



Using Homophones Correctly

Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings. Each homophone has a unique function within a sentence; using the wrong one can change the meaning of the sentence, or make it nonsensical. What's more, spell-check won't always detect an incorrectly used homophone, so it is important to have a reliable method to select the right homophone within a sentence.

Some common homophones:

Accept/except	affect/effect	are/our	by/bye/buy	complement/compliment
dear/deer	do/due	heal/heel	hear/here	its/it's
know/no	lead/led	maybe/may be	morning/mourning	one/won
patients/patience	presents/presence	principle/principal	than/then	to/too/two
they're/their/there	weather/whether	who's/whose	your/you're	

For a more complete list of homophones, see: <http://www.taupecat.com/personal/homophones/>

The following sections explain some of the most common—and most often confused—homophones and provide example sentences to show their functions.

They're/Their/There

They're

“They're” is a contraction for “they are.” To find out whether or not it is the correct homophone to use within a sentence, substitute the words “they are” where it appears in the sentence. If the sentence makes sense when it includes “they are,” then “they're” is the correct homophone; if not, you need to use “there” or “their.”

Sample Sentence: They're/Their car wouldn't start this morning.

Test the Homophone: They are car wouldn't start this morning. *Wrong.*

Correct Sentence: Their car wouldn't start this morning.

Sample Sentence: They're/Their going to have to rent a car.

Test the Homophone: They are going to have to rent a car. *Right.*

Correct Sentence: They're going to have to rent a car.

Their

“Their” is a possessive word meaning “belonging to them.” To determine whether or not a homophone is correct within a given sentence, look to see whether or not it indicates that something belongs to an individual or another object.

Sample Sentence: Their/They’re car is going to be in the shop for a week.

Test the Homophone: They are car is going to be in the shop for a week. *Wrong.*

The homophone shows that the car belongs to them, so . . .

Correct Sentence: Their car is going to be in the shop for a week.

Sample Sentence: They’re/Their rental car is parked in the driveway.

Test the Homophone: Their rental car is parked in the driveway. *Right.*

There

“There” refers to a location (My bag is over there.) or a state of being (There is no way for us to get there.) or (There are six stars in the drawing.). To determine whether it is the correct homophone to use in a sentence, look to see if it is indicating a location or state of being.

Sample Sentence: They’re/Their/There total for car repairs is \$700.

Test the Homophone: They are total for car repairs is \$700. *Wrong.*

Test the Homophone: There total for car repairs is \$700. *Wrong.*

The homonym is not indicating location or state of being, so . . .

Correct Sentence: Their total for car repairs is \$700.

You’re/Your

“You’re” is a contraction, short for “you are.” To determine whether to use “you’re” in a given sentence, substitute “you are.” If the sentence makes sense, “you’re” is the correct homophone to use in that sentence.

Sample Sentence: You’re/Your new rental car is nicer than theirs.

Test the Homophone: You are new rental car is nicer than theirs. *Wrong.*

Correct Sentence: Your new rental car is nicer than theirs.

Sample Sentence: You’re/Your going to have to buy more gas for the new rental car.

Test the Homophone: You are going to have to buy more gas for the new rental car. *Right.*

Correct Sentence: You’re going to have to buy more gas for the new rental car.

“Your” is possessive, meaning “belonging to you.” To determine whether “your” is correct in a given sentence, look to see if it indicates that something or someone belongs to the “you” in the sentence.

Sample Sentence: You’re/Your car wasn’t flashy, but it was fuel efficient.

Test the Homophone: You are car wasn’t flashy, but it was fuel efficient. *Wrong.*

Correct Sentence: Your car wasn’t flashy, but it was fuel efficient.

Two/To/Too

Two

“Two” always represents the numeral (2). To determine whether or not it belongs in a given sentence, look to see whether it is indicating a quantity.

Sample Sentence: Two/To get to the repair shop, take I-94 west.

Test the Homophone: Two (2) get to the repair shop, take I-94 west. *Wrong.*

Correct Sentence: To get to the repair shop, take I-94 west.

Sample Sentence: Two/To times a day she asks whether her car has been repaired.

Test the Homophone: Two (2) times a day she asks whether her car has been repaired. *Right.*

Correct Sentence: Two times a day she asks whether her car has been repaired.

To

“To” is a preposition; it indicates direction or position. Most often, it explains where or how something is positioned with regard to something else.

Sample Sentence: To/Two drivers sharing one car can be a hassle.

Test the Homophone: To drivers sharing one car can be a hassle. *Wrong.*

The homophone indicates a quantity, so Correct Sentence: Two drivers sharing one car can be a hassle.

Sample Sentence: To/Two see if the repairs are covered by insurance, call your agent.

Test the Homophone: To see if the repairs are covered by insurance, call your agent. *Right.*

Correct Sentence: To see if the repairs are covered by insurance, call your agent.

Too

“Too” has two (2) uses. It can indicate an extreme or overabundance of something, or it can indicate an addition or similarity. In the second use, it means the same thing as “also.” To determine whether or not “too” is correct in a sentence, look to see whether it is indicating an extreme or whether “also” makes sense in its place.

Sample Sentence: Putting too/two/to many people in one car is uncomfortable.

Test the Homophone: Putting two (2) many people in one car is uncomfortable. *Wrong.*

Test the Homophone: Putting to many people in one car is uncomfortable. *Wrong.*

The homophone isn't indicating a quantity, direction, or position, so . . .
Correct Sentence: Putting too many people in one car is uncomfortable.

Sample Sentence: We were thrilled when we got our car back, and our mechanic was too/two/to.

Test the Homophone: We were thrilled when we got our car back, and our mechanic was also. *Right.*

“Also” fits in the sentence, so . . .
Correct Sentence: We were thrilled to when we got our car back, and our mechanic was too.