Commonly Confused Words (Volume #1)

1. **there** vs. **their** vs. **they’re**
   - **there** refers to a location
   - **their** is for when something belongs to them
   - **they’re** is a contraction for ‘they are’

   Example Sentence: They’re setting up their picnic over there by that tree.

2. **your** vs. **you’re**
   - **your** is for when something belongs to you
   - **you’re** is a contraction for ‘you are’

   Example Sentence: You’re going to lose your hat in this wind!

3. **its** vs. **it’s**
   - **its** is for when something belongs to it
   - **it’s** is a contraction for ‘it is’

   Example Sentence: The company says its goal is to help people, but actually it’s just to make money.

4. **to** vs. **too** vs. **two**

   Example Sentences:
   - Two of my friends went to the mall.
   - I wanted to go too, but I couldn’t.

5. **accept** vs. **except**
   - **accept** means to agree, admit, or say yes
   - **except** is used to show something is not included

   Example Sentence: The store accepts all major credit cards except Discover.

6. **than** vs. **then**
   - **than** is for when you are comparing things
   - **then** is for when you are talking about time

   Example Sentence: Back then my job paid way less than the one I have now.

7. **affect** vs. **effect**
   - **effect** means “a result or consequence”
   - **affect** means “to influence” or “to act in a way that you don’t feel”

   Example is from Grammar Girl’s Quick & Dirty Grammar Tricks!
   - The arrow affected the aardvark.
   - The effect was eye-popping!

Brought to you by the HACC York Writing Center.
http://www.hacc.edu/Students/Tutoring/York-Tutoring.cfm
Commonly Confused Words (Volume #2)

8. set vs. sit

set is used when you have an object, meaning you set something down (transitive verb).
sit is used when you don't have an object (intransitive).

Example Sentence:
I think I'll sit down for awhile after I set this heavy box down.

9. lay vs. lie

lay is used when you have an object, like you might lay the books down (transitive verb).
lie is used when you don't have an object, like you might lie down on the couch (intransitive).

~ALSO this is the lie that means not telling the truth.

Example Sentence:
Just lay the keys on the counter, I need to lie down.

For lay and lie, you need to be careful about tense. Grammar Girl has a helpful guide here →

Yesterday she laid the keys down while I lay on the couch.

10. cite vs. sight vs. site

cite means to quote, reference, or document something.
sight refers to what you can see.
site refers to a location.

Example Sentence:
What a wonderful sight to see! HACC has on-site tutoring to help me cite my sources in MLA format.

11. principle vs. principal

principle means a value, standard, or guideline.
principal can refer to the person who is in charge of a school (a noun) OR it can be an adjective meaning most important.

Example Sentence:
The principal (most important) requirement for someone to be hired as the principal of our school is that he or she has strong principles (values/standards) and will stick to them.

12. past vs. passed

past is the period of time that is before the present.
passed is the past-tense of the verb 'pass'.

Example Sentence:
Despite all the years that have passed since I saw The Lion King, I still always remember Rafiki saying "it doesn't matter; it's in the past." That was a great movie!

Brought to you by the HACC York Writing Center.
www.hacc.edu/Students/Tutoring/York-Tutoring.cfm