**Homonyms, Homophones, and Homographs**

Homonyms are two or more words that have the same sound or [spelling](https://www.thoughtco.com/spelling-definition-1692125) but differ in [meaning](https://www.thoughtco.com/meaning-semantics-term-1691373). Homophones—which means "same sounds" in Latin—are two or more words, such as *knew* and *new* or *meat* and *meet*, that are [pronounced](https://www.thoughtco.com/pronunciation-english-1691686) the same but differ in meaning, origin, and often spelling. Homographs, meanwhile, are words that have the same spelling but differ in origin, meaning, and sometimes [pronunciation](https://www.thoughtco.com/pronunciation-english-1691686), such as the verb *bear* (to carry or endure) and the noun *bear* (the animal with a shaggy coat).

Words that fall under any of these three categories often confuse readers and writers alike. But they need not perplex you : Understanding the meaning of these three grammatical terms and, especially, being able to recognize them can help clear up any confusion. A list of some of the most common homonyms, homophones, and homographs can help any writer use these words correctly and any reader or listener - recognize them when they occur.

Homonyms, Homophones, and Homographs

Here is a listing of some the most common homonyms, homophones, and homographs. The first column contains homonyms in alphabetical order, while the second and third columns list the corresponding homonym, homophone, or homograph as applicable.

