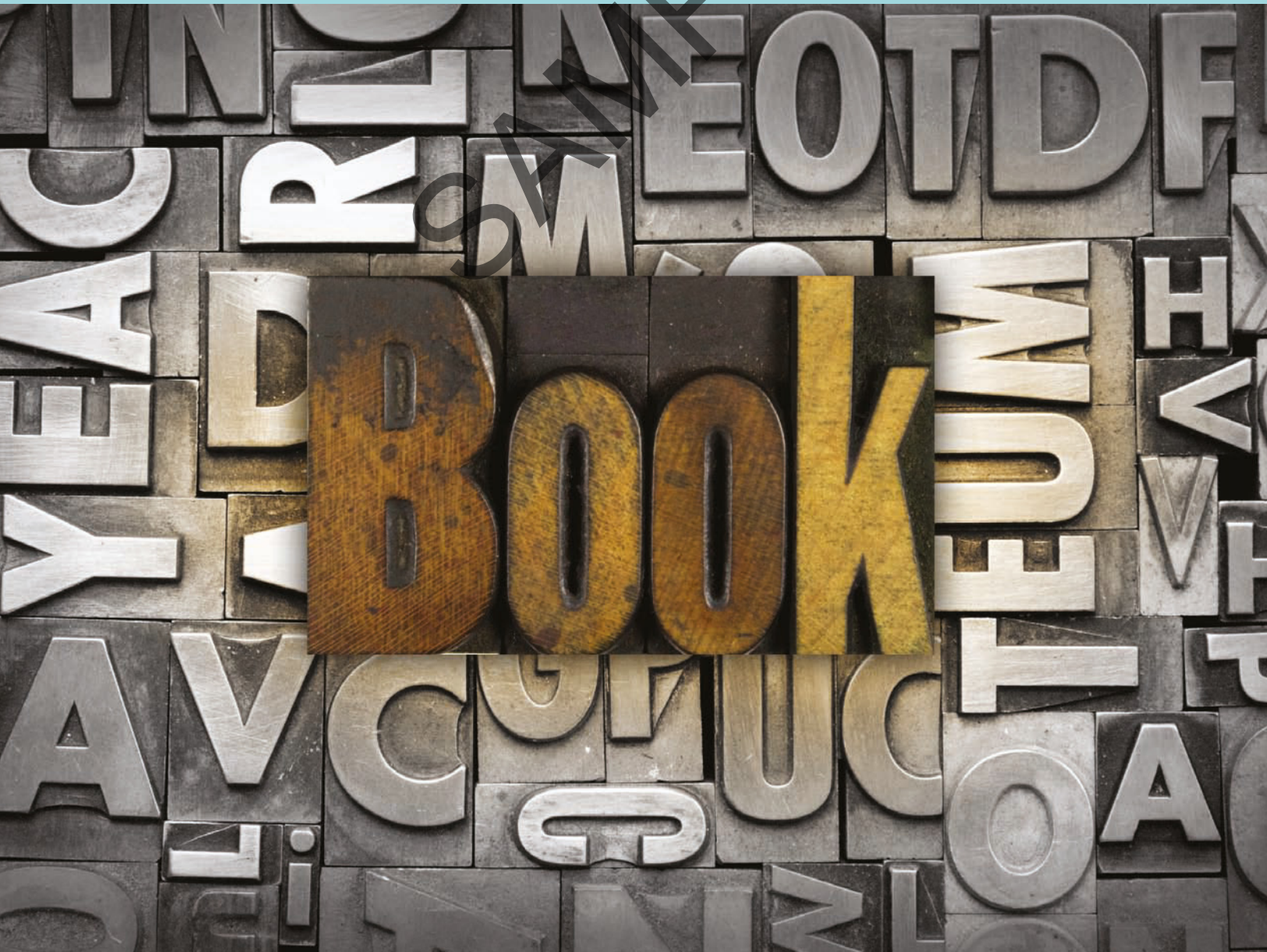


# 5: *Literary Terms and Mechanics*

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## CHAPTER 5

# LITERARY TERMS AND MECHANICS

You should be familiar with the meanings of each of the following literary terms:

