

Commonly confused words

Certain word pairs are very similar but choosing the wrong word can lead to confusion about the meaning of your sentence.

Some word pairs are different based on whether the word is an action (a verb) or a thing (a noun). Some word pairs are different based on whether you should insert an apostrophe or not.

Advice / advise

“Advise” is a verb; it means “to tell someone what you think they should do” or “to give help or information”.

“Advice” is a noun; it means “guidance or help”.

For example:

Her advice was very useful.

The general advised the president to attack. Her advice was very useful.

How to tell the difference:

If you can add “some” before the word, it should be “advice”.

Affect / effect

“Affect” is a verb; it means “to change, alter, or influence something”.

“Effect” is a noun; it means “the result, outcome, or consequence”.

For example:

The wind will affect TV reception. Rheumatic fever affected his heart.

The yen has an effect on the Kiwi dollar.

The effects of the earthquake were felt in several countries.

Note: ‘effect’ can also mean “to cause something”, but this use is not very common. For example: He effected a political coup by sending in a private army.

How to tell the difference:

If you can add “some” before the word, it should be “effect”.

Practise / practice

“Practise” is a verb; it means “to do something over and over” “Practice” is a noun; it means “something that people do regularly”.

For example:

You'll get better at it – you just need to practice.

He practises the piano every day.

How to tell the difference:

If you can add “some” before the word, it should be “practice”.

Were / we’re / where

“Were” is a past form of the ‘to be’ verb; it means “are [in the past]”.

“We’re” means “we are”.

“Where” means “a place, point, or position”, and is often part of a question.

For example:

Were you involved?

We’re having a barbecue after work this afternoon. Where did you buy that book?

How to tell if you should be using “we’re”:

If you can replace the word with “we are”, there should be an apostrophe.

Your/you’re

“Your” means “belonging to you”.

“You’re” means “you are”.

For example:

Your car was towed yesterday. I like your outfit.

You’re going to be late unless you hurry. If you’re careful, you won’t get hurt.

How to tell if you should be using “you’re”:

If you can replace the word with “you are”, there should be an apostrophe.

There/they’re/their

“There” has many meanings, but is similar to “here” and often refers to a place or position. It is also used in phrases like “there is” or “there are”.

“They’re” means “they are”.

“Their” means “belonging to them” or “a part of them”.

For example:

I’m going there tomorrow. There is nothing you can do.

They're going to Europe for the holidays. They're not very happy about the rainstorm. Their car was stolen.

I liked their photo album.

How to tell if you should be using “they’re”:

If you can replace the word with “they are”, there should be an apostrophe.

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students s an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).