



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	It's been a long, hard day at work.
Its	Means belonging to	The dog hurt its paw.
Who's	Is short for who is or who has	Who's got the study book?
Whose	Means who does it belong to	Whose is this red coat?
You're	Is short for you are	You're early for class today.
Your	Means belonging to	Is this your hat?
They're	Is short for they are	They're waiting for us downstairs.
Their	Means belonging to them	Their 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 there .
We're	Is short for we are	We're all part of the football team.
Were	Is part of the past tense of the verb to be	We were 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 of that chicken pie.</i>
off	stress 'ff' when you write 'off' - use in phrases such as - to get off / to fall off <i>eg, Can you turn the light switch off?</i>

quiet	means to be silent, make very little noise <i>eg, Please be quiet in the classroom.</i>
quite	means fairly, almost <i>eg, He won quite a large prize at the ceremony.</i>
chose	past tense of 'to choose' - stress 'o' sound <i>eg, I chose a chicken sandwich for my lunch yesterday.</i>
choose	present tense of the verb 'to choose' - stress 'oo' <i>eg, Which meal will you choose today?</i>
lose	think of 'lost' <i>eg, Be careful not to lose your train ticket.</i>
loose	means not tight - stress 'oo' <i>eg, The lid on the jar was loose.</i>
affect	means have an influence on - affect is only used as a verb <i>eg, Smoking can affect 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 effect on her headache.</i>
accept	means to receive <i>eg, I can't accept this gift because it's too expensive.</i>
except	means not including <i>eg, Everyone was invited to the party except 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 past lives.</i>
passed	means moved by - passed is a verb or action word <i>eg, The car that passed us was going very fast.</i>
stationary	means standing still or not moving <i>eg, The tractor was stationary 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 stationery.</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 personal phone call.</i>
personnel	means employees or staff <i>eg, The personnel 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 compliment 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 complement 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 practice in London.</i> <i>eg, You need to do more question practice 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 practise questions every day.</i> <i>eg, The doctor has been practising 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 <i>eg, the principle of physics dictates that you cannot travel faster than the speed of light.</i>
principal	means primary or chief or highest in rank or importance <i>eg, He is the principal at our school.</i> <i>eg, My principal complaint is a persistent headache.</i>

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