



## HELP SHEET: CONFUSING WORDS AND APOSTROPHES

Poor grammar and bad use of written English can really harm your chances of getting a job, being promoted in a job or gaining respect from your peers and colleagues at work. Many employers will simply not consider inviting candidates for interview if their CV is badly written and shows poor understanding of the basics of grammar. You must always make sure that you use appropriate spelling and good grammar in any application form, CV or indeed anything you write (presentation slides, report, letter, business plan, executive summary etc).

This help sheet tackles some of the words and aspects of grammar that can cause problems.

### APOSTROPHES

You use an apostrophe when a letter(s) are missing. By putting in the missing letters and thinking about the meaning of the words you should find them less confusing.

Word	Meaning	Example
it's	Is short for it is or it has	<b>It's</b> been a long, hard day at work.
Its	Means belonging to	The dog hurt <b>its</b> paw.
Who's	Is short for who is or who has	<b>Who's</b> got the study book?
Whose	Means who does it belong to	<b>Whose</b> is this red coat?
You're	Is short for you are	<b>You're</b> early for class today.
Your	Means belonging to	Is this <b>your</b> hat?
They're	Is short for they are	<b>They're</b> waiting for us downstairs.
Their	Means belonging to them	<b>Their</b> dog barks all the time.
There	Means that place or is used in phrases such as there is or there are	Our exam hall is over <b>there</b> .
We're	Is short for we are	<b>We're</b> all part of the football team.
Were	Is part of the past tense of the verb to be	We <b>were</b> all students in 1997.

### WORDS THAT SOUND SIMILAR

With words that sound similar it is important to know their meanings or how they are used in sentences. This will help you to work out which word and spelling you should use.

Word	Hint
of	stress 'ov' when you write 'of' <i>eg, I'll have some <b>of</b> that chicken pie.</i>
off	stress 'ff' when you write 'off' - use in phrases such as - to get <b>off</b> / to fall <b>off</b> <i>eg, Can you turn the light switch <b>off</b>?</i>

quiet	means to be silent, make very little noise <i>eg, Please be <b>quiet</b> in the classroom.</i>
quite	means fairly, almost <i>eg, He won <b>quite</b> a large prize at the ceremony.</i>
chose	past tense of 'to choose' - stress 'o' sound <i>eg, I <b>chose</b> a chicken sandwich for my lunch yesterday.</i>
choose	present tense of the verb 'to choose' - stress 'oo' <i>eg, Which meal will you <b>choose</b> today?</i>
lose	think of 'lost' <i>eg, Be careful not to <b>lose</b> your train ticket.</i>
loose	means not tight - stress 'oo' <i>eg, The lid on the jar was <b>loose</b>.</i>
affect	means have an influence on - affect is only used as a verb <i>eg, Smoking can <b>affect</b> your health.</i>
effect	means a result or to bring something about - effect can be used as a noun (thing) or a verb (doing word) <i>eg, The aspirin had an immediate <b>effect</b> on her headache.</i>
accept	means to receive <i>eg, I can't <b>accept</b> this gift because it's too expensive.</i>
except	means not including <i>eg, Everyone was invited to the party <b>except</b> for me.</i>
past	this is used mainly for time gone by - past is an adjective or describing word <i>eg, Some people believe in <b>past</b> lives.</i>
passed	means moved by - passed is a verb or action word <i>eg, The car that <b>passed</b> us was going very fast.</i>
stationary	means standing still or not moving <i>eg, The tractor was <b>stationary</b> in the field.</i>
stationery	means notepaper, exercise books, envelopes etc - you can remember this one by the 'e' in exercise books and envelopes. <i>eg, Please order some more office <b>stationery</b>.</i>
personal	individual or private - a letter that is only to be opened by the person it is addressed to may be marked 'personal' <i>eg, She left the meeting to take a <b>personal</b> phone call.</i>
personnel	means employees or staff <i>eg, The <b>personnel</b> department look after 100 employees.</i>
compliment	indicates the offering of praise or flattery to another person, as does the adjective <i>complimentary</i> . Compliment can be used as a verb or noun <i>eg, He gave me a <b>compliment</b> about my dress.</i>
complement	refers to something that completes or goes well with something. It can be used as a noun (thing) or verb (doing word) <i>eg, The sauce is a nice <b>complement</b> to the vegetables.</i>
practice	this is the noun 'the practice' (as in 'piano practice' or 'accountancy practice') <i>eg, I work at an accountancy <b>practice</b> in London.</i> <i>eg, You need to do more question <b>practice</b> to help you in your exams.</i>
practise	This is the verb 'to practise' and also the adjective from that verb <i>eg, I need to <b>practise</b> questions every day.</i> <i>eg, The doctor has been <b>practising</b> medicine for more than 10 years.</i>

principle	refers to a fundamental assumption, law, doctrine, belief, rule or way of doing something. You can also say that someone is a man of principle, meaning a man who has strong ideals. It is a noun only eg, the <b>principle</b> of physics dictates that you cannot travel faster than the speed of light.
principal	means primary or chief or highest in rank or importance eg, He is the <b>principal</b> at our school. eg, My <b>principal</b> complaint is a persistent headache.

## FURTHER GUIDANCE AND EXAMPLES

More information, examples and guidance is available on the excellent BBC Skillswise website:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/english>

You'll find lots more examples and exercises online including the difference between:

- Farther vs Further
- Fewer vs Less
- Hers vs Her's
- Everyday vs Every day
- Assure vs Ensure vs Insure
- Addition vs Edition
- Me vs Myself
- I vs Me
- Who vs Whom
- To vs Too vs Two