

33 Commonly Misunderstood Words & Phrases

People misunderstand words and phrases all the time. This may be because of poor hearing or comprehension.

Speaking informally can also cause a person to misunderstand and misuse words.

Homonyms, or words that **sound alike**, can also present as an obstacle in comprehending words. However, the spellings should always be observed because changing one letter could change the entire meaning of the word.

For all intents and purposes

'For all intents and purposes' means for all practical purposes.

By and large

Mistaken as 'by in large.' This phrase is used when discussing a subject in a general sense.

Sneak peek

Often mistaken as 'sneak peak.' This phrase means to take an early look at something.

Lie/Lay

These two words are often misused for the other. Lie means to rest on a surface while lay means to put something in place.

Literally

Literally is often misused to express intensity when in fact, it is a word that implies something is completely true. Don't use literally unless something is true.

Supposed

This is often misused as 'suppose to' which is incorrect because it lacks the letter 'd.'

Should of

'Should of' is not proper. Use 'should have' instead.

Toward/Afterward/Anyway

None of these words should end with 's.'

Beck and call

Often mistaken as 'beckon call.' This phrase means being made available.

Bemused

This word is not related to 'amuse' in any way. Bemused means bewildered or perplexed.

Hunger pangs

Mistaken as 'hunger pains.' This is the contraction of the empty stomach or intestines.

Fewer/Less

'Fewer' is used for things you can count while 'less' is for things you can't count.

Another think coming

Often mistaken as 'another thing coming.' The phrase implies you have another thought coming.

Farther/Further

'Farther' refers to physical distance. 'Further' means advancement.

Wreak havoc

Mistaken as 'wreck havoc.' This phrase means to cause chaos.

Climactic/Climatic

Climactic is derived from climax while climatic refers to the climate.

Scapegoat

Often mistaken as 'escape goat.' A scapegoat is someone who gets blamed for the errors of others. An escape goat, on the other hand, is a goat that has escaped.

(i.e.)/(e.g.)

i.e. is the abbreviation for the Latin term 'id est' which means 'in other words.' This abbreviation is used to explain something further. If you want to abbreviate something or enumerate examples, you should use e.g.

Couldn't care less

Misused as 'could care less.' With this phrase, it is important to keep things negative. With could care less, you are implying that you care and you could care less. With couldn't care less, you don't care and wouldn't care any less.

Accept/Except

Accept is a verb which means 'to receive.' Except can be used as a preposition to mean 'not including'

Deep-seated

This is often mistaken as 'deep-seeded.' If you would think about it, deep seeded does make a lot of sense because it indicates something is deeply planted into the ground but it is an incorrect expression nonetheless. Deep-seated means that something is firmly established.

Affect/Effect

Affect means 'to influence.' Effect is a noun and it is a result of an event.

Exact revenge

Often mistaken or misunderstood as 'extract revenge.' Extract revenge means you would 'remove' revenge like a tooth. In contrast, exact revenge means to 'achieve' vengeance.

Capital/Capitol

Capital is a place or center of a place. Capitol refers to a building where lawmakers meet.

Sleight of hand

Misunderstood as 'slight of hand.' Slight is an insult while sleight of hand refers to dexterity or cunningness especially in the world of magic and illusion.

Elicit/Illicit

Elicit is a verb that means to bring out or evoke. Illicit is an adjective which means unlawful.

Peace of mind

Mistaken as 'piece of mind' which means a portion of the brain. Peace of mind refers to tranquility and calmness.

Emigrate/Immigrate

Emigrate is leaving one country to move to another while immigrate means to enter or reside in another country.

Whet your appetite

It is often mistaken as 'wet your appetite.' Whet means to stimulate.

Principal/Principle

A principal is the head of a school while principle means basic truth or law.

One and the same

Often mistaken as 'one in the same' which doesn't make any sense. 'One and the same,' however, means the same thing or same person.

Dog-eat-dog world

This phrase is often used and heard as 'doggy-dog' world. This phrase refers to a situation where individuals are ruthlessly competitive because of their goals.

Make do

Mistaken as 'make due' which would mean to 'make owed.' 'Make do' is short for 'make something do well' especially during tough situations.



GrammarCheck
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