

Confusable Words

Introduction

There are many word sets that confuse people. To help you, each word of a confusable set has been used in one or more sentences. Think about each sentence to see the difference between the words in a set. If you are still unsure of the difference between words and when they should be used, look them up in a **dictionary** (<http://www.mamacquariedictionary.com.au>).

Also, make sure you know how to spell each word.

Hint

You will see that in some cases the difference between words is that one is a noun and one is a verb. You can determine whether a word is a noun by seeing whether you can put an **adjective** (a describing word modifying a noun) in front of it. You can determine whether a word is a verb by seeing whether you can modify the verb by putting an **adverb** (a verb modifier telling you *how* something is done) after it.

Look at the following sentences and work out whether the words in bold are verbs or nouns.

Practice makes perfect.

You can put the adjective *good* in front of practice. This shows you that practice is a *noun*.

She will **practise** tomorrow.

You can modify the word practise by putting the adverb *diligently* after it. This shows you that practise is a *verb*.

Word Sets

ability	She has the ability to be a great singer.
capacity	The hall will be filled to its capacity .
accept	I would love to accept your invitation.
except	All of her friends, except Tom, are coming to the party.
access	The student could not gain access to the class.
excess	The number of applicants was in excess of five hundred.
adolescents	The adolescents decided to form a new group.
adolescence	He was often depressed in his adolescence .
adapt	Susan helped adapt the film script for television.
adopt	My friend wants to adopt a child. The government wants to adopt a new environmental strategy.
advice	He gave sound advice to his client. (rollover: a noun)
advise	He will advise his client to invest his money. (rollover: a verb)
affect	Does the music affect your mood? (rollover: a verb meaning influence) These measures may affect savings. (rollover: a verb meaning influence)
effect	I wonder what effect that will have on his grades. (rollover: a noun meaning influence) The heat has a bad effect on my mood. (rollover: a noun meaning influence) The prisoner tried to effect an escape through the ventilation system. (rollover: a verb meaning to do something to cause a result) These measures may effect savings. (rollover: effect meaning cause)

allusion	An allusion was made to the role of women in the campaign.
illusion	She gave the illusion of being more confident than she was.
alternately	The exercise program requires us to run and walk alternately .
alternatively	You could pay the parking fine or, alternatively , you could go to court.
among	He divided the money among three people. The money was found among the clothes. The bomb landed among the houses. (rollover: some houses may have been hit)
between	He divided the money between two people. The money was found between two pages. The bomb landed between the houses. (rollover: no houses were hit)
bare	The cupboard was bare .
bear	She has a heavy load to bear . Winnie-the-pooh is a friendly bear .
bored	The children were bored on the rainy day.
board	He nailed the board to the floor.
bought	She bought a coat at the shop. (rollover: from the verb to <i>buy</i>) She bought a book. (rollover: from the verb to <i>buy</i>)
brought	She brought her coat to the shop. (rollover: from the verb to <i>bring</i>) She brought a book. (rollover: from the verb to <i>bring</i>)
break	He will probably break that glass.
brake	He put his foot on the brake .

breath	He took a deep breath . (rollover: a noun)
breathe	I told him to breathe deeply. (rollover: a verb)
compliment	She was pleased with the compliment that she received from her teacher. After the compliment from her new friend she felt very happy.
complement	That subject will complement the other subjects you have studied. The red roses will complement the silver place settings.
counsel	She will counsel him about his problems.
council	The council decided to remove the parking meters.
course	The computing course is very popular. (rollover: this noun) We will follow the course of a river. (rollover: this noun)
coarse	The material in the dress is quite coarse . (rollover: an adjective) She used coarse language. (rollover: an adjective)
comprises	A bicycle comprises two wheels and a frame. (rollover: note the form <i>comprises</i>)
composed of	A bicycle is composed of two wheels and a frame. (rollover: note the form <i>is composed of</i>)
consists of	A bicycle consists of two wheels and a frame. (rollover: note the form <i>consists of</i>)
dessert	She enjoyed the dessert at the end of the meal.
desert	He was lost in the desert . He could not believe that his family would desert him.

