

CONFUSED & MISUSED WORDS

a/an 'A' is used before a word beginning with a consonant or consonant sound ("a door", "a one-time deal"). 'An' is usually used before a word beginning with a vowel or vowel sound ("an operation"). 'A' is usually used before 'h' when the 'h' is pronounced ("a headache"); 'an' is used if the 'h' is not pronounced ("an honor").

accept/except The verb 'accept' means "to agree to, receive" ("accept a gift"). 'Except' most often means "not including" ("will visit all national parks except the Grand Canyon").

adapt/adopt The verb 'adapt' means "to change or modify" ("adapt to the warmer climate"); the verb 'adopt' means "to take as one's own" ("adopt a child").

affect/effect The verb 'affect' means "to cause a change in something" ("rain affects plant growth"); the noun 'effect' means "the result" ("the effect of rain on plant growth").

ain't 'Ain't' is used by some people in informal speech to mean "are not," "is not," or "am not," among other things. Because "ain't" is considered very informal it is not generally used in formal speech or in writing.

aisle/isle 'Aisle' means "a walkway between seats"; 'isle' is a poetic word meaning "island".

a lot, allot 'A lot', meaning "a great number", is spelled as two words; it is sometimes written incorrectly as 'alot'. 'Allot' is a verb meaning "to give out in portions" ("allotted one hour for the project").

an See 'a/an'.

apt See 'liable/likely/apt'.

as. . .as Is it more correct to say "she is as smart as I" or "she is as smart as me"? Actually, both ways are correct. In comparisons with "as. . .as", it's acceptable to use either subject pronouns (like

"I", "you", "he", "she", "it", "we", and "they") or object pronouns (like "me", "you", "him", "her", "it", "us", and "them") after the second 'as'. However, subject pronouns are more formal, so you may want to use subject pronouns in your comparisons when you are speaking formally or writing.

as/like Sometimes 'as' is used with the same meaning as 'like' ("do as I do"), ("do like I do"). At other times, 'as' means "in the role of" ("acted as a substitute teacher").

as well as When 'as well as' is used in a comparison, the pronoun following the second 'as' is usually in the subject form ("she can spell as well as I [can]", not "she can spell as well as me"). (For a list of subject pronouns, see 'as. . .as'.)

aural/oral 'Aural' and 'oral' are sometimes pronounced the same, but they have different meanings. 'Aural' means "of or relating to the ear or sense of hearing." It comes from the Latin word for "ear". 'Oral' means "of, relating to, given by, or near the mouth," and comes from a Latin word for "mouth." (See also 'verbal/oral'.)

bare/bear 'Bare' means "without clothes or a covering" ("bare feet"); 'bear' means "to carry".

bazaar/bizarre 'Bazaar' is a fair or an exhibition of things for sale; 'bizarre' means 'weird'.

beside/besides 'Beside' generally means "next to or at the side of" something; 'besides' means "in addition to".

born/borne 'Born' is having come into life; 'borne' means "carried".

bring/take 'Bring' usually means "to carry to a closer place"; 'take', "to carry to a farther place".

can/may 'Can' usually means "to be able to or know how to" ("they can read and write"); 'may' means "to have permission to" ("may I go?"). In casual conver-

sation, 'can' also means "to have permission to" ("can I go?"), but 'may' is used instead in more formal speech or in writing.

canvas/canvass 'Canvas' is a cloth; 'canvass' means to ask people's opinions.

capital/capitol 'Capital' is the place or city of government; 'capitol' is the building of government.

cereal/serial 'Cereal' is a breakfast food; 'serial' is a story presented in parts.

colonel/kernal 'Colonel' is a military rank; 'kernel' is a part of a seed.

compliment/complement A 'compliment' is a nice thing to say; a 'complement' is something that completes.

council/counsel A 'council' is a group of people meeting; 'counsel' is advice.

country/county 'Country' is a nation; 'county' is a small, local government area.

data This was originally a plural form, but today it is used as both a singular and a plural noun.

desert/dessert 'Desert' (with one 's') is a dry, barren place; 'dessert' is a sweet eaten after a meal.

die/dye To 'die' is to cease to live; to 'dye' is to change the color of.

dived/dove Both spellings are common as a past tense of the verb 'dive' ("she dived into the pool", "she dove into the pool").

effect See 'affect/effect'.

except See 'accept/except'.

farther/further 'Farther' usually refers to distance ("he ran farther than I did"). 'Further' refers to degree or extent ("she further explained the situation").

flammable/inflammable Both words mean "capable of catching fire", but 'inflammable' is also sometimes used to mean "excitable".

forth/fourth 'Forth' means "forward"; 'fourth' means "number four in a sequence".

further See 'farther/further'.

