



# Commonly confused words

*Extra practice with the pairs that matter*

A few word pairs look or sound alike but mean different things. Reviewers notice these quickly, and a wrong one can change your meaning. The pairs that matter most in research writing: affect/effect, its/it's, comprise/consist, and principle/principal.

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affect / effect affect = verb (to change); effect = noun (the result)

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its / it's its = belonging to it; it's = it is (a contraction – avoided in papers)

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comprise / consist consist takes "of"; comprise does not

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principle / principal principle = a rule or belief (noun); principal = main

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Quick test for affect/effect: if you can put “the” or “an” in front, you need the noun “effect”.

SEE — *choose the correct word*

Underline the correct word.

1. Temperature can strongly ( affect / effect ) the rate of reaction.
2. The treatment had a clear ( affect / effect ) on recovery time.
3. Each molecule keeps ( its / it's ) shape under pressure.
4. The sample ( consists / comprises ) of forty participants.

TRY — *fill the gap with the right word*

Write the correct word from the pair in brackets.

5. Diet can \_\_\_\_\_ the rate of recovery. (affect / effect)
6. The main \_\_\_\_\_ of the policy was lower costs. (affect / effect)
7. The system reached \_\_\_\_\_ limit after an hour. (its / it's)
8. The course \_\_\_\_\_ of five modules. (consists / comprises)

ACT — *find and fix the confused word*

Each sentence has one wrong word. Cross it out and write the correct one.

9. Smoking has a serious affect on the lungs.

> \_\_\_\_\_

10. The device increased it's output over time.

> \_\_\_\_\_

11. The committee comprises of five members.

> \_\_\_\_\_

ACT — *principle or principal?*

Write the correct word in each gap.

12. The \_\_\_\_\_ cause of the failure was overheating.

> \_\_\_\_\_

13. This rests on a basic \_\_\_\_\_ of physics.

> \_\_\_\_\_

14. Cost was the \_\_\_\_\_ reason for the delay.

> \_\_\_\_\_

REFLECT — *judge the three versions*

Three versions of one idea. Mark the one with no errors, then say what is wrong with the other two.

\_\_\_\_\_ a. The affect was clear, and it's structure consists of two parts.

\_\_\_\_\_ b. The effect was clear, and its structure comprises of two parts.

\_\_\_\_\_ c. The effect was clear, and its structure consists of two parts.

Best: \_\_\_\_\_ What is wrong with the other two?

> \_\_\_\_\_



# Commonly confused words

*Model answers and short explanations*

SEE – choose the correct word

1. affect – verb (to change the rate).
2. effect – noun (the result), after 'a clear'.
3. its – possessive, no apostrophe.
4. consists – takes 'of'.

TRY – fill the gap

5. affect – verb.
6. effect – noun (the main effect).
7. its – possessive.
8. consists – takes 'of'.

ACT – find and fix

9. a serious effect – noun, not the verb 'affect'.
10. increased its output – possessive, not 'it's'.
11. comprises five members – 'comprise' takes no 'of' (or 'consists of').

ACT – principle or principal

12. principal cause – 'principal' means main.
13. a basic principle – a rule (noun).
14. the principal reason – main.

REFLECT – judge the three versions

Best: c – 'effect', 'its', and 'consists of' are all correct.

a and b both have errors. 'a' is worst: 'affect' should be the noun 'effect', and 'it's' should be 'its' – two errors. 'b' has one: 'comprises of' – comprise takes no 'of'.

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Source note. All sentences in this worksheet are original, written for teaching. The confused-word pairs are informed by the Academic Phrasebank (John Morley, University of Manchester, 2023), 'Commonly Confused Words'. No part of the Phrasebank PDF is reproduced here.