Homonyms Homophones Homographs

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| [**accept**](https://www.thoughtco.com/accept-except-expect-1692640) - take in | **except** - other than |  |
| **ad** - advertisement | **add** - join, combine |  |
| [**advice**](https://www.thoughtco.com/advice-vs-advise-1692641) - guidance | **advise** – recommend |  |
| [**aid**](https://www.thoughtco.com/aid-and-aide-1689293) - assist, assistance | **aide** - one who gives assistance |  |
| **ail** - to suffer poor health | **ale** - a beverage |  |
| [**air**](https://www.thoughtco.com/air-ere-and-heir-1689294) - atmosphere | **ere** – before | **heir** - one who inherits property |
| [**aisle**](https://www.thoughtco.com/aisle-ill-and-isle-1689295) - a passage | **I'll** - contraction of *I will* | **isle** - island |
| [**allusion**](https://www.thoughtco.com/allusion-and-illusion-1692706) - an indirect reference | **illusion** - false appearance |  |
| **altar** - table in a church | **alter** - to change |  |
| **ate** - past tense of *eat* | **eight** - the number 8 |  |
| [**bail**](https://www.thoughtco.com/bail-and-bale-1689311) - to clear water | **bail** - release of a prisoner | **bale** - a large bundle |
| [**band**](https://www.thoughtco.com/band-and-banned-1689312) - a ring, something that binds | **band** - a group | **banned** - prohibited |
| bare - uncovered | **bear** - large animal | **bear** - support, yield |
| **bases** - starting points | **bases** - four stations on a baseball field | **basis** - a basic principle |
| [**beat**](https://www.thoughtco.com/beat-and-beet-1689316) - to strike, overcome | **beat** - exhausted | **beet** - a plant with red roots |
| **blew** - past tense of *blow* | **blue** - the colour |  |
| **bread** - baked food item | **bred** - produced |  |
| [**buy**](https://www.thoughtco.com/buy-by-and-bye-1689328) - purchase | **by** - near, through | **bye** - goodbye |
| [**capital**](https://www.thoughtco.com/capital-and-capitol-1692717) - punishable by death | **capital** - chief city | **capitol** - building where legislature meets |
| **ceiling** - top of a room | **sealing** - setting, fastening |  |
| **cell** - compartment | **sell**- vend |  |
| **cent** - penny coin | **scent** - an odor | **sent** - past tense of send |
| **cereal**- breakfast food | **serial**- sequential |  |
| **chews** - gnaws with teeth | [**choose**](https://www.thoughtco.com/choose-chose-and-chosen-1692718) - to select |  |
| **Chile**- country in South America | **chili**- bean stew | **chilly**- frosty |
| [**chord**](https://www.thoughtco.com/chord-and-cord-1689342) - musical tone | **cord** - rope |  |
| **cite** - quote | **site** - location | **sight**- view |
| **close** - opposite of open | **clothes**- clothing |  |
| [**coarse**](https://www.thoughtco.com/coarse-and-course-differences-1689737) - rough | **course** - path, procedure |  |
| **complement** – enhance; go together | **compliment**- praise |  |
| **conduct** - behavior | **conduct** - to lead |  |
| [**council**](https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-run-for-student-council-1857201) - committee | **counsel**- guidance |  |
| **creak** - squeak | **creek**- stream of water |  |
| **crews** - gangs | **cruise**- ride on a boat |  |
| **days** - plural of day | **daze** - stun |  |
| **dear** - darling | **deer**- woodland animal |  |
| [**desert**](https://www.thoughtco.com/desert-and-dessert-1689549) - to abandon | **desert** - dry land | **dessert** - after-dinner treat |
| **dew** - morning mist | **do**- operate | **due**- payable |
| [**die**](https://www.thoughtco.com/die-and-dye-1689368) - cease to exist | **dye**- color |  |
| [**discreet**](https://www.thoughtco.com/discreet-and-discrete-1689550) - tactful | **discrete** - distinct |  |
| **doe**- female dear | **dough**- uncooked bread |  |
| **dual** - double | **duel**- battle |  |
| **elicit** - draw out | **illicit** - illegal |  |
| **eminent** - distinguished | **imminent** - soon |  |
| **ewe**- female sheep | **you**- second-person personal pronoun |  |
| **eye** - sight organ | **I**-first-person personal pronoun |  |
| **facts**- true things | **fax** - a document transmitted via telephone |  |
| [**fair**](https://www.thoughtco.com/fair-and-fare-1689559) - equal | **fare**- price |  |
| **fairy**- elflike creature with wings | **ferry**- boat |  |
| **faze** - impact | **phase**- stage |  |
| **feat** - achievement | **feet**- plural of foot |  |
| **find -**to discover | **fined**- charged a penalty |  |
| **fir** - type of tree | **fur**- animal hair |  |
| **flea** - small biting insect | **flee -**run |  |
| [**flew**](https://www.thoughtco.com/flew-flu-and-flue-1689393) - did fly | **flu**- illness |  |
| **flour** - powdery, ground up grain | **flower**- blooming plant |  |
| **for** - on behalf of | **fore**- front | **four**- three plus one |
| **forth** - onward | **fourth -**number four |  |
| **foreword -**introduction to a book | **forward**- advancing |  |
| **gene**- a chromosome | **jean**- fabric; pants |  |
