Confusing Words and Usage Errors

Similar words that are spelled differently (homonyms or homophones) can be tricky. Here are some of the most commonly confused words and phrases. If you can't distinguish between them, you need to look them up in the dictionary or a grammar guidebook and learn the difference. Homonyms are particularly dangerous on computers since spell-checkers will not spot them.

These words confuse students by sounding alike.

1. affect / effect
2. accept / except
3. advice / advise
4. all ready / already
5. all together / altogether
6. allusion / illusion
7. anyone / any one
8. awhile / a while
9. cite / site / sight
10. conscience / conscious
11. forth/ fourth
12. its / it's
13. may be / maybe
14. past / passed
15. principal / principle
16. than / then
17. there / their / they're
18. to / two / too
19. whether / weather
20. who's / whose

Other words, while not homonyms, are also frequently confused, misused or misspelled.

1. amount / number
2. fewer / less
3. further / farther
4. lie / lay (past tense: lay, laid)
5. lead / led
6. that/ which
7. loose / lose
8. precede / proceed
9. raise/ rise (and raised/risen)
10. between / among
11. can / may / might
12. could of / could have
13. hanged / hung
14. regardless / irregardless

(No such word in the later case)

15. more unique, more straight

(These absolute words don't take comparatives)

16. quit / quite / quiet (These three are often mistyped)

17. quote (verb) / quotation (noun)
18. who/ whom
19. who/ that