

A Quick Reference Guide from Writing Support Services

<http://www.cuw.edu/Tools/resources/lrc/writingcenter/grammar.html>

Commonly Misused Words

A LOT/ALOT/ALLOT

-A Lot is two words, not one.

-The only allot that is one word means to distribute by lot or arbitrary shares.

Correct: I like reading books a lot.

Incorrect: I like this game alot.

Correct: I am going to allot the property.

Incorrect: I like this movie allot.

ACCEPT/EXCEPT

Accept---a verb meaning to take or receive

Except---usually a preposition which means excluding

Correct: Everyone was there except for you and me.

Incorrect: Please except my answer.

Correct: I accept your apology.

Incorrect: Will you please except me as a member of the club?

An easy way to remember this is?

There is an "x" in except. "x" usually means to take out (x out) or exclude.

ACCESS/EXCESS

Access---the right to enter or use

Excess---more than enough; beyond what is proper or right

Correct: I have complete backstage access.

Incorrect: I have access brownies.

Correct: I have excess drinks.

Incorrect: I have excess to the room.

An easy way to remember this is?

Excess is extreme.

AFFECT/EFFECT

Affect---usually a verb meaning to influence
Effect---usually a noun meaning result or aid

People usually know the meaning, but they confuse the spellings

An easy way to remember this is?.

Something must **affect** something to have an **effect** on it. Remember **A** comes before **E** in the alphabet.

Special effects are things. Things are nouns.

ALL RIGHT/ALRIGHT

All right is always written as two words. Alright is nonstandard English.

Correct: The movie was all right.

Incorrect: The movie was alright.

ALTOGETHER/ALL TOGETHER

Altogether---completely

All together---in a group

An easy way to remember this is?

If you can take **all** out and it still makes sense, you should use all together.

Example---We sing all together.

We sing together.

ITS/IT'S

Its---possessive form of it

It's---a contraction of it is

Usually writers put an apostrophe thinking that it makes its possessive, but it does not.

Correct: It's Monday morning.

Incorrect: It's ball is in the corner.

Correct: Its ball is in the corner.

Incorrect: Its Monday morning.

An easy way to remember this is?

If you can insert "it is" in place of "it's" you are using the right form.

LAY/LIE

Lay--- to put down, always takes an object, past tense is laid

Lie---to recline, doesn't take an object, past tense is lay

Present Tense:

Correct: I am going to lay the book on the table.

Incorrect: I am going to lay in the sun.

Correct: I am going to lie in the sun.

Incorrect: I am going to lie the book on the table.

Usage errors occur because the present tense of lay and the past tense of lie are both lay.

Past Tense:

Correct: Yesterday I laid the book on the table.

Correct: This morning I lay in the sun.

THAN/THEM

Than---used in comparisons

Then---indication of point in time; also, next

Correct: I like red better than blue.

Incorrect: I will than go to the store.

Correct: First I will go to the store. Then I will go to the beach.

Incorrect: She is nicer then he.

An easy way to remember this is?

Than---comparisons

Then---next

THEIR/THERE/THEY'RE

Their---belonging to them

There---in or at that place

They're---contraction formed from they are

Correct: There is no explanation for your behavior.

They're coming!

Their behavior was inappropriate.

Incorrect: Their is the field. I hope there coming. Susan and Dan are bringing they're bats.

An easy way to remember this is?

If you can't replace they're with the phrase "they are", you are using the wrong word.

For the word there, remember they are places---here is in there.

WHO'S/WHOSE

Who's---a contraction of who is

whose---a possessive pronoun

Correct: Who's going to the movie?

Incorrect: Who's pencil is this?

Correct: Whose book is this?

Incorrect: Whose going on the trip?

An easy way to remember this is?

If you can use "who is" in place of who's you are using the right word