

Commonly Confused Words

1. Allusion vs. Illusion

An *allusion* refers to implying or referring to something, especially in literature.

Ex. The horse mentioned in the text is clearly an allusion to the Trojan horse.

An *illusion* refers to a misleading image, object, or idea that does not exist as it appears.

Ex. The magician created the illusion of a disappearing coin.

2. Among vs. Between

Among is used when referring to three or more.

Ex. Among the paintings was an original Picasso.

Between is used when referring to two.

Ex. I am stuck in traffic between Alden Rd. and Pennell Dr.

3. Effect vs. Affect

An *effect* is a result or a consequence.

Effect may also function as a verb meaning “to bring about something.”

Ex. The effect was catastrophic. OR The effects of the change in the existing system are, as yet, undetermined.

An *affect* is to have an impression, influence, or effect on something. (*usually* a verb)

Ex. This greatly affected his mental state that evening.

4. Fewer vs. Less

Fewer is used when referring to things that can be counted.

Ex. There were fewer customers than anticipated.

Less is used when referring to uncountable and usually abstract nouns.

Ex. I have less patience than Ted.

5. Hanged vs. Hung

Hanged refers to the past tense and past participle of hang (to put to death).

Ex. Many people were hanged during the Salem Witch Trials.

Hung refers to the past tense and past participle of hang (to suspend).

Ex. He hung the picture on the wall.

6. Imply vs. Infer

To *imply* means to suggest something without specifically stating it.

Ex. Are you implying that I did something wrong?

To *infer* means to draw a conclusion about something that hasn't been directly stated.

Ex. From your statement, I can infer that you believe he is guilty.

7. Lie vs. Lay

Use *lie* when the object is reclining on its own.

Ex. I am going to lie down. OR Go lie down on the couch.

Use *lay* when the object is being placed down.

Ex. I will lay the book on the table. OR I need to lay the baby down; it's nap time.

8. Many vs. Much

Many is used when referring to a large but definite number. *Many* refers to things that can be counted.

Ex. I have too many shoes.

Much is used when referring to something great in quantity, amount, extent or degree. *Much* refers to things that cannot be counted.

Ex. You have too much time on your hands.

9. Rise vs. Raise

Use *rise* when the object is lifting itself.

Ex. I rise each morning at six.

Use *raise* when the object is being lifted by another force.

Ex. She raised her hand; it did not rise on its own OR He raised the flag during the ceremony

10. Than vs. Then

Than is used to draw a comparison.

Ex. I like vanilla more than chocolate.

Then is used to refer to time/at that time.

Ex. I went to the store; then I went to David's graduation.

11. Their vs. They're vs. There

Their is the third person plural pronoun. It indicates a possession or relationship.

Ex. Their dog was in the backyard.

They're is the contraction of "they" and "are."

Ex. They're going to the amusement park on Friday.

There is used to refer to a specific location, position, or time. It may also be used to introduce a sentence or clause when the verb has no definite subject.

Ex. The books are over there. OR There will be cake at the party.

12. To vs. Too vs Two

To is used with verbs to form the infinitive or as a preposition expressing movement towards something.

Ex. It is important to tell the truth. OR We went to the mall.

Too is used to show an extensive degree or as a synonym of "also."

Ex. He is too young for that ride. OR I am going to the movies too.

Two is used when indicating a number.

Ex. There are two dishes to bring to the party. OR Two is too many; we only need one.

13. Who vs. Whom

Who is used when it is the subject of a sentence or a predicate noun.

Ex. Who wants ice cream?

Whom is used when it is the direct object, the indirect object, or the object of a preposition.

Ex. Whom did you ask to the dance? OR You are giving the ring to whom?

14. Whose vs. Who's

Whose is a pronoun expressing possession.

Ex. Whose car are we taking?

Who's is the contraction of who is.

Ex. Who's going to the concert?

Commonly Confused Words Practice Exercises

For each of the following sentences, circle the correct word choice:

1. We discussed the multiple literary (illusions/allusions) within the text.
2. (Among/Between) me and you, I think Kallie won the contest.
3. She had too (many/much) sweaters in her closet.
4. Alex was (to/too) excited to sleep.
5. (Their/They're/There) going to the amusement park tomorrow.
6. The sugar had a negative (effect/affect) on the science experiment.
7. Nicole has (fewer/less) shoes than Sara.
8. The gas prices continue to (raise/rise).
9. Michael (hanged/hung) the picture for his mother.
10. Cindy, (lay/lie) the book on the table.
11. John scored higher on the exam (then/than) I did.
12. (Who/Whom) wants to go to the mall tonight?
13. Haley did not mean to (infer/imply) that Jenny was to blame.
14. John had (less/fewer) travel time because he lives closer to the airport.
15. (Whose/Who's) watch is this on the counter?
16. I am going to (lie/lay) down for an hour.
17. The disappearing penny was simply an optical (allusion/illusion).
18. The book is on the table over (their/there/they're).
19. (Whose/Who's) responsible for the advertising of the event?
20. From your words, I can (infer/imply) that you think he is guilty.
21. The weather greatly (effected/affected) the outcome of the race.
22. (Their/They're/There) books are on the bottom shelf.
23. Earlier today we walked (to/too) the ice cream parlor.
24. The prisoner was (hung/hanged) last night.
25. There are red roses scattered (among/between) the carnations.
26. Kelly ordered her lunch, and (then/than) she went back to work.
27. Mark wanted (to raise/to rise) the flag at the assembly today.
28. (Who/Whom) did you ask to the party?
29. There was too (much/many) chlorine in the pool.

Commonly Confused Words Practice Answers

1. Allusion
2. Between
3. Many
4. Too
5. They're
6. Effect
7. Fewer
8. Rise
9. Hung
10. Lay
11. Than
12. Who
13. Imply
14. Less
15. Whose
16. Lie
17. Illusion
18. There
19. Who's
20. Infer
21. Affected
22. Their
23. To
24. Hanged
25. Among
26. Then
27. Raise
28. Whom
29. Much

Tips for Troublesome "T" Words

There and Their:

"There" and "their" are frequently confused when writing. Below is a device which might help you to remember how to use each word:

Remove the T from each	You are left with	Tip for remembering usage
T/here	here	Here denotes place - Think "here and there."
T/heir	heir	h heir is one who inherits or comes into possession Remember that "their" shows possession.

Then and Than:

Try this tip to help you remember how to use each word correctly in your writing:

"Then" rhymes with "when", and "when" refers to time.

Use "then" in cases in which you want to refer to time.

Otherwise, use "than."