Less vs. Fewer: “Less” is for things you can’t count. “Fewer” is for things you can count.
Ex. If I take fewer breaks I feel less focused.

Two, Too, To: “Two” is a number. “Too” means overly or also.
“To” is directional or used with infinitive verbs.
Ex. I have two kids. Me too. Let’s take them out to see a movie!

There, They’re, Their: “There” is a directional adverb. “They’re” is a contraction for “they are.”
“Their” is possessive.
Ex. They’re always there on Friday nights. Their seats have red cushions.

Who’s vs. Whose: “Who’s” is a contraction for “who is.” “Whose” is possessive.
Ex. Who’s that guy over there? Whose sweater is that?

It’s vs. Its: “It’s” is a contraction for “it is.” “Its” is possessive.
Ex. It’s my favorite pencil, but its eraser is broken.

You’re vs. Your: “You’re” is a contraction for “you are.” “Your” is possessive.
Ex. You’re very handsome when you wear your hat.

You and I vs. You and Me: Take the other person out of the sentence and see if it works.
Ex. I went to the store. → You and I went to the store.
He gave the sweaters to me. → He gave the sweaters to you and me.

Bad vs. Badly: When someone hurts your feelings, you feel “bad”. If you say you feel “badly” that means you’re having trouble feeling anything.
Ex. I feel bad about missing your party last week.
I won’t sing in public because I sing badly.

Allusion vs. Illusion: An allusion is an indirect reference. An illusion is a false perception of reality.
Ex. The author made an allusion to a Bob Dylan song. The magician created the illusion that the girl was being sawed in half.

Lead vs. Led: Lead is a type of metal. “Led” is the past tense of the verb “to lead.”

**Imply vs. Infer:** The speaker or writer implies. The listener or reader infers.

**Desert vs. Dessert:** “S”s are like cherries. You won’t find many in the desert, but you’ll find plenty in a dessert.

**Affect vs. Effect:** Affect is a verb. It means to influence. Effect is a noun. It is a result or consequence.

Ex. *Will drinking coffee affect my sleep? Drinking coffee has an effect on my sleep.*

**Lie vs. Lay:** In the present tense, “lie” is for people and animals, and “lay” is for objects. In the past tense, use “lay” for people and animals, and use “laid” for objects.

Ex. *I’m going to lie down now. I lay the scissors on the desk.*

Yesterday, Steve *lay on the floor for three hours.* Last week, I *laid the scissors on your desk.*

**Loose vs. Lose:** Loose means “not on tightly.” Lose means to misplace or not win.

Ex. *Your button is loose. You should sew it up before you lose it.*

**Set up vs. setup:** In “set up,” “set” is a verb. “Setup” is a noun.

Ex. *Please set up an appointment. I didn’t care for the setup of the office.*

**Everyday vs. every day:** “Everyday” as a compound word is an adjective (example: “my everyday routine”). If you mean “each day”, separate the two words.

Ex. *I will write you a letter every day.*

**Anyway vs. any way:** “Anyway” is an adverb meaning “regardless.” “Any way” means “in any manner.”

Ex. *I wasn’t feeling very well today anyway. Is there any way you could come visit me tomorrow?*

**Capital vs. Capitol:** “Capital” is the seat of government or financial resources. “Capitol” is the actual building in which a legislative body meets.

Ex. *The capital of Virginia is Richmond. The firm had enough capital to build the new plant.*

*The governor announced his resignation in a speech given at the capitol today.*

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**Tips**

- Watch out for words that sound the same, but have different meanings (homonyms). *Example: Pour vs. Pore*

- Look for switched letters or omitted letters that created another word. *Uninformed vs. Uniformed; Marital vs. Martial*

- Need more examples of commonly confused words? Go to: *http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/conford.html*