Alliteration	Repetition of the first-consonant sound of words which are placed close to each other: 'I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore.'
Allusion	A reference to something familiar or well known that exists outside the literary work.
Antagonist	Character that is the villain or source of conflict in a literary work.
Aside	A dramatic device in which a character makes a comment to the audience which is not heard by the other characters on stage.
Assonance	Repetition of vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds: 'I will arise and go now...'
Characterisation	The way in which an author creates and develops characters, their attitudes and their personalities.
Climax	The turning point in a literary work.
Conflict	A struggle between two or more opposing forces (person vs. person; nature; society; self; fate/God).
Dialogue	Direct speech between characters.
Diction	Words chosen by a writer to create a specific effect.
Exposition	The essential background information at the beginning of a literary work.
Falling action	Results or effects of the climax of a literary work.
Figurative language	Language which is not meant to be taken literally but functions as a comparison or representation of something else. Includes simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, symbol.
Flashback	The method of returning to an earlier point in time for the purpose of making the present clearer.
Foreshadowing	Providing a hint of what is to come in a literary work.
Genre	Type or category to which a literary work belongs.
Hyperbole	Extreme exaggeration to add meaning or emphasis.
Imagery	Pictures created by language that appeal to the five senses.
Irony	<b>Dramatic:</b> when the reader or audience knows something a character does not. <b>Situational:</b> when there is a difference between what is expected to happen and what actually happens. <b>Verbal:</b> when the speaker says one thing but means the opposite.
Melodrama	An extravagant comedy in which action is more important than characterisation.
Metadrama	A play which somehow draws attention to the acts of playing/acting/spectating themselves rather than to a theme or subject.
Metaphor	An implied comparison between dissimilar objects: 'He was a lion in battle.'
Motif	A recurring idea or feature of a literary work that is connected to the theme.

Onomatopoeia	A word whose sound imitates its meaning: 'The buzz of bees.'
Oxymoron	Phrase that consists of two contradictory words: 'sad smiles' or 'happy tears'.
Parody	An ironic or comic version of a literary work.
Persona	An adopted character or personality to hide the author's own identity.
Personification	Figure of speech in which non-human things are given human characteristics: 'The great tree waved its arms as it bade farewell to the last leaves of autumn.'
Plot	The order or sequence of events in a literary work.
Point of view	The vantage point or perspective from which a literary work is told: First-person point of view – the narrator is the 'I' telling the story. Third-person point of view – the narrator is not a part of the plot. Also known as omniscient point of view.
Protagonist	The hero/heroine or main character in a work of literature.
Resolution (denouement)	The end of a literary work, where loose ends are tied up and questions answered.
Rising action	The development of conflict and complications in a literary work.
Rhyme	Repetition of similar or identical sounds: 'dear/clear'; 'sad/glad'.
Rhyme Scheme	A pattern of rhyme in lines of poetry [denoted using letters, as in abab, cdcd, efef, gg].
Setting	The background, time and place for a narrative.
Simile	A direct comparison of dissimilar objects, usually using 'like' or 'as': 'He was like a lion in battle.'
Soliloquy	A dramatic device in which a character is alone and speaks his or her thoughts aloud to the audience.
Speaker	The voice in a poem; the person or thing that is speaking.
Stanza	A verse or group of lines in a poem which form a unit.
Stereotype	Standardised, conventional ideas about characters, plots and settings.
Suspense	Tension, a technique that keeps the reader guessing what will happen next.
Symbol/symbolism	One thing (object, person, place) used to represent something else: 'a dove' (peace).
Syntax	Word order in a sentence. The way words are grouped to develop meaning.
Theme	The underlying, central idea of a literary work. Theme differs from the subject of a literary work in that it offers an opinion or makes a statement about the subject matter.
Tone	The author's feelings or attitude towards the subject.
Tragedy	A drama which traditionally witnesses the fall of a great man to utter destruction as a result of some tragic flaw or excess which usually has made him blindly proud of his mortal accomplishments, and forgetful of his mortal weakness (Aristotle).



