

## 50 Sets of Easily-Confused Homonyms

One great way to improve spelling skills is to learn the correct spellings and meanings of common sets of homonyms. A large percentage of spelling errors are actually *homonym usage* errors. In this sentence, for example, every word is spelled correctly.

I herd the reign ruined there picnic.

But three words are the *wrong words*, and our spellchecker didn't flag even one of them. Written correctly, the sentence should, of course, read:

I heard the rain ruined their picnic.

We've included 50 sets of commonly used and sometimes confused sets of homonyms here. There are many, many more that you may want to study as well.

To help you improve spelling skills, for each word listed, we've also included its:

- part of speech
- a very brief definition
- a sentence to show its correct use.

Please note that we've not included every meaning, or every part of speech for each word. We've used the most common meanings—the ones that are most often misused.

We've used these abbreviations:

adj. – adjective

adv. – adverb

contr. – contraction

n. – noun

prep. - preposition

pron. - pronoun

v. - verb

1. allowed (adj.) permitted. *Pets are not allowed in this motel.*  
aloud (adv.) out loud; with noise. *The teacher asked me to read the story aloud.*
2. bare (adj.) uncovered, naked. *His bare arms quickly became sunburned.*  
bear (v.) endure, support. *I can't bear to go another hour without water.*

3. board (n.) plank; *We need to replace the board under the window.*  
 (v.) get on; *Passengers will be asked to board the plane in 30 minutes.*  
 (v.) lodge; *I will board at the motel while I'm in town.*  
 bored (adj.) uninterested, tired of something. *I grew bored during the mayor's long speech.*
4. brake (n.) a device for slowing down a vehicle; *My car needs new brakes.*  
 (v.) to run or use a brake; *Be sure to brake before you run into the garage.*  
 break (v.) to smash or divide into parts; *Please don't break my new dishes.*
5. capital (n.) the city where the government is located; *Paris is the capital of France.*  
 (adj.) highly important; *Always begin your name with a capital letter.*  
 capitol (n.) the building in Washington, D.C., in which Congress meets; *The reporters waited at the Capitol to see the senator.*
6. cent (n.) a penny; *That old sock isn't worth a cent!*  
 scent (n.) a distinctive smell; *I love the scent of roses.*  
 sent (v.) to cause to go; *He sent his payment in the mail.*
7. close (v.) to shut; *Please close the window before it rains.*  
 clothes (n.) garments to wear; *She bought new clothes when she lost weight.*
8. coarse (adj.) rough, crude or harsh; *His coarse manners were very irritating.*  
 course (n.) a path or route to be taken; *Now that you've lost your job, what is the first course of action to be taken?*
9. die (v.) to pass away; *The animal will die without proper nourishment.*  
 dye (n.) coloring; *We used four kinds of dye to color our Easter eggs.*
10. fair (adj.) just, proper under the rules, or ample; *The judge made a fair decision.*  
 (n.) a carnival or exhibition; *She won a blue ribbon at the county fair.*  
 fare (n.) money paid to ride in a bus, taxi or other vehicle. *He paid his fare when he got on the bus.*  
 (v.) to get by, perform; *She fared well on the job interview.*
11. feat (n.) accomplishment; *Composing an entire symphony is a remarkable feat.*  
 feet (n.) plural of *foot*; *Her feet were sore because her shoes were too tight.*
12. flew (v.) past tense of *fly*; *The bird flew past my window.*  
 flu (n.) short for *influenza*; *Sam missed three days of work because he had the flu.*  
 flue (n.) passage for smoke in a chimney; *The chimney flue needs to be cleaned regularly.*

13. heard (v.) past tense of *hear*; *The little girl heard the sound of her mother's voice.*  
 herd (n.) large group of animals: *The cattle herd roamed freely, looking for grass to eat.*
14. hear (v.) to perceive sounds; *I love to hear clarinet music.*  
 here (adv.) in this place; *Put the groceries here on the table.*
15. heal (v.) to make healthy; *Extra rest and fluids will help to heal your sickness.*  
 heel (n.) the back part of the foot; *Place your heel firmly into the boot.*  
 he'll (contr.) *he will*; *If you're ever late to his class, he'll make you work extra hard.*
16. hole (n.) an opening or hollow place; *The squirrel ran through the hole in the fence.*  
 whole (adj.) the entire amount; *He ate the whole pizza by himself.*
17. idle (adj.) doing nothing; *How can you remain idle when there's so much work to do?*  
 (v.) to pass time doing nothing; *She idled along the street.*  
 idol (n.) an image to be worshiped, or a person who is greatly admired; *The rock singer became the newest teen idol.*
18. its (pron.) possessive form of *its*; *The dog lost its bone.*  
 it's (contr.) *it is* or *it has*; *It's time for the play to begin.*
19. loan (n.) money lent; *The car loan was for \$5,000.*  
 (v.) to lend something; *Can you please loan me enough money for lunch?*  
 lone (adj.) single, only; *The truck driver was the lone customer at the all-night diner.*
20. mail (n.) items sent in the postal system; *I received six letters today in the mail.*  
 (v.) to send something by mail or e-mail; *She will mail her car payment today.*  
 male (n.) a boy or man; *There were ten male passengers on the train.*  
 (adj.) related to a man or boy; *I heard a male voice on the telephone.*
21. main (adj.) most important; *The speaker's main point was that we can all fight poverty.*  
 mane (n.) long hair on the neck of an animal; *The little girl hung on to the horse's mane when it started galloping.*
22. meat (n.) edible flesh from an animal; *We eat meat nearly every night for dinner.*  
 meet (v.) get together; *Let's meet for coffee tomorrow morning.*  
 (n.) sports competition; *Athletes from ten schools will compete at the track meet.*
23. pail (n.) bucket; *That pail holds five gallons of paint.*  
 pale (adj.) lacking color; *The sick child's face was very pale.*

