

Homonyms

WHAT IS A HOMONYM?

Homonyms are words that sound the same but have completely different meanings. For example:

Incorrect: There house is a mess!

("There" refers to the opposite of "here." This sentence does not make sense.)

Correct: Their house is a mess!

("Their" refers to the possessive form of "they." This sentence makes sense and shows that the house belongs to them.)

There are many commonly confused homonyms: (*examples provided)

***Affect** (to influence)/**Effect** (a result)

***Allusion** (reference)/**Illusion** (mistaken belief)

Bare (unclothed)/**Bear** (to carry, an animal)

Brake (to slow down)/**Break** (smash)

Fair (average, lovely)/**Fare** (a fee for transportation)

Hardy (tough, strong)/**Hearty** (genuine)

Hole (an opening)/**Whole** (entire/complete)

Know (to be certain, sure)/**No** (opposite of yes)

Passed (past tense of "pass")/**Past** (after)

Plain (clear)/**Plane** (an airborne vehicle, a tool)

Principal (the head of a school)/**Principle** (truth, law)

Scene (where action occurs)/**Seen** (past tense of "see")

Stationary (unmoving)/**Stationery** (writing paper)

***To** (toward)/**Too** (also)/**Two** (the number)

Weak (opposite of strong)/**Week** (seven days)

***Weather** (climate)/**Whether** (if)

***Your** (possessive of "you")/ **You're** (you are)

All ready (prepared)/**Already** (by this time)

***Ascent** (movement up)/**Assent** (agree)

Board (wood, to enter)/**Bored** (uninterested)

***Cite** (quote)/**Sight** (see)/**Site** (a place)

Forth (forward)/**Fourth** (after third)

Hear (to listen)/**Here** (in an exact location)

***Its** (possessive of it)/**It's** (it is or it has)

Meat (flesh)/**Meet** (encounter)

Peace (harmony)/**Piece** (part of a whole, portion)

Presence (current state)/**Presents** (gifts)

Rain (precipitation)/**Reign** (rule)/**Rein** (strap)

Shear (to cut or clip)/**Sheer** (transparent)

***Their** (belonging to "them")/**There** (location)/
They're (they are)

Waist (part of body)/**Waste** (discarded material)

***Wear** (clothe oneself)/**Where** (location)

***Who's** (who is/has)/**Whose** (possessive of who)

The following are examples of how homonyms are used incorrectly and correctly:

Affects v. Effects

- **Incorrect:** The affects of global warming are raising sea levels and climate change.
- **Correct:** The effects of global warming are raising sea levels and climate change.
(Here, you use “effects” because you are discussing the results of global warming, not the influences.)

Allusion v. Illusion

- **Incorrect:** Often, authors make an illusion to Greek mythology.
- **Correct:** Often, authors make an allusion to Greek mythology.
(Here, you use “allusion” because you are talking about an indirect reference, not a belief.)

Ascent v. Assent

- **Incorrect:** Josh nodded his head in ascent with his friend’s argument.
- **Correct:** Josh nodded his head in assent with his friend’s argument.
(Here, you use “assent” because Josh is in agreement with his friend.)

Cite v. Site

- **Incorrect:** The archaeological cite is located on the property of the Lakota Indian Reservation.
- **Correct:** The archaeological site is located on the property of the Lakota Indian Reservation.
(Here, you use “site” because you are talking about a place, not a quotation.)

Its v. It’s

- **Incorrect:** Its a shame that its raining today because I was really looking forward to going to the beach.
- **Correct:** It’s a shame that it’s raining today because I was really looking forward to going to the beach.
(Here, you use “it’s” because you are saying “it is.”)

Their v. They’re

- **Incorrect:** Shannon and I are going over to they’re house around 8:30.
- **Correct:** Shannon and I are going over to their house around 8:30.
(Here, you use “their” because it shows that the house belongs to “them.” You do not use “they are.”)

To v. Too

- **Incorrect:** Today I forgot my book, notebook, and my cell phone, to!
- **Correct:** Today I forgot my book, notebook, and my cell phone, too!
(Here, you use “too” because you forgot your cell phone in addition to other things.)

Wear v. Where

- **Incorrect:** Can you please tell me wear the bookstore is?
- **Correct:** Can you please tell me where the bookstore is?
(Here, you use “where” because you are asking for a location, not clothing yourself.)

Weather v. Whether

- **Incorrect:** It does not matter weather you go to Foodtown or Shop Rite; they both carry natural foods.
- **Correct:** It does not matter whether you go to Foodtown or Shop Rite; they both carry natural foods.
(Here, you use “whether” because you are introducing a choice between Foodtown and Shop Rite.)

The following are examples of how homonyms are used incorrectly and correctly:

Whose v. Who's

- **Incorrect:** Whose going to the concert tonight?
 - **Correct:** Who's going to the concert tonight?
- (Here, you use "who's" because you are asking "who is.")

Your v. You're

- **Incorrect:** Try not to forget you're keys today!
 - **Correct:** Try not to forget your keys today!
- (Here, you use "your" because it is the possessive form of "you.")