

## Commonly confused words

English has many words that sound the same but mean different things. The technical term is 'homophones'. This is a short list of common examples with a brief indication of the ways in which these words may be used. We do not have room to include every possible usage of a word here. Please check in a dictionary for full details. Most importantly, do not rely on your computer spell-check – it will not tell you if you have used a correctly spelled word in the wrong way.

**Their** Indicates belonging e.g. 'They got their coats.'

**There** Indicates place e.g. 'Over there.'  
Introduces a clause or a sentence i.e. 'There will be . . .'

**They're** This is a contraction of 'they are.' The apostrophe (') indicates that the letter 'a' has been missed out.

**Example:** 'They get **their** shopping from Harrods,' sniffed Gloria enviously. 'Oh, they *would* shop **there**,' exclaimed Geoff, '**they're** so rich!'

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**Where** Indicates place e.g. 'Where are you?'

**Were** Part of the verb 'to be' i.e. 'we were,' 'you were,' 'they were'.

**We're** This is a contraction of 'we are'. The apostrophe (') indicates that the letter 'a' has been missed out.

**Wear** Part of the verb 'to wear' e.g. 'to wear a coat, ready-to-wear'.

**Wear** Also used in the sense of 'to wear out, to wear thin, wear and tear.'

**Ware** Most commonly used as a noun to describe goods or products e.g. 'earthenware'.

**Example:** '**Where** are you going?' asked Stacey crossly. 'We **were** going for a walk,' replied Ann with a smile. 'But now it's raining **we're** not so sure.' She and Tim looked uneasy. Stacey could tell that something was going on. 'I see you decided to **wear** my coat,' said Stacey accusingly. Ann's smile began to **wear** thin. 'To be honest we were just sneaking out to buy you a new earthen**ware** mug. I'm afraid I dropped it when I was washing up this morning.'

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## A WRITING CENTRE HANDOUT

- Bear:** Noun. Brown hairy animal.
- Bear:** Verb. To carry a weight i.e. 'load-bearing walls.' Also used in the following phrases: 'bear fruit', 'bear in mind,' 'bear with me'.
- Bare:** Adjective. Naked, stripped or unadorned.
- Bare:** Verb. To make or lay bare i.e. 'to bare all.' To show something.
- Example:** The **bare** brown **bear** had to **bear** a heavy burden. He **bared** his teeth and shivered.
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- Board:** Noun. A wide flat piece of wood e.g. 'board game'. Also an official committee or group e.g. 'Board of Directors.'
- Board:** Verb. To board something e.g. 'they boarded the boat.'
- Bored:** Part of the verb 'to bore' e.g. 'I am bored.' This describes a state rather than an action.
- Bored:** Also used in the sense of 'the drill bored through the wood.' This describes an action.
- Example:** 'I'm **bored**,' sighed the airhostess as countless passengers **boarded** the plane. Little did she know that one of the passengers was a member of the **Board** of Directors. His eyes **bored** through her indignantly as she handed out **board** games to the children.
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- Write:** Verb. To write something e.g. 'write your name'.
- Right:** A direction e.g. 'left or right'.
- Right:** Colloquial phrase expressing agreement e.g. 'oh right then,' or 'that's all right'.
- Right:** Also a concept e.g. 'the right to vote'.
- Example:** 'I am going to **write** an article about the **right** to speak freely,' shouted the Professor, waving his **right** hand in the air. 'All **right** dear,' replied his mother good-humouredly.
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## A WRITING CENTRE HANDOUT

- Bow:** Verb 'to bow,' e.g. 'to bow to the Queen'. Also to submit to someone's wishes e.g. 'he bowed to the committee's decision'.
- Bow:** Used as a noun e.g. 'to perform a bow', that is to bend the head and body in a show of respect.
- (Bow:** Pronounced differently from the above, but note the noun 'bow' e.g. 'to tie a bow'.)
- Bough:** Noun. The branch of a tree e.g. 'the bird sat on a low bough'.
- Example:** Having delivered a brilliant paper showing that low **boughs** are more likely to fall from trees, the shy researcher **bowed** to the will of the audience and returned to the podium to take a **bow**.
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- Wait:** Verb. 'To wait', e.g. 'I had to wait for three hours'.
- Wait:** Also in the sense of being a waiter or waitress, e.g. 'to wait tables'. Also 'to wait on someone hand and foot'.
- Weight:** Noun e.g. 'my weight is ten stone'.
- Example:** I had to **wait** an hour for a table at that restaurant; there aren't enough **waiting**-on staff. I had definitely lost some **weight** by the time the food arrived.
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- Site:** Noun indicating a place e.g. 'building site, site of special scientific interest, website.'
- Sight:** Many different uses, all related to the act of seeing e.g. 'to see the sights, we have lost sight of the issues, I caught sight of it'.
- Cite:** Verb. To quote or refer to e.g. 'he cited Jones as his main supporting evidence.'
- Example:** As they discussed the archaeological **site**, Matthew felt that the committee had lost **sight** of the main issue. He objected strongly to the proposed building **site**, **citing** the survey team's findings as evidence against the development.
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## A WRITING CENTRE HANDOUT

- Straight:** Adjective. Many uses, including the description of something free of curves e.g. 'a straight line'.
- Strait:** Meaning a difficult situation e.g. 'dire straits'. Also a geographical description of a narrow passageway connecting two large bodies of water e.g. 'the Magellan straits'.
- Example:** They had been sailing in a **straight** line for weeks now, but they had yet to cross the Baring **Strait**, and the Captain began to feel that they were in **straitened** circumstances.
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- No:** Indicating the negative e.g. 'no you may not'.
- Know:** Verb. 'To know' about something means to have knowledge of it.
- Example:** 'You know my reasons for saying no.'
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- Your:** Indicates possession e.g. 'Your turn,' or 'Is that your coat?'
- You're:** This is a contraction of 'you are'. The apostrophe (') indicates that the letter 'a' has been missed out.
- Example:** You're sure to lose all your money if you carry on like that.
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There are many other words that we do not have room to include. If you would like to suggest a word for inclusion on this list, please contact us on:  
[writingcentre@hope.ac.uk](mailto:writingcentre@hope.ac.uk)