

Accept vs. Except

Accept is a verb that means “to take, receive or agree to.”

e.g. Users must first accept Apple’s terms and conditions before downloading any software updates.

Except is a preposition or conjunction that means “to exclude.”

e.g. I like all kinds of chocolate except white chocolate.

Affect vs. Effect

Affect is usually a verb that means “to change or influence.”

e.g. Recent cutbacks will affect social programming.

Effect is a noun that means “a consequence, result or impression.”

e.g. The drug has a number of side effects.

Amount vs. Number

Amount refers to the quantity of something you can measure, but can’t count.

e.g. I am astonished by the amount of peanut butter you slather onto your toast.

Number refers to the quantity of something you can count.

e.g. The number of calories you should consume depends on your age and lifestyle.

Assure vs. Ensure vs. Insure

Assure means “to remove doubt or anxiety,” usually from people or animals.

e.g. The server assured the guests that their food would be ready soon.

Ensure means “to guarantee or make certain,” usually in reference to events or conditions.

e.g. Clear signage will ensure that attendees know where to register when they arrive.

Insure refers to liability or securing an insurance policy.

e.g. Tenants should insure the contents of their apartments.

Comprise vs. Compose

Comprise means to include.

e.g. The whole comprises the parts.

Compose means to constitute and is often used in the passive voice.

e.g. The whole is composed of the parts.

i.e. vs e.g.

i.e. is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *id est*, which means “that is” or “that is to say.” It introduces a clarification.

e.g. The defense argued that he was not a reliable witness due to the nature of his relationship with the accused, *i.e.*, their acrimonious divorce.

e.g. is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *exempli gratia*, which means “for example” or “for instance.” It introduces an example. (Do not use “ex.”)

e.g. This event will have a number of features to attract students (e.g. free food, therapy dogs, free printing.)

Its vs. It's

Its is a possessive adjective, like *his* or *her*.

e.g. The dog was chasing its tail

It's is a contraction of *it is*.

e.g. It's cloudy outside today.

Lead vs. Led

Lead is the present tense of the verb “to lead.” Or it refers to a poisonous metal.

e.g. Lead us not into temptation.

e.g. The child who ate old paint now suffers from lead poisoning.

Led is the past tense of the verb “to lead.”

e.g. He led the Liberal Party to victory in the 2015 federal elections.

Less vs. Fewer

Less is used when comparing the quantity of something we measure, but can't count.

e.g. We received less snow than last winter.

Fewer is used when comparing the quantity of something we can count.

e.g. There were fewer people than we expected.

Loose vs. Lose

Loose is the opposite of tight. It's an adjective.

e.g. I lost so much weight, my pants are loose.

Lose means "to misplace." It's a verb.

e.g. Did you lose your keys again?

Their vs. There vs. They're

Their is a possessive adjective, like *our* or *your*.

e.g. Students must submit their assignments by the deadline indicated in the syllabus.

There is the opposite of *here*. It is also used with the verb *to be* to form an expletive, which lets us express that something exists.

e.g. Put the package over there.

e.g. There are fourteen students registered in the course.

They're is a contraction of *they are*.

e.g. They're not being held accountable.

Then vs. Than

Then can indicate time or sequence order; it can also introduce a result or consequence.

e.g. First, pat the chicken dry. Then salt it liberally.

e.g. If you don't season the chicken with salt, then it will taste bland.

Weather vs. Whether

Weather refers to atmospheric conditions. It is also the #1 topic of conversation in Canada.

e.g. Can you believe this weather? Why, Mother Nature? WHY?

Whether indicates that a choice exists.

e.g. Have you asked whether she's going to apply for an internship?

Which vs. That

Which usually introduces non-essential information in a sentence. It is preceded (and sometimes later followed) by a comma.

e.g. He lives in Memramcook, which isn't far from Moncton.

e.g. St. Thomas University, which was first established in Chatham, is located in Fredericton.

That introduces information essential to the meaning in a sentence. No commas are needed.

e.g. SSRIs are a class of drugs that are commonly used to treat depression.

Who vs. Whom

Who is doing the action in the clause that follows it.

e.g. Students who attend the Writing Centre can improve their assignments.

Whom is receiving the action or being affected by it in the clause that follows it.

e.g. Do you know the name of the person whom I was talking to just now?

Whose vs Who's

Whose is a possessive pronoun. It indicates ownership.

e.g. Whose car is in our driveway?

Who's is a contraction of "who is" or "who has."

e.g. Who's in charge here?

e.g. Who's eaten the last cookie?

Your vs. You're

Your is a possessive pronoun, like *our* or *their*.

e.g. Your girlfriend phoned.

You're is a contraction of *you are*.

e.g. You're supposed to call her back.