



## Most Common Confusing Words

Take a look at these two sentences – one of them contains a mistake:

*I poured over book after book.*

*We pored over the catalogues.*

Are you uncertain which one is right?

There are a lot of words in English that look or sound alike but have very different meanings, such as accept and except. Here's a quick-reference list of pairs of such imp words that regularly confuse students in exam.

| <i>Word 1</i> | <i>Meaning</i>                      | <i>Word 2</i> | <i>Meaning</i>                         |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--|
| accept        | to agree to receive or do           | except        | not including                          |
| adverse       | unfavourable, harmful               | averse        | strongly disliking; opposed            |
| advice        | recommendations about what to do    | advise        | to recommend something                 |
| affect        | to change or make a difference to   | effect        | a result; to bring about a result      |
| aisle         | a passage between rows of seats     | isle          | an island                              |
| all together  | all in one place, all at once       | altogether    | completely; on the whole               |
| along         | moving or extending horizontally on | a long        | referring to something of great length |
| aloud         | out loud                            | allowed       | permitted                              |
| altar         | a sacred table in a church          | alter         | to change                              |
| amoral        | not concerned with right or wrong   | immoral       | not following accepted moral standards |

|                   |  |                    |  |
|-------------------|--|--------------------|--|
| <b>appraise</b>   | to assess  | <b>apprise</b>     | to inform someone                                      |
| <b>assent</b>     | agreement, approval  | <b>ascent</b>      | the action of rising or climbing up                    |
| <b>aural</b>      | relating to the ears or hearing                                      | <b>oral</b>        | relating to the mouth; spoken                          |
| <b>balmy</b>      | pleasantly warm  | <b>barmy</b>       | foolish, crazy   |
| <b>bare</b>       | naked; to uncover  | <b>bear</b>        | to carry; to put up with                               |
| <b>bated</b>      | in phrase 'with bated breath', i.e. in great suspense                | <b>baited</b>      | with bait attached or inserted                         |
| <b>bazaar</b>     | a Middle Eastern market  | <b>bizarre</b>     | strange  |
| <b>berth</b>      | a bunk in a ship, train, etc.  | <b>birth</b>       | the emergence of a baby from the womb                  |
| <b>born</b>       | having started life  | <b>borne</b>       | carried  |
| <b>bough</b>      | a branch of a tree   | <b>bow</b>         | to bend the head; the front of a ship                  |
| <b>brake</b>      | a device for stopping a vehicle; to stop a vehicle                   | <b>break</b>       | to separate into pieces; a pause                       |
| <b>breach</b>     | to break through, or break a rule; a gap                             | <b>breech</b>      | the back part of a gun barrel                          |
| <b>broach</b>     | to raise a subject for discussion                                    | <b>brooch</b>      | a piece of jewellery                                   |
| <b>canvas</b>     | a type of strong cloth   | <b>canvass</b>     | to seek people's votes                                 |
| <b>censure</b>    | to criticize strongly  | <b>ensor</b>       | to ban parts of a book or film; a person who does this |
| <b>cereal</b>     | a grass producing an edible grain; a breakfast food made from grains | <b>serial</b>      | happening in a series                                  |
| <b>chord</b>      | a group of musical notes   | <b>cord</b>        | a length of string; a cord-like body part              |
| <b>climactic</b>  | forming a climax   | <b>climatic</b>    | relating to climate                                    |
| <b>coarse</b>     | rough  | <b>course</b>      | a school subject; part of a meal                       |
| <b>complacent</b> | smug and self-satisfied  | <b>complaisant</b> | willing to please                                      |