## A Quick Guide to Punctuation

### Use a full stop [ . ]

- ❑ at the end of a complete statement: *John is not coming to the cinema with us.*
- ❑ at the end of a command: *Pay close attention to what I am saying.*
- ❑ at the end of an indirect question: *My teacher asked me why I was so late.*
- ❑ with abbreviations: *I need to be there at 9 a.m.*



### Use a comma [ , ]

- ❑ to separate the elements in a series or list of things: *She came in, changed her shoes, took off her coat and headed upstairs.*
- ❑ to connect two independent clauses: *He threw the spear with force, but it did not hit the target.*
- ❑ to show that an adverbial clause is introducing the sentence: *Crawling on his belly towards the camp, he knew that he was being watched by a sniper.*
- ❑ to address someone directly in the middle of a sentence: *If I were you, Joan, I'd contact a solicitor about that.*
- ❑ to divide a sentence into clauses: *Michael Maher, who was my grandfather, fought in World War II.*
- ❑ to separate adjectives: *She is a strong, generous and kind woman.*
- ❑ to introduce a quotation into a sentence: *Summing up his argument, Peter Collins writes, 'There is immediate concern regarding the funds available to address the damage caused by the floods.'*
- ❑ to create clear meaning where ambiguity is possible: *Outside, the garden was covered in leaves.* If the comma was left out, this sentence could mean that the area outside the garden was covered in leaves.



### Use a question mark [ ? ]

- ❑ at the end of a direct question: *Why do you keep asking the same questions?*
- ❑ at the end of a rhetorical question: *Who, I ask you, wants to live in such a society?*
- ❑ when a statement is turned into a question: *He should be sacked for doing that, shouldn't he?*
- ❑ when there is a series of short questions: *Who is responsible for this poor performance? The coach? The players? The organisers?*
- ❑ if a book title which ends in a question is quoted, do not use a full stop after the question mark: *I enjoyed reading 'How Many Miles to Babylon?'*



**N.B. Do not use a question mark at the end of an indirect question:**  
*I asked my sister if she would come to town with me.*

### Use an exclamation mark [ ! ]

- ❑ at the end of an emphatic declaration, interjection or command. *'No!' she screamed. 'Get out of here!'*
- ❑ to close questions that are meant to convey extreme emotion: *What do you think you're doing! Stop!*
- ❑ if an exclamation mark is part of a quoted book title, do not use a full stop after it. End with the exclamation mark: *My favourite childhood book was Oh, the Places You'll Go! by Dr Seuss.*



- in newspaper reporting the exclamation point is virtually nonexistent due to the objectivity which is required.



## Use a colon [ : ]

- before a list: *The following people have been chosen for the team: John, Mark, Anthony and Bernard.*
- before an explanation that is preceded by a clause that can stand by itself. Think of the colon as a gate, inviting one to go on: *There is only one other thing I can do now: write her a letter asking for her resignation.*
- when designating the speaker within a play or in court testimony:  
*BIFF: He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong.*  
*HAPPY (almost ready to fight Biff): Don't say that!*

**N.B. Remember that the clause that precedes the colon ought to be able to stand on its own as an independent clause. Its purpose might be strictly to introduce the clause that follows, so it might feel rather incomplete by itself, but grammatically it will have both a subject and a predicate. In other words, we would not use a colon in situations like the following: *My favourite breakfast cereals are cornflakes, muesli and oatmeal.* No colon after the word 'are'. But you could write: *These are my favourite breakfast cereals: cornflakes, muesli and oatmeal.***



## Use a semicolon [ ; ]

- to help sort out a complex list: *There were people from Coolock, Dublin; Blackpool, Cork; Patrickswell, Limerick; and Salthill, Galway.*
- to separate closely related independent clauses: *My grandfather has to listen to the last news bulletin every night; he's afraid he'll miss out on something.*  
The semicolon here allows the writer to imply a relationship between ideas without actually stating that relationship. It avoids having to say 'because'. In this way the reader is involved in the development of an idea – a clever, subliminal way of engaging interest.



