

Proofreading Skills Tutorial:

**Tutorial #9:
Homonyms**

Using Too/To/Two

Using It's/Its

Using They're/There/Their

Using Who's/Whose

Using Your/You're

Using Affect/Effect

Writing Center

English 800 Center

All notes and exercises should be done on separate sheets of paper, which you will bring to your conference with an instructor in the center.

As you work through the tutorial, make sure to see an instructional aide at the front desk in the Writing Center or English 800 Center if you have any

Homonyms

This tutorial will explain the correct use of homonyms, words that sound exactly alike:

1. **too/to/two**
2. **it's/its**
3. **they're/there/their**
4. **who's/whose**
5. **your/you're**
6. **affect/effect**

Knowing which words to use can make a big difference in your writing, especially since readers are more likely to value a piece of writing when the words are spelled correctly.

Consider these two ads.

<p>Ad #1: If your interested in learning more about this websight, contact us. This product will make you're life better. Its time to take a break.</p>
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<p>Ad #2: If you're interested in learning more about this website, contact us. This product will make your life better. It's time to take a break.</p>
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In your own words, identify which group of words makes a better impression, and explain why.

Most people would say that Ad #2 is more impressive because the words are spelled correctly, and the writer seems more knowledgeable. Ad #1 has more spelling errors because the writer has trouble with **homonyms**, words that *sound* exactly alike but are spelled differently (**your/you're**, **websight/website**, and **its/it's**). Spell-check won't catch these errors because the words are correctly spelled words, but they are not the right words.

This tutorial will teach you about some of the most commonly confused homonyms.

Too/To/Two

Following is a chart that explains the differences between the homonyms *too*, *to*, and *two*.

Homonym	Meaning(s)	Example
Too	used to mean “also” or “very”	I, too , am too tired to go to the party. also very
To	used as part of a verb or preposition	I am too tired to go to the party. part of verb preposition
Two	used for the number 2	I am too tired to go to two parties. 2

Exercise 1

Instructions: Add **too**, **to**, or **two** in the following sentences. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. ~~To~~ tell you the truth, I'm ~~too~~ tired ~~to~~ even write ~~two~~ more words.
2. I keep _____ caged snakes near my bed _____ remind me of what it is like
_____ be with _____ many lawyers.
3. If _____ turtle doves aren't already _____ many Christmas presents, you're
probably _____ greedy _____ be my true love.
4. _____ guys go into a bar _____ try and tell a joke until people get _____ tired
of listening _____ them.
5. It takes _____ years of lessons _____ learn _____ play basic piano, which is
_____ long for most people.
6. Try _____ believe me when I tell you that the car in the swimming pool was an
accident.

Exercise 2

The paragraph below contains sentences with errors in the use of the homonyms *too*, *to*, and *two*. Underline the homonyms, and write the correct word above the wrong one. The first sentence has been done for you.

Two *to*
To years ago, I wrote a letter too the City Pest Extermination Company.

I wanted to complain that my house still contained to many rats for my family's comfort after one of their exterminators visited. Too my dismay, the letter was not answered for to months. Even my daughter, who used to think that rats were "cute," is now to scared to go into her room at night, as the rats have taken over. I, to, am afraid because two rats appeared last night in the kitchen. Unfortunately, our to pets—our dog, Smoky, and cat, Tiger—feel this way to.

It's/Its

Following is a chart that explains the differences between the homonyms *it's* and *its*.

Homonym	Meaning(s)	Example
It's	used as a contraction—the combination of "it" and "is" or "it" and "has"	It's time to go to the party. It + is It's been a long time since I took a vacation. It + has
Its	used to show ownership	The dog wagged its tail. ownership

Exercise 3

Instructions: Add either **it's** or **its** in the following sentences. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. It's good to see you again. _____ been too long.
2. Juan may not want to believe it, but _____ obvious that his car is making _____ last cross-country trip.
3. “_____ not polite to point,” said Greg, pointing at Ricky.
4. _____ not surprising to see the Warriors winning again, but _____ great all the same.
5. Never let a pit bull sink _____ teeth into your leg, or you'll find out that _____ pretty darn painful.

Exercise 4

The paragraph below contains sentences with errors in the use of the homonyms **it's** and **its**. Underline the homonyms, and write the correct word above the wrong one. The first sentence has been done for you.

