• **Accept/except**

“Accept” means to receive. “Except” is usually a preposition meaning “other than” or “leaving out” or “everything but.” As verbs, they are near opposites, with “accept” signaling approval and “except” indicating exclusion.

• **Advice/advise**

“Advice” is a noun meaning “informed recommendation.” “Advise” is the corresponding verb form, as in “to give an informed recommendation.”

Ex. I would advise against giving that new mother any further unsolicited advice.

• **Affect/effect**

“Affect” is a verb meaning “to influence.” “Effect” is usually a noun meaning “result.” As a verb, it means “to bring about or cause.”

Ex. The bad weather will not affect our plans. The compliment he paid her had an immediate effect on her mood. It is never too late to effect a change in our approach to this problem.

• **All ready/Already**

“All ready” is a phrase that means “completely prepared.” “Already” means “by this or that time.”

Ex. She is finally all ready to go to the concert, which has already begun.

• **All right**

In all forms of writing, “all right” is always best as two words. Though very common, “alright” is considered non-standard and should be avoided.

• **All together/altogether**

“All together” means “joined in a single group,” whereas “altogether” means “in all” or “entirely.”

Ex. The tourists traveled all together on a single bus, and I believe there were fifty of them altogether. Some passengers thought that was altogether too crowded!

• **Allusion/illusion**

An “allusion” is an indirect reference. An “illusion” is a deceptive appearance.

Ex. The opening lines of the novel might be understood as an allusion to the main character’s troubled childhood.

A good magician can create a believable optical illusion.
• **Can/may**
  Remember to use “can” to mean “able to,” and not to use it when the best meaning is “may,” meaning “permitted to.”

• **Complement/compliment**
  A “complement” is something that reinforces or completes a whole. A “compliment” is a flattering remark or statement of praise.
  
  Ex. Use the documentary film as a complement to our text.
  
  Tom appreciated the compliment you paid him on his new suit.

• **Device/devise**
  Something used for a specific purpose is the noun “device.” To create or plan something is the verb “devise.”

• **Discreet/discrete**
  Being “discreet” is using good judgment or prudence. Something which is “discrete” is separate.
  
  Ex. The committee was being discreet in their endeavor to divide the organization into two discrete entities.

• **Disinterested/uninterested**
  To be “disinterested” is to be unbiased; to not be partial. Being “uninterested” is lacking any interest at all.
  
  Ex. We sought out a disinterested party to help us settle our dispute.

• **Ensure/insure**
  To “ensure” means “to make certain,” in a general sense. To “insure” is the same, but in a context of financial/legal protection.

• **Evoke/invoke**
  To “evoke” is to call forth an image or emotion. To “invoke” is to appeal to a higher authority.

• **Farther/further**
  “Farther” is a comparative of “far” in reference to distance. “Further” is a comparative of “far” when it describes amount, degree, or time.
  
  Ex. She will have to travel farther to get to the bigger library, but her thesis does require further research.

• **Good/well**
  “Good” is an adjective often used with a linking verb such as “look” or “taste.” “Well” is an adjective meaning “healthy” or an adverb meaning something between “adequately” and “exceptionally.”
  
  Ex. Does that soup taste as good as it looks?
  
  This morning’s lecture on eighteenth century literature was presented well.
  
  Are you sure you are feeling well enough to go outside today?
**Irrespective (of)/regardless**

These near-synonyms are commonly, but completely incorrectly, blended into the non-existent word “irregardless.” Normally, regardless is what is meant.

**Lay/lie**

With “lay,” the action always takes an object because it means “to place something down.” In the case of “lie,” no object is taken since it means “to recline or be placed.”

Ex. Please lay the book down on the table next to the lamp.  
At the beach, my friends and I prefer to lie in the sun rather than swim.  
If you leave the dog alone, it will lie there all day.

**Loose/lose**

These are never confused in spoken language because the pronunciation makes the meaning clear. However, “loose” is an adjective meaning “not tight,” and “lose” is a verb meaning “to misplace.” In writing, just remember that “loose” has a soft “s,” while the “s” in “lose” sounds like a “z.”

**Persecute/prosecute**

To “persecute” is to harass, ostracize or cause injury. To prosecute is to bring a legal claim against a person, usually for a crime.

Ex. They intend to prosecute anyone who tries to persecute homeless people.

**Perspective/prospective**

A “perspective” is a point of view. “Prospective” is an adjective which means “potential or possible.”

Ex. From our perspective, these are some excellent prospective jurors.

**Prescribe/proscribe**

To “prescribe” is to set down a directive, often medical. To “proscribe” is to limit or prohibit. They can be considered near opposites.

**Single/singular**

“Single” is an individual person or thing. “Singular” means “distinctive.”

Ex. She had a singular charm that not a single other girl possessed.

**Supposed to**

“Supposed to” means “meant to.” In writing, take care never to drop the final “d” in imitation of how it sounds when spoken.
• **Then/than**  
  “Than” is used in comparisons. “Then” refers to time and sequence.  
  Ex. One professor’s course may be much harder than another’s in the same subject.  
  First, you have to be accepted by the university; then, you must register for courses.

• **That/which/who**  
  “That” refers to things, animals, or a class or type of person. “Which” is used for animals and things, and “who” refers exclusively to people or named animals. The general rule is that “which” is used to introduce a clause that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, whereas “that” is used to introduce a clause that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.  
  Ex. The newest Harry Potter book is the only one that I haven’t read.  
  The most annoying dogs are the ones which bark incessantly.  
  Between Ann and her cat, Leo, I can’t tell who enjoys milk more.

• **Their/there/they’re**  
  “Their” is the possessive pronoun, “there” refers to a location, and “they’re” is the contraction of “they are.”

• **To/too/two**  
  “To” is used in prepositional phrases or has part of an infinitive and is correct in all cases except for “too,” which means “also” or “excessively,” and “two” (the number).

• **Who/whom**  
  These words follow the same pattern as “he/him” and “they/them.”  
  Ex. He is going to school. / She is going with him.  
  Who is going to school? / She is going with whom?  
  -also-  
  They vacation in the summer. / I will vacation with them.  
  Who vacations in the summer? / With whom will I vacation?

• **Who’s/whose**  
  “Who’s” is the contraction of “who is,” and “whose” is the possessive (to whom something belongs.)

• **You’re/your**  
  “You’re” is the contraction of “you are,” and “your” is the possessive (belonging to you).