

## EASILY CONFUSED WORDS: MNEMONIC HOMONYMS

A **mnemonic** is a memorization tool such as a short phrase or image. For instance, when music students memorize the phrase "Every Good Boy Does Fine," the phrase helps them remember the order of letters *E G B D F* on the musical scale. Another phrase, "Oh Be a Fine Girl/Guy, Kiss Me Right Now" helps astronomers remember the sequence of stars, from type O, to type B, to type F, and so on. The phrase, "It is Classy to have Order in your Family, says G. S." helps biologists and taxonomists remember that biological *class* is the larger category into which biological *classes, orders, families, genus, and species* fit respectively. Visually oriented images may help other students memorize facts. For instance, when I want to remember the geography of southern England, I imagine the image of my cousin Wight lying down with a laundry hamper on his back, and a shotgun inside the hamper. That reminds me that the Isle of Wight is farthest south, with the county of Hampshire [hamper] above that, and the city of Winchester [the shotgun] inside Hampshire. Other students prefer rhymes. Pick whatever mnemonic works for you--whatever it may be.

Mnemonics are often useful for grammarians and students. Though exceptions abound to the rule, some students find it useful to remember "I before E except after C, except when pronounced 'ay' as in neighbor and weigh."

Similar words that are spelled differently (**homonyms** or **homophones**) can be tricky. Making mnemonics can help students remember the difference. Here are some of the most commonly confused words and phrases. If you can't distinguish between them, you need to look them up in the dictionary or a grammar guidebook and then invent a mnemonic to learn the difference. Homonyms are particularly dangerous on computers since spell-checkers will not spot them.

*affect / effect*  
*accept / except*  
*advice / advise*  
*all ready / already*  
*all together / altogether*  
*allude / elude*  
*illusion / illusion*  
*amoral / immoral*  
*anyone / any one*  
*awhile / a while*  
*back up / backup*  
*capital/ capitol*  
*censure / censor /sensor*  
*cite / site / sight*  
*complement / compliment*  
*conscience / conscious*  
*council / counsel*  
*(and councilor / counselor)*  
*desert/dessert*  
*elicit / illicit*  
*forth/ fourth*  
*hear / here*  
*its / it's*  
*may be / maybe*  
*past / passed*  
*principal / principle*  
*stationary / stationery*  
*there / their /they're*

*vain / vein / vane*  
*to / two / too*  
*whether / weather*  
*who's / whose*

**Other words, while not homonyms, are also frequently confused, misused or misspelled.**

*amount / number*  
*than / then*  
*fewer / less*  
*compare to / compare with*  
*farther / further*  
*lay / lie*  
*lead / led*  
*that/ which*  
*loose / lose*  
*precede / proceed*  
*raise/ rise (and raised/risen)*  
*beside / besides*  
*between / among*  
*can / may*  
*continual / continuous*  
*could of / could have*  
*criteria / criterion*  
*differ from /differ with*  
*disinterested / uninterested*

*emigrate/ immigrate*  
*eminent / imminent*  
*envelop / envelope*  
*eventually / ultimately*  
*explicit / implicit*  
*hanged / hung*  
*ingenious/ ingenuous*  
*regardless / irregardless*  
*(traditionally no such word in the later case)*  
*more unique, more straight, more perfect*  
*(these absolute words don't take comparatives)*  
*parameters / guidelines*  
*phenomenon / phenomena*  
*plus / moreover*  
*quit / quite / quiet (those three are often mistyped)*  
*quote / quotation*  
*relation / relationship*  
*shall / will*  
*since / because*  
*try to / try and*  
*who/ whom*  
*who/ that*