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Language Tips Series

Easily confused words

What are easily confused words?

Some pairs or groups of words are easily confused with each other because they are similar in some way. Often, they are **homophones** or **homographs**. In some cases, they are **homonyms**.

What are some examples?

easily confused words	example
there / their	Is that your car over there ? Their office is on the 5th floor.
too / to	His rates are too high for us. I'll call you to arrange a meeting.
whose / who's	Whose logo is that? Who's joining us today?
everyday / every day	Emailing is an everyday task. We post on social media every day .
lose / loose	We can't afford to lose more money. It's loose – can we tighten it?
affect / effect	This shouldn't affect our costs. What will the effect be on sales?
e.g. / i.e.	Reason for the return, e.g. faulty item Speak to senior staff – i.e. managers



Keywords

homophone: a word that has the same pronunciation as another word but is spelled differently and has a different meaning

homograph: a word that has the same spelling as another word but is pronounced differently and has a different meaning

homonym: a word that has the same pronunciation and spelling as another word, but the meaning is different



Extra tip

they / them / their are pronouns used to refer to a group of people (plural) AND one person (singular).

If you're not sure which singular pronouns the person you're writing about uses, ask them.



Confusing word pairs in detail

there / their

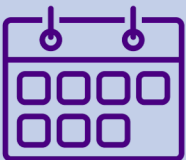
Word	When to use it	Example
there	To introduce a statement with 'there is' or 'there are'	There are 12 items in this product range. In 2023, there will be some changes to our company structure.
there	To refer to a place that we've already referred to in some way	Is that your car over there ?
their	To show that something belongs to or relates to a person or group of people we've already referred to as 'they'	Please speak to my VA. Their name is Simon and they will be happy to help you. Their office is on the 5th floor.

For more uses of 'there', refer to a dictionary such as [MacmillanDictionary.com](https://www.macmillandictionary.com) or [Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com).

too / to

Word	When to use it	Example
too	To help describe that a situation / action is impossible or unacceptable (<i>too much; too fast; too big</i>)	He works too slowly . This piece is too short to use.
too	To mean 'also'	Can I take a look, too ?
to	With the infinitive form of a verb	Let's make a plan to discuss this next time.
to	To show direction / place	I'm going to Perth next week.

For more uses of 'to', refer to a dictionary such as [MacmillanDictionary.com](https://www.macmillandictionary.com) or [Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com).



Extra tip

lose and **loose** are not actually homophones, homographs or homonyms! The trick to using them correctly is to listen to their pronunciation.

lose is pronounced with a 'z' sound: 'l-oo-z'.

loose is pronounced with an 's' sound: 'l-oo-s'.

Confusing word pairs in detail

whose / who's

Word	When to use it	Example
whose	To show that something belongs or is related to someone we've just referred to	<i>We'll be choosing the candidate whose resume fits our needs the best.</i>
who's	In place of 'who is'	<i>Who's your favourite designer?</i>

everyday / every day

Word	When to use it	Example
everyday	To describe that something is completely normal / very common	<i>Early meetings are an everyday occurrence in my job.</i>
every day	To mean 'each day'	<i>I work Mondays to Sundays; I work every day.</i>

lose/ loose

Word	When to use it	Example
lose	To express that something is taken away from you or you can't find something	<i>We're going to lose a huge contract this week. I think I've lost the blue file. Have you seen it?</i>
loose	To mean 'not firmly fixed' or 'not tight'	<i>You need to tighten these loose fixtures. Their uniform is loose on them; it's too big.</i>

For more uses of 'lose' and 'loose', refer to a dictionary such as [MacmillanDictionary.com](https://www.macmillandictionary.com) or [Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com).



Extra tip

Here **affect** is a verb and **effect** is a noun.

Affect can also be a noun meaning 'an emotion that influences your thoughts/actions'. It's also pronounced differently.

Effect can also be a verb meaning 'to make something happen'.



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Confusing word pairs in detail

affect / effect

Word	When to use it	Example
affect	To express a change or influence on something	<i>Not making enough money this month will affect our budget for next year.</i>
effect	To name a change that is the result of an action	<i>Low sales had a negative effect on staff morale.</i>

e.g. / i.e.

Word	When to use it	Example
e.g.	To mean 'for example'	<i>We include a one-year warranty on all electronic items, e.g. audio players and headphones.</i>
i.e.	To mean 'that is' and explain exactly what you mean	<i>If I suspect that any section of your work was not written by you, i.e. it has been copied from another source, I will not complete the project.</i>

Getting the most out of this tip sheet

Reading about these easily confused words is just the first step to improving your written English! To get the most out of this resource, I recommend:

- keeping this tip sheet somewhere you can refer to it easily
- noticing the easily confused words listed here when you read other pieces of writing
- writing down any of the word pairs that you often confuse so you can check for them when you proofread your writing before you share it with your readers.