

Misused Words: A Glossary

Have you been told you used the wrong version of a word, but you can't remember what the different versions mean? Need to quickly check a version of 'your' but don't have a dictionary near you? Here's a glossary of commonly misused words and their commonly used definitions for you to tackle word precision. Misused words can impact the clarity and accuracy of your words and meaning of your writing; this guide can be a helpful resource to use during revising and editing. You can learn more about the concept of misused words in our "Misused Words: A Learner's Guide" and use this glossary alongside it as well. Please note that this list is not exhaustive, meaning that not every misused word is listed nor is every possible definition.

Misused Words and Phrases List

Homonyms		
Word	Definition	Sentence
Affect	To act on and cause a change in (someone or something)	"This earthquake affected everyone in this town."
Effect	A result or outcome caused by a participating noun	"Natural disasters can have terrible effects on cities."
Dessert	A sweet food usually served at the end of a meal	"He doesn't like dessert . His teeth hurt when he eats it."
Desert	A biome; arid land with sparse vegetation	"He hates how dry the desert is ."
Accept	To receive something willingly	"If San José State University accepts you, that's great."
Except	With exclusion in mind; to exclude	"We should invite the whole class except him."
Then	At that time; next in the sequential order	"I'll go to the store, and then I'll come pick you up."
Than	Used to indicate comparison between two items	"We need to be quicker than the other team to win."

Homonyms		
Your	Possessive form of 'you'	"Can I come to your place?"
You're	Contraction of 'you' and 'are'	"You said you're going to the party."
Its	Possessive pronoun used to replace a nonhuman noun	"Put the jelly back in its place when you're finished!"
It's	A contraction form of 'it' and 'is'	" It's sunny out today."
Lose	To not win (a competition or contest) or misplace something	"I keep my keys here so I don't lose them."
Loose	Describing something not tightly attached	"The boss said no loose t-shirts for the office party."
Breathe	The act of inhaling using the nose or mouth	"She couldn't breathe in that bathroom; it stunk so bad."
Breath	The air you inhale and exhale	"Take a deep breath and sit down."
Allude	To make an indirect reference	"She alludes to an earlier comment."
Elude	To physically avoid; to escape understanding of a concept	"Rocket science eludes me all the time."
Compliment	An expression of regards or respect	"Give my compliments to the chef, will you?"
Complement	A counterpart; something that completes or makes perfect	"Blue is a bold complement to orange."
To	Used to indicate that the following verb is in the infinitive form; used to indicate direction	"She wants to sing a solo song." / "She hasn't been to the beach in so long."
Too	Besides or also; something described as excessive	"I have class with Mr. Smith too ." / "Your boots are too big."
Two	More than one countable quantity	"They have two classes together."

Homonyms		
There	Used to indicate something or someone in or at a particular place or position	“ There she goes, past the stairwell!”
Their	Possessive form of ‘ they ’	“I always wondered what was in their bag.”
They’re	Contraction of ‘ they ’ and ‘ are ’	“Can you believe they’re not even coming?”
Farther	At or to a greater distance	“I threw the ball farther than last week.”
Further	To a greater degree; in addition	“We need to further study some harmful bacteria in the food.”
Weary	Exhausted in strength or patience	“I’ve grown weary of exams.”
Wary	To be cautious or untrusting	“Be wary of that kid over there.”
Later	At some time after a given time	“Want to go swimming later ?”
Latter	Coming after a process, series, or activity	“He became angrier in his latter days.”
Whose	Possessive pronoun; used to ask about ownership or subject of topic	“ Whose bag is on the ground?”
Who’s	Contraction of ‘ who ’ and ‘ is ’	“ Who’s coming to the party?”
Where	At, in, or to what place	“You’re where you need to be.”
Wear	To bear or have on one’s person	“I should wear a coat this morning.”

Word Choices		
Word	Definition	Sentence
Fewer	Typically used for countable nouns	“This line is for 10 items or fewer .”
Less	Typically used for uncountable nouns	“The lion had less courage than her.”

Word Choices		
Lay	To put something to rest	“I lay my dog across the couch.”
Lie	To rest in a horizontal position	“I lie down on the couch.”
Number	A total sum of countable units	“She does a number of chores before leaving.”
Amount	Total or aggregate uncountable quantity	“What’s the least amount of work I can do today?”
Rise	To be upright from a different position	“The vampire rises from the coffin.”
Raise	To set upright; to help something or someone grow	“ Raising children never comes with a rulebook, as they say.”
Who	What or which person or persons; used in the subject position of a sentence, replacing ‘he,’ ‘she,’ etc.	“ Who found my leftovers and ate them?”
Whom	Formal version of ‘who’; used in the object position of a sentence, replacing ‘him,’ ‘her,’ etc.	“To whom should I address this letter?”
Between	Connected by a common action; joint engagement; used when referring to two items/people	“The remote is between those two cushions.”
Among	In or through the midst of; used when referring to three or more items/people	“The confederate is hiding among us.”

Spellings		
Word	Definition	Sentence
Onto	To a position on; upon or on	“The barista set her order onto the rack.”
On to	‘On’ and ‘to’ used as two separate phrasal verbs	“Turn the lamp on to see in the dark.”

Spellings		
Into	To indicate direction, entry, or introduction	“Don’t walk into my house without taking your shoes off.”
In to	‘In’ and ‘to’ used as two separate phrasal verbs	“I walked in to give my boss the report.”
Upon	On the surface; on	“ Upon arrival, he gave his mother-in-law a hug.”
Up on	‘Up’ and ‘on’ used as two separate phrasal verbs	“She gave up on trying for a better grade.”
Everyday	Encountered or used routinely	“My everyday clothes are boring.”
Every day	Daily occurrence of action	“No, he doesn't sing every day .”
Awhile	For a short period of time; usually modifies a verb	“Sit awhile . I won’t be long.”
A while	A period of time	“Read for a while ; it’s relaxing!”
Someday	At an indefinite, future point in time	“He might be famous someday .”
Some day	A day that is unspecified or unknown	“We can hunt deer on some day in July.”

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