discreet	When you talk to Mary be very discreet because we do not want her to become suspicious. (rollover: prudent, tactful)
discrete	The course is divided into two discrete units. (rollover: separate, distinct)
device	Your stanley knife is a useful device . (rollover: a noun)
devise	She will devise a sophisticated plan (rollover: a verb)
dual	She had dual citizenship because she was born in the United States but her mother is Australian.
duel	The count challenged the prince to a duel .
effect	I wonder what effect that will have on his grades. (rollover: a noun meaning influence) The heat has a bad effect on my mood. (rollover: a noun meaning influence) The prisoner tried to effect an escape through the ventilation system. (rollover: a verb meaning to do something to cause a result) These measures may effect savings. (rollover: effect meaning cause)
affect	Does the music affect your mood? (rollover: a verb meaning influence) These measures may affect savings. (rollover: a verb meaning influence)
ensure	You should ensure that the program will meet your specifications. (rollover: make sure)
insure	You should insure your jewelry against theft. (rollover: provide insurance)
excess	The number of applicants was in excess of five hundred.
access	The student could not gain access to the class.

except	All of her friends, except Tom, are coming to the party.
accept	I would love to accept your invitation.
eligible	The test will determine if you are eligible for Austudy.
legible	Make sure your writing is legible . (rollover: easy to read)
illegible	His handwriting is illegible . (rollover: difficult to read)
evolve	A market will evolve for wireless devices. (rollover: to develop gradually)
revolve	The course will revolve around selected readings and class discussions. (rollover: to centre around) The planets revolve around the sun. (rollover: to centre around)
fourth	The fourth person comes after the third person.
forth	She came forth to give her opinion.
formerly	My car formerly belonged to my father. She was formerly known as Ms. Smith, but she is now known as Mrs. Smith.
formally	After the meeting you will be formally recognized as a member of our club. She was formally called Ms. Smith, but informally she was called Smithy.
hear	Can you hear the music?
here	The envelope is over here .
illegible	His handwriting is illegible . (rollover: difficult to read)
eligible	The test will determine if you are eligible for Austudy.
legible	Make sure your writing is legible . (rollover: easy to read)

illusion	She gave the illusion of being more confident than she was.
allusion	An allusion was made to the role of women in the campaign.
incidence	The incidence of theft is lower than average here.
incidents	Three incidents led to his dismissal.
insure	You should insure your jewelry against theft. (rollover: provide insurance)
ensure	You should ensure that the program will meet your specifications. (rollover: make sure)
knew	She said she knew french.
new	Learning new material requires time.
know	I know what she is studying.
no	Please answer yes or no on the form.
later	Jane and Sue will go to the movies later . (rollover: afterwards)
latter	We tried to do exercises 1 and 2, but found the latter more difficult. (rollover: last mentioned)
led	He led the horse to water. (rollover: a verb that rhymes with <i>bed</i>)
lead	You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. (rollover: a verb that rhymes with <i>bead</i>) She was in the lead for most of the race. (rollover: a noun that rhymes with <i>bead</i>). They found a rich supply of lead . (rollover: this is a noun and rhymes with <i>bed</i>).
legible	Make sure your writing is legible . (rollover: easy to read)
illegible	His handwriting is illegible . (rollover: difficult to read)
eligible	The test will determine if you are eligible for Austudy.

loose	She has a lot of loose change. (rollover: a noun that rhymes with <i>juice</i>)
lose	She made sure she did not lose her notes. (rollover: a verb that rhymes with <i>choose</i>)
loan	She obtained a loan from the bank. (rollover: a noun)
lend	I hope the bank will lend me some money. (rollover: a verb)
meat	She does not eat red meat .
meet	I will meet you at the airport.
naval	He was a naval officer and had served on many ships.
navel	He had a bruise near his navel .
no	Please answer yes or no on the form.
know	I know what she is studying.
one	The boy has one sister.
won	The boy won the race.
patience	The teacher showed patience in dealing with the students.
patients	The nurse helped the patients during their recovery.
pray	She will pray for a good result.
prey	The cat likes to hunt prey . Her bad results will prey on her mind.
practice	The website demonstrates best practice in privacy. (rollover: a noun)
practise	Angela intends to practise the piano tonight. (rollover: a verb) Angela will practise the piano tonight. (rollover: a verb)

principal	He is the principal of our school. You should concentrate on the principal ideas.
principle	He understood the principle behind the system. She is a woman of principle .
past	It is past midnight. (rollover: a preposition) She dwells on the past . (rollover: a noun) In centuries past , the land was much greener. (rollover: an adjective)
passed	They passed the village. (rollover: a verb) The time passed quickly. (rollover: a verb)
quiet	The examination room must remain quiet .
quite	You are quite good at spelling.
revolve	The course will revolve around selected readings and class discussions. (rollover: to centre around) The planets revolve around the sun. (rollover: to centre around)
evolve	A market will evolve for wireless devices. (rollover: to develop gradually)
respectively	Mary, Tom and Joe brought drinks, chips and fruit respectively .
respectfully	He answered the judge's questions respectfully .
role	She has a great role in the play. His role is to act as a mentor to new students.
roll	She will roll the ball down the hill. He ate a salad roll .
stationery	I need to go to the store to get some stationery .
stationary	That car is stationary .

