

Overcome Word Confusion

There's nothing that distracts a teacher more from the content of a term paper than grammatical errors. Like spelling errors, these are slips that almost anyone can make on occasion in a first draft. However, they should not survive the careful proofreading that teachers expect before students turn in their term papers. Here are some of the more common mistakes that irritate instructors everywhere:

Affect & Effect:

Use affect (a verb) when expressing the action that means "to influence" or "have an impact upon." Don't confuse it with either the noun form of effect, which means "result," or with the verb form of effect, which means "produce a result." The speech had a strong effect (impact) on all of us. Her tearful reply affected (had an influence on) us even more.

Already & All Ready:

Use already as an adverb to show that something has happened previously. Use all ready to give emphasis to "being set." We were all ready (all set) to give up hope when we learned that he had already (it has happened) arrived.

Capitol & Capital:

Use capitol in two situations only: one, when you are referring to the Capitol building in Washington, DC; two whenever you mention any of the buildings in which state legislatures conduct their business. In all other situations, use capital.

It's & Its:

Use it's as a contraction for "it is" (and be careful where you stick the apostrophe). Use its- without an apostrophe-as the possessive form of it. Just as there are no apostrophes in the possessive pronouns my, his, hers, ours, yours or theirs, you don't need one for its. It's (it is) too early to tell how the plan will turn out and what its (possessive) impact will be on the future.

Lie & Lay:

Use lie to express the act of reclining, resting or simply sitting somewhere. Use lay to express the act of setting something down. Be careful about how you express the past tense of each word-lay becomes laid and lie becomes lay! Lay (set) that toy down, go into the bedroom and lie (recline) down on the bed.

Lose & Loose:

Use lose to indicate that you can't find something or that you've failed. Use loose when something is slack or not fitted properly. Did you lose (misplace) your loose (baggy) pants on the camping trip?

Marital & Martial:

Marital relates to marriage. Martial relates to military matters. Spellcheck will never catch this mistake! She has been able to put up with the marital (marriage) problems by becoming a martial (military) arts expert.

Principal & Principle:

Use principle when referring to things you should believe in or follow-rules or standards of behavior. Use principal when referring to either people (the principal of a school or the principals in a company) or money (the principal on a loan). As an adjective, use principal to indicate prominence or importance.

Than & Then:

Use than to connect the two parts of a comparison. Use then to denote a point in time. He was more ambitious four years ago than (comparison) he is today. Back then (when), however, he wasn't interested in Lisa.

Their, There & They're

Use their as the possessive form of they, there as an adverb that means the opposite of here, and they're as a contraction of they are. Based on our conversations, there is every reason to believe that they're going to give us their full cooperation.