

Homophones are words that sound alike, but are spelled differently.

Spelling errors can cause readers to perceive the writer as careless or unprofessional. Avoid this perception by understanding and avoiding the following errors:

## Your/You're

your = belongs to you (*Is that your car?*)

you're = you are (*You're my best friend!*)

When in doubt about these two words, try replacing the word with "you are." If the replacement makes sense, use the *you're* spelling.

## There/Their/They're

there = location (*Put the vase over there.*)

their = belongs to them (*Is that their new dog?*)

they're = they are (*They're planning to go on vacation next year.*)

When in doubt about these three words, remember these tips:

There refers to a location, and it has the word "here" in it.

Their shows possession, and it has the word "heir" in it, as in the person who will one day possess the throne.

They're has the word "they" in it, and it means "they are."

## Affect/Effect

Effect = a result, as in cause and effect (*Second-hand smoke has many life-threatening effects.*)

Affect = to impact someone or something (*Second-hand smoke affects many people.*)

When in doubt about these two words, ask yourself if the word is a noun that means a result of something else. If so, use *effect*. It may also help to remember that *effect* starts with a long e sound, and *result* and *consequence*, which mean the same as *result*, also contain long e sounds. Similarly, *affect* is the same as an *action*, and both words start with the letter *a*.

## Its/It's

Its = belongs to it (*The house and its garage need painting.*)

It's = it is (*It's sunny today!*)

When in doubt about these two words, simply ask yourself if you could replace the word with "it is." If you can, then use the *it's* spelling.

## Than/Then

Than = comparison (*Seven is less than eight.*)

Then = time sequence (*Then, he left for the park.*)

When in doubt about these two words, ask yourself if you can replace the word with "next." If you can, use the then spelling of the word.

## Were/Where

Were = past tense of are (*We were on our way to the rodeo when we heard the news.*)

Where = location (*Where do you plan to have the picnic?*)

When in doubt about these two words, remember that the word where has the word "here" in it, which indicates a location.

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