| **gorilla** - big ape | **guerrilla -**warrior |  |
| **grease**- fat | **Greece -**country in Europe |  |
| **groan**- moan | **grown -**form of grow |  |
| **hair**- head covering | **hare**- rabbit-like animal |  |
| **hall -**passageway | **haul**- tow |  |
| **halve -**cut in two parts | **have**- possess |  |
| **hay**- animal food | **hey**- interjection to get attention |  |
| **heal**- mend | **heel**- back of foot |  |
| **hear**- to listen | **here**- at this place |  |
| **hi**- hello | **high**- up far |  |
| **hoarse**- croaky | **horse**- riding animal |  |
| **hole**- opening | **whole**- entire |  |
| **holey**- full of holes | **holy**- divine | **wholly**- entirely |
| **hoarse**- rough voice | **horse**- animal |  |
| **hour** - sixty minutes | **our**- belonging to us |  |
| **knead**- massage | **need**- desire |  |
| **knew**- did know | **new**- not old |  |
| **knight**- feudal horseman | **night**- evening |  |
| **knot**- tied rope | **not**- negative |  |
| **know**- have knowledge | **no**- opposite of yes |  |
| **lead**- metal | **led**- was the leader |  |
| **leased**- past tense of lease | **least**- the minimum |  |
| **lessen**- make smaller | **lesson**- class |  |
| **loan**- lend | **lone**- solitary |  |
| **made**- did make | **maid**- servant |  |
| **mail**- postage | **male**- opposite of female |  |
| **marry**- to wed  [**material**](https://www.thoughtco.com/material-and-materiel-1689440) | **merry**- very happy  **materiel** |  |
| **meat**- animal protein | **meet** - encounter |  |
| **mince -**to chop finely | **mints**- type of sweet |  |
| **morning -** a.m. | **mourning**- remember the dead |  |
| **none** - not any | **nun** - woman who takes special vows |  |
| **oar** - boat paddle | **or** - otherwise | **ore** - mineral |
| **oh** - expression of surprise or awe | **owe** - be obligated |  |
| **one** - single | **won** - did win |  |
| **overdo** - do too much | **overdue** - past due date |  |
| **pail** - bucket | **pale** - not bright |  |
| [**pain**](https://www.thoughtco.com/plain-and-plane-1689593) - hurt | **pane** - window glass |  |
| **peace** - calm | **piece** - segment |  |
| **peak** – highest point | **peek** - glance |  |
| **patience**- being willing to wait | **patients**- person treated in a hospital or by a doctor |  |
| **pear**- a type of fruit | **pair**- two (usually matching) |  |
| **plain** - ordinary | **plane** - flight machine plane; flat surface |  |
| **pole** - post | **poll**- survey |  |
| **poor** - not rich | **pour** - make flow |  |
| **pray** - implore God | **prey** - quarry |  |
| **principal** - most important | **principle** - belief |  |
| **rain** – water from sky | **rein** - bridle |  |
| **rap** - tap | **wrap** - drape around |  |
| **read**- past tense of the verb to read | **red**- colour |  |
| **real** - factual | **reel**- roll |  |
| [**right** - correct; not left](https://www.thoughtco.com/right-rite-wright-and-write-1689483) | [**write** - scribble](https://www.thoughtco.com/right-rite-wright-and-write-1689483) |  |
| **ring** - encircle | **wring** - squeeze |  |
| **road**- street | **rode**- past tense of ride |  |
| **role**- function | **roll** - rotate |  |
| **rose** - flower | **rows** - lines |  |
| **sail**- move by wind power | **sale**- bargain price |  |
| **scene** - landscape | **seen** - viewed |  |
| **sea** - ocean segment | **see** - observe with eyes |  |
| **seam** - joining edge | **seem** - appear |  |
| **sew** - connect with thread | **so** - as a result | **sow** - plant |
| **soar** - ascend | **sore** - hurt place |  |
| **sole** - single | **soul** - essence |  |
| **son**- male child | **sun**- the star that lights the solar system |  |
| **some** - a few | **sum** - amount |  |
| **stair**- step | **stare**- to look at steadily |  |
| **steal** - swipe | **steel**- alloy |  |
| **suite**- large room in a hotel | **sweet**- the opposite of sour |  |
| **tail** - animal’s appendage | **tale** - story |  |
| **their**- belonging to them | **there** - at that place | **they’re** - they are |
| **threw**- past tense of throw | **through**- passing from one place to another |  |
| **to** - toward | **too** - also | **two**- the number 2 |
| **toe** - foot appendage | **tow** - pull along |  |
| **vary** - differ | **very** - **wail** - howl |  |
| **wail** - howl | **whale**- huge sea mammal |  |
| **waist** - area below ribs | **waste** - squander |  |
| **wait** – kill time | **weight** - measurable load |  |
| **war**- battle | **wore** - did wear |  |
| **warn** - caution | **worn** - used |  |
| **way** - path | **weigh** - measure mass |  |
| **we** - us | **wee** - tiny |  |
| **weak -** not strong | **week** - seven days |  |
| **wear**- to don attire | **where**- question word |  |
| **weather**- climate | **whether** - if |  |
| **which** - that | **witch**- sorcerer |  |
| **wood**- material coming from trees | **would**- conditional auxiliary |  |
| **your** - belonging to you | **you’re** - you are |  |