good/well 'To feel good' generally means "to be in good health and good spirits." 'To feel well' usually means "to be healthy".

half/half a/a half a The 'l' in 'half' is silent—it is used in writing, but it is not pronounced. 'Half' is often

used with the word 'a', which can either come before 'half' or after it ("ate a half sandwich", "ate half a sandwich"). In casual speech, 'a half a' is sometimes used ("ate a half a sandwich"), but it is avoided in more formal speech and in writing.

hanged/hung Both 'hanged' and 'hung' are used as the past tense of the verb 'to hang'. 'Hanged' is used when referring to execution by hanging; 'hung' is used in all other senses.

hardy/hearty 'Hardy' (suggestive of 'hard') means "strong"; 'hearty' (suggestive of 'heart') means "friendly, enthusiastic".

isle See 'aisle/isle'.

its/it's 'Its' means "of or relating to it or itself" ("the dog wagged its tail"). 'It's' is a contraction of 'it is' ("it's polite to say 'thank you'").

kernel See 'colonel/kernel'.

later/latter 'Later' is the comparative form of 'late'; it means "after a given time" ("they started later than they had intended"). 'Latter' is an adjective that refers to the second of two things mentioned, or the last one of a sequence ("of the two choices, the latter is preferred").

lay/lie 'Lay' means "to put (something) down"; 'lie' means "to put one's body in a flat position".

lead/led These two words are pronounced the same, but have different meanings. 'Lead' is a metal; 'led' is the past tense of the verb 'to lead'.

less/fewer 'Less' is usually used with things that cannot be counted ("there is less sunshine today") and 'fewer' with things that can be counted ("there are fewer people today").

liable/likely/apt All three words mean the same thing, but 'likely' and 'apt' are more often used in situations that could have a positive or neutral outcome ("she's apt to burst out laughing", "they'll likely visit today"). 'Liable' is usually used where there is a possibility of a negative outcome ("you're liable to get hurt").

lie See 'lay/lie'.

like See 'as/like'.

liter/litter A 'liter' is a unit of measurement; 'litter' is a messy collection of things.

loose/lose 'Loose' means "not tight"; 'lose' means "to misplace or fail to win".

marital/martial 'Marital' has to do with marriage; 'martial' has to do with the military.

may See 'can/may'.

moral/morale 'Moral' has to do with high ideals ("a person of good moral character"); 'morale' is the state of feelings of a person or group ("after the victory, morale was high").

naval/navel 'Naval' has to do with a navy; a 'navel' is a belly button.

no way 'No way' is an expression meaning "no" or "not at all." It is used in everyday speech, but is usually considered too casual for formal speech and writing.

oral See 'verbal/oral' and 'aural/oral'.

peace See 'piece/peace'.

pedal/peddle 'Pedal' means "to use or work the pedals of something" ("pedal a bicycle"). 'Peddle' means "to sell from house to house".

piece/peace A 'piece' is a portion of something ("a piece of cake"); 'peace' is the freedom from war or fighting.

precede/proceed 'Precede' means "to go ahead of or come before"; 'proceed' means "to start or move forward".

principle/principal A 'principle' is a rule or guiding truth; 'principal' is "the main one"—as an adjective or a noun: ("the principal meal of the day," "the head of a school is a principal." It may help you to remember that that 'principle' and 'rule' end with the same two letters.

serial See 'cereal/serial'.

set/sit The verb 'set' means "to rest on eggs to hatch them"; 'sit' means "to rest on the part of the body where the hips and legs join".

stationary/stationery Something that is stationary stands still; 'stationery' is paper that is used for writing letters. It's easy to tell these two words apart if you remember that 'stationery' and 'letter' are both spelled with 'er'.

take See 'bring/take'.

than/then 'Than' is a conjunction used to indicate a comparison ("better than that"); 'then' means "at that time" ("then we went home").

there/their 'There' points to a place ("there it is"); 'their' refers to "what belongs to them" ("this is their house").

to/too/two 'To' implies a direction ("went to the store"). 'Too' means "also", "very", or "excessively" ("brought a pen and pencil too", "not too difficult", "too much"). 'Two' is the number 2.

used to/use to The phrases 'used to' and 'use to' are often confused since they have the same pronunciation. 'Used to' is correct in most instances ("we used to go to the lake every summer", "I used to know that"). But when it follows 'did' or 'didn't', the correct spelling is 'use to' ("that didn't use to be a problem").

verbal/oral Both 'verbal' and 'oral' are sometimes used to mean "spoken rather than written" ("a verbal agreement", "an oral agreement"). 'Verbal' can also mean "of, relating to, or formed by a verb," or "of, relating to, or consisting of words." (For more about 'oral,' see 'aural/oral'.)

want See 'won't/want'.

were/we're 'Were' is a past tense verb form of 'be' ("they were