## Use a hyphen [ - ]

- to create compound words, particularly before nouns: *the well-known singer, my five-year-old daughter, the out-of-date syllabus.*
- to write numbers twenty-one to ninety-nine and fractions: *five-eighths, two-fifths, etc.*
- to add certain prefixes to words: *self-control, ex-wife, all-inclusive.*
- when the prefix ends with the same letter that begins a word, you will often use a hyphen: *anti-intellectual, de-emphasise*, but not always, e.g. *unnatural, co-ordinate, co-operate*. These latter two can also be written as *co-ordinate and co-operate*. If in doubt use a dictionary.

**Use brackets as parentheses [ ( ) ]**

- to include material that wouldn't normally fit into the flow of your text but which you want to include. If the writing within brackets appears within a sentence, do not use a capital letter or full stop to punctuate it, even if it is itself a complete sentence: *'One hundred years after the 1916 Rising (you learnt about that in school) we are preparing to commemorate the leaders.* (A question mark or exclamation mark, however, might be appropriate and necessary.) If the material within your brackets is written as a separate sentence, punctuate it as if it were a separate sentence: *One hundred years after the 1916 Rising, we are preparing to commemorate the leaders. (You learnt about them in school.)*

**Use dashes as parentheses [ – – ]**

- to make the parenthitic clause more important: *All four students – Maria, Jill, John and Kevin – won scholarships to college.*

**Use ellipsis [...]**

- to quote material when you want to omit some words. Take, for example, the sentence *The doctor told the committee that he wasn't afraid of an investigation into his accounts.* This could be quoted as *The doctor ... wasn't afraid of an investigation into his accounts.* You will find ellipses very useful when you want to use longer quotations to support a point.
- to indicate a pause in the flow of a sentence. This is especially useful in quoted speech: *I thought and thought ... and then made up my mind.*

**Use an apostrophe [ ' ]**

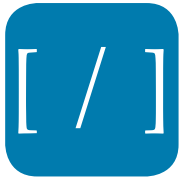
- to indicate possession. In possessives, the placement of the apostrophe depends on whether the noun that shows possession is singular or plural. Generally, if the noun is singular, the apostrophe goes before the s: *The girl's hat.* If the noun is plural, the apostrophe goes after the s: *The girls' hats.* However, if the word is made plural without an s, the apostrophe comes before the s: *She put the children's toys into the boxes.*
- to indicate contractions. The apostrophe is placed where a letter or letters have been omitted: *I am = I'm. They are = They're.* Be particularly careful with the word *it's*. This word always means *It is* or *It has*. *It's my birthday tomorrow. The cat put its paw in the fish bowl.*

**Use quotation marks [ ' ' ]**

- to indicate quoted or spoken language: *'I don't care,' she said. 'Why should I?'* You should begin a new paragraph with each change of speaker. This is important when writing dialogue in an essay or when you are quoting in an exam. Usually, a quotation is separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma.
- to indicate the titles of things that do not normally stand by themselves: short stories, poems, and articles: *I love Frost's poem, 'The Road not Taken'.*
- Do not use speech marks for reported speech: *His mother told him to come home quickly because she needed help.*
- Full stops and commas go inside the quotation marks when an entire sentence is quoted: *'Newland Archer, leaning against the wall at the back of the club box, turned his eyes from the stage and scanned the opposite side of the house.'*



Punctuation goes outside the speech marks when part of a sentence is quoted: *Edith Wharton describes how Newland Archer 'scanned the opposite side of the house'.*



## Use of a slash [ / ]

- to indicate a choice between the words it separates: *Explain your reason/reasons for doing this.*  
The slash means 'or' and should not be used where the word 'or' could not be used in its place. To avoid gender problems with pronouns, some writers use *he/she*, *his/her* and *him/her*. This should be avoided by using the plural *they*, *their*, *them* or just choosing between *he* or *she*.
- to indicate a line break in quoted poetry: 'The woods are lovely, dark, and deep / but I have promises to keep.' Only use this method when quoting two or three lines from a poem. Indent and follow the verse pattern for anything more.

