

# Understanding Commonly Confused Words

## a while vs. awhile

**Explanation:** A while is a period of time, while awhile means for a short time.

### Clues:

- If you can replace it with "for a short time," use awhile.
- If it's followed by a specific duration, use a while.

## addition vs. edition

**Explanation:** Addition is the process of adding something, while edition refers to a version or a particular form of something.

### Clues:

- Think of math when you see addition.
- Edition often relates to books, newspapers, or versions of software.

## advice vs. advise:

**Explanation:** Advice is a noun, meaning guidance or recommendations. Advise is a verb.

### Clues:

- If you can add the before the word, use advice.
- Advise sounds like an action; it's something you do. It is the action of providing advice or guidance.
- I appreciate your advice.
- What do you advise me to do?

### **affect vs. effect:**

**Explanation:** Affect is a verb, meaning to influence or change something. Effect is a noun, denoting a change that occurred. It is the outcome.

#### **Clues:**

- **A**ffect is an **A**ction (both start with 'A').
- The weather can affect how early we must leave in the morning.
- **E**ffect is an **E**nd result (both start with 'E').
- The new seating chart had a positive effect on student work.

### **all ready vs. already:**

**Explanation:** All ready is a phrase that means completely prepared. Already is an adverb that means before or by this time. It means that something has already happened.

#### **Clues:**

- If you can replace it with completely prepared, use all ready.
- If it is referring to a time frame, use already.

### **all right vs. alright:**

**Explanation:** All right is the correct form, this means it is correct to ALWAYS use all right. Alright is considered informal and is best avoided.

#### **Clues:**

- Never use alright! (It is technically correct if you are being informal but all right will always work.)

### **collaborate vs. corroborate:**

**Explanation:** Collaborate means to work together. Corroborate means to confirm or support with evidence.

#### **Clues:**

- Think of collaboration as cooperation.
- Corroborate involves confirming facts.
- You can corroborate what you saw happen if you are helping to solve a mystery.

### **complement vs. compliment:**

**Explanation:** Complement means to go well with or complete. Compliment is a nice thing said about someone.

#### **Clues:**

- If it's about completing or going well with something, use complement.
- If it's a nice comment about someone, use compliment.

### **farther vs. further**

**Explanation:** Farther refers to physical distance. Further is often used for metaphorical or figurative distance.

#### **Clues:**

- Think far in farther for physical distance.
- Something can be farther away.
- Use further for abstract situations. For example, it might be used when referring to discussions, ideas or progress.
- We need to conduct further research. (meaning more)

## **fewer vs. less**

**Explanation:** Fewer is used with countable items, while less is used with uncountable items.

### **Clues**

- If you can count it, use fewer.
- If it's a general quantity, use less.

## **formally vs. formerly:**

**Explanation:** Formally means in a formal manner. Formerly means in the past.

### **Clues:**

- If it's about being proper or official, use formally.
- If it's about something that happened in the past, use formerly.

## **forth vs. fourth:**

**Explanation:** Forth means forward or onward. Fourth is the numerical position.

### **Clues:**

- Fourth is a number; use it when counting.
- Forth is like forward; use it for movement.

## lay vs. lie

**Explanation:** Lay means you are putting a thing or object in a place. Lie is about a person reclining or being in a position to rest.

### Clues:

- Use lay when you are laying something down.
- Use the i in lie to help you remember it is about a person.  
Think of: I will lie down.

## loose vs. lose:

**Explanation:** Loose means not tight. Lose means to misplace or fail to win.

### Clues

- Loose is about something being not tight or restrained.
- Lose is about misplacing or failing to win something.

## passed vs. past:

**Explanation:** Passed is the past tense of pass. You might say you passed a ball or passed a test. Past refers to a time that has gone by.

### Clues:

- Use passed when describing an action that has already happened.
- Use past when referring to a period of time that has already happened.

## **saw vs. seen**

**Explanation:** Saw is the past tense of see and refers to an action from the past. Seen is the past participle and requires an auxiliary verb like have or has.

### **Clues**

- Use saw when talking about an action in the past.
- Use seen with auxiliary verbs like have or has.
- You will NEVER say: *I seen that movie yesterday.*
- You can say: I have seen that movie before.
- You can also say: The movie was seen by many people.

## **set vs. sit:**

**Explanation:** Set is to place or put something in a spot. I set the book down. Sit is to be seated. I will sit down.

### **Clues:**

- Use set when arranging objects.
- Use sit when referring to the action of being seated.
- The i in sit can help you remember that sit is referring to a person or something else living like a cat.

## **stationary vs. stationery:**

**Explanation:** Stationary means not moving. Stationery refers to writing materials.

### **Clues:**

- Stationary has stand in it, which means not moving.
- Stationery has letter in it, which relates to writing materials.

## than vs. then

**Explanation:** Than is used in comparisons. Then is used to indicate time or consequence.

### Clues:

- If you're comparing things, use than.
- If you're talking what comes next, use then.

## wander vs. wonder:

**Explanation:** Wander means to roam around without a specific purpose. Wonder means to be curious or in awe.

### Clues:

- Wander is like walking without a plan.
- Wonder is about curiosity or amazement.

## who vs. whom

**Explanation:** Who and whom are both pronouns. Who is used as a subject. Whom is used as an object.

### Clues:

- If it's the subject of the sentence, use who.
- If you can use he, she, or they in the sentence, then use who.
- If it's the object, use whom.
- If you can use him, her, or them, then use whom.
- If there is a preposition like to, with, or for before the word, then use whom.

## **were vs. where:**

**Explanation:** Were is a past tense form of be. Where refers to a location.

### **Clues:**

- Use were when talking about something that happened in the past.
- Use where when talking about a place.