Practice Using Homonyms, Homophones, and Homographs

Complete each of the following sentences by filling in the blank with the correct word. You'll find the answers at the end of the exercise. To heighten interest, all of the sentences are quotes from various authors' writings in books and magazine articles published over the years. Feel free to use the previous table to help you if you get stumped.

1. “He simply sat down on the ledge and forgot everything \_\_\_\_\_ [*accept* or *except]* the marvelous mystery.”— Lawrence Sargent Hall
2. "I live in the Oakland Hills in a tiny house on a street so windy you can’t drive more than ten miles per hour. I rented it because the \_\_\_\_\_ [*ad* or *add*] said this : 'Small house in the trees with a garden and a fireplace. Dogs welcome, of course.'"— Pam Houston
3. "Francis wondered what \_\_\_\_\_ [*advice* or *advise*] a psychiatrist would have for him."— John Cheever
4. "The \_\_\_\_\_ [*aid* or *aide*] gets out of the way, picking her skirt out of the rubble of children at her feet."— Rosellen Brown
5. "He seemed to want to recapture the cosseted feeling he'd had when he'd been sick as a child and she would serve him flat ginger \_\_\_\_\_ [*ail* or *ale*], and toast soaked in cream, and play endless card games with him, using his blanket-covered legs as a table."— Alice Elliott Dark
6. "He sat down and leaned forward, pulling the chair's rear legs into the \_\_\_\_\_ [*air, ere,*or *heir*] so that the waitress could get by."— Stanley Elkins
7. "[T]he stewardess was moving down the \_\_\_\_\_ [*aisle, I'll*, or *isle*], like a trained nurse taking temperatures in a hospital ward, to see that they were all properly strapped in for the take-off."— Martha Gellhorn
8. "Mrs. Parmenter laughed at his \_\_\_\_\_ [*allusion* or *illusion*] to their summer at Mrs. Sterrett's, in Rome, and gave him her coat to hold."— Willa Cather
9. "In the long years between, she had fashioned many fine dresses—gowned gay girls for their conquests and robed fair brides for the \_\_\_\_\_ [*altar* or *alter*]."— Mary Lerner
10. "On a Saturday morning soon after he came to live with her, he turned over her garbage while she was at the grocery store and \_\_\_\_\_ [*ate* or *eight*] rancid bacon drippings out of a small Crisco can."— Pam Durban
11. "The barn was bigger than a church, and the fall's fresh hay \_\_\_\_\_ [*bails* or *bales*] were stacked to the roof in the side mows."— John Updike
12. "Her two spare dresses were gone, her comb was gone, her checkered coat was gone, and so was the mauve hair-\_\_\_\_\_ [*band* or *banned*] with a mauve bow that had been her hat."— Vladimir Nabokov
13. "Without the shelter of those trees, there is a great exposure—back yards, clotheslines, woodpiles, patchy sheds and barns and privies—all \_\_\_\_\_ [*bare* or*bear*], exposed, provisional looking."— Alice Munro
14. "This was the time when outfields were larger than they are today and well-hit balls would roll for a long time, giving runners ample time to round the \_\_\_\_\_ [*bases* or *basis*] for a home run."— Deidre Silva and Jackie Koney
15. "The conductor had his knotted signal cord to pull, and the motorman \_\_\_\_\_ [*beat* or *beet*] the foot gong with his mad heel."— Saul Bellow
16. "Nancy held the cup to her mouth and \_\_\_\_\_ [*blew* or *blue*] into the cup."— William Faulkner
17. "A pigeon landed nearby. It hopped on its little red feet and pecked into something that might have been a dirty piece of stale \_\_\_\_\_ [*bread* or *bred*] or dried mud."— Isaac Bashevis Singer
18. "He was wearing a new hat of a pretty biscuit shade, for it never occurred to him to \_\_\_\_\_ [*buy, by*, or *bye*] anything of a practical color; he had put it on for the first time and the rain was spoiling it."— Katherine Anne Porter

Answers to the Exercise

1. except 2. ad 3. advice 4. aide 5. ale 6. air 7. aisle 8. allusion 9. altar 10. ate 11. bales 12. band 13. bare 14. bases 15. beat 16. blew  17. bread 18. buy