  It’s nice to have good friends to count on.

  **Note**: Contractions (such as it’s) are not appropriate for formal or academic writing.

LEAD VS. LED:

- **Lead** (rhymes with red): Noun—A heavy, malleable metal, as in graphite
  
  The pipe was made of lead.

- **Led**: Verb—The past tense form of lead (rhymes with seed), to have guided the way
  
  The tour guide led them through the museum.
LAY VS. LIE:

- Lay: Verb—To place something down; the past tense form of lie (in the above context)
  
  Lay your coat on this chair.
  The baby lay in its crib all day yesterday.

- Lie: Verb—To recline or get into a reclining position
  
  I think I’ll lie down for a few minutes.

Note: Lay and lie are sometimes used interchangeably, especially in everyday conversation. However, they are most acceptably used in the above contexts.

PASSED VS. PAST:

- Passed: Verb—Having completed the act of passing; Received a passing grade on an evaluation
  
  She passed the store on her way to work.
  He passed the exam on the first try.

- Past: Noun—Time gone by, or history; Adjective—Gone by or just passed; Adverb—So as to pass by
  
  He recalled events from his past with great detail.
  I’ve been very busy these past few months.
  She walked past her neighbour’s house.

PEACE VS. PIECE:

- Peace: Noun—A state of ease, harmony, or tranquility
  
  The war had ended many years ago, and they were now at peace with one another.

- Piece: Noun—An isolated part of something; Verb—to repair something
  
  The last piece of the puzzle was still missing.
  He tried to piece together the broken vase with glue.

LOOSE VS. LOSE:

- Lose: Verb—To come to be without something; The opposite of win
  
  Did you lose your keys?
  She hated to see her favourite team lose to their rivals.

- Loose: Adjective—Free, unbound, or not tightly fastened
  
  Your shoelaces are loose, you should tie them tighter.
PEDAL VS. PEDDLE VS. PETAL:

- **Pedal**: *Noun*—A foot-operated lever as found on a bicycle or piano; *Verb*—To operate a piece of equipment with one’s feet
  
  The toddler’s legs were too short to reach the pedals on her tricycle.  
  She pedaled her bike down the lane.

- **Peddle**: *Verb*—To sell small articles
  
  The old man peddled his wares at the market.

- **Petal**: *Noun*—Part of a flower
  
  She only picked the flowers with the brightest petals.

PERFORM VS. PREFORM:

- **Performed**: *Verb*—To have carried out; Enacted, as in a play
  
  He performed his tasks dutifully.  
  They performed in front of a live audience.

- **Prefomed**: *Adjective*—Already made (as in premade or prefabricated)
  
  She had a preformed opinion of the book before she read it.

PERSONAL VS. PERSONNEL:

- **Personal**: *Adjective*—Relating to an individual; Private; Referring to another in an offensive manner
  
  She paid using her personal bank account.  
  You should never share important personal information with strangers.  
  His remarks during the debate were highly personal and unprofessional.

- **Personnel**: *Noun*—People hired for a company, staff
  
  The office threw a party for all of its personnel.

POOR VS. POUR VS. PORE:

- **Poor**: *Adjective*—Deficient in money or resources; Unsatisfactory
  
  Growing up, her family had been very poor. 
  The employee was criticized for poor behaviour.

- **Pour**: *Verb*—To send a liquid falling or flowing
  
  He poured her a cup of coffee.

- **Pore**: *Noun*—A small opening, as on the surface of one’s skin; *Verb*—To read or study with intensity
  
  Leaving makeup on overnight can clog your facial pores.  
  He pored over the textbook in preparation for the exam.

PRAY VS. PREY:

- **Pray**: *Verb*—To offer a prayer, devotion, or petition
  
  They prayed in their church.

- **Prey**: *Noun*—A small animal hunted for food; *Verb*—To hunt a small animal
  
  The gazelle is prey to the lion.  
  The cat preyed on the mouse.
PREPOSITION VS. PROPOSITION:

- **Preposition**: *Noun*—A word that is placed before nouns and pronouns to modify nouns, verbs, or adjectives.
  
  The word “before” is a *preposition*.

- **Proposition**: *Noun*—The act of offering or suggesting something to be considered
  
  Have you considered my *proposition* to expand the company?

PRINCIPAL VS. PRINCIPLE:

- **Principal**: *Adjective*—Highest in rank, first and foremost; *Noun*—The chief, head, or director of an institution such as a school
  
  Our *principal* concern should be reducing our environmental impact.
  
  His mother had to meet with the school’s *principal* after he was suspended.

- **Principle**: *Noun*—A fundamental or generally accepted rule that guides one’s conduct; *Noun*—A law or truth (as in math or science)
  
  He was a well-behaved man with good *principles*.
  
  The artistic composition adheres to the basic *principles* of design.

QUIET VS. QUITE:

- **Quiet**: *Adjective*—Silent, an absence of noise
  
  The room was very *quiet* during the exam.

- **Quite**: *Adverb*—Completely, wholly, very
  
  Despite its poor reviews, the book was *quite* interesting.

RIGHT VS. RITE VS. WRITE:

- **Right**: *Adjective*—Correct, not wrong; *Noun*—A just claim to something; *Noun*—Direction opposite to left;
  
  *Adverb*—Directly, straight; *Adverb*—Completely
  
  I had the *right* answer for every question except the last one.
  
  Freedom of speech is a human *right*.
  
