



Grammar Help Sheet: Commonly Confused Words

There and Their

The words there and their are pronounced alike. There is a difference in meaning. There usually indicates place as opposed to here. It is an adverb.

Stay there!

I saw him there today.

Another use for there is as an introductory word, or expletive. Then it stands first and throws the subject after the verb. It has no other use in the sentence.

There is Mary now!

There are many apples.

The word their is an adjective and is used to modify some noun. It means “belonging to them.”

They brought their friends.

I visited them in their home.

Then and Than

Do not confuse the two words then and than. They sound somewhat alike but are spelled differently and have very different meanings.

Than is a conjunction and introduces the second part of a comparison.

Then is an adverb and tells when.

Do you like football better than baseball?

He will know then that I shall not come.

I would rather be happy than rich.

After the rain has fallen, then we go outside.

That

The word that has several different uses. When it modifies a noun or a pronoun, it is an adjective.

When it takes the place of a noun (as an object or a subject), it is a pronoun. When it only connects, it is a conjunction.

That man is my father. (adjective)

That is the man. (pronoun)

He saw that it was no use. (conjunction)

Lie and Lay

The various forms of the verbs “lie” and “lay” are misused probably more often than any other verbs in the English language. It really is not at all difficult to keep these forms straight if you first reason out the meaning of the sentence.

You will need to memorize the forms of each of these verbs, or you cannot decide upon the right meaning.

Meaning	Present Tense	Past Tense	Present participle	Past participle
Rest/Recline	Lie	Lay	Lying	Lain
Place/Put	Lay	Laid	Laying	Laid

The two forms above which will confuse you most are the past tense of lie which is spelled lay and the present tense form meaning place or put which is also spelled lay. You will first need to figure out the meaning of the sentence.

Examples of correct uses of the forms of lie:

I lie (rest) on the grass.

Lie down (rest) here a few minutes.

Smoke lies (rests) over the buildings.

I lay (rested) on the couch this morning.

He lay (rested) there yesterday.

Ted has just lain (has rested) in the hammock one hour.

Dad has just lain down (has rested) on the cot.

They will lie (will rest) under the trees for a while.

Have they lain (have rested) here long?

Is she lying (is resting) on account of her headache?

The boy lying (resting) in the boat has caught no fish.

Snow was lying (was resting) here yesterday.

Examples of correct uses of the forms of lay:

He lays (places) the apples in the dish.

She will lay (will place) the papers in the folder.

They laid (placed) the packages in the box.