

# 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 <b>sits</b> by me when I watch T.V.
Present Participle:	sitting	She is <b>sitting</b> near the window.
Past:	sat	I <b>sat</b> by Rick.
Past Participle:	sat	You have <b>sat</b> in the same seat all term.

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

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

## SUPPOSE / SUPPOSED

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

Example:	I <b>suppose</b> you like cream in your coffee.
	I <b>supposed</b> 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 <b>suppose to</b> study last night.
Correct	I was <b>supposed to</b> study last night.
Incorrect	A reliable employee is <b>suppose to</b> be on time.
Correct	A reliable employee is <b>supposed to</b> be on time.

## THAN / THEN

**Than** is used to compare.

Example:	My sister is taller <b>than</b> I am.
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**Then** refers to time.

Example:	I'll have more time by <b>then</b> .
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## **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.