

Commonly Misspelled Words

“Are you quite quiet?”

English spelling is difficult. Words are often not spelled the way they sound. *Raccoon* sounds like it should have a *k* but doesn't. *Threw* sounds like *through* but is spelled differently. *Though*, *cough*, and *through* look like rhyming words but are actually not pronounced at all alike. Given that English has a vocabulary of over 400,000 words, it's a wonder that we spell as well as we do. Some words—called homophones—sound exactly alike but have different spellings and meanings. Other words are not exactly homophones but are similar enough to be often confused. Study the following examples:



Homophones:

Altar (a raised platform in church)
The minister stood at the *altar*.

It's (a contraction of "it is")
It's getting late.

Alter (to change)
I can *alter* your jacket.

Its (possessive form of the pronoun "it")
The rabbit is in *its* nest.

Confusing Words:

Accept (to receive with consent)
I *accept* your money.

Advice (a noun)
She asked for *advice*.

Except (excluded)
Everybody left *except* Fred.

Advise (a verb)
We *advise* you to study.

Homophones and Frequently Confused Words

Learn the meaning and spelling of homophones and frequently confused words. Errors in spelling can drastically change the meaning of writing. *Angel* spelled correctly will still confuse your reader if you really meant *angle*. English is riddled with many homophones and confusing words. The examples on the following sheets are just some of the ones you are mostly likely to encounter. When in doubt, use a dictionary to verify that the word you want to use really is the word that matches the context of your sentence.

Sole — only; the bottom of the foot I was the <i>sole</i> member of the team to go. The <i>soles</i> of my feet itch.	Soul — the spirit Music is good for the <i>soul</i> .	
Whose — the possessive form of who I know <i>whose</i> coat that is.	Who's — a contraction of "who is" <i>Who's</i> she talking about?	
Your — the possessive form of you This is <i>your</i> choice.	You're — a contraction of "you are" <i>You're</i> quite welcome.	
Their — ownership This is <i>their</i> boat.	There — in that place My car is over <i>there</i> .	They're — a contraction of "they are" <i>They're</i> friendly people.
To — a preposition; part of any infinitive He went <i>to</i> the beach. I'm going <i>to</i> walk the dog.	Too — also, excessively First Julie wept; then Meg wept, <i>too</i> . Don't eat <i>too</i> much ice cream.	Two — the whole number between one and three I have <i>two</i> dogs. <i>Two</i> round trip tickets to Paris cost \$1,700.28.

Tip
Possessive pronouns have zero apostrophes (none).
Apostrophes are used with pronouns to form contractions

Adapted from *Writing Talk: Sentence and Short Paragraphs with Readings* by Anthony C. Winkler and Jo Ray McCuen-Metherell, Second Edition, pages 415-418; *Writing Talk: Paragraphs and Short Essays with Readings* by Anthony C. Winkler and Jo Ray McCuen-Metherell, Third Edition Edition, pages 527-528; *Passages: A Writer's Guide* by Richard Nordquist, Third Edition, pages 366-375; and *The Blair Handbook* by Toby Fulwiler and Alan R. Hayakawa, Fourth Edition, pages 902-917.

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Frequently Misspelled Words

accidentally	disappearance	maintenance	relieve
acquaintance	embarrass	mathematics	relief
acquire	environment	medicine	resemble
address	especially	million	restaurant
already	exaggerate	miracle	reverence
all right	exercise	miscellaneous	ridiculous
answer	existence	mischief	sandwich
anxious	familiar	necessary	seize
arithmetic	fascinate	neighbor	separate
athletics	foreign	noticeable	several
attendance	forty	nuisance	similar
awful	fragrant	occasion	sincerely
awkward	friend	occur	succeed
believe	fulfill	occurrence	surprise
breathe	government	occurred	temperature
business	grammar	offered	than
calendar	harass	parallel	thorough
cemetery	height	peculiar	tragedy
changeable	hindrance	politics	truly
chief	incredible	possess	unnecessary
chosen	independent	practically	until
conscience	interesting	proceed	usually
daily	irresistible	receive	vegetable
definite	judgment	recognize	visitor
dependent	library	referred	weird
design	literature	referring	writing
device			

Frequently Confused Words/Phrases

a, an, and	because of, due to	everyday, every day	nausea, nauseated, nauseating, nauseous
accept, except, expect	beside, besides	everybody, everyone, every one	passed, past
adapt, adopt	breath, breathe	farther, further	perspective, prospective
adverse, averse	but, however, yet	few (fewer), little (less)	precede, proceed
advise, advise	can, may	formally, formerly	principal, principle
affect, effect	capital, capitol	former, latter	quotation, quote
all ready, already	cancel, censure	good, well	quiet, quit, quite
all right, alright	choose, chose, chosen	hanged, hung	real, really, very
all together, altogether	cite, site, sight	have, of	so, so that
allude, elude	clothes, cloths	healthful, healthy	some time, sometime, sometimes
allusion, illusion	compare to, compare with	hear, here	stationary, stationery
a lot, much, many	complement, compliment	hoping, hopping	supposed to, used to
among, between	conscience, conscious	imply, infer	than, then
amount, number	continual, continuous	in, into	their, there, they're
anxious, eager	council, counsel	its, it's	'til, till, until
anyplace, anywhere	could have/could've, must have/must've	lay, lie	to, too, two
as, as if, like	should have/should've, would have/would've (not could of, must of, should of, would of)	lead, led	usage, use
assure, ensure, insure	device, devise	loose, lose	were, we're, where
awful, awfully	different from, different than	many, much	which, who, that
awhile, a while	disinterested, uninterested	may be, maybe	whose, who's
bad, badly	especially, specially	moral, morale	your, you're

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