

Using Homophones

Words With Different Meanings & Spellings Pronounced the Same

The prefix *homo-* means “same,” and the word root *-phon-* means “sound.” *Homophones* are pairs or groups of words with the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings. They exist by chance because in English, many sounds can be spelled by more than one letter or letter combination.

Homophones cause problems for English language learners; even educated native speakers confuse them now and then. They are also the basis of many puns (plays on words), jokes, and other language humor. Because they are so common, homophones come up often in everyday speech as well as informal and formal writing. There are probably over 500 pairs or groups of commonly-used homophones, so they are worth special attention in language teaching and learning.

This instruction and creative idea booklet tells how to teach or learn the homophones in fifty-four word pairs that even beginning students of language are likely to know or need to learn. The suggestions can be applied to the six **HOMOPHONE-PAIR CARD DECKS** available with this book or to any materials that you create and produce yourself. Use as many ideas as fit your situation, adapting them to your own education styles and goals. Add your own creativity. Above all, be effective and efficient—and enjoy your own teaching and learning!

TO THE PURCHASER OF THESE HOMOPHONE CARD DECKS AND BOOKLET:

Permission is granted to you to reproduce any or all of the pages in this instruction booklet for classroom or other educational (non-commercial) use. To reproduce the entire book, remove the staples. Copy the pages back to back—right side up!

After collating the pages in the appropriate order and folding them in half vertically, you will have an instructional, practice, and test book for every learner. Staple in the middle.

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Table of Contents

	page
Homophones: Words with Different Meanings & Spellings Pronounced the Same	2
Why Homophones Exist in English	4
How to Teach & Learn Homophones	6
What are HOMOPHONE PAIR CARD DECKS ?	7
Using the HOMOPHONE PAIR CARD DECKS 1-5 in Cooperative Learning Activities	8
Homophone Card Games and Activities:	9
THE GAME OF CONCENTRATION	9
THE GAME OF "SNAPPING UP HOMOPHONES"	10
SENTENCE OR MEANING PAIRS	11
Checking for Understanding of Homophone Uses in Contexts	12
HOMOPHONE QUIZZES 1A-6A: CHOOSING HOMOPHONES FOR THE CONTEXT	13-18
Checking for Understanding of Homophone Meanings (Definitions)	19
HOMOPHONE QUIZZES 1B-6B: MATCHING HOMOPHONES TO THEIR MEANINGS	20-25
Answer Keys for Homophone Quizzes 1A-6A and 2B-6A (from pages 13-18 and 20-25)	26
How to Encourage Active Vocabulary Acquisition: Teaching, Learning, & Reviewing Homophones	27-28
HOMOPHONE PAIRS: Basic, Intermediate, & Advanced Level Homophone Card Deck	29-31

Why Homophones Exist in English

Homophones exist because there are several spellings for most English sounds. Therefore, two, three, or even four different words can have exactly the same pronunciation. This “Sound and Spelling” chart shows some of the spelling patterns that lead to homophones. In the first column is the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbol for each sound. In the second are some of the possible spellings, beginning with the most common. In the third are some homophone examples.

