

WORDS FREQUENTLY CONFUSED

THE BIG LIST

A / AN

A and **an** are special adjectives called *articles*.

1. Use *a* and *an* to mean one. Use **an** before a word that begins with a vowel sound (*a, e, i, o, and u*). Use **a** before a word that does not begin with a vowel sound. Here are some examples:

Vowel Sound	No Vowel Sound
an otter	a table
an egg	a dog
an igloo	a plate

2. Sometimes the letter *u* has a vowel sound (“uh”), and sometimes it has a sound similar to *y* in the word *yellow* (not a vowel sound). Use **a** and **an** according to whether or not you hear the vowel sound of *u*.

Vowel Sound	No Vowel Sound
an understanding	a unicycle
an umpire	a unit
an ugly duckling	a used book

3. Use **a** when the letter *h* is pronounced, and **an** when *h* is silent.

Vowel Sound	No Vowel Sound
an hour	a hobby
an honest answer	a habit

4. Abbreviations sometimes create unique situations. Listen for the vowel sound.

Vowel Sound	No Vowel Sound
an M&M	a chocolate candy
an M.D.	a doctor
an IOU	a promise

A LOT / ALLOT

A lot means “a great amount” or “very much” It is always written as two words.

Example: I have **a lot** of time to study on Thursdays.
I like Italian food **a lot**.

Allot means “to parcel out” or “distribute.”

Example: We can **allot** only five minutes to each speaker.
The department will **allot** employees \$200 for professional growth.

ACCEPT / EXCEPT

Accept means “receive” or “get” It is a verb.

Example: Blake does not **accept** help easily.

Except means “excluded” or “other than”. (See the X?) It is a preposition.

Example: All of my family **except** my brother will attend the wedding.

ADVICE / ADVISE

Advice is a suggestion or an opinion. It is a noun.

Example: If you have a problem, ask Cheryl for **advice**.

Advise means “recommend” It is a verb.

Example: I **advise** you to get there early if you want to get good seats.

AFFECT / EFFECT

Affect means “influence” It is a verb.

Example: Rainy weather **affects** my mood.

Effect means “end result” It is a noun.

Example: The **effects** of the drought are not yet known.

ALL READY / ALREADY

All ready means “all set” or “prepared”

Example: I am **all ready** for the trip.

Already means “previously”, “by a specific time” or “by this time” It is an adverb.

Example: Her boyfriend is **already** an hour late.

ALL RIGHT / ALRIGHT

Alright is non-standard and should be written as **all right** in formal situations.

Example: Is it **all right** with you if I come along?

BESIDE / BESIDES

Beside means “alongside” or “next to”

Example: Why don't you come sit **beside** me?

Besides means “in addition to”

Example: **Besides** being talented, Jared is also very well liked.

HAVE / OF

Some writers mistakenly use **of** instead of the helping verb **have**. This error most frequently occurs after one of these verbs: *could*, *would*, *should*, *may*, *must*, *might*, and *will*.

Incorrect : I **could of** eaten the whole pie.

Correct : I **could have** eaten the whole pie.

Incorrect: Terry **must of** been here earlier.

Correct: Terry **must have** been here earlier.

Incorrect: Robby **should of** gone to that movie with us.

Correct: Robby **should have** gone to that movie with us.

ITS / IT'S

Its shows ownership. **Its** is a possessive pronoun just as his, her, and our are pronouns.

Example: I believe the house is in good condition, but **its** plumbing may need some attention.

It's means "it is" or "it has"

Example: **It's** sunny today. (it is)
It's been sunny for two weeks now. (it has)

LIE / LAY

1. **Lie** is an irregular verb meaning "rest on a surface" It has the following forms:

Present: lie(s) My dad **lies** down for a rest every afternoon.
Present Participle: lying My dad is **lying** down right now.
Past: lay My dad **lay** there for two hours without moving.
Past Participle: lain My dad has **lain** there for a while.

2. **Lie** is also a regular verb meaning "not tell the truth" It has three forms:

Present: lie(s) Please don't **lie** to me.
Present Participle: lying I hope he wasn't **lying** when he said that.
Past: lied She **lied** for the first time when she was seven.
Past Participle: lied She has never **lied** to me before.

3. **Lay** is an irregular verb meaning "put down" or "place" It has these forms:

Present: lay(s) I always **lay** my keys on the kitchen table.
Present Participle: laying Mike was **laying** his glasses on the table.
Past: laid Rachel **laid** the car keys on the table.
Past Participle: laid He has never **laid** carpet before.

LOOSE / LOSE

Loose means "not tight" It is an adjective.