site	A beautiful site was found for the ceremony. (rollover: related to <i>situated</i>)
sight	The man caught sight of a whale in the distance. (rollover: this is related to <i>seeing</i>)
threw	She threw the ball to the little boy.
through	The ball went through the window.
too	The cake is too rich.
to	I want to go to the city.
they're	They're waiting over there. (rollover: they are)
their	Their party is in two weeks. (rollover: possessive pronoun)
there	Your phone is over there . (rollover: in that place)
verses	He practised the first two verses of the music.
versus	He showed us examples of journals versus web sources.
who's	Who's entering the competition? (rollover: who is)
whose	Whose hat is this? (rollover: possessive pronoun)
won	The boy won the race.
one	The boy has one sister.
you're	You're talented at soccer. (rollover: you are)
your	Please leave your hat over there. (rollover: possessive pronoun)

Confusables Quiz

For each of the following 51 sentences, choose the best completion.

She has the ... to excel in mathematics.

- ability
- capacity

He was investigating the ... of stress on learning.

- affect
- effect

He was able to say the alphabet in a single ...

- breathe.
- breath.

When teaching someone to drive you need ... controls.

- dual
- duel

She decided to complain ... about the service.

- formerly
- formally

She ... the group discussion.

- lead
- led

Come to the next ... your skills.

- practise to practice
- practice to practise

The secretary has ordered new ...

- stationery.
- stationary.

You need to decide on ... main argument for the presentation.

- won
- one

Please let the manager know if ... going to the dinner.

- you're
- your

He agreed to ... responsibility for the damages.

- except
- accept

The clarity of presentation will ... your grade.

- effect
- affect

The yellow chairs will ... the furniture in the room.

- compliment
- complement

Our host will ... that everyone feels comfortable.

- insure
- ensure

If you ... anything about the reasons for the decision, please tell me.

- hear
- here

The boss does not want to ... any more workers.

- lose
- loose

She wanted to read through ... exam papers.

- past
- passed

They are moving the exhibition to a new ...

- sight
- site

... book is this?

- Whose
- Who's

The new rules are designed to give everyone better ... to the facilities.

- access
- excess

The pattern creates a visual ...

- allusion.
- illusion.

Immediately after the incident, he decided to ... the students.

- counsel
- council

The number of defects was in ... of one hundred.

- access
- excess

The organisation is concerned with an increase in violent ...

- incidence.
- incidents.

Will you ... Tony your book?

- loan
- lend

He prefers to study in the library because it is very ...

- quiet.
- quite.

They pushed the letter ... the opening.

- threw
- through

... planning the meet us at the theatre, I believe.

- They're
- Their

She wanted to know the advantage of narrowband ... broadband internet.

- verses
- versus

Several solutions to the problems facing ... in the town were discussed.

- adolescents
- adolescence

You can complete the form online or, ... , you can print the form and post it.

- alternately
- alternatively

The modern violin ... about seventy individual parts.

- consists of
- comprises of

The college will ... students from any discipline.

- except
- accept

She ... all of the answers to the quiz.

- new
- knew

The group decided to ... that night.

- meet
- meat

The discussion ... around the need for better working conditions.

- evolved
- revolved

He took on the ... of sound engineer for the production.

- role
- roll

The members of the board voted to ... a new strategy.

- adopt
- adapt

Luckily for the workers, the blast occurred ... the factories.

- among
- between

They were worried that the programmer would ... the project.

- desert
- dessert

She discovered that she was ... for government support.

- legible
- eligible

Do you ... the facts of the case?

- know
- no

He was identified by his ... uniform.

- navel
- naval

Tom, Peter, and Lisa brought paint, scissors, and balloons, ...

- respectfully.
- respectively.

That gang is known to ... on elderly residents.

- prey
- pray

I ... you to act immediately.

