Commonly Confused Words

**a, an**
Use a before words that begin with a consonant sound.
Ex.: a computer, a student’s grade, a university, a window
Use an before words that begin with a vowel sound.
Ex.: an apple, an electric guitar, an honor student, an outrage

**accept, except**
*Accept* means “to receive.” Ex.: Please accept our apologies.
*Except* means “excluding.” Ex.: Everyone except Horace was at the party.

**advice, advise**
*Advice* (pronounced with an “s”) is a noun meaning “wise or helpful information.”
Ex.: The counselor’s advice made the student feel much better.
*Advise* (pronounced with a “z”) is a verb meaning “to give advice.”
Ex.: The counselors advise students every day.

**affect, effect**
*Affect* is a verb that means “to influence.”
Ex.: Your tardiness will affect your grade.
*Effect* is a noun that means “a result.”
Ex.: Studying hard will have a positive effect on your grade.

**conscience, conscious**
*Conscience* is a noun meaning “a person’s sense of right and wrong.”
Ex.: Skipping class gives some students a guilty conscience.
*Conscious* is an adjective meaning “alert or aware.”
Ex.: The victim was in pain but completely conscious.

**idea, ideal**
*Idea* is a noun meaning “thought or notion.”
Ex.: Reviewing grammar and punctuation is a good idea.
*Ideal* can be an adjective meaning “best possible.”
Ex.: In an ideal world, people would not have to work.
*Ideal* can be a noun meaning “a perfect example or model.”
Ex.: The techniques of Gandhi are held as the ideal of nonviolent protest.

**its, it’s**
*Its* is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to it.”
Ex.: The puppy wagged its tail.
*It’s* is a contraction of “it is.”
Ex.: It’s going to be a long semester.
loose, lose
Loose is an adjective meaning “unfastened or not tight.”
Ex.: The screw on the doorknob is loose.
Lose is a verb meaning “to misplace or to be defeated.”
Ex.: Teachers lose pencils and pens every day.

their, there, they’re
Their is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to them.”
Ex.: Their baby girl is beautiful.
There is a word that indicates location.
Ex.: The kids are over there.
There is also used to begin certain kinds of sentences.
Ex.: There are many good reasons for attending WCC.
They’re is a contraction of “they are.”
Ex.: They’re falling in love.

than, then
Than is a conjunction used for comparison.
Ex.: For office parties, pizza is better than spaghetti.
Then is an adverb that means “after” or “at a later time.”
Ex.: I ordered spaghetti; then my boss ordered pizza.

to, too, two
To is a preposition that indicates destination.
Ex.: I am going to class now.
Too is a synonym for “also.”
Ex. She is going to class too.
Too can be an intensifier for an adjective.
Ex.: This classroom is too hot.
Two is the word for 2.
Ex.: There are two teachers in the Writing Center.

were, where
Were is the past-tense form of the verb “are.”
Ex. His grandparents were very happy together.
Where is a word for location.
Ex.: Where are my navy blue socks?

your, you’re
Your is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to you.”
Ex.: She has never met your mother.
You’re is a contraction of “you are.”
Ex.: You’re welcome to take any of these handouts; they’re free.