Homophones & Easily Confused Words
by Shawna Roche

Definition:
Homophones are words that sound alike but are different in spelling, meaning or origin.

Writers often confuse and misuse these words. It’s helpful to use a dictionary to look up the meaning of the word in question, but here’s a short list of common problem words.

Nine frequently misused homophones

1. affect/effect

affect (verb) - to do something that influences someone or something
   Example: The actions of the nobility affected girls’ ideas of correct behavior.

effect (verb) - to make something happen
   Example: His careful work affected (brought about) the new structures in the organization.

effect (noun) - a result or reaction to someone or something
   Example: The aristocrats’ purchase of more and more elaborate clothing had the effect of increasing social divisions.

2. its/it’s

its (possessive adjective) - belonging to people, animals, or things
   Example: The company needs to do what is in its best interest.

it’s = the short form of “it is”
   Example: It’s important to understand the organization’s goals before implementing any changes.

3. lay/lie

- lay, laid (present, past verb) - to put or set something down
  Example: You can lay (present) your books over there. She laid (past of lay) her books on the table.

lie, lay (present, past verb) - for a person or creature to recline or rest in a horizontal position
   Example: Every morning, I lie (present) down to take a nap. Yesterday after the exam, I lay (past of lie) down for just five minutes.

4. lead/led
**lead** (noun) - substance in a pencil
  Example: *You need to sharpen your pencil because the lead is dull.*

**lead** (verb) - to guide a person or animal to a place
  Example: *Moses endured many obstacles to lead the Israelites out of bondage.*

**led** (past tense of *lead*)
  Example: *The actions taken in science to better our society led people to become too materialistic.*

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5. **then/than**

**then** (adverb) - after something has happened; next
  Example: *If the risks are too great, then the company may gain almost nothing.*

**than** (conjunction/preposition) - used when comparing
  Example: *Although he should be more grieved than the doctor, Meursault displays much less sorrow.*

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6. **there/their/they’re**

**there** (expletive) - it has no meaning but is used to start sentence
  Example: *There are many areas in which a manager needs to be competent; these areas include writing, speaking, critical thinking, and active listening.*

**there** (adverb) - it is used to describe a location
  Example: *She dumped the books over there and then left for school.*

**their** (possessive adjective) - belonging to people, animals, or things
  Example: *The employees’ need to care for their sick relatives is a sensitive issue.*

**they’re** = the short form of “they are”
  Example: *A person may follow rules, but they’re not always the best guide to the right action.*

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7. **to/too/two**

**to** - used with the basic form of a verb to make the infinitive
  Example: *He mentioned that he liked to watch TV for the liquor commercials and that it made him want to try new drinks and beverages.*

**to** (preposition) - toward or in the direction of
  Example: *I went to the lab early in the morning.*

**too** (adverb) - more than is needed or wanted
  Example: *However, too much monitoring can have a negative effect on morale.*
**too** (adverb) – also
   Example: I have that exam tomorrow too.

**two** = number
   Example: Assuming that these two issues are truly the source of the absentee problem, then implementing the recommendations will decrease the absentee rate.

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**8. you’re/your**

**you’re** = the short form of “you are”
   Example: Sometimes you do not know if you’re doing well at all, since nobody tells you where you stand at each meeting.

**your** (possessive adjective) - belonging to people
   Example: Mr. Friedlander told you that the most important aspect of being human is to use your intelligence and reasoning abilities.

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**9. whether/weather**

**whether** (conjunction) - used when talking about a choice between two possibilities
   Example: Resources obviously play a big role in whether or not a company takes risks.

**weather** - the temperature or conditions outside
   Example: The rainy weather was responsible for the car accident.