

Frequently Confused Words

It's perhaps the most common writing question: "your" or "you're"? "It's" or "its"? Hopefully, this handout will help.

Your/You're

- *Your* is used to indicate possession: "*You'll shoot your eye out.*"
- *You're* is a contraction: it's the shortened form of "you are." "*You never know what you're going to get in a box of chocolates.*"

There/Their/They're

- *There* is used as a pronoun: "*There is no ice cream.*" "*Over there, you'll find Australia.*"
- *Their* is used to indicate possession: "*We're going to kidnap their dog and sell it on the Internet.*"
- *They're* is a contraction: it's the shortened form of "they are." "*It's too late to hide; they're already here!*"

It's/Its

- *It's* is a contraction, short for "it is." "*A lie grows until it's as clear as your nose.*"
- *Its* is used to indicate possession: "*The dog chased its tail!*"

Affect/Effect

- *Affect* is a verb, meaning to change something. "*Turning off the power to the city will affect people watching television.*"
- *Effect* is a noun, the result of some change. "*The effect of turning off the power was that people could not watch television.*"

Who/Whom

- *Who* and *whom* basically mean the same thing. The trick is to know when to use them. This is a good rule of thumb: in the question you are asking, substitute another word for *who/whom*. If the words "he" or "she" work, then *who* is correct. If "him" or "her" sound better, then use *whom*. You may have to rephrase a sentence.
 - Example: "*Whom did you dance with last night?*" You can rephrase this sentence as "*Did you dance with him last night?*" In this case, *whom* is correct.
 - Example: "*Who went to the movies last night?*" You can rephrase this sentence as "*Did she go to the movies last night?*" In this case, *who* is correct.