Word Choice: Homophones

Homophones are words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings. When we speak, homonyms are not an issue; however, when we write, we can distort the meaning of a sentence by using the wrong word.

For example: I would like to lie back on a plain and gaze into the sky.
I would like to lie back on a plane and gaze into the sky.

Plain and plane are homophones. These words sound alike, so in a spoken sentence, the listener would have to rely on the rest of the conversation to determine which word the speaker means. The two sentences written in the above example are identical except for the homophones, yet the change in one word alters the entire meaning of the sentence. By choosing the wrong word from this pair of homophones, the writer might end up with a sentence about reclining on an aircraft when he wants to talk about relaxing in a meadow!

As you can probably imagine, or perhaps have already experienced, choosing the wrong word from a pair of homophones can be risky. It can annoy or distract your reader, and in some cases, it may hinder meaning.

Here is a list of some commonly confused homophones along with their meanings. In the space provided, write a sentence for each word, being sure to use it correctly. This practice will help you become familiar with choosing the right words.

1. their belonging to them

   their

   belong to them

   there at that place; used with verbs is, are, was, were, have, had

   there

   at that place

   they’re contraction for they are

   they’re

   contraction for they are

2. then at that time; next

   then

   at that time

   than used in comparison

   than

   in comparison

3. right correct; opposite of left; something to which one is entitled

   right

   correct

   write what you do in this class

   write

   do in this class

4. **hear**  perceive with the ear

**here**  in this place

5. **hole**  empty spot

**whole**  entire

6. **its**  belonging to it

**it's**  contraction for *it is* or *it has*

7. **knew**  past tense of *know*

**new**  opposite of old

8. **your**  belonging to you

**you're**  contraction of *you are*

9. **threw**  past tense of *throw*

**through**  from one side to the other; finished

10. **too**  also

**to**  toward

**two**  the number 2