It's

Its good to see that today's generation hasn't lost all interest in poetry. While poetry seemed to be having it's last heyday in the mid-1960's, today its starting to appear everywhere from bathroom walls to MTV. Poetry may owe much of it's current popularity to hip-hop. The Brew Krew, a group from the tough streets of Las Vegas, Nevada, even includes lines from T.S. Eliot in it's most recent release.

They're/There/Their

Following is a chart that explains the differences between the homonyms *they're*, *there*, and *their*.

Homonym	Meaning(s)	Example
They're	used as a contraction—the combination of “they” and “are”	They're going to a party in Berkeley. They + are
There	used to indicate a direction <i>or</i> <i>there</i> + <i>to be</i> construction, which means that something exists	Are you going there ? a direction There are many reasons for recycling. something exists (that is, reasons exist)
Their	used to show ownership	Their friends are going to the party. ownership

Exercise 5

Instructions: Add *they're*, *there*, or *their* in the following sentences. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. Your parents are coming over for dinner and they're bringing their new puppy.
2. _____ are many ways to cook a tortoise, but you probably shouldn't talk about any of them.
3. Aren't _____ laws against that?
4. The judges made _____ final decision at midnight.
5. _____ must be a place where people like your relatives can practice _____ strange hobbies.
6. _____ is a time and a place for performing rap, but _____ aren't many people who think Sunday Mass is one of them.

Exercise 6

The paragraph below contains sentences with errors in the use of the homonyms *they're*, *there*, and *their*. Underline the homonyms, and write the correct word above the wrong one. The first sentence has been done for you.

There

Their isn't any good reason why the educational system can't be reformed so that this generation of college students, many of whom hold down full-time jobs while attending *their* school, can finish there degrees in four years, as their parents' generation did. According to Soledad Bristow, director of San Juan University, "Today's students know that their not really going to graduate in four years, and often expect to wait as long as six." While many pundits act as if their is some epidemic of laziness going around, many students who work and take they're studies seriously know that there facing new challenges that the system does not accommodate.

Who's/Whose

Following is a chart that explains the differences between the homonyms *who's* and *whose*.

Homonym	Meaning(s)	Example
Who's	used as a <i>contraction</i> —the combination of either "who" and "is" or "who" and "has"	Who's going to the party? Who + is Raquel is the one who's been having parties every weekend. who + has
Whose	used to show ownership	Whose dog is barking? ownership

Exercise 7

Instructions: Add **who's** or **whose** in the following sentences. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?
2. _____ smelly Vans sneakers are those?
3. I know a woman _____ perfect for you.
4. James is a man _____ not afraid to cry, particularly if he is the one _____ been hurt.
5. You used to say I was the one _____ hair was too short. _____ laughing now, baldy?

Exercise 8

The paragraph below contains sentences with errors in the use of the homonyms **who's** and **whose**. Underline the homonyms, and write the correct word above the wrong one. The first sentence has been done for you.

Jamil, the director of janitorial services, whose ^{who's} been working here for ten years, would like to know whose ^{who's} been leaving the candy wrappers all over the floor in the men's restroom. He would also like to know who's blue suede shoes were left in the freezer and who's purple tie was found floating in the Brita water pitcher. The sooner we find out whose behind these silly pranks, the easier it will be to get back to normal.

You're/Your

Following is a chart that explains the differences between the homonyms **you're** and **your**.

Homonym	Meaning(s)	Example
You're	used as a contraction—the combination of “you” and “are”	You're going to the party, right? You + are
Your	used to show ownership	Your dog was barking all night! ownership

Exercise 9

Instructions: Add **you're** or **your** in the following sentences. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. After the tune-up, your car is getting better gas mileage now.
2. _____ so beautiful!
3. _____ mother-in-law called to say that _____ welcome to come over for dinner.
4. Don't use _____ cell phone while driving.
5. _____ writing keeps getting better, which shows that _____ practicing a lot.

Exercise 10

The paragraph below contains sentences with errors in the use of the homonyms **you're** and **your**. Underline the homonyms, and write the correct word above the wrong one. The first sentence has been done for you.

