

Commonly *confused* English words

Often pause mid-email to ponder... *is it enquiry or inquiry?*

With this guide to the most frequently fuddled English words, you and your team will ponder no more!



Affect

Is a verb meaning 'make a difference to'.

Low morale is affecting the team's work.

Effect

Is a noun or verb meaning 'a result' or 'bring about a result'.

A team lunch will have a positive effect on staff morale.

Among

Refers to people or things that are viewed as a group.

The debate over where to eat lunch caused chaos amongst the team.

Between

Refers to any number of people or things that are separate and distinct.

The team struggled to choose between Italian and Japanese for lunch.

Assume

Means to make a guess based on little or no evidence.

I assume you're coming to the party?

Presume

Means to make an informed guess based on reasonable evidence.

Her grammar is impeccable, so I presume she's a professional writer.

Assure

Means to promise or say with confidence.

You will receive the document, I assure you.

Ensure

Means to make sure something will/won't happen.

We encrypt your information to ensure your privacy.

Biannual / Semi-annual

Means twice a year.

The report is published biannually – in January and July.

Biennial

Means every two years.

The circus comes to town biennially, so it won't run this year.

Continual

Means repeated many times.

The continual interruptions from the plumber are distracting me from my work.

Continuous

Means going on without a break.

My tap was continuously dripping, so I'm glad the plumber is fixing it.

Discreet

Means careful, confidential.

I keep chocolate in a discreet location.

Discrete

Means individual, distinct.

It's important for brands to have their own discrete identity.

Enquiry

In Australian English, it means 'ask'.

I received an enquiry from a new customer.

Inquiry

In Australian English it means 'formal investigation'.

We're conducting a high-level police inquiry.

Fewer

Refers to a number that can be counted.

You have fewer smarties than me.

Less

Refers to an uncountable amount.

I need to eat less sugar.

Frequent

Refers to something that happens often.

Sarah visits her parents frequently throughout the year.

Regular

Refers to something that happens at set intervals or constant patterns.

Every Saturday morning, Sarah enjoys her regular pilates class.

Immigrate

Means 'to move to a foreign country'.

My British grandparents immigrated to Australia.

Emigrate

Means 'move from your home country'.

My British grandparents emigrated from the U.K.

Imply

A verb meaning 'to suggest or say something in an indirect way'.

The Minister implied that the policy would be changed, although she did not say it outright.

Infer

A verb meaning 'to suppose or come to a conclusion based on an indirect suggestion'.

The audience inferred that the policy would be changed.

Its

Is the possessive pronoun of 'it'.

The computer has a scratch on its trackpad.

It's

Means 'it is' or 'it has'.

The trackpad is scratched because it's a really old computer.

Licence / Practice

Are both nouns, because they end in -ce.

I'm getting my driver's licence.

I have tennis practice after work.

License / Practise

Are both verbs, because they end in -se.

The venue is licensed to sell alcohol.

I need to practise my forehand.

That

Clarifies which object you're talking about.

The chairs that have leather upholstery are new.

Which

Gives more information about the object.

The chairs, which have leather upholstery, are new.

Me

Is used when you are the object of the sentence. (Even alongside someone else.)

Maddy made brownies for me and Zach.

I

Is used when you are the subject of the sentence.

I made brownies for Zach and Lewis.

-ze endings

American English spelling.

"Wherever I go, people recognize me," said Britney Spears.

-se endings

Australian and British English spelling.

"I've memorised the lyrics to all my songs!" exclaimed Kylie Minogue.

Is your team often 'umming' and 'ahhing' about which English word to use when?

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