

**a, an** Use *an* before a word that begins with a vowel sound (*a, e, i, o, and u*).

**an** orange, **an** essay, **an** heir (silent *h*), **an** honest man (silent *h*), **an** umbrella,  
**an** umpire, **an** uncle, **an** ulcer (all the *u*'s sound like *uh*)

Use *a* before a word that begins with a consonant sound (all the sounds except the vowels) plus *u* or *eu* when it sounds like *yu*.

**a** pencil, **a** hotel, **a** history book, **a** university, **a** uniform, **a** union, **a** unit (all the *u*'s sound *yu*). **A** European trip (*Eu* sounds like *yu*).

**accept, except** *Accept* is a verb. Use *except* when it is not a verb.

I *accept* your invitation.

Everyone came *except* him.

**advice, advise** *Advise* is a verb. Use *advice* when it is not a verb. Pronounce these words correctly, remembering that the *s* sounds like *z*, and you will not confuse them.

I **advise** you to go.

I do not need any **advice**.

**affect, effect** *Affect* is a verb. Use *effect* when it is not a verb. If *a, an*, or *the* is in front of the word, then you know it is not a verb, and you will use *effect*.  
The lack of rain **affected** the crops.

The lack of rain had an **effect** on the crops.

The lack of rain had a bad **effect** on the crops.

**all ready, already** If you can leave out the *all* and the sentence still makes sense, then *all ready* is the form to use.

I'm **all ready** to go. (*I'm ready to go* makes sense.)

Dinner is **all ready**. (*Dinner is ready* makes sense.)

If you can't leave out the *all* and still have the sentence make sense, then use *already* (the one with the *all* left in it).

I'm **already** late. (*I'm ready late* does not make sense.)

**are, or, our** *Are* is a verb. *Or* is use between two possibilities as tea *or* coffee. *Our* shows we possess something.

We **are** studying English.

Take it **or** leave it.

**Our** class meets at eight.

**brake, break** *Brake* means “to slow or stop motion.” It’s also the name of the devise that slows or stops motion. *Break* means “to shatter.”

You **brake** the speed of a car.

You slam on your **brakes**.

You **break** a dish or an engagement or a track record.

**choose, chose** I will **choose** a partner right now.

I **chose** a partner yesterday.

**clothes, cloths** Her **clothes** were attractive.  
We used soft **cloths** to polish the car.

**coarse, course** *Coarse* describes texture, as *coarse* cloth. *Course* is used for all other meanings. Remember this sentence: Of *course you* are taking this *course*. Find the tree *u*'s in that sentence and then remember that those words are always spelled with *u*.  
Her suit was made of **coarse** material.  
Of **course** I enjoyed that **course**.

**complement, compliment** A *complement* completes something. *Compliment* means “praise.” Remember “I like compliments,” and you will remember to use the *i* spelling.  
A 30-degree angle is the **complement** of a 60-degree angle.  
She gave him a **compliment**.

**conscience, conscious** The extra *n* in *conscience* should remind you of NO, which is what your conscience often says to you. The other word *conscious* simply means “aware.”  
My **conscience** bothers me because I ignored him.  
I was not **conscious** that it was raining.

**desert, dessert** *Dessert* is the sweet one, the one you like two helpings of. So give it two helping of *s*. The other one, *desert*, is used for all other meanings.  
We had apple pie for **dessert**.  
Don't **desert** me.  
The camel moved slowly across the **desert**.

**does, dose** *Does* is a verb. A *dose* is an amount of medicine.  
He **does** his work well.  
She **does not** care about cars.  
He took a **dose** of medicine.

**forth, fourth** *Fourth* with four in it is a number. Otherwise use *forth*. Note that while *fourth* has four in it, *forty* does not. Remember the word *forty-fourth*. This is our **fourth** game.  
That was our forty-**fourth** point.  
She walked back and **forth**.

**have, of** *Have* is a verb. When you say *could have*, the *have* sounds like *of*, but it must not be written that way. *Of* is a preposition.  
I should **have** finished my work sooner.  
Then I could **have** gone home.  
I often think **of** him.

**it's, its** *It's* always means “it is” or “it has.” *Its* is a possessive.

**It's** too late now.  
**It's** been a long time.  
The committee gave **its** report.

**knew, new** *Knew* has to do with knowledge (both start with *k*). *New* means “not old.”  
I **knew** that I wanted a **new** job.

**know, no** *Know* has to do with knowledge (both start with *k*). *No* means “not any.”  
I **know** she has **no** money left.

**moral, morale** *Moral* has to do with right and wrong; *morale* means “group spirit.”  
Pronounce them correctly, and you won’t confuse them—móral, morale.  
It was a **moral** question.  
The **morale** of the team was excellent.

**passed, past** *Passed* is a verb. Use *past* when it’s not a verb.  
He **passed** the house.  
He walked **past** the house (it’s the same as *He walked by the house*, so you know it is not a verb).  
He is living in the **past**.  
He was going on his **past** reputation.

**peace, piece** Remember “piece of pie.” The one meaning “a *piece* of something” always begins with *pie*. The other one, *peace*, is the opposite of war.  
I gave him a **piece** of my mind.  
They signed the **peace** treaty.

**personal,**  
**personnel** Pronounce these two correctly, and you will not confuse them—pérsocial,  
personnel.  
He had a **personal** interest in the election.  
He was in charge of **personnel** in the factory.

**principal,**  
**principle** *Principal* means “main.” Both words have *a* in them:  
principal  
main  
The **principal** of the school spoke. (main teacher)  
The **principal** difficulty is time. (main difficulty)  
He lost both **principal** and interest. (main amount of money)  
A principle is a “rule.” Both words end in *le*:

principle  
rule

He lived by his **principles**. (rules)  
I object to the **principle** of the thing. (rule)

**quiet, quite** Pronounce these two correctly, and you will not misspell them. *Quiet* is pronounced *qui et*.  
Be **quiet**.  
The book is **quite** interesting.

**than, then** *Than* compares two things. *Then* tells when (*then* and *when* sound alike and both have *e* in them).

I would rather have this **than** that.

**Then** he started home.

**their, there,**

**they're** *Their* is a possessive. *There* points out something and is spelled like *here*. Remember “here and there.” *They're* always means “they are.”

**Their** house is painted pink.

**There** is where I left it.

**There** were clouds in the sky.

**They're** planning to come.

**threw, through**

*Threw* means “to throw something” in past time. If you do not mean “to throw something,” use *through*.

He **threw** the ball. I **threw** away my chance.

I came in **through** the out door.

He **threw** the ball **through** the window.

**to, too, two** *Two* is a number. *Too* means “more than enough” or “also.” Use *to* for all other meanings.

I have **two** brothers.

The lesson was **too** difficult and **too long**. (more than enough)

I found it difficult, **too**. (also)

It was **too** much for **two** people to eat.

**weather, whether** *Weather* refers to atmospheric conditions. *Whether* means “if.”

**Whether** I'll go depends on the **weather**.

**were, where** *Were* is a verb. *Where* has herein it, and both *where* and *here* refer to a place.

**Were** you the winner?

**Where** is he? **Here** he is.

**Where** are you? **Here** I am.

**who's, whose**

*Who's* always means “who is” or “who has.” *Whose* is a possessive.

**Who's** there?

**Who's** been using my tennis racket?

**Whose** book is this?

**woman, women** Remember that the word is just *man* or *men* with *wo* in front of it.

wo man ...woman ... one woman

wo men ...women ... two women

**your, you're** *You're* always means “you are.” *Your* is a possessive.

**You're** very welcome.

**Your** toast is ready.