

Commonly Confused Words

They, They're, Their, and There

This word family is understandably the most abused and confused in writing. Students most often go with the word “there” for sentences where one of the other three is actually needed. It is important to learn the proper meaning and use of each word in order to write effectively.

They

Used to describe people in general, often does not depict the sex of those being talked about

They say she is a good listener.

They're

Contraction for the words “they are”

*They are a cute couple can be changed to
They're a cute couple.*

Their

A possessive pronoun, shows something belongs to someone

*Sally and her husband bought their dog
an adorable bowtie.*

There

Points to a location or place

We live over there.

Through, Threw, Thorough, Though, and Thru

This word family has been known to trip students up as well. Not only do many of the words sound very similar, if not just alike, but they are also spelled alike. Learning each words meaning and proper use will help in using them correctly.

Through

To be finished with something, a directional word

*She was told not to go outside until she was
through with her homework.
Or*

She went through the door.

Threw

Past tense of the word throw

He threw the ball.

Thorough

To complete or take care of something with every detail in mind

*The police were very thorough with their
investigation.*

Though

Same as however, can contradict or add to two statements

*Even though the two fought almost every day,
they were still best friends.*

Thru *

Slang form of through

*She drove up to the drive thru, eager to pick up
her iced coffee.*

*Not commonly used in academic writing



Accept and Except

Understanding the definition is always key in keeping words that share similarities apart from each other.

Accept

To agree or receive something

I accept your apology.

Or

She was accepted into ASU.

Except

To not include something or someone, other than

Everyone was invited except Taylor.

Affect and Effect

Without over exaggeration in pronunciation -and a very clear understanding in both definitions- the two words above can be very tricky. Even more, there are a few grammar rules involved with these words that can often make them even more difficult to understand.

Affect

To influence something or someone

How will this affect my total grade?

Effect

The result of something or to accomplish. Can be used as both a noun or verb

Choosing not to study will have a negative effect on your grade.

She hoped to effect change in her grade by studying more.

We're, Where, and Were

Two out of the three words in this word family sound alike, making it harder to pick out which one is need in any given sentence or phrase.

We're

Contraction for the words "we are"

We're ready for the beach trip!

Were

The past tense of the word be

They were going to the park.

Where

A word for a place or location *Where did you get that cookie?*

Your and You're

In most cases, the "your" version of "you" is a person's go to word, even when they really needed "you're". It sounds the same, so why not? The problem is within both words very different definitions.

Your

The possessive form of you.

Your dog is adorable.

You're

Contraction for the words "you are"

You're going to let me walk him, right?