

# Homophones

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Homophones are words that have nothing more in common than that *they sound the same*. Because English speakers have been reluctant to clean up their spelling system, they are chained to a dictionary for life if they wish to spell correctly. Spelling is based more on tradition than on the sound of a word. Homophones are part of this spelling dilemma.

For example, the words **to**, **too**, and **two** have completely different meanings and uses but are pronounced the same way. This was not always true. The number **two**, for instance, was at one time pronounced more like it is spelled. In fact, this ancient Anglo-Saxon word has a long-lost sister in modern German in the form of **zwo** (a variant of **zwei**). **Two's** pronunciation once resembled that of **zwo**. And the German word **zwo** means **two**.

But it is not the pronunciation of words that makes homophones a problem for both native and non-native English speakers. It is spelling. The reader of this book needs to compile a list of homophones and understand how they are spelled in order to use them correctly. This chapter offers practice with a wide variety of homophones to help with this objective.

Let's look at some homophones and their meanings.

HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
aid	assistance, help	Can I be of aid to you, ma'am?
aide	assistant, helper	My aide will show you to my office.
ail	sick	What's ailing you?
ale	beer	Give me a tall, cool ale, please.
air	what one breathes	The air in here is stifling.
heir	one who inherits	The heir to the throne is in France.
bailed	pumped water out	They bailed out the boat, but it finally sank.
baled	bundled hay	We baled hay in the hot sun.
bald	hairless	The bald man is buying a wig.
bawled	cried	He bawled his eyes out over the puppy.
bare	naked	She agreed to pose bare.
bear	ursine animal	A bear smelled what we were cooking on the grill.

(continued)



HOMOPHONE	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
capital	principal, wealth; seat of government	You'll need plenty of start-up capital.
capitol	government building	The US Congress is located on Capitol Hill.
carrot	vegetable	I finally learned to eat peas and carrots.
karat	measure of gold	Is that fourteen-carat gold?
cent	penny	The matches cost fifty cents.
scent	smell, aroma	There was a strong scent of perfume in the room.
sent	past tense of <i>send</i>	Did you get the letter I sent you?
days	plural of <i>day</i>	He spent ten days in jail.
daze	bewilder, stun	I was dