Spelling problem words

Some words are so close to others in spelling or meaning that they cause **confusion**. Words such as *there* and *their* are so frequently mistaken in the context of the sentence that they drive lecturers to distraction. If you do not want to annoy the very person you are trying to impress, it's a good idea to study these problem words:

1. Common misused words (choosing the wrong word)
2. Compound word errors (one or more words combined into a single word)
3. Common homophone errors (same sound, different spelling)

SPELLING CHECKERS can help with about 60% of **spelling errors** in your writing if you have a reasonable 'sound' match. It cannot read context, so you will have to know your homophones, compound words, American spelling and read for the use of correct words. Always proofread your work manually and use a standard Australian dictionary to check for the correct spelling of words.

1. Common misused words

Words that sound alike or nearly alike but have different meanings often cause writers trouble. Here are a few of the most common words with correct definitions and examples:

a lot / allot (~~alot~~) (There is no such word as 'alot'.)

- **a lot**: Common usage meaning is 'a great many'. (e.g. There are *a lot* of rules for conducting an election.)
- **allot**: Common usage meaning is 'to share out'. (e.g. Voters were asked to *allot* votes according to party preferences.)

accept / except / expect (Each word has a completely different meaning.)

- **accept**: A verb meaning to 'consent' or 'take willingly' (e.g. The politician *accepted* the offer to address the strikers.)
- **except**: A preposition or a conjunction meaning 'other than' (e.g. Everyone, *except* for the elderly and infirm, must vote.)
- **expect**: A verb meaning 'to consider probable' (e.g. Most people *expected* the popular party to win the election.)

affect / effect (Spelling words have a noun and verb function.)

- **affect**: Common usage is a verb meaning 'to influence'. (e.g. The politician's speech *affected* my opinion before voting.)
- **effect**: Common usage is a noun meaning 'result' or 'consequence'. (e.g. Her speech had *a strong effect* on the audience.)

could have / could've / (~~could of~~) (There are no such terms as 'could of', 'should of' or 'would of'.)

- **could have**: A modal verb group meaning 'maybe' (e.g. The election was so close that either party *could have* won.)
- **could've**: A contraction of 'could have' (e.g. The election *could've* been won by either party.)

in turn / intern (~~inturn~~) (There is no such word as 'inturn' as one word.)

- **in turn**: A phrase meaning 'likewise' (e.g. The councillor was very supportive and the electors, *in turn*, were loyal.)
- **intern**: 'A person in workplace training' / 'imprisoned' (e.g. The tax office *intern* was *interned* for a financial misdemeanour.)

practice / practise, advice/ advise, licence / license (Spelling words have a noun and verb function.)

- **practise**: Common usage as a verb includes 'perform repetitive actions' (e.g. The politician *practised* her speech.)
- **practice**: Common usage as a noun includes a habit, regular exercise, a usual way of doing, a professional business (e.g. The law *practice* was supposed to follow the *practice* of not employing politicians, but in *practice* this was ignored.)

then / than (Each word has a completely different meaning.)

- **then**: Commonly means 'at that time', 'next' or 'as a consequence' (e.g. If the party wins, *then* they will be in power.)
- **than**: Commonly used for comparison (e.g. The party won the election by larger numbers *than* was expected.)

2. Compound word errors

There are over 2000 compound words in the English language. If you write these words as two or more words instead of single words, then you are spelling these words INCORRECTLY. The spelling checker will NOT assist you, so use a good Australian dictionary. Some examples of common compound words are:

alongside, another, aftermath, anybody, background, beforehand, cannot, commonplace, elsewhere, everywhere, everything, however, keyboard, meantime, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, somewhat, spokesperson, therefore, underachievement, underdeveloped, underestimate, underground, update, upheaval, whatever, widespread, without

3. Common homophone errors

Your spelling checker will NOT pick up the errors in sentences such as '**Their** coming **too sea** if **its reel**' because the 'offending' words are not spelled incorrectly. They are just the wrong words. The computer is logical, but is not able to apply common sense to wording. There are **hundreds** of homophones in the English language. Following are the TOP TEN homophone errors in student writing.

Common homophones	Examples
1. it's & its ❶ **its** (without an apostrophe): a possessive pronoun ❷ **it's** (with an apostrophe): a contraction meaning 'it is' OR 'it has'	❶ The parliament felt that <u>its</u> ✓power was being blocked. NOT The parliament felt that <u>it's</u> ✗ power was being blocked. ❷ <u>It's</u> (it is) ✓difficult for parliament to operate when power is blocked.
2. to, too & two ❶ **to**: part of an infinitive verb group OR a preposition ❷ **too**: meaning 'excessively' OR 'additionally' ❸ **two**: a number	❶ The politicians wanted <u>to</u> **choose** a new party leader before going <u>to</u> the State elections. ❷ The results of the election were <u>too</u> (excessively) close to announce a winner as votes from remote areas had to be counted <u>too</u> (additionally). ❸ <u>Two</u> members of the Cabinet were not re-elected.
3. there, their & they're ❶ **there**: refers to location ❷ **their**: a possessive pronoun (**ownership**) ❸ **they're**: a contraction meaning 'they are'	❶ The politicians were <u>there</u> waiting for the results. ❷ <u>Their</u> results were announced to the media. ❸ <u>They're</u> (they are) announcing the winners of the election after the absentee votes are counted.
4. who's & whose ❶ **who's**: a contraction meaning 'who is' OR 'who has' ❷ **whose**: a possessive pronoun	❶ They'll announce <u>who's</u> (who has) won the election. ❷ When they know <u>whose</u> party has the most votes, the winning party will be announced.
5. weather & whether ❶ **weather**: a noun meaning 'climatic conditions' ❷ **whether**: a conjunction that introduces alternatives	❶ The freezing <u>weather</u> affected voting attendance. ❷ As voting is compulsory, fines for absenteeism depend on <u>whether</u> there is a reasonable excuse.
6. lose & loose ❶ **lose**: a verb meaning 'unable to find' OR 'not win' ❷ **loose**: an adjective meaning 'not fastened' OR 'not tight'	❶ The opposition party seemed set to <u>lose</u> the election. ❷ The policies of the losing party seemed <u>loose</u> and unfocused when compared to the opposition party.
7. where & were ❶ **where**: refers to 'a place' ❷ **were**: a past form of the verb 'to be'	❶ The voters enquired about <u>where</u> (place) the poll booths were located for voting day. ❷ There <u>were</u> voting booths in all State schools.
8. past & passed ❶ **past**: means 'beyond' OR 'before the present time' ❷ **passed**: a verb (action) meaning 'went by'	❶ The politicians ignored protestors as they drove <u>past</u> them. In the <u>past</u>, they would stop to speak to them. ❷ The politicians <u>passed</u> the protestors without acknowledging their presence.
9. principle & principal ❶ **princip<u>le</u>**: means a 'theory' OR 'rule' ❷ **princip<u>al</u>**: means 'first' OR 'most important'	❶ The <u>principles</u> (rules) of the party were upheld in their education policies. ❷ The <u>principal</u> (most important) cause of losing the election was raised interest rates.
10. quiet & quite ❶ **qui<u>et</u>**: means 'without noise' OR 'calm' OR 'unobtrusive' ❷ **qui<u>te</u>**: means 'rather' OR 'completely'	❶ The streets were <u>quiet</u> after the election was over. ❷ The results of the election were <u>quite</u> a surprise to those who were <u>quite</u> sure the opposition would lose.