

The Top 20 Most Commonly Confused Words in English

Whether you're a native English speaker or new to the language, you may have misused some vocabulary here and there while speaking or writing. While it's usually no big deal to have someone politely correct you, misusing words in a presentation can cause quite a bit of confusion. Even if the audience understands what you mean, the mixup could take away from your point and even make you seem less credible.

Today, I'll be listing 10 pairs of the most commonly confused words in English for your convenience. Some of these words are similar but not identical in meaning; some sound exactly the same but mean different things; and others are variations of a word in different parts of speech.

[Affect vs. Effect](#) Affect is a **verb** that means "to make a difference to". Effect is usually a **noun** meaning "a change that is the result of an action". Effect is sometimes used as a verb, but it's very formal and not used nearly as often.

- *One of the pill's side effects was nausea.*
- *The gloomy weather affected my mood.*

[Advice vs. Advise](#) Advice is a **noun** meaning "a recommendation or an opinion". Advise is a **verb** meaning "to give advice".

- *My advice for you is to always try your best.*
- *She advised the boy to go to bed earlier.*

[Ensure vs. Insure](#) Ensure is a verb meaning "**to make sure**". Insure is a verb meaning "to keep something safe with an insurance policy".

- *They had to ensure she would stay safe.*

- *Our house is insured against burglaries.*

Compliment vs. Complement Compliment is a **noun** that means “to say something nice about someone”. Complement is a **verb** that means to “to go well with” or “to match”.

- *I’m trying to pay 10 strangers compliments this week.*
- *The tart strawberries complemented the sweet cream.*
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Disinterested vs. Uninterested Disinterested is an adjective meaning **“impartial; unbiased”**. Uninterested is an adjective meaning **“to not be interested in something”**.

- *The disinterested judges scored each contestant fairly.*
- *The cat was rather uninterested in chasing mice.*

Emigrate vs. Immigrate Emigrate is a verb that means **“to leave a country to settle in another”**. Immigrate is a verb that means **“to come to a foreign country to live there”**.

- *The twins’ parents had emigrated from Italy many years ago.*
- *The young couple planned to immigrate to Thailand.*

It’s vs. Its It’s (with an apostrophe) is a contraction short for **“It is” or “it has”**. Its (without an apostrophe) is a possessive adjective that means **“belong to it”**.

- *It’s too hot outside to go hiking!*
- *The application’s most useful feature was its undo button.*

Loose vs. Lose Loose is usually an **adjective** that means “not tight/firm”. Lose is a **verb** that means a lot of different things, including “being unable to find something”, “failing to win”, and “not having something anymore”.

- *These pants are too loose for me.*
- *I'm going to lose my appetite.*

Stationary vs. Stationery Stationary is an **adjective** meaning “unmoving/unchanging”. Stationery is a **noun** that means “writing materials (such as pens, ink, envelopes, paper, etc.)”.

- *My uncle likes using the stationary bicycle I gave him last year.*
- *Roberta buys the same purple stationery every year.*

Than vs. Then Than is a **conjunction** that is used in comparisons. Then is an **adverb** that is used to link different events in time or to refer to an event in the past.

- *Back then, my dog was much more energetic than he is now.*
- *The magician pulled a rabbit from a hat, then disappeared in a poof of smoke.*

And that brings us to the end of our list! When you write your next speech, essay, report, or even a text message, keep these tricky words in mind. Just remember: if you aren't sure about which word to use in a speech, double-check before you present rather than afterward...

Next time, we'll go over 10 more pairs of commonly confused words!

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