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 *effected* (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.

---

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.

---

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.

---

7. to/too/two

---

t**o** - 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.

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.

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.