Example: Those pants are too **loose** for you.

Lose means "misplace" (See? You lost an O.) or "not win" It is a verb.

Example: Fred must **lose** his car keys once a week.
Did your team win or **lose** yesterday?

PASSED / PAST

Passed is the past tense of the verb *pass*. It means “went by” or “handed”

Example: I can't believe the car **passed** us on that curve.
As the young man **passed** the sugar, he knocked over the wine.
Jake **passed** the final with flying colors.

Past means “previous time” It also means “by”

Example: I don't know much about his **past**.
Go **past** the sheep barn, and you'll see the horses in the field.

PRINCIPAL / PRINCIPLE

Principal means “main” or “most important” It is an adjective.

Example: The **principal** concern here is money.

Principal can also be a noun meaning “the head of a school”

Example: Every **principal** must decide how funds will be allocated.

Principle is a truth or a standard. It is a noun.

Example: The **principles** of math make sense to those who think logically.

QUIET / QUIT / QUITE

Quiet means “without noise” or “calm”

Example: I need **quiet** when I study.

Quit means “stop” or “give up” It is a verb.

Example: Marta wants to **quit** smoking.

Quite means “exactly” or “very”

Example: Those pants don't look **quite** right on you.
I was **quite** surprised by the phone call.

SIT / SET

Sit is an irregular verb meaning “sit down” or “rest” It has these forms:

Present:	sit(s)	My cat sits by me when I watch T.V.
Present Participle:	sitting	She is sitting near the window.
Past:	sat	I sat by Rick.
Past Participle:	sat	You have sat in the same seat all term.

Set is an irregular verb meaning “place” or “arrange” It has these forms:

Present:	set(s)	Maggie sets her keys on the table.
Present Participle:	setting	Margo is setting a date for her party.
Past:	set	Bill set his keys right there but can't find them.
Past Participle:	set	Blanca has set the date for her departure.

SUPPOSE / SUPPOSED

Suppose means “assume” Its past tense form is *supposed*.

Example: I **suppose** you like cream in your coffee.
I **supposed** he had traveled during childhood.

Supposed to means “should” but because the *d* at the end of *supposed* and the *t* at the beginning of *to* are pronounced as one sound, writers sometimes omit the *d* in *supposed*.

Incorrect I was **suppose to** study last night.
Correct I was **supposed to** study last night.

Incorrect A reliable employee is **suppose to** be on time.
Correct A reliable employee is **supposed to** be on time.

THAN / THEN

Than is used to compare.

Example: My sister is taller **than** I am.

Then refers to time.

Example: I'll have more time by **then**.

THERE / THEIR / THEY'RE

There refers to a direction or a place. It can also be used as a sentence opener.

Example: Put your coat over **there**.
There was so much excitement in the air.

Their shows ownership.

Example: The students listened intently to **their** president's speech.

They're means "they are"

Example: **They're** planning a surprise party for Elsa.

THREW / THROUGH

Threw is the past tense of *throw*. It is a verb.

Example: Tom **threw** the ball to first base, but the runner was safe.

Through means "in one side and out the other". It is a preposition.

Example: I walked **through** the Learning Center but couldn't find you.

Through can also be an adjective meaning "finished".

Example: Are you **through** with your homework yet?

TO / TOO

To means *toward*. It is a preposition. It is also used to form the infinitive, as in *to eat*.

Example: Did you go **to** the game last night?
I love **to** watch the Super Bowl with friends.

Too means *also* or *excessively*. It is an adverb.

Example: I would like to go **too**.
That enchilada was **too** spicy for me.

USE / USED

Use is a verb meaning “make use of” Its past tense form is *used*.

Example: Please **use** my car if you need to.
Mike **used** my cell phone to call his girlfriend.

Used to means *in the habit of*.

Example: When we were kids, we **used to** visit my grandma a lot.
I **used to** like loud music, but now I don't.

WERE / WE'RE

Were is the past tense of *are*. It is a verb.

Example: They **were** exhausted by the end of the trip.

We're means *we are*.

Example: **We're** so glad you could make it.

WHO'S / WHOSE

Who's means *who is* or *who has*.

Example: **Who's** planning to drive with Jackie to Portland?
Who's been eating my porridge?

Whose shows ownership. It is a relative pronoun.

Example: He is a musician **whose** talent is unmatched.
Do you know **whose** jacket that is?

YOUR / YOU'RE

Your shows ownership. It is a possessive pronoun like our, his, or her.

Example: Is this **your** correct phone number?

You're means *you are*.

Example: If **you're** in town next week, give me a call.