24. pain (n.) physical distress; *Her back pain prevented her from bending over.*  
pane (n.) section of a window; *The window pane was covered with frost.*
25. passed (v.) past tense of *pass*; *The teenager finally passed his driving test.*  
past (adj.) later, or in a time gone by; *Her financial worries are now all in the past.*
26. patience (n.) the ability to wait; *The kindergarten teacher's patience is remarkable.*  
patients (plural n.) people under the care of a doctor; *Five patients were waiting to see the doctor.*
27. peace (n.) absence of war; *The longtime peace between two countries was broken by a single bullet.*  
piece (n.) a portion of something; *He asked for just one piece of peach pie.*
28. plain (adj.) clear; *It was plain to everyone in the crowd that the singer had talent.*  
plane (n.) a carpenter's tool, an airborne vehicle, or a flat surface; *The wood carver used his plane to make the table top very smooth.*
29. presence (n.) the state of existing in a place *Her presence was requested at the party.*  
presents (plural n.) gifts; *Children love to open presents on their birthdays.*
30. principal (n.) most important, or the leader of a school; *The principal wrote a new homework policy.*  
principle (n.) basic truth or law; *Throughout life, it is wise to adhere to one's principles.*
31. rain (n.) precipitation; *The rain poured down all day.*  
(v.) drizzle, shower; *The weatherman says it will rain tomorrow.*  
reign (n.) time in power; *The king's reign was very brief.*  
(v.) to rule; *How long will the Queen reign?*  
rein (n.) a strap to control an animal; *Pull on the reins when you want the horse to stop.*
32. raise (v.) to build up; *Let's raise the sign a bit higher so it can be read more easily.*  
raze (v.) to tear down; *The city plans to raze the vacant building.*
33. right (adj.) correct; *The student gave the right answer to the math question..*  
write (v.) to make letters; *Please write you name at the top of the page.*
34. road (n.) driving surface; *She had difficulty keeping her car on the slippery road.*  
rode (v.) past tense of *ride*; *We rode the bus for thirty minutes to get across town.*

35. sail (v.) travel in a boat; *We plan to sail across the bay.*  
sale (n.) a deal or transaction; *The store had a special sale on blue jeans.*
36. scene (n.) the place where an event occurs; *A criminal sometimes returns to the scene of the crime.*  
seen (v.) past participle of see; *I've never seen so many flowers!*
37. soar (v.) fly; *An eagle can soar higher than many other birds.*  
sore (adj.) painful; *My sprained knee is very sore.*
38. sole (adj.) only; *My dad was the sole survivor of the plane crash.*  
(n.) the bottom part of a foot or shoe; *There's a hole in the sole of my old boot.*  
soul (n.) the spiritual part, or character, of a person; *Those old hymns always comfort my soul.*
39. stair (n.) step; *The bottom stair is broken, so please be careful when you go down.*  
stare (v.) to look intently in one place; *I couldn't help but stare at the legless man.*
40. stationary (adj.) unmoving; *You should keep the fractured finger stationary for one week.*  
stationery (n.) writing paper; *The lawyer wrote the letter on her business stationery.*
41. stake (n.) a thin pointed stick or post that is driven into the ground; *Since we were missing a stake, we couldn't finish putting up the tent.*  
steak (n.) a piece of meat or fish; *He ordered a sirloin steak and baked potato.*
42. steal (v.) to take something without permission; *Some children steal money from their mother's purses.*  
steel (n.) a strong metal made of iron and carbon; *Many buildings are constructed with steel frames.*
43. tail (n.) the rear part of an animal's body; *My dog wags its tail when he's happy.*  
tale (n.) a story; *One popular fairy tale is about a giant, a beanstalk and a boy named Jack.*
44. their (pron.) belong to them; *Their house is always clean and tidy.*  
there (adv.) at that place; *Please put the groceries over there.*  
they're (contr.) *they are*; *They're going to Paris for vacation.*
45. threw (v.) past tense of *throw*; *The kids threw the stones into the stream.*  
through (prep.) movement from one side to, or past, the other side; *Let's walk all the way through the dark tunnel together.*

46. to (prep.) toward; *We drove to the theater.*  
too (adv.) also; *Jimmy likes pizza, too.*  
two (n.) a symbol for 1 plus 1; *Susan spun a two in the board game.*
47. waist (n.) the middle of the body; *The belt was too large for her small waist..*  
waste (n.) discarded material; *The factory's waste products were dumped in the landfill.*
48. weak (adj.) not strong; *The young boy was too weak to lift the box of books.*  
week (n.) a seven-day period; *The worker went on vacation for one week.*
49. who's (contr.) *who is* or *who has*; *Who's been drinking my soda?*  
whose (pron.) possessive form of *who*; *Does anyone know whose coat is this one?*
50. your (pron.) possessive form of *you*; *It's your turn to go first.*  
you're (contr.) *you are*; *You're the person I want to hire.*