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.

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.

They’re
Contraction for the words “they are”

They are a cute couple.

Thorough
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.

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

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?