## Common Errors in Expression

### Confusing 'Either' and 'Neither'

Both words can be used as pronouns, conjunctions and adjectives; however, the use of 'either' is positive, while 'neither' is negative.

#### As adjective

'Either' indicates one or the other, or both. For example:

*You may choose either the white or the pink dress.*  
= You may choose the white or the pink dress – not both.

*There were trees growing on either side of the river.*  
= There were trees growing on both sides of the river.

'Neither' indicates not one or the other; none of the two. For example;

*Neither of the children was willing to share the toys.*  
= None of the children was willing to share the toys.

#### As pronoun

'Either' indicates one or the other. For example:

*Both planes are flying to London, you can get on either.*  
= Both planes are flying to London, you can get on one or the other.

'Neither' indicates not one or the other. For example:

*Both of the boys were shocked, but neither let it be seen.*  
= Both of the boys were shocked, but not one or the other let it be seen.

**As a conjunction**

'Either' is used with 'or' to imply a choice of alternatives. For example:

*You can either come with me to the shops or stay at home and study.*

= You can do one of two things: come with me to the shops or stay at home and study.

'Neither' is used with 'nor' to make both parts of a statement negative. For example:

*I can neither sleep nor eat.*

= I cannot sleep or eat.

**TIP!**

Remember this sentence: '**Either**' goes with '**or**', '**neither**' goes with '**nor**'.

**Using double negatives**

You should avoid using two negatives in a sentence, e.g.

1. *I never do nothing right.*
2. *We aren't going nowhere.*

These should be:

1. *I never do anything right.*
2. *We are going nowhere or We aren't going anywhere.*

Check your sentences to make sure that you only use one negative.

**'Would', 'Should' and 'Could'**

'Would', 'should' and 'could' are auxiliary verbs, this means that they help or assist main verbs. For example, in the sentence 'I would like to go to the beach', 'like' is the main verb that is assisted by 'would'.

These three words are the past tenses of will (would), shall (should) and can (could).

Be very careful to use the past tense correctly – would have... could have... should have.

(Do not fall into the trap of using 'of' with these verbs instead of 'have' - it is never right!)

**Confusing 'Can' and 'May'**

The key difference between 'can' and 'may' is that 'can' is about ability and 'may' is about permission.



'Can' has two uses:  
It refers to ability.

*I can play the guitar.  
Can you come to the city with me today?*

To ask or give permission **informally**.

*Can I borrow your book?  
You can use my pen.*

'May' is used to ask or give permission **formally**.

*May I leave the room, please?  
Yes, you may.*

## There, Their, and They're

'There', 'Their' and 'They're' are homophones (two words that are spelt differently but pronounced the same).

'There' always refers to a place.

*Does anyone live there? There will be a day off tomorrow. Put it over there.*

'Their' shows belonging or possession.

*They put their books in their lockers. Their house is in the city.  
I think they spend their money wisely.*

'They're' is a contraction of the words they and are.

*They're on their way to the party. I will tell you if they're coming. They're almost there now.*

## TIP!

Replace the word 'there' with 'here', 'their' with 'our' and 'they're' with 'they are'.  
If the sentence still makes sense, you've got it right.

*I will see you there. (I will see you here.)  
Their marks are good. (Our marks are good.)  
They're going away. (They are going away.)*

It makes sense, so you've got it right!  
It makes sense, so you've got it right!  
It makes sense, so you've got it right!

