

Commonly confused words

'accept' and 'except'

accept – to agree to receive or do

except – not including

I will accept that argument.

Dinner will be served at 6pm, except on Sundays.

'advice' and 'advise'

advice – recommendations about what to do

advise – to recommend something, to inform

John gave me some advice.

John will advise the best course of action.

'affect' and 'effect'

affect – to change or make a difference to

effect – a result; to bring about a result

The manager's attitude affected all workers.

The effect was mass resignations.

'alternate' and 'alternative'

alternate – taking turns

alternative – an option

Teams A and B clean the kitchen in alternate weeks.

An alternative is to hire a cleaner.

'brake' and 'break'

brake – stopping a vehicle

break – to separate into pieces

We need to brake the progress of this project.

We need to break this project into 3 sub-projects.

'canvas' and 'canvass'

canvas – a type of strong cloth

canvass – to seek people's opinions

Let's canvass the market about the colour of our new canvas.

'council' and 'counsel'

council – a group of people who manage

counsel – advice; to advise

The city council decided against the proposal.

The decision was based on legal counsel.

'dependent' and 'dependant'

dependent – relying on something else

dependant – person relying on someone else

The success of the project is dependent on swift action.

His son is still a dependant, despite his age.

‘imminent’, ‘eminent’, ‘immanent’, ‘immanant’

imminent – about to happen

eminent – of high rank, importance

immanent – inherent, pervading

immanant – function of a matrix

The king’s entrance is imminent.

The eminent professor gave a speech.

Protection of individual freedoms is immanent in
the constitution

'it's' and 'its'

it's – the abbreviated form of 'it is'

its – ownership.

It's raining outside.

The dog buried its bone in the garden.

'principal' and 'principle'

principal – of highest rank, chief

principle – fundamental idea, general truth

The school principal said it was a matter of principle.

'licence', 'license', 'licensee'

licence – authority to do something

license – to give somebody authority to do something

licensee – the entity that has been given the authority

The police officer asked to see my drivers' licence.

I had been licensed for 40 years.

The licensee must meet all conditions of the licence.

'their' and 'there'

their – belonging to a group of people

there – referring to a place

It was their special place.

It was over there, near the tree.

'that' and 'which'

Use 'which' for a set of words enclosed with commas that adds information

Leap years, which have 366 days, have an extra day in February.

Use 'that' if it limits what you are talking about.

Meetings that are held on Wednesdays are in room 2.

Consider deleting 'that'.

Meetings held on Wednesdays are in room 2.

'to' and 'too' and 'two'

to – a preposition

too – as well as

two – the number 2

I want to go to the number two show too.

'reign' and 'rein' and 'rain'

reign – what the Queen does

rein – what you hold on to when riding a horse

rain – water falling from the sky

'stationary' and 'stationery'

stationary – not moving

stationery – writing materials

'your' and 'you're'

your – belonging to a person

you're – abbreviation of 'you are'