You're *your*
Your not going to believe this, but until yesterday, you're car was just fine. It was only when I let you're sister borrow it that most of the damage that your so upset about occurred. I admit that I'm responsible for smashing in your headlights and for the moose antlers stuck in you're front bumper, but it was your sister who spilled the coffee on the steering wheel. I'm sure your pretty angry with both of us, especially you're sister, but please try to understand. After all, I'm still your best friend, right?

Affect/Effect

Following is a chart that explains the differences between the homonyms **affect** and **effect**.

Homonym	Meaning(s)	Example
Affect	used as a verb—meaning to have an influence on somebody or something	The full moon affects everyone. verb (to have an influence on somebody) The lack of rain affected the crops. verb (to have an influence on something)
Effect	used as a noun—meaning a result or changed state (usually preceded by the, a, or an)	The vodka had an effect on him noun once he got home.

Exercise 11

Instructions: Add **affect** or **effect** in the following sentences. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. Critics have observed how television has a strong effect on young people.
2. My lack of sleep can _____ my performance on the final exam.
3. Falling on his head had a bad _____ on Greg's memory.
4. The California budget will surely _____ significant improvements on our campus.

5. Alice's brownies did not have any _____ on me.
6. The early frost will undoubtedly _____ the tomato harvest this year.

Exercise 12

The paragraph below contains sentences with errors in the use of the homonyms *affect* and *effect*. Underline the homonyms, and write the correct word above the wrong one. The first sentence has been done for you.

Although many marijuana users believe smoking pot does not have long-term health risk *effects*
affects, scientific research indicates that marijuana use can cause many different health problems. When smoked, marijuana begins to effect users almost immediately and can last for one to three hours. When it is eaten in food, such as baked in brownies and cookies, the affects take longer to begin but usually last longer. Some of the short-term affects of marijuana include distorted perception, problems with memory and learning, loss of coordination, trouble with thinking, increased heart rate, and reduced blood pressure. There are also long-term affects. Marijuana contains more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke. Because marijuana smokers usually inhale deeper and hold the smoke in their lungs longer than tobacco smokers, their lungs are affected since they are exposed to those carcinogenic properties longer. In fact, many researchers believe that marijuana smoking overall has a more harmful affect on the lungs than smoking tobacco.

Print the combined chart below for your convenience and later reference.

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Two	used for the number 2	I am too tired to go to two parties. 2
It’s	used as a contraction—the combination of “it” and “is” or “it” and “has”	It’s time to go to the party. It + is It’s been a long time since I took a vacation. It + has
Its	used to show ownership	The dog wagged its tail. ownership
They’re	used as a contraction—the combination of “they” and “are”	They’re going to a party in Berkeley. They + are
There	used to indicate a direction <i>or</i> a <i>there + to be</i> construction, which means that something exists	Are you going there ? a direction There are many reasons for recycling. something exists (that is, reasons exist)
Their	used to show ownership	Their friends are going to the party. ownership
Who’s	used as a <i>contraction</i> —the combination of either “who” and “is” or “who” and “has”	Who’s going to the party? Who + is Raquel is the one who’s been having who + has parties every weekend.
Whose	used to show ownership	Whose dog is barking? ownership
You’re	used as a contraction—the combination of “you” and “are”	You’re going to the party, right? You + are
Your	used to show ownership	Your dog was barking all night! ownership
Affect	used as a verb—meaning to have an influence on somebody or something	The lack of rain affected the crops. verb (to act upon something) The full moon affects everyone. verb (to have an influence on somebody)
Effect	used as a noun—meaning a result or changed state (usually preceded by the, a, or an)	The vodka had an effect on him noun once he got home.

Note: There are other words that writers often misspell or are uncertain about. When you are unsure about a word and its meaning, be sure to use a dictionary.

Exercise 13

Instructions:

1. Review an essay where your teacher has graded and marked your homonym errors. Which ones give you the most trouble? Knowing which homonyms to look for during proofreading can make it easier to find your errors.
2. Look back at the principles and exercises in this tutorial and make notes on a separate sheet of paper. You will bring these notes and the essay to your conference.
3. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor in the Writing Center (18-104) or English 800 Center (18-102). To make this appointment, stop by the Centers or call (650) 574-6436. During this appointment, the professor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to these exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.

Reminder:

For this appointment, bring

- any notes about the tutorial that you have taken
- your completed tutorial exercises
- and the essay