

Common Usage Mix-Ups with Easy-to-Remember Memory Hooks


1. **accept / except**

- ◆ *Accept* = to receive
- ◆ *Except* = to leave out

 You **ACCEPT** a gift, **EXCEPT** when it's broken.


2. **affect / effect**

- ◆ *Affect* = action (verb)
- ◆ *Effect* = end result (noun)

 A = Action, E = End result.


3. **its / it's**

- ◆ *Its* = belongs to it
- ◆ *It's* = it is

 If you can say "it is," use the apostrophe.

4. **your / you're**

- ◆ *Your* = belongs to you
- ◆ *You're* = you are

 *You're always* means "you are." Try saying it out loud!


5. **their / there / they're**

- ◆ *Their* = belongs to them
- ◆ *There* = a place
- ◆ *They're* = they are

 **THEY** own **THEIR** house over **THERE** because **THEY'RE** rich.


6. **then / than**

- ◆ *Then* = time
- ◆ *Than* = comparison

 If you're talking about time, use **THEN**.

7. **to / too / two**

- ◆ *To* = direction
- ◆ *Too* = also or too much
- ◆ *Two* = the number 2

 **TO** goes to a place, **TOO** has too many o's, and **TWO** is 2.

8. **who / whom**

- ◆ *Who* = subject
- ◆ *Whom* = object

 If you can replace it with "him," use **WHOM**.

9. **whose / who's**

- ◆ *Whose* = belongs to someone
- ◆ *Who's* = who is

🧠 *If you can say "who is," it's who's.*

10. **lay / lie**

- ◆ *Lay* = to place something down
- ◆ *Lie* = to recline

🧠 *You LAY a book down. You LIE on the bed.*

11. **rise / raise**

- ◆ *Rise* = go up (by itself)
- ◆ *Raise* = lift something

🧠 *The sun RISES. You RAISE your hand.*

12. **farther / further**

- ◆ *Farther* = distance
- ◆ *Further* = more depth or detail

🧠 *FARther = how FAR you go.*

13. **fewer / less**

- ◆ *Fewer* = things you count
- ◆ *Less* = things you measure

🧠 *If you can count it, use FEWER.*

14. **all ready / already**

- ◆ *All ready* = completely prepared
- ◆ *Already* = before now

🧠 *We're ALL READY to leave because we've ALREADY packed.*

15. **everyday / every day**

- ◆ *Everyday* = ordinary
- ◆ *Every day* = each day

🧠 *EVERYDAY shoes are worn EVERY DAY.*

16. **passed / past**

- ◆ *Passed* = verb (we passed the store)
- ◆ *Past* = time or location

🧠 *I PASSED the store in the PAST.*

17. **desert / dessert**

- ◆ *Desert* = dry land
- ◆ *Dessert* = sweet treat

🧠 *You want two S's in DESSERT because you want seconds!*

18. **principle / principal**

- ◆ *Principle* = rule
- ◆ *Principal* = school leader
- 🧠 *The PRINCIPAL is your PAL.*

19. **amount / number**

- ◆ *Amount* = can't count
- ◆ *Number* = can count
- 🧠 *You count a NUMBER of things, not an amount.*

20. **capital / capitol**

- ◆ *Capital* = city or letter
- ◆ *Capitol* = government building
- 🧠 *CAPITOL has a dome, like the "O" in the word.*

21. **compliment / complement**

- ◆ *Compliment* = a kind word
- ◆ *Complement* = goes well with
- 🧠 *A COMPLIMENT makes you SMILE. A COMPLEMENT completes.*

22. **stationary / stationery**

- ◆ *Stationary* = not moving
- ◆ *Stationery* = paper
- 🧠 *E for Envelope = StationEry.*

23. **cite / site / sight**

- ◆ *Cite* = to quote
- ◆ *Site* = a location
- ◆ *Sight* = vision
- 🧠 *You CITE a source at a construction SITE with an amazing SIGHT.*

24. **advice / advise**

- ◆ *Advice* = noun
- ◆ *Advise* = verb
- 🧠 *You give ADVICE, but you ADVISE someone.*

25. **aloud / allowed**

- ◆ *Aloud* = spoken out loud
- ◆ *Allowed* = permitted
- 🧠 *You're ALLOWED to speak ALOUD.*

26. **bare / bear**

- ◆ *Bare* = uncovered
- ◆ *Bear* = animal or to carry
- 🧠 *A BARE wall has nothing. A BEAR has fur—and maybe claws.*

27. **brake / break**

- ◆ *Brake* = to stop
- ◆ *Break* = to shatter or rest
- 🧠 *Use the BRAKE in the car so you don't BREAK something.*

28. **council / counsel**

- ◆ *Council* = group of people
- ◆ *Counsel* = to give advice
- 🧠 A **COUNCIL** makes rules; a **COUNSEL** gives advice.

