



Ten Word Choices That Can Trip Up Any Writer

“Between you and I” sounds polished, but it is a trap. After the preposition *between*, the pronoun should be *me*: **between you and me**. Even experienced writers can stumble over choices like this, and spell-check will not catch them when both words are spelled correctly.

For fun, choose the word that best completes each sentence. The answers are below.

The quiz

1. Between you and (I / me), I believe he is smarter than (he / him).
2. (Its / It's) the (principle / principal) of the matter, regardless of (who's / whose) opinion you value most.
3. He paid us a generous (complement / compliment), then offered funds to (complement / compliment) our work.
4. (Every day / Everyday), we encounter (every day / everyday) problems.
5. I could not abide (his / him) treating my mother that way.
6. If we could (affect / effect) change, what (affect / effect) would it have?
7. While camping in the (desert / dessert), we ate (desert / dessert) around the fire.
8. As I (laid / lay) the tile, I became dizzy and decided to (lie / lay) down.
9. Give the book to (whoever / whomever) wants to read it.
10. Don't let your belt get too (loose / lose), or you might (loose / lose) your trousers.

Answers and explanations

1. Me; he or him. Use *me* after the preposition *between*. In formal writing, *than he* means “than he is.” In everyday English, *than him* is also natural and accepted.

2. It’s; principle; whose. *It’s* means *it is*; *its* shows possession. A *principle* is a rule or belief; a *principal* can be a school leader or the main person or thing. *Whose* shows possession; *who’s* means *who is* or *who has*.

3. Compliment; complement. A *compliment* is praise. Something that *complements* another thing adds to it or makes it more complete.

4. Every day; everyday. *Every day* means “each day.” *Everyday* is an adjective meaning “ordinary” or “common.”

5. His or him. *His* is a formal choice that focuses on the *treating*, or behavior. *Him* is also common and acceptable in everyday English.

6. Effect; effect. As a verb, *effect* means “bring about.” As a noun, an *effect* is a result. The more common verb *affect* means “influence”: “The change affected us.”

7. Desert; dessert. A *desert* is a dry region. *Dessert* is the sweet course after a meal. Remember the two s’s in *dessert* by thinking of “sweet stuff.”

8. Laid; lie. *Lay* takes an object: you *lay tile*, and yesterday you *laid tile*. *Lie* means “recline” and takes no object. After *decided to*, use its base form: *lie down*.

9. Whoever. The word is the subject of *wants* in “whoever wants to read it.” The whole clause is the object of *to*.

10. Loose; lose. A belt that does not fit snugly is *loose*. To *lose* your trousers is to misplace them—or, in this case, have them fall down.

If you got all ten without looking at the answers, well done. If you looked first, you probably **peeked**—not *peaked* or *piqued*.

For a deeper look at pronouns and verb forms, see [Purdue OWL’s guide to pronoun case](#) and its [irregular verb list](#).