- advise
- advice

She ... her book from the new shop.

- brought
- bought

Members of the committee need to be ...

- discrete.
- discreet.

She put ... several new ideas at the meeting.

- fourth
- forth

We will discuss the ...

- latter problem later
- later problem latter

She has got the ... of a saint.

- patients
- patience

Answers

She has the ... to excel in mathematics.

- ability ✓
- capacity ✗

✓ Correct!

✗ No. "Capacity" is related to being able to receive or contain something.

He was investigating the ... of stress on learning.

- affect ✗
- effect ✓

✓ Yes. You need a noun here. The noun "effect" means "influence", as in "the influence of stress".

✗ No. Look at the confusables lesson again. Notice, too, that you need a noun that means "influence", as in "the influence of stress on learning".

He was able to say the alphabet in a single ...

- breathe. ✗
- breath. ✓

✓ Yes. That's right. You need a noun and "breath" is a noun.

✗ No. You need the noun form.

When teaching someone to drive you need ... controls.

- dual ✓
- duel ✗

✓ Correct. "Dual" means double.

✗ No. A "duel" is a type of fight.

She decided to complain ... about the service.

- formerly ✗
- formally ✓

✓ Correct. She is going to make a "formal" complaint.

✗ No. The word "formerly" is related to the word "former", as in "previous".

She ... the group discussion.

- lead ✗
- led ✓

✓ Yes. "Led" is a verb that rhymes with "bed".

✗ No. "Lead" can be a verb, but when it is a verb it rhymes with "bead". You need the verb that rhymes with "bed".

Come to the next ... your skills.

- practise to practice ✗
- practice to practise ✓

✓ Yes. The word "practice" is a noun, but "practise" is a verb. To remember which is which, think of the word "ice": it is a noun just like "practice".

✗ No. The word "practice" is a noun, but "practise" is a verb. To remember which is which, think of the word "ice" which is a noun just like "practice".

The secretary has ordered new ...

- stationery. ✓
- stationary. ✗

✓ Yes. That's correct.

✗ No. "Stationary" means "not moving".

You need to decide on ... main argument for the presentation.

- won **X**
- one **✓**

✓ Correct.

X No. The verb "won" comes from the verb "win".

Please let the manager know if ... going to the dinner.

- you're **✓**
- your **X**

✓ Yes. "You're" means "you are".

X No. You want an expression that means "you are". "Your" is a possessive pronoun.

He agreed to ... responsibility for the damages.

- except **X**
- accept **✓**

✓ Yes.

X No. This is the wrong word.

The clarity of presentation will ... your grade.

- effect **X**
- affect **✓**

✓ Correct. A verb meaning "influence" is required.

X No. You need a verb meaning "influence".

The yellow chairs will ... the furniture in the room.

- compliment **X**
- complement **✓**

✓ That's correct. The other "compliment" means to say something nice about someone.

X No. "Compliment" means to say something nice about someone.

Our host will ... that everyone feels comfortable.

- insure **X**
- ensure **✓**

✓ Yes.

X No. The word "insure" is related to the word "insurance".

If you ... anything about the reasons for the decision, please tell me.

- hear **✓**
- here **X**

✓ Yes.

X No. The word "here" refers to a location.

The boss does not want to ... any more workers.

- lose **✓**
- loose **X**

✓ Yes. This is the required verb.

X No. The word "loose" rhymes with "juice".

She wanted to read through ... exam papers.

- past ✓
- passed ✗

✓ That's right. The adjective "past" is required.

✗ No. You need an adjective, not a verb.

They are moving the exhibition to a new ...

- sight ✗
- site ✓

✓ Yes. The word "site" is related to the word "situated".

✗ No. The word "sight" is related to the word "see". You need the word that is related to "situated".

... book is this?

- Whose ✓
- Who's ✗

✓ Yes. This is a possessive form.

✗ No. "Who's" means "who is". You need a possessive pronoun.

The new rules are designed to give everyone better ... to the facilities.

- access ✓
- excess ✗

✓ Yes. The rules will make things more "accessible".

✗ Wrong. The word "excess" is related to the word "excessive".

The pattern creates a visual ...

- allusion. **X**
- illusion. **✓**

✓ Correct.

X No. The word "allusion" is related to the verb "to allude".

Immediately after the incident, he decided to ... the students.

- counsel **✓**
- council **X**

✓ Correct.

X No.