  Turn to the *right* when you reach the traffic lights.
  
  Come *right* home when you are finished school.
  
  The top of the bottle should come *right* off when you twist it.

- **Rite**: *Noun*—A ceremonial act
  
  Graduation is a *rite* of passage for students.

- **Write**: *Verb*—To express an idea in writing, to transcribe words
  
  Write your answers to the questions in the space given below.

STATIONARY VS. STATIONERY:

- **Stationary**: *Adjective*—Still, not moving
  
  The car was *stationary* because it was in park.

- **Stationery**: *Noun*—Supplies used for writing (particularly paper)
  
  The assistant picked up *stationery* for the office.
THAN VS. THEN:

- **Than**: *Conjunction*—Used to introduce the second object in an unequal comparison; Used to introduce a rejected option; Except
  
  The cheetah is faster *than* the lion.
  
  I would rather eat in a restaurant *than* prepare my own meal.
  
  She had no choice other *than* to find a new job.

- **Then**: *Adverb*—At that time; *Adverb*—Next; *Noun*—That time
  
  She had more free time back *then*.
  
  We ate dinner. *Then* we went to a movie.
  
  Since *then*, he hasn’t seen his parents.

THAT VS. WHICH:

The words *that* and *which* are used very similarly. In many cases, either word be used in the same place to form a grammatically correct sentence; however, the meaning of the sentence changes slightly depending on which word is used.

- **That**: Introduces a *restrictive clause*—a clause that is essential to the sentence and cannot be removed.
  
  *She*________ is exclusive

- **Which**: Introduces a *non-restrictive clause*—a clause that contains supplementary information and can be removed from the sentence without changing its meaning.
  
  Example
  
  *Here, _______ is not necessarily exclusive to ___.*

THEIR VS. THERE VS. THEY’RE:

- **Their**: *Pronoun*—Possessive form of *they*
  
  *Their* house is larger than ours.

- **There**: *Adverb*—At, in, or to that place; *Pronoun*—That place; *Pronoun*—Introduces a clause in which the verb comes before the subject or has no complement
  
  *The event is being held there.*
  
  Have you been *there* yet?
  
  *There* was no use.

- **They’re**: Contraction of *they are*
  
  They’re coming to the party on Saturday.

Note: Contractions (such as *they’re*) are not acceptable in formal or academic writing.

TO VS. TOO VS. TWO:

- **To**: *Preposition*—Expresses direction toward a destination; Expresses a limit; Expresses contact, on, against, upon
  
  *They went to school together.*
  
  The entire store is *up to* fifty percent off.
  
  He applied a coat of paint *to the fence*.

- **Too**: *Adverb*—In addition, also; Excessively, to a higher degree than desired
  
  *The movie was interesting, funny, and heartfelt too.*
  
  Taxis are *too* expensive; we should walk.

- **Two**: *Noun*—Number following one; *Adverb*—Amounting to two of something
  
  *The answer to the problem is two.*
  
  There were *two* slices of pizza leftover.
TRACK VS. TRACT:

- **Track**: Noun—A structure consisting of rails or a path for sporting activities; Noun—A path made by a person or animal or the evidence of their passing; Noun—A path to follow or that is currently being followed; Verb—To follow a trail or pursue
  
  The running **track** is by the railroad **tracks**.
  The hunter followed the deer’s **tracks** through the woods.
  You are on the right **track**.
  The detective **tracked** the criminal.

- **Tract**: Noun—Land or water area; Noun—A region of the body, a series of organs, or a system designed to perform a function
  
  Ecologists studied the wetland **tract** for evidence of pollution.
  The esophagus and stomach are parts of the digestive **tract**.

WHO’S VS. WHOSE:

- **Who’s**: Contraction of who is
  
  Who’s coming to dinner tonight?

  **Note**: Contractions (such as who’s) are not acceptable in formal or academic writing

- **Whose**: Pronoun—Possessive form of who or which used as an adjective
  
  Whose coat is this?
  “The Raven” is a poem whose name is well known.

WHO VS. WHOM:

- **Who**: Pronoun—What person(s)? Pronoun—Used in restrictive or non-restrictive clauses to refer to a previously mentioned item/person/event
  
  Who are teaching the courses this year?
  Here the who is the person teaching the course (i.e., performing the action of teaching).

  Charles Dickens is the man who wrote *Great Expectations*.
  Here, Charles Dickens is the person performing the action of writing *Great Expectations*.

- **Whom**: Pronoun—Objective form of who
  
  Whom is used with the prepositions to, for, by, and from

  Whom did you speak to this morning?
  To whom it may concern…
  For whom is this message intended?

  **Tip**: Generally, if you can replace the word in the sentence with they, then who is the correct form. If you can replace the term with them, then whom should be used.

  ______ is teaching the course this year?
  → They are teaching the course this year.
  → Therefore, who is the correct form.
  Who is teaching the course this year?

  ______ did you speak to this morning?
  → You spoke to them this morning.
  → Therefore, whom is the correct form.
  Whom did you speak to this morning?
YOUR VS. YOU’RE:

- **Your**: *Pronoun*—The possessive form of *you*.
  
  Can I borrow *your* book?

- **You’re**: Contraction of *you are*.
  
  You’re going to do great on the test!

**Note**: Contractions (such as *you’re*) are not acceptable in formal or academic writing.

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**Sources:**

(MLA 8th Edition)

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