

-- This is the hammer WITH WHICH my brother built that cabinet.
(People build things WITH a hammer.)

it's/its

It's = A short-cut way of writing IT IS or IT HAS:
Jeff said IT'S always hard to find a parking space near campus.
(it is always . . .)
IT'S been a long time since I had a physical check-up.
(it has been a long time . . .)

Its = Whatever "it" is OWNS something.
The committee gave ITS report on Tuesday.
Wal-Mart is having ITS big sale next month.

lie/lay

lie = To tell a falsehood; Sometimes I lie about my age.
Forms: I lied (past tense)
I was lying
I had lied

lay = To put something down on a surface.
I always lay my books over there.
Forms: I laid my books down. (past)
I was laying my books down.
I had laid my books down.

lie = To put one's body in a horizontal position for sleeping or resting.
I lie down every day for about twenty minutes.
Forms: I lay down for an hour yesterday.
I was lying down when you called.
I had lain down for a few minutes when the door bell rang.

loneliness

Spell it correctly: l-o-n-E-l-i-n-e-s-s

loose/lose

Don't confuse these words.
loose = Not tight; not closed completely.
The top of the jar is rattling because it is loose.
lose = Not winning a contest or an athletic event.

lose = We did not want to LOSE our homecoming football game.
To fail to keep something or to hold on to it.
It was a shame that he had to lose such a good parking space.

receive

Spell it correctly: r-e-c-E-i-v-e

there/they're/ their

Take time to use these words correctly.

There = In that place. I like Chicago because I was born THERE.
There = A “dummy subject”
THERE are a few things you should remember about this job.

They’re = A contraction for THEY ARE.
I like bananas when THEY’RE ripe.
(they are)

Their = Of or belonging to something plural.
The students received THEIR grades early this year.
The two children visited THEIR father last week.

two/to/too

Don’t confuse these words.

TWO = The number 2. My boss lives only TWO blocks from me.

TO = A preposition in front of a noun.
to the school to the back of the room
to the church to the job

Used in front of a present-tense verb.

I like **to eat** It began **to snow** I want **to go**
to fish **to rain** **to play**

TOO = 1. Another word for ALSO.
I go to John A. Logan College, and my cousin goes there TOO.

2. Meaning “very” or “extremely” or “going beyond acceptable limits”
He was TOO old to bungee jump.
The necklace was TOO expensive.
The policeman said that I had been driving TOO fast.

quiet/quite/ quit

quiet = Silent; without noise.
The room became QUIET when the mayor entered.

quite = Very; It became QUITE hot in the afternoon.

quit = To stop working or to leave a job permanently.
The factory workers QUIT promptly at 5 p.m.

than/then

Don't confuse these two words.

than = A word used when comparing two people, places, or things.
Chicago is much larger THAN Rockford.

then = 1. At that time.
We ate a nice dinner, and THEN we went for a short walk.
2. Used with *if* to mean "as a result of something"
If it rains, THEN we can't have a picnic.

were/where

Don't confuse these words.

were = Rhymes with *fur*. Plural, past-tense form of verb "to be"
Tom and Joe WERE in class yesterday.

where = Rhymes with *dare*. Referring to a physical place.
I know WHERE you live and Where you go to school.

who's/whose

who's = A contraction of WHO IS or WHO HAS.
A teacher knows WHO'S late and WHO'S been on time.
(who is) (who has)

whose = Belonging to WHO; ownership.
The scholarship goes to the student WHOSE grade point is the highest.

woman/women

woman = one female adult human being.
I know a WOMAN who has traveled around the world.

women = (Rhymes with *lemon*)
two or more adult female human beings
Many WOMEN have both a career and a home life.

your/you're

your = Belonging to you;
I'll be visiting YOUR home next week.

you're = a contraction of YOU and ARE:
YOU'RE one of the most interesting people I know.

nowadays

This word is frequently misspelled.

It means "at the present time in history" or "at the current time in which we are now living" as opposed to some earlier unspecified times in the past. It is made up of three small words all jammed together to make one word:

now + a + days = nowadays

The professor explained that nowadays the phrase "a hard day at work" refers to stressful mental tension rather than hard physical labor on the job.

feel/fell/fill

Do not confuse these three similar-sounding words.

feel = Rhymes with *peel* and *steel*

1. To touch with the fingers or the hand to get a sensation.
Susan likes to feel the smoothness of silk.
2. To make an estimate of one's general state of health.
The doctor asked his patient, "How do you feel today?"

fell = Rhymes with *sell* and *bell*.

- The past tense of the verb *fall*.
Last year snow fell in Los Angeles, and many people fell down while trying to work on it.

fill = Rhymes with *pill* and *Bill*.

1. To leave no remaining room, as in a container.
Jack wanted to fill his coffee cup to the brim.
2. To make complete and whole, as in a written form.
We were asked to fill out the entire application in ink.

go/went/ have gone

These are the three main forms of the verb *go*.

go = Past tense.

I go to Logan, and my cousin goes there also.

went = Past tense of *go*.

Last semester I went to SIU but didn't really care for it.

gone = The form of *go* used only after the words *have* or *had*.

If I had gone to a much larger school farther away, perhaps I would have liked it better.

Note: Never ever say or write "have went" or "had went." It is very incorrect.

kid (kids)

This is a very casual word for "young children." As such, it is acceptable only in very casual conversations with a close friend. However, in written essays for a college class, it is too informal to be used in that way. Use a different, more formal word for "young children." Technically, a *kid* is actually a baby goat or lamb.

kid = A baby goat

young children = youngsters, teenagers, young people, teeny-boppers, adolescents, youth

you

This is another word that is very informal and can be misused. Technically, the words *you* and *your* refer only to the person (or persons) being addressed by someone else. Avoid trying to make it refer to everyone in general.

Incorrect: When you are attending college, you should take your required classes early.

(The above sentence would be correct only if it is being addressed directly to one individual student alone.)

More accurate and general:

When students are attending college, they should take their required classes early.

Here is a list of several alternative words and phrases that are more correct than using *you*.

1. One = One should always take care of one's health.
2. A person = A person should always take care of his health.
3. An individual = An individual should always take care of his health.
4. People = People should always take care of his health.
5. Any specific noun that fits the context.
A patient should always take care of his health.

hardly

A negative adverb indicating “in a difficult way” or “with great difficulty.”

The assembly hall was so noisy that I could hardly hear the speaker.

Note: Never use any form of the word *not* with *hardly*.

Wrong: The fog was so thick that I couldn't hardly see.

Correct: The fog was so thick that I could hardly see.

only

This word should always be placed as close as possible to what it actually modifies in the sentence.

Not: I only had ten minutes to fill out the lengthy questionnaire.

Rather: I had only ten minutes to fill out the lengthy questionnaire.

wake up turn off/on

Phrases using a preposition as their second word should usually be written together and never separated.

Awkward: My first action every morning was to turn the radio on and listen to it while I brushed my teeth.

Better: My first action every morning was to turn on the radio and listen to it while I brushed my teeth.

**numbers as
digits or as
words?**

Which is correct?

My great grandfather is one hundred and two years old.

or

My grandfather is 102 years old.

I have lived in this area for 5 years.

or

I have lived in this area for five years.

Here's the general rule:

1. If the number can be expressed in one word, then use the one word.
three children, eight years ago, at age sixteen, fifty students
2. If it takes a hyphenated word to express the number, then use that hyphenated word. (This is usually an expression of age.)
twenty-one years of age.
3. If it takes three or more words to express a number, then use digits:
America is more than 220 years old.
We achieved our independence in the year 1776.
(Note: Years are always written in digits.)