### Your and You're

'Your' is a possessive adjective. It is used to describe something as belonging to you. It is usually followed by a noun. For example:

*Is this your bag?*  
*Your party really was a great success.*  
*Did your exams go well?*

'You're' is the contraction of two words 'you' and 'are' and is often followed by a verb ending in 'ing'. For example:

*You're looking very well today.*  
*You're going to be glad that you did your revision for the test.*  
*I will go if you're going too.*

### Its and It's

'Its' and 'it's' are often incorrectly used.

'It's' is a contraction for the words 'it is' or 'it has':

*It's all his fault.*

'Its' shows possession:

*The dog buried its bone in the garden.*

### Where and Wear

The word 'where' is used when asking a question about a location.

*Where are you going? Where is the cash kept? Where did you stay when you went away?*

'Wear' has a couple of meanings.

It can refer to an article of clothing that a person is 'wearing'.

*I wouldn't wear that to a dog-fight! What will you wear today? Wear something special today.*

'Wear' can also mean to make tired or exhausted.

*She would wear you out! The wear and tear of life can be seen in the old man's face.*

### We're and Were

The word 'we're' is a contraction of the two words 'we are':

*We are coming tomorrow becomes We're coming tomorrow.*

*We are playing together = We're playing together.*

*We are best friends = We're best friends.*

'Were' refers to something that happened in the past.

*Where were you going? Were you lost? We were on the beach when it started to rain.*

## Two, To, Too

'To' functions as:

A preposition, in which case it always goes before a noun, e.g.

*I am going to school.*

*She is on her way home.*

An infinitive, in which case it always goes before a verb, e.g.

*I am going to work during the summer holidays from school.*

*He thought he was going to have the day off.*

'Too' functions as:

Another word for 'also', e.g.

*Mark would like to come to the party too.*

*Jane worked in the supermarket too.*

Another word for 'excessively', e.g.

*I am too tired to go for a walk.*

*This soup is much too salty.*

## Two

'Two' is the number that follows 'one'. It has no other meaning.

## Of and Off

The words 'of' and 'off' are commonly confused.

The word 'of' has several uses, but it is usually a preposition which expresses a link between a part of something and the whole,

e.g. *The sleeve of his coat is torn or I put it in the back of the car.*

It is often used to point out what something is made of or what it contains:

*I ate a bag of crisps or She loves her cup of tea.*

## TIP!

You will know that you should only use one 'f' if the 'f' sounds like a 'v'.

'Off' is frequently used as an adverb or a preposition.

As an adverb, it is used usually to describe a state of finishing something:

*Turn off the light.*

As a preposition, it is used to show the physical separation or distance from two positions:

*Take those things off the table or The shop is just off the main street.*

## Other Commonly Confused Words

The following words are commonly used and commonly confused. Make sure that you understand the meaning and can spell each one of them.

Word 1	Meaning and example	Word 2	Meaning and example
accept	to agree; to receive: 'I accept your offer.'	except	not including: 'Everybody is going except John.'
advice	(noun) suggestions about what to do: 'Take my advice.'	advise	(verb) to recommend a course of action: 'I advise you to work hard.'
affect	(verb) to change or make a difference to something: 'If it rains, it will affect the picnic.'	effect	(noun) a result; to bring about a result: 'Smoking has a bad effect on your health.'
aisle	a passage between rows of seats: 'The bride walked up the aisle.'	isle	an island: 'I like the poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'.'
all together	all in one place, all at once: 'The visitors arrived all together.'	altogether	completely; on the whole: 'He bought three books altogether.'
aloud	out loud: 'I read my essay aloud in class.'	allowed	Permitted: 'You are not allowed to go to the party.'
altar	a sacred table in a church: 'They brought the gifts to the altar.'	alter	to change: 'Please do not alter the seating arrangements.'
bare	naked; to uncover: 'It is not a good idea to bare your skin to the rays of the sun without protection.'	bear	1. to put up with: 'I cannot bear the pain.' 2. an animal: 'The bear came out of the forest.'
born	having started life: 'The baby was born yesterday.'	borne	carried: 'The illness was borne courageously.'
bough	a branch of a tree: 'When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall.'	bow	1. to bend the head: 'People bow to the king.' 2. a decorative ribbon: 'The girl had her hair tied in a bow.'
brake	a pedal for stopping a vehicle; to stop a vehicle: 'She had to brake hard to avoid an accident.'	break	1. to separate into pieces: 'Sticks and stones may break my bones.' 2. a pause: 'I need a break from school.'
cereal	a grass or a breakfast food made from grains: 'I eat a cereal every morning.'	serial	happening in a series: 'My mum hates missing any serial from her favourite soap.'
chord	a group of musical notes: 'Mike taught me a new chord on the guitar.'	cord	a piece of string: 'The parcel was tied with cord.'
coarse	rough: 'The drunk man spoke in a coarse manner to the police.'	course	1. a direction: 'Follow the course of the river.' 2. a series of lessons: 'We are beginning a new course in maths.'