Sound & Spelling Chart		
IPA SYMBOL (SOUND)	LETTERS THAT SPELL THIS SOUND COMMON ← → UNCOMMON	EXAMPLES OF HOMOPHONES THAT CONTAIN THESE SOUNDS WITH DIFFERENT SPELLINGS
tʃ	ch, tch	wh <u>ic</u> h, w <u>it</u> ch
ɛ	e, ea	br <u>e</u> d, br <u>ea</u> d; wh <u>e</u> ther, w <u>ea</u> ther
e ^y	ai, ay, a-e, ei(g)(h), ey	ra <u>in</u> , re <u>in</u> , re <u>ign</u> ; pra <u>y</u> , pre <u>y</u>
ɪ	i, y	J <u>i</u> m, g <u>y</u> m; h <u>i</u> m, h <u>y</u> mn
i ^y	ea, ee, e, ie, ei	be <u>e</u> , br <u>ee</u> ; pe <u>a</u> ce, pi <u>e</u> ce
a ^y	ie, i-e, y(e), igh	di <u>e</u> . d <u>y</u> e; hi, hi <u>gh</u>
dʒ	j, g	J <u>i</u> m, g <u>y</u> m; j <u>e</u> ans, g <u>e</u> nes
k	c, k(e), ck, ch, que	c <u>o</u> rd, c <u>h</u> ord; cl <u>ic</u> k, cli <u>q</u> ue
ks	ks, cks, x	tack <u>s</u> , tax; lock <u>s</u> , lo <u>x</u>
o ^w	o, o-e, oa, ow, ou, oe	ro <u>ad</u> , ro <u>de</u> ; n <u>o</u> , kn <u>ow</u>
ɔ	a, aw, au	ma <u>ll</u> , ma <u>ul</u> ; ba <u>ll</u> , ba <u>wl</u>
ʌ, ə	u, o, o-e, ou	n <u>u</u> n, n <u>o</u> n <u>e</u> ; w <u>o</u> n, <u>o</u> n <u>e</u>
u ^w	oo, u-e, ew, ui, ue, o(e)	to <u>o</u> , to, tw <u>o</u> ; bru <u>i</u> se, br <u>ew</u> s
a ^w	ou, ow	fl <u>ow</u> er, fl <u>ow</u> er
û[r]	e, ea, i, o, u	<u>e</u> arn, <u>u</u> rn; fir, f <u>u</u> r
s	s, sc, c, ce	<u>s</u> ent, <u>c</u> ent, <u>s</u> cent
t	t, (e)d	pas <u>t</u> , pas <u>s</u> ed
ʃ	sh, che	sh <u>ie</u> k, ch <u>i</u> c; cas <u>h</u> , cas <u>h</u> e
z	z(e), s(e)	raze, raise; row <u>s</u> , rose

Here are two more reasons for the many homophone pairs and groups in English:

- There are many “silent letters”—consonant letters that are either part of a vowel sound or that are not pronounced at all.
- In some words consonant letters are “doubled,” while in their homophone matches they are single letters.

In the following chart are some common silent letter and doubling patterns that appear in homophones:

Sound & Spelling Chart		
IPA SYMBOL (SOUND)	LETTERS AND LETTER COMBINATIONS—INCLUDING SILENT LETTERS	EXAMPLES OF HOMOPHONES WITH THESE LETTERS AND LETTER COMBINATIONS
d	<i>d, dd</i>	<u>ad</u> , <u>add</u> ; <u>medal</u> , <u>meddle</u>
-	<i>h (silent h)</i>	air, <u>heir</u> ; our, <u>hour</u>
l, -	<i>l, ll, silent l</i>	chili, chilly; <u>role</u> , <u>roll</u> ; have,
m	<i>m, mb (silent b), mn</i>	<u>clime</u> , <u>climb</u> ; <u>plum</u> , <u>plumb</u> ; <u>him</u> , <u>hymn</u>
n, -	<i>n, nn, gn (silent g); kn</i>	<u>canon</u> , <u>cannon</u> ; <u>in</u> , <u>inn</u> ; <u>new</u> , <u>gnu</u> , <u>knew</u> ; <u>not</u> , <u>knot</u>
r	<i>r, rr, wr (silent w)</i>	<u>bury</u> , <u>berry</u> ; <u>ring</u> , <u>wring</u>
s	<i>s, ss</i>	<u>canvas</u> , <u>canvass</u>
-	<i>sl (silent s)</i>	I'll, <u>isle</u> , <u>aisle</u>
t	<i>t, tt</i>	<u>but</u> , <u>butt</u>

What else is there to know about the spelling of homophones?

- In a few homophone groups, one word has an apostrophe (') and the others do not (Examples: *I'll + aisle* or *isle*; *we'd + weed*).
- The plural forms of some nouns and the third person singular or past tense of some verbs form homophones with other words (Examples: *days + daze*; *sighs + size*; *ducked + duct*; *rode + road*).
- Some words are homophones in some places but not in others. For example, *Barry*, *berry*, and *bury* are pronounced the same only in *some* parts of the United States.
- Homophones are pronounced exactly the same as one another. They are different from *homographs*—words spelled the same but pronounced differently (Examples: *does*, the plural of *doe*, *is a homograph of does*, a form of the verb *do*).