29. **elicit / illicit**

- ◆ *Elicit* = to bring out
- ◆ *Illicit* = illegal
- 🧠 **ELICIT** emotions. **ILlicit** is **ILlegal**.

30. **emigrate / immigrate**

- ◆ *Emigrate* = to leave
- ◆ *Immigrate* = to enter
- 🧠 *Emigrate* = *Exit*. *Immigrate* = *In*.

31. **formally / formerly**

- ◆ *Formally* = with formality
- ◆ *Formerly* = in the past
- 🧠 **FORMALLY** dressed. **FORMERLY** known as Prince.

32. **hear / here**

- ◆ *Hear* = listen
- ◆ *Here* = location
- 🧠 You **HEAR** with your **EAR**. **HERE** is a place.

33. **hole / whole**

- ◆ *Hole* = empty space
- ◆ *Whole* = complete
- 🧠 A **HOLE** makes something **NOT WHOLE**.

34. **lead / led**

- ◆ *Lead* = present tense or metal
- ◆ *Led* = past tense of lead
- 🧠 He **LED** the group yesterday, and **LEADS** today.

35. **loose / lose**

- ◆ *Loose* = not tight
- ◆ *Lose* = to misplace
- 🧠 **LOOSE** shoes will make you **LOSE** a race.

36. **maybe / may be**

- ◆ *Maybe* = perhaps
- ◆ *May be* = could be
- 🧠 **MAYBE** I **MAY BE** late.

37. **peak / peek / pique**

- ◆ *Peak* = the top
- ◆ *Peek* = to look
- ◆ *Pique* = to interest
- 🧠 **PEEK** at the **PEAK** that **PIQUES** your curiosity.

38. **precede / proceed**

- ◆ *Precede* = come before
- ◆ *Proceed* = move forward
- 🧠 **PRE** means before. **PRO** means forward.

39. **quiet / quite**

◆ *Quiet* = no sound

◆ *Quite* = very

🧠 *Be QUIET. I'm QUITE serious.*

40. **weather / whether**

◆ *Weather* = sun, rain, etc.

◆ *Whether* = a choice

🧠 *WHETHER or not the WEATHER cooperates, we're going!*

41. **steel / steal**

◆ *Steel* = strong metal

◆ *Steal* = to take

🧠 *STEEL is strong. STEAL is wrong.*

42. **suppose / supposed**

◆ *Suppose* = to think

◆ *Supposed* = expected to

🧠 *I SUPPOSE I was SUPPOSED to call!*

43. **wander / wonder**

◆ *Wander* = to roam

◆ *Wonder* = to think

🧠 *WANDER outside. WONDER about the stars.*

44. **waste / waist**

◆ *Waste* = to throw away

◆ *Waist* = part of your body

🧠 *Don't WASTE time measuring your WAIST.*

45. **despite / in spite of**

◆ Both mean the same, but used differently

🧠 *DESPITE the rain = IN SPITE OF the rain.*

46. **adopt / adapt**

◆ *Adopt* = to take in

◆ *Adapt* = to adjust

🧠 *You ADOPT a child. You ADAPT to change.*

47. **loath / loathe**

◆ *Loath* = unwilling

◆ *Loathe* = to hate

🧠 *I'm LOATH to go, because I LOATHE the idea.*

48. **breathe / breath**

◆ *Breathe* = verb

◆ *Breath* = noun

🧠 *Take a BREATH, then BREATHE deeply.*

49. **descent / dissent**

◆ *Descent* = going down

◆ *Dissent* = disagreement

🧠 *The airplane DESCENDS; the crowd DISSENTS.*

50. **ensure / insure**

◆ *Ensure* = to make sure

◆ *Insure* = to cover financially

🧠 You *ENSURE* safety, but *INSURE* your car.