The number of defects was in ... of one hundred.

- access **X**
- excess **✓**

✓ Correct. The word is related to "excessive".

X No. You need the word that is related to "excessive".

The organisation is concerned with an increase in violent ...

- incidence. **X**
- incidents. **✓**

✓ Yes. The word "incidents" is the plural of "incident".

X No. You need the plural of the word "incident".

Will you ... Tony your book?

- loan **X**
- lend **✓**

✓ Correct. This is the verb.

X No. This is a noun. You need a verb.

He prefers to study in the library because it is very ...

- quiet. ✓
- quite. ✗

✓ Yes.

✗ No. Look at the two words very carefully.

They pushed the letter ... the opening.

- threw ✗
- through ✓

✓ Correct.

✗ No. "Threw" is a form of the verb "throw".

... planning the meet us at the theatre, I believe.

- They're ✓
- Their ✗

✓ Correct.

✗ Incorrect. You need a word that means "they are".

She wanted to know the advantage of narrowband ... broadband internet.

- verses ✗
- versus ✓

✓ Yes.

✗ No.

Several solutions to the problems facing ... in the town were discussed.

- adolescents ✓
- adolescence ✗

- ✓ Yes. This is the plural of "adolescent".
- ✗ Wrong. You need the plural of "adolescent".

You can complete the form online or, ... , you can print the form and post it.

- alternately ✗
- alternatively ✓

- ✓ Correct.
- ✗ No. Nothing is alternating.

The modern violin ... about seventy individual parts.

- consists of ✓
- comprises of ✗

- ✓ That's correct.
- ✗ No. You should never write "comprises of".

The college will ... students from any discipline.

- except ✗
- accept ✓

- ✓ Yes.
- ✗ No. The word "except" is related to the word "exception".

She ... all of the answers to the quiz.

- new ❌
- knew ✅

✅ Correct. The word "knew" is related to the word "know".

❌ No. You need a word that is related to the word "know".

The group decided to ... that night.

- meet ✅
- meat ❌

✅ Correct.

❌ Incorrect.

The discussion ... around the need for better working conditions.

- evolved ❌
- revolved ✅

✅ Yes.

❌ Incorrect. The word "evolve" is concerned with evolution.

He took on the ... of sound engineer for the production.

- role ✅
- roll ❌

✅ Correct.

❌ No.

The members of the board voted to ... a new strategy.

- adopt ✅
- adapt ❌

✅ Correct.

❌ No. It is unlikely the word "adapt" is intended here.

Luckily for the workers, the blast occurred ... the factories.

- among **X**
- between **✓**

✓ Yes. If it occurred between the factories, then indeed it would be lucky.

X No. If it occurred among the factories it would not be lucky.

They were worried that the programmer would ... the project.

- desert **✓**
- dessert **X**

✓ Correct.

X "Dessert" is what you eat after a main meal.

She discovered that she was ... for government support.

- legible **X**
- eligible **✓**

✓ Yes.

X No.

Do you ... the facts of the case?

- know **✓**
- no **X**

✓ Yes.

X No.

He was identified by his ... uniform.

- navel **X**
- naval **✓**

✓ Yes.

X No. That is part of your anatomy.

Tom, Peter, and Lisa brought paint, scissors, and balloons, ...

- respectfully. **X**
- respectively. **✓**

✓ Correct.

X Incorrect.

That gang is known to ... on elderly residents.

- prey **✓**
- pray **X**

✓ Correct.

X No. They would not be saying a prayer.

I ... you to act immediately.

- advise **✓**
- advice **X**

✓ Yes. This is the verb form.

X No. Like "ice", "advice" is a noun. You need the verb form.

She ... her book from the new shop.

- brought **X**
- bought **✓**

✓ Yes. The word "bought" is related to "buy" and "brought" is related to "bring".

X No. The word "brought" is related to "bring". You need a word that is related to "buy".

Members of the committee need to be ...

- discrete. **X**
- discreet. **✓**

✓ Yes.

X No.

She put ... several new ideas at the meeting.

- fourth **X**
- forth **✓**

✓ Yes. "Forth" is related to the word "forward".

X No. "Fourth" is related to "four".

We will discuss the ...

- latter problem later. **✓**
- later problem latter. **X**

✓ Yes.

X No.

She has got the ... of a saint.

- patients ✗
- patience ✓

✓ Correct.

✗ Incorrect. "Patients" see doctors.