

Vocabulary

Pronouncing words

Learning English pronunciation is not always easy, as is shown in this poem:

*Beware of heard, a dreadful word,
That looks like beard and sounds like bird,
And dead: it's said like bed, not bead,
For Goodness' sake don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat,
They rhyme with suite and straight and debt.*

In this lesson we will look at words that have similar and different pronunciations.

Lesson Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- define and give examples of homonyms, homophones and homographs

Curriculum Links

LO 4: Language

- identify and explain the meanings of words and use them correctly in a range of texts
- use dictionaries and a thesaurus for different purposes such as researching meanings and pronunciation

Lesson notes

Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelt differently and have different meanings.

Here are a few examples of homophones.

tale tail
flour flower
which witch

It is a good idea to be aware of homophones as people often mistakenly make the incorrect choice in their writing. It is also important that you are aware that computer spell checks will not fix your mistakes if you use the wrong homophone because the word will still be spelt correctly.

Homonyms are words that are spelt and pronounced in the same way, but have different meanings.

Here are some examples of homonyms.

bear (to carry)
bear (the animal)
cricket (the game)
cricket (the insect)

To work out which version of the word is being used, read the word in the context of a sentence or passage; then it is quite easy to figure out. If you look in a dictionary, you will see that some words have more than one meaning and so they are marked like this:

fair 1 a. just, equitable

fair 2 n. periodical gathering for sale of goods

In this example, the word “fair” has two definitions. Either it means something can be described as fair or just; or it can refer to a fun fair or fete. These entries also show that “fair” can be used as different parts of speech, an adjective and a noun.

Homographs are words that are spelt the same, but are pronounced differently.

Here are some examples:

The clothes are blowing in the wind.

I must wind my watch.

Try not to tear the paper.

Wipe the tear from your eye.

Come here this minute!

New cell phones are minute!

When you are speaking English you will want to be understood easily. This won't happen if you use the incorrect pronunciations of words. Homographs are potentially tricky pairs, so it is a good idea to become aware of them so that you can always make sure you are using the correct version!

TASK

Choose the correct option from these pairs of homophones:

- I eat (serial / cereal) for breakfast.
- When can we (meet / meat)?
- There are (two / too) many people here.