

13. Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound alike but do not mean the same thing and are therefore not spelled alike. These "soundalikes" are not interchangeable. If you use the wrong form in a sentence, you will confuse or mislead your reader—the last thing you want to let happen.

Your/You're

Underline all uses of *your* and *you're* in the following paragraph:

Your mother called this morning to find out if you're coming for dinner on Sunday. She wants to borrow your soufflé dish. You're going, aren't you? She also said that you're welcome to bring your friend, John, but you're going to have to watch your manners because Mrs. Moorhouse will be there, and she is not accustomed to college students and is always nervous around your friends.

1. Which form shows ownership?_____

2. Which is the contraction of you + are?_____

On the lines below, write *your* or *you're*, as appropriate.

1. _____ hot tub will be installed Monday.
2. Do you know where _____ going to put it?
3. I imagine _____ friends will want to spend the weekends at _____ house now.
4. _____ going to miss _____ quiet weekends alone.
5. I realize _____ looking forward to relaxing.
6. _____ chemistry needs work if _____ going to pass the class.
7. _____ the one I want to talk to.
8. Get _____ feet off the coffee table.

Its/It's

Underline all uses of its and it's in the following paragraph:

It's surprising to many people how close the "distant past" really is to us living today. For instance, the American Civil War seems so long ago that it's almost a part of ancient history. Yet its influence lingers with us today in tensions between the North and the South; its battles are still studied by young military officers, and its last veterans died not in the dim past but in the 1950's.

Which form shows ownership? _____

Which form is the contraction of *it + is* or *it + has*? _____

On the lines below, write its or it's as appropriate.

1. The team won _____ game with _____ chief rivals.
2. Today _____ time to learn that “ _____ ” is a possessive word.
3. The rain certainly took _____ time getting here last winter.
4. Although _____ true that _____ getting rather dark now, I think _____ still too early to go home.
5. _____ sometimes said that France is like a miniature United States; _____ climate and geography are almost as varied as America's.
6. _____ plain to see that the dog obeys _____ master.
7. _____ been four years since I've been to New York.
8. One of SFSU's disadvantages is _____ foggy weather.
9. _____ been a long road for me; _____ taken me ten years to finish college.

Their/There/They're

Underline all uses of *their*, *there*, and *they're* in the following paragraph.

Mr. and Mrs. Casey are very staunch Catholics, so they're upset about their son marrying a Jewish woman. They're concerned that their grandchildren will not have one firm religion to believe in. The Caseys know that there is some basis for their fear, since children of a religiously mixed marriage do have to cope with two religions at one time. However, they've begun to think, "So long as there is love between the parents, how can that harm the children?" In the end, they've reconciled themselves to the marriage.

1. Which form shows ownership? _____
2. Which indicates direction or is a way of introducing a thought? _____
3. Which is a contraction of *they + are*? _____

On the lines below, write *their*, *there*, or *they're* as appropriate.

1. _____ are three kinds of ghosts in that house.
2. _____ minds weren't on the subject the teacher was talking about.
3. _____ a lot of trouble to people who spend the night.
4. _____ is no time like the present to take care of business.
5. They tried to win _____ final game, but _____ was no way they could beat _____ opponents.
6. _____ tired of doing _____ work.
7. _____ are many problems with the proposal.
8. _____ cats always get into fights.

Whose/Who's

Underline all uses of whose and who's in the following paragraph.

Who's going to the beach with us? We have to decide whose car we're going to take so we can fill it with gas. I already know who's bringing the food and drinks. Susan, whose father runs China Camp, will bring a cooler with cold drinks. Ted, who's Jeff's brother, promised to bring fried chicken and potato salad. But who's agreed to bring the napkins and eating utensils? Whose idea was this anyway?

1. Which form shows ownership? _____
2. Which form is the combination of
who + is
or *who + has*? _____

On the lines below, write *whose* or *who's*, as appropriate.

1. _____ picking up Sally from the airport?
2. No one knows _____ responsible.
3. He knows _____ fault it is.
4. Can you find out _____ taking Kathy home?
5. The teacher knew all along _____ idea it was to draw the picture on the board.
6. _____ backpack is this?
7. Jeff is the one _____ been getting A's on all the tests.
8. We never found out _____ dog spread our garbage all over the neighborhood.
9. Wait until you hear _____ playing at the dance Friday.

Two/To/Too

Underline all uses of two, to, and too in the following paragraph.

Strikes by employees of mass transit systems inconvenience many people. During the last Muni strike, many people had to rearrange their schedules so that they were getting to work earlier than usual and leaving later than usual. Some students found themselves in awkward situations too, for they were unable to go to school without walking for miles. During the BART strike, too many cars cluttered the freeways and bridges, and this increase in traffic was hazardous to commuters and pedestrians alike. Just these two examples should serve to explain why I am against strikes by Muni and BART employees.

1. Which form indicates the number 2? _____
2. Which is a preposition or a part of a verb? _____
3. Which means either "also" or "very"? _____

On the lines below, write two, to, or too as appropriate.

1. It's _____ bad that many people find it _____ easy ___ settle down in front of the television rather than read a book.
2. Over-achievers try _____ hard _____ be perfect at everything they do, but they would be better off trying _____ excel at one or _____ things rather than _____ many at once.
3. My sister's _____ favorite cookie recipes call for _____ much sugar in the ingredients.
4. Pets require lots of care and attention _____ grow into healthy organisms, and plants do _____.
5. It's _____ bad that plants aren't as stimulating _____ talk _____ as pets, though.
6. My brother is so clumsy that he finds it difficult _____ tie his shoestrings together.
7. Children who watch _____ much television usually end up with _____ crossed eyes.

More "Homonyms"

There are other "soundalikes," some of which are listed below. Whenever you use one of these words, you need to know how you're using it: what idea are you trying to get across? Do you mean the word as a noun, a verb, an adjective, a preposition? If you do not know, use your dictionary.

Example: Before we (accept or except) the offer, we should first consult a lawyer.

According to the dictionary, *accept* is a verb meaning *to receive* and *except* is a preposition meaning *to the exclusion of*. Since *receive* makes sense in the parenthesis while *the exclusion of* does not, *accept* is the correct choice.

Correct: Before we accept the offer, we should first consult a lawyer.

Use your dictionary to determine each word's definition and part of speech. Then circle the correct word.

1. Her father tried to give her sound (advice or advise), but she refused to listen to him.
2. Whatever the counselors (advice or advise), you should listen to them.
3. Doctors continue to research the (affect or effect) alcohol has on the nervous system.
4. I do not see how this will (affect or effect) me.
5. We were (lead or led) to our seats just moments before the house lights went down.
6. She will (lead or led) us in battle.
7. He is still trying to estimate the effects of his (loss or lost) on both his personal and business life.
8. I looked everywhere, but the negatives were (loss or lost).
9. Jose thought the team was going to (lose or loose) the game.
10. Although tight clothes are in style, I like to wear things that are (lose or loose).
11. I think I (know or no) the poem well enough to recite it.
12. He has (know or no) understanding of the situation.
13. Because his grades were dropping, Ben was very (quite, quiet, or quit) in class.
14. Mary seemed (quite, quiet, or quit) upset after she hung up the phone.
15. We have lived in our apartment (since or sense) December.
16. His argument makes no (since or sense) unless you have read the book.