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|----------------------|---|---------------------|---|
| <b>complement</b>    | to add to so as to improve; an addition that improves something | <b>compliment</b>   | to praise or express approval; an admiring remark               |
| <b>council</b>       | a group of people who manage or advise                          | <b>counsel</b>      | advice; to advise   |
| <b>cue</b>           | a signal for action; a wooden rod                               | <b>queue</b>        | a line of people or vehicles                                    |
| <b>curb</b>          | to keep something in check; a control or limit                  | <b>kerb</b>         | (in British English) the stone edge of a pavement               |
| <b>currant</b>       | a dried grape   | <b>current</b>      | happening now; a flow of water, air, or electricity             |
| <b>defuse</b>        | to make a situation less tense                                  | <b>diffuse</b>      | to spread over a wide area                                      |
| <b>desert</b>        | a waterless, empty area; to abandon someone                     | <b>dessert</b>      | the sweet course of a meal                                      |
| <b>discreet</b>      | careful not to attract attention                                | <b>discrete</b>     | separate and distinct   |
| <b>disinterested</b> | impartial   | <b>uninterested</b> | not interested  |
| <b>draught</b>       | a current of air  | <b>draft</b>        | a first version of a piece of writing                           |
| <b>draw</b>          | an even score at the end of a game                              | <b>drawer</b>       | a sliding storage compartment                                   |
| <b>dual</b>          | having two parts  | <b>duel</b>         | a fight or contest between two people                           |
| <b>elicit</b>        | to draw out a reply or reaction                                 | <b>illicit</b>      | not allowed by law or rules                                     |
| <b>ensure</b>        | to make certain that something will happen                      | <b>insure</b>       | to provide compensation if a person dies or property is damaged |
| <b>envelop</b>       | to cover or surround  | <b>envelope</b>     | a paper container for a letter                                  |
| <b>exercise</b>      | physical activity; to do physical activity                      | <b>exorcise</b>     | to drive out an evil spirit                                     |
| <b>fawn</b>          | a young deer; light   | <b>faun</b>         | a mythical being, part  |

|           |   |           |   |
|-----------|---|-----------|---|
|           | brown   |           | man, part goat  |
| flaunt    | to display ostentatiously   | flout     | to disregard a rule   |
| flounder  | to move clumsily; to have difficulty doing something                          | founder   | to fail   |
| forbear   | to refrain  | forebear  | an ancestor   |
| foreword  | an introduction to a book   | forward   | onwards, ahead  |
| freeze    | to turn to ice  | frieze    | a decoration along a wall   |
| grisly    | gruesome, revolting   | grizzly   | a type of bear  |
| hoard     | a store   | horde     | a large crowd of people   |
| imply     | to suggest indirectly   | infer     | to draw a conclusion  |
| loath     | reluctant, unwilling  | loathe    | to hate   |
| loose     | to unfasten; to set free  | lose      | to be deprived of; to be unable to find                             |
| meter     | a measuring device  | metre     | a metric unit; rhythm in verse                                      |
| militate  | to be a powerful factor against   | mitigate  | to make less severe   |
| palate    | the roof of the mouth   | palette   | a board for mixing colours  |
| pedal     | a foot-operated lever   | peddle    | to sell goods   |
| pole      | a long, slender piece of wood   | poll      | voting in an election   |
| pour      | to flow or cause to flow  | pore      | a tiny opening; to study something closely                          |
| practice  | the use of an idea or method; the work or business of a doctor, dentist, etc. | practise  | to do something repeatedly to gain skill; to do something regularly |
| prescribe | to authorize use of medicine; to order authoritatively                        | proscribe | to officially forbid something                                      |
| principal | most important; the head of a school  | principle | a fundamental rule or belief  |

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|-------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>sceptic</b>    | a person inclined to doubt                | <b>septic</b>     | infected with bacteria    |
| <b>sight</b>      | the ability to see                        | <b>site</b>       | a location                |
| <b>stationary</b> | not moving                                | <b>stationery</b> | writing materials         |
| <b>storey</b>     | a level of a building                     | <b>story</b>      | a tale or account         |
| <b>titillate</b>  | to arouse interest                        | <b>titivate</b>   | to make more attractive   |
| <b>tortuous</b>   | full of twists; complex                   | <b>torturous</b>  | full of pain or suffering |
| <b>wreath</b>     | a ring-shaped arrangement of flowers etc. | <b>wreathe</b>    | to surround or encircle   |

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