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 r*ise* 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 of 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

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **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 | An heir is one who inherits or comes into possession -  Remember that "their" shows possession. |

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:

**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."