UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH WRITNG & READING CENTER

**FREQUENTLY CONFUSED WORDS**

accept/except

The verb accept means to receive. As a preposition, except means other than or but.

All the boys accept John as their leader.

All the boys except John are leaders.

advice/advise

Pronounced and spelled differently, advice is a noun while advise is a verb.

Patients should follow their doctor's advice.

Patients should do what their doctors advise.

affect/effect

Affect is a verb that means to influence; the noun affect means an emotional state. The verb effect means to bring about, achieve; the noun effect means the result.

The reforms affected many new citizens.

The citizens effected a few reforms.

The patient’s affect revealed her agitation.

She stressed the effect of wars on the economy.

all right/alright

Both mean satisfactory or correct, though alright is still considered a questionable spelling.

The accountant checked my income-tax return and said it was all right.

allusion/illusion

Allusion means an indirect reference. Illusion means an unreal image or false impression.

Timothy made an allusion to the Trojans.

The Trojan Horse was no optical illusion.

already/all ready

Already means before or by the time specified. All ready means completely prepared.

The theater was already full by seven o'clock.

The cast was all ready for the curtain call.

altogether/all together

Altogether means completely, thoroughly. All together means in a group.

That type of rule is altogether unnecessary.

They were all together in the lobby.

among/between

Among always implies more than two; between is used for two.

What honor was there among the forty thieves?

What is the difference between a thief and a robber?

amount/number

Amount refers to things in bulk and mass; number refers to something that can be counted.

A large amount of rice is consumed annually.

A large number of disgruntled workers barred the entrance.

angry/mad

Both can mean feeling or showing anger; but mad can also mean insane, senseless, or illogical.

The teacher became angry when he caught the student cheating.

Because of his unusual behavior, the man was diagnosed as being mad.

cite/sight/site

Cite means to quote as an authority; sight refers to seeing, or that which is seen; site means a place or location.

The professor cited an example from the textbook to prove his point.

The moon shimmering on the lake was a beautiful sight.

The site that we picked for our new home has a view overlooking the river.

compliment/complement

Compliment means an expression of admiration, praise, or congratulation. Complement means that which fills up or completes a thing.

Jack was pleased with the compliments he received for his stirring speech.

Joanne's hat and dress complement each other.

council/counsel

Council is a noun that means an assembly or meeting. Counsel, when used as a noun, means advice given, or a policy or plan. When used as a verb, counsel means to give advice to, or to advise.

The council voted against the proposal.

Brown followed the counsel of his lawyer and paid the fine without protest.

disinterested/uninterested

Disinterested means unbiased or impartial; uninterested means lacking interest.

In hiring a referee for the Rose Bowl, the officials looked for a disinterested person.

Some students are completely uninterested in the course.

emigrate/immigrate

Emigrate means to move from a country; immigrate means to move into a country.

Because of the potato famine, many people emigrated from Ireland to the United States.

The people who immigrated to the United States in the 19th century played an important role in the industrialization of the country.

farther/further

These words are often used interchangeably to express geographic distance, although some writers prefer farther. Further is used to express additional time.

Denver is farther north than Dallas.

Will there be further improvements in city government?

fewer/less

Informally, they are used interchangeably. Fewer usually refers to quantities that can be counted, while less refers to value, degree, or amount.

Women now spend fewer hours in the kitchen.

Women now spend less time in the kitchen.

like/as

Like should be used as a preposition; as is used as a conjunction. Like used as a conjunction is widely used in conversation but is still controversial in a formal context.

He drives like me. (prepositional function)

He drives like I do. (used as a conjunction: not accepted in formal context)

He drives as I do. (used as a conjunction)

lose/loose

Lose is a verb that means to cease having. Loose is an adjective which means free, not fastened, or the opposite of tight.

I was warned not to lose the keys.

All loose bolts should be tightened.

principle/principal

Principle is a noun meaning a fundamental truth; principal is an adjective or noun meaning chief or chief official.

A principal factor in the decision was the principal's principle that might does not make right.

rise/raise

Rise (rose, risen) is an intransitive (does not need an object) verb meaning to move upwards. Raise (raised, raised) is a transitive verb (does need an object) meaning to cause to move upward, to place erect.

Franklin rises promptly at seven.

Franklin raises his hand often in physics class.

stationary/stationery

Stationary means in a fixed position; stationery means writing paper and envelopes.

The tables were fastened to the floor so that they would be stationary.

Elaine selected the blue stationery to write to her friend.

than/then

Than is a term of comparison. Then relates to time.

Nylon wears better than rayon.

First it rained; then it snowed.

Adapted From:

Kinsella, Paul. *The Techniques of Writing*. Stamford: Thomas Learning, 1981. Print.

Hodges, John C. and Mary Whitten. *Harbrace College Handbook*. San Diego: Harcourt College Publishers,

1989. Print.