Easily Confused Words

Not quite homophones, these words sound so much alike that students often confuse them. When a student uses one of these words incorrectly, spend some time asking the student what word he thought he was using to determine if he knows the correct word or not.

accede (v.)—to agree
exceed (v.)—to go beyond
accent (n.)—pronunciation
ascent (n.)—climb
assent (v., n.)—agree
accept (v.)—agree to, believe
except (prep.)—not including
access (n.)—way in, admission
excess (n., adj.)—extra, more than what’s needed
adapt (v.)—to become adjusted to
adept (adj.)—skillful
adopt (v.)—to accept
adverse (adj.)—unfavorable
averse (adj.)—reluctant
affect (v.)—to influence
affect (n.)—feeling
effect (n.)—result of a cause
effect (v.)—to make happen
alley (n.)—narrow street
ally (n.)—supporter
all ready (adj.)—completely ready
already (adv.)—even now or by this time
all together (pron., adj.)—everyone in one place
altogether (adv.)—total, completely
anecdote (n.)—a short story
antidote (n.)—cure
angel (n.)—heavenly body
angle (n.)—space between where two rays intersect at a point; slant
annul (v.)—to cancel
annual (adj.)—yearly
anter—prefix meaning before
anti—prefix meaning against
any way (n.)—however you want
anyway (adv.)—nonetheless
area (n.)—region, surface
aria (n.)—melody
biannual (adj.)—twice per year
biennial (adj.)—every other year
bizarre (adj.)—strange
bazaar (n.)—market
breadth (n.)—width
breath (n.)—amount of air taken in
breathe (v.)—to inhale and exhale
calendar (n.)—almanac, a chart of days and months
colander (n.)—a strainer
casual (adj.)—informal
causal (adj.)—relating to cause
cease (v.)—to stop
seize (v.)—to grab
click (n.)—snap, short sound
clique (n.)—small group
collision (n.)—accident
collusion (n.)—conspiracy
coma (n.)—unconsciousness
comma (n.)—a punctuation mark
command (n., v.)—an order, to order
commend (v.)—to praise, to entrust
comprehensible (adj.)—understandable
comprehensive (adj.)—extensive
confidant (n.)—best friend, one you turn to for advice
confident (adj.)—certain
confidentially (adv.)—privately
confidently (adv.)—certainly
conscience (n.)—sense of right and wrong
conscious (adj.)—mindful, aware
costume (n.)—attire
custom (n.)—usual practice of habit
credible (adj.)—believable
creditable (adj.)—worthy
deceased (adj.)—dead
diseased (adj.)—ill
decent (adj.)—proper
descent (n.)—way down
dissent (n., v.)—disagreement, to disagree
deferece (n.)—high esteem
difference (n.)—not similar
deprecated (adj.)—immoral
deprieved (adj.)—disadvantaged
desert (n., v.)—arid land, to leave
dessert (n.)—course served at the end of a meal
detract (v.)—to take away from
distract (v.)—sidetrack
disapprove (v.)—to condemn
disprove (v.)—refute
disassemble (v.)—to take apart
dissemble (v.)—to evade
disburse (v.)—to pay out
disperse (v.)—disband, scatter
disinterested (adj.)—impartial
uninterested (adj.)—indifferent
elicit (v.)—to draw out
illicit (adj.)—unlawful
emerge (v.)—appear
immerge (v.)—plunge into
emigrate (v.)—to leave your country
immigrate (v.)—to move to another country
eminent (adj.)—well known
imminent (adj.)—about to happen
envelop (v.)—to enclose
envelope (n.)—a wrapper for a letter
expand (v.)—get bigger
expend (v.)—to use, to spend
farther (adj.)—beyond
further (adj.)—additional, more
finale (n.)—the end
finally (adj.)—at the end
fiscal (adj.)—economic
physical (adj.)—relating to the body
formally (adv.)—officially
formerly (adv.)—previously
human (adj.)—relating to mankind
humane (adv.)—caring
imitate (v.)—to copy
intimate (v.)—personal; familiar
incredible (adj.)—hard to believe
incredulous (adj.)—doubtful, skeptical

indigenous (adj.)—native
indigent (adj.)—poor
indignant (adj.)—angry
ingenious (adj.)—clever
ingenuous (adj.)—honest

later (adj.)—to be very late
latter (adj.)—second in a series of two

lay (v.)—to set something down
lie (v.)—to recline

loose (adj.)—not tight
lose (v.)—not win, misplace

message (n.)—communication
massage (v.)—rub

moral (adj.)—ethical
morale (n.)—confidence

morality (n.)—virtue
mortality (n.)—being mortal

of (prep.)—having to do with;
indicating possession
off (adv.)—not on

official (adj., n.)—approved; person
with authority
officious (adj.)—offering services
where they are neither wanted
nor needed

oral (adj.)—verbal
aural (adj.)—having to do with
listening, hearing

pasture (n.)—grassy field
pastor (n.)—preacher

perpetrate (v.)—to be guilty of;
to commit
perpetuate (v.)—to make perpetual

persecute (v.)—to harass
prosecute (n.)—to take legal
action against

personal (adj.)—private
personnel (n.)—a body of people,
usually employed in some
organization

peruse (v.)—to read thoroughly
pursue (v.)—to chase

picture (n.)—drawing
pitcher (n.)—container for liquid;
baseball player

precede (v.)—to come first
proceed (v.)—continue

preposition (n.)—a part of
speech
proposition (n.)—a proposal or
suggestion

pretend (v.)—to make up
portend (v.)—foreshadow

quiet (adj.)—calm
quite (adv.)—very

recent (adj.)—current
resent (v.)—dislike

than (conj.)—used in comparison
then (adv.)—next

through (prep.)—finished, during
thorough (adj.)—methodical,
complete

use (v.)—employ something
used (adj.)—secondhand