

## WRITING CENTER

### Commonly Confused Words

#### Accept / except

**Accept** is a verb meaning “to receive or come to terms with”—“She *accepted* his story as truth.”

**Except** is either a verb meaning “to exclude”—“Please *except* that item from the list”—or a preposition meaning “excluding”—“I like every kind of ice cream *except* strawberry.”

#### A lot / allot

**A lot** is an informal way of saying “a bunch” or “several.” It is **never** combined as *alot* (not a word).

**Allot** is a verb meaning “to divide up and distribute”—“The father *allotted* one share to each child.”

#### Effect / affect

**Effect** is almost always a noun meaning “a result” or “a consequence”—“The drug had side *effects*.”

**Affect** is a verb meaning “to change, alter, or have impact on”—“His harsh words really *affected* me.”

**Exception:** *effect* can be used as a verb meaning “to bring about”—“The president’s new policies *effected* a big change in the economy.” (most often used in “*to effect a change*”)

#### Every day / everyday

**Every day**, typed as two words, means the same as *each day* or *every single day*.

**Everyday** is an adjective that means “common,” “typical,” or “routine”: “The doctor said I could resume my *everyday* activities” or “Falling asleep at her desk is an *everyday* occurrence for her.”

#### Good / well

**Good** is an adjective used to describe a noun—“a *good* dinner” or “a *good* performance,” etc.

**Well** is an adverb used to describe a verb—“she cooks *well*” or “the choir sings *well*.” **Well** can also modify an adjective—“a well-known cook” or “well-informed journalist.” (Note the hyphen usage.)

#### It’s / its

**It’s** includes an apostrophe ( ‘ ), which means the word is a contraction of two words: *it* and *is*. If you use this word, you must be able to logically replace it with “it is.” Otherwise, it’s incorrect.

**Its** (without an apostrophe) is a possessive pronoun which shows that something belongs to “it”—“The dog found *its* bone” or “The corporation failed to fully report *its* losses.”

## Loose / lose

**Loose** (with the double o) is an adjective meaning a variety of things: relaxed, not tight, not secure, etc: “She preferred to wear *loose*-fitting pants” or “The *loose* screw made the ladder dangerous.”

**Lose** is a verb meaning to misplace, shed, or not win; you can *lose* keys, *lose* weight, *lose* a game, etc.

## Then / than

**Then** is an adverb referring to time or sequence (like “next” or “afterward”).

**Than** is a conjunction implying a comparison—“He is a stronger swimmer *than* she is.”

## They’re / their / there

**They’re** also includes an apostrophe, indicating that the word is a contraction of *they* and *are*. Any other use is incorrect.

**Their** is a possessive pronoun. Use this word to show that something belongs to two or more people—“Their son failed first grade” or “The women fought for their rights.”

**There** is an adverb denoting a place—“Put the book over *there*”—or an expletive, an “empty” word used to begin a sentence when the subject follows the verb: “*There* is too much poverty in our world.”

## Too / to / two

**Too** is an intensifier used to show the extent or extremity of some adjective or adverb--“She’s *too* skinny to be healthy” or “He exercised *too* soon after eating dinner.”

**To** is a preposition for location or direction—“Go *to* New York” or “Give it *to* the teacher.”

**Two** is a number following *one* and preceding *three*.

## Weather / whether

**Weather** refers to the climate, temperature, outdoor conditions, etc.

**Whether** is a conjunction referring to the choice between two or more alternatives—“I have to decide whether or not I want to attend the party.”

## Who / whom

**Who** is a relative pronoun that acts as a subject, which means it usually appears just before a verb—“The prize went to the contestant who ran the fastest” or “Do you know who called this morning?”  
S V S V

**Whom** is a relative pronoun that functions as an object of a verb or preposition—“This is the woman whom he photographed” or “I don’t know whom to contact” or “To whom would you like to speak?”  
O S V O V P O

(he photographed *whom*)

(to contact *whom*)

(to speak to *whom*)

In each example, *whom* functions as an object (“receiver”) of something, not the subject (“doer”).

## You’re / your

**You’re** is always a contraction of *you* and *are* (as noted by the apostrophe).

**Your** is a possessive pronoun showing that something belongs to a second person: “You haven’t finished *your* dinner” or “Record *your* name in the space provided.”