Writing and Study Skills Services – Laurier Brantford
Common Word Choice Mistakes – As Outlined in the Brief Penguin Handbook

Then and Than:

Then
- is used to indicate time or when explaining things chronologically.
  - Example: Christine and William went out for dinner and **then** to the movies.

Than
- is used when making comparisons.
- Jon like the band's new album better **than** their last.

Its and It's:

Its
- is the possessive form of 'it', implying ownership.
- The dog liked to chase **its** own tail.

It's
- is a contraction for 'it is' and should not be used in academic writing.
- **It's** getting late; I should probably go home now.

A lot and Allot:

A lot
- is informal and generally shouldn't be used in academic writing. It is used to indicate much of something.
- Nick bought **a lot** of stuff at the mall today.

Allot
- is used to designate.
- Mr. Anderson is going to **allot** us three hours of class time to write the test.

Affect and Effect:

Affect
- is a verb that means to influence.
- Matt's breaking up with Leah did not **affect** her like he thought it would.

Effect
- is a noun, meaning a result.
- The coffee seemed to have no **effect** on Liz's sluggish mood.

Their, There, and They're:

Their
- means belonging to them and is the possessive form of they.

For student use. 2007, 2016

There
- means 'in, at, or to that place'.

They're
- is the contraction for 'they' and 'are'. It shouldn't be used in academic writing.

Example:
- Melissa and Tom have always loved Australia; **they're** going to go **there** on **their** honeymoon.

Assure, Ensure, and Insure:

Assure
- means to promise.
- I **assure** you, he will not be at the party tonight.

To ensure
- is to make certain.
- She wanted to **ensure** that I knew where I was going.

Insure
- means to make certain in legal or financial terms.
- He was paying a considerably larger amount than before to **insure** his new car.

Regardless, Irregardless:

Regardless

- is an adverb used to emphasis a lack of concern.
- **Regardless** of the impact if would have on the economy, he decided to increase the taxes by fourteen percent.

Irregardless
- is incorrect and should not be used.

Anyway, Anyways:

Anyway
- is an adverb that can be used to change the subject or to emphasize.
- Even though he specifically asked her not to, she sped on the way home **anyway**.

Anyways
- is a slang term that is often used in place of anyway, but is not standard English.

To, Too, and Two:

To
- is commonly used as 'in the direction of'.
- Cam drove **to** Montreal early this morning.

Too
- is used to explain when something is more than is desired, allowed, or possible.
- There are **too** many cars of the road.

Two
- is the spelling of the number 2.
- He had **two** children from a previous marriage.

Work Cited:

Faigley, Lester, Roger Graves and Heather Graves. "Glossary of Grammatical Terms
and Usage." *The Brief Penguin Handbook*. Canadian ed. Toronto: Pearson
Longman, 2008. 567-573. Print.