Frequently Misused Words

Accept/Except
Accept is a verb meaning to agree or receive willingly, to allow. Except is a preposition that means to exclude or omit, or (more rarely and usually in the past tense) a verb meaning to leave out.

I will except accept the job offer.
I like the new car, accept except for the color. I dislike my teammates, present company excepted.

Advise/Advice
Advise is a verb meaning to recommend or give an opinion. Advice is a noun meaning recommendation

The professor’s job was to advise advise her.
My advice advice is that you eat green vegetables daily.

Affect/Effect
Affect is a verb meaning to influence. Effect is a noun meaning the result of an action or (more rarely) a verb meaning to bring about.

Your attitude will affect effect your performance in school.
Lack of sleep has a negative effect effect on test scores. Gathering signatures on a petition is one way to effect change.

All together/Altogether
All together means all in a group. Altogether is an adverb meaning completely or in all.

The team traveled altogether all together to the tournament.
He was altogether altogether correct about the outcome of the game.

Beside/Besides
Beside is a preposition meaning next to. Besides is a preposition meaning in addition to or an adverb meaning moreover.

Are you comfortable sitting besides beside a bear?
Besides besides bees, hornets also sting.

Capitol/Capital
Capitol is a noun referring to a building where government offices are located. Capital is an adjective meaning the most important or a noun referring to a city or letter.

The Texas capital Capitol is taller than the capital Capitol building Washington D.C.
The Virginians emerged with the nation’s capital capital.

Device/Devise
Device is a noun meaning a machine that was invented to fulfill a particular purpose. Devise is a verb meaning to invent, design, or construct.

A cell phone is a useful device device.
The labyrinth he was to devise devise would be inescapable.

Cite/Site/Sight
Cite is a verb meaning to quote or reference. Site is a noun referring to a particular location. Sight is both a noun and a verb relating to the ability to see.

Be sure to site cite your sources.
The sight site of the monument has yet to be approved.
The optometrist said that she had excellent sight. Three months into the voyage, the sailors finally sight sight land.
Complement/Compliment
Compliment is a verb (or, more rarely, a noun) referring to the act of completing or bringing to perfection.
Compliment is a verb or noun meaning to praise or flatter.

The light salad complemented the heavy stew.
She received a compliment on her work. His date complimented his tie.

Lose/Loose
Lose is a verb meaning to be unable to find or to be defeated. Loose is an adjective meaning not tight or, more rarely, a verb meaning to free or set loose.

Put the keys to the house in a safe place so you will not lose them.
Barbed wire can catch on loose clothing. Loose the hounds!

Past/Passed
Past is a preposition meaning beyond or a noun/adjective referring to time gone by. Passed is the past tense of the verb “to pass.”

It is past midnight; you can’t change the passed past.
Congress passed a new law yesterday.

Principal/Principle
Principal is an adjective meaning first in order of importance and a noun meaning the leader of a school or an amount of money invested, lent, or borrowed. Principle is a noun meaning a moral law or general truth.

The principle principal crop in 19th century Ireland was the potato; the principle principal lectured our whole class.
You’ve got to stick to your principles.

Stationary/Stationery
Stationary is an adjective meaning motionless. Stationery is a noun that refers to writing supplies.

He ordered us to move, but we remained stationary.
I sent my grandmother a letter written on the stationary she gave me.

Tenant/Tenet
Tenant is a person who pays rent to occupy a building. Tenet is a principle (see above) or doctrine.

The tenants complained about the high rent.
Racial equality was one of the central tenants of the Civil Rights Movement.

It’s/Its
It’s is a contraction of “it is.” Its is a possessive personal pronoun meaning belonging to it.

My Chihuahua wears a sweater when it’s (it is) cold outside. It’s (the Chihuahua’s) sweater is green and pink.

Their/There/They’re
Their is the possessive form of they/them. There is an adverb meaning at. They’re is a contraction of “they are.”

Their They’re they are! There They’re headed for the Their their hideout in the canyon!

Whose/Who’s
Whose is the possessive form of who. Who’s is a contraction of “who is.”
Who’s Whose birthday is it? Whose Who’s coming to the party?

Your/You’re
Your is a possessive pronoun meaning belonging to you. You’re is a contraction of “you are.”

Watch you’re your tone. I don’t like what you’re implying.