council	a group of people who manage or advise: 'Amy is on the student council.'	counsel	advice; to advise: 'I was given good counsel regarding my choice of subjects.'
curb	to keep something in check or under control: 'You need to curb the money spent on sweets.'	kerb	the stone edge of a pavement: 'The little boy tripped over the kerb.'
currant	a dried grape: 'I love eating a currant bun.'	current	1. happening now: 'The current trend for make-up is for smoky eyes.' 2. a flow of water, air or electricity: 'He swam with the current.'
desert	a waterless, empty area; to abandon someone: 'I'd hate to be deserted in a desert.'	dessert	the sweet course of a meal: 'The meal finished with a delicious dessert.'
draught	a current of air: 'There is a cold draught from under that door.'	draft	a first version of a piece of writing: 'You need to draft your essay a few times.'
dual	having two parts: 'There is a new dual carriageway in my area.'	duel	a fight or contest between two people: 'The men engaged in a duel to the death.'
ensure	to make certain that something will happen: 'Please ensure that the room is left tidy.'	insure	1. to arrange compensation if a person dies: 'John insured his life for a large sum of money.' 2. compensation if property is damaged: 'It is necessary to insure your house against flood damage.'
exercise	physical activity; to do physical activity: 'Everybody needs to exercise to maintain good health.'	exorcise	to drive out an evil spirit: 'Not many priests are called on to exorcise evil spirits.'
loose	wobbly or unstable: 'I have a loose tooth.'	lose	to be unable to find: 'Did you lose your wallet?'
our	belonging to us: 'This is our house.'	are	(verb): 'We are good friends.'
pedal	a foot-operated lever: 'Her leg was too short to reach the pedal.'	peddle	to sell goods: 'Many goods can be peddled in garage sales.'
pour	to flow or cause to flow: 'Pour some milk into the cat's dish.'	pore	a tiny opening; to study something closely: 'Darren had to pore over the details of his contract carefully.'
practice	(noun) 1. repeated exercise of a skill: 'Practice makes perfect.' 2. Exercise of a profession: 'Dr Murphy has a successful practice.'	practise	(verb) to do something regularly to gain skill: 'I am going to practise playing the piano every day because my music exams are next week'.
principal	most important; the head of a school: 'Mr Jones was appointed as school principal.'	principle	a rule or belief: 'It is important to follow your principles in life.'

quiet	making little or no noise. 'Be quiet!'	quite	absolutely: 'Are you quite sure about that?'
sight	the ability to see: 'I could hardly believe the sight of my own eyes!'	site	a location: 'That is a good site to build your house.'
stationary	not moving: 'The van was stationary outside the shop.'	stationery	writing materials: 'I must buy more stationery because I have a lot of letters to write.'
storey	a level of a building: 'The house is three storeys high.'	story	a tale or account: 'Children love to hear a story.'
thought	Past tense of 'think'; idea or opinion: 'I thought the door was open.'	taught	Pass tense of teach: 'The instructor taught me how to dance.'
threw	Past tense of 'throw': to hurl or cast something: 'He threw the stone at the pig.'	through	A preposition meaning in one side and out the other: 'The sun shone through the window.'

SAMPLE