How to Teach & Learn Homophones

Here are some suggested steps to include in homophone lessons that do not require pre-prepared materials:

- Write pairs or groups of homophones on the chalkboard (**EXAMPLES:** *to, too, and two*). Help or have learners read the words aloud. Make clear that the pronunciation of both or all of the words should be exactly the same.
- Tell the meaning of one of the homophones (**EXAMPLES:** *It's a preposition of direction. It means "also." It's the number after one.*) Learners pronounce and tell which word (the first, second, or third) is meant. Tell, or have learners tell, the meaning of the other homophone(s).
- Use one of the homophones in a phrase or sentence (**EXAMPLE:** *Five minus three equals two.*). Learners tell which homophone is meant. Use, or have learners use, the other homophone(s) in phrases or sentences.
- Orally or in written form, give a "homophone quiz," based on meanings or examples. For each pair or group of homophones listed on the board, give a definition of or example containing one of the words. (If the quiz consists of written sentences, provide a blank for each missing word.) Learners write the answers in a numbered list. Then go over the answers by repeating the definitions or examples and having learners read and spell their answers aloud. The same listed words can be used for a second quiz, of course, in which the clues are for the other or another word in each pair or group.
- Using the listed homophones, learners can make vocabulary charts with these headings. If a word can be more than one part of speech, they can choose which one to use. A few examples are supplied.

<i>HOMOPHONE (PART OF SPEECH)</i>	<i>SHORT DEFINITION (MEANING)</i>	<i>EXAMPLE (PHRASE OR SENTENCE THAT INCLUDES THE WORD)</i>
to (preposition)	in the direction of	Let's go <u>to</u> lunch.
too (adverb)	also	I'm hungry and tired <u>too</u> .
two (adjective)	the number between one and three	What is a pair of homophones? <u>Two</u> words with the same pronunciation but different spellings.

What are “Homophone Pair Card Decks?”

Every **BEGINNING-LEVEL HOMOPHONE CARD DECK 1-6** consists of nine matching word pairs. Each of the 18 cards (9 pairs x 2 words) in each deck has a different homophone on it. The first word of each pair appears in white print on a darkly-colored background. The second word is printed in black on a corresponding light-colored background. On the back of each card is a picture illustrating the sentence below, which substitutes a blank line for the intended homophone.



Here are the faces and backs of one pair of cards (two cards) from Deck 1, in which the *first* cards of all the pairs begin with the letters A or B. Two-sided word-and-picture card decks of this kind are versatile and effective in vocabulary teaching and learning.

To make them easier to work with, arrange, and maintain, the card backs of half the cards in the six **BEGINNING-LEVEL HOMOPHONE PAIR CARD DECKS** are numbered consecutively 1-54. The corresponding word and picture cards are lettered A-Z and AA-ZZ.

- **CARD DECK 1:** 9 Homophone Pairs A-B (Words 1-9, A-I)
- **CARD DECK 2:** 9 Homophone Pairs C-H (Words 10-18, L-R)
- **CARD DECK 3:** 9 Homophone Pairs H-O (Words 21-27, S-Z +)
- **CARD DECK 4:** 9 Homophone Pairs P-S (Words 28-36, AA-II)
- **CARD DECK 5:** 9 Homophone Pairs S-T (Words 37-45, JJ-RR)
- **CARD DECK 6:** 9 Homophone Pairs U-Z (Words 46-54, SS-ZZ ++)

Also available from Authors & Editors are five **INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL HOMOPHONE CARD DECKS 1-5**, consisting of 18 matching word pairs each, also arranged in alphabetical order according to the first homophone of all the pairs. These “intermediate homophones” are words more commonly used in everyday speech and writing than those of the **ADVANCED-LEVEL HOMOPHONE PAIR CARD DECKS**, which contains 108 “higher-level” homophone pairs (216 words). An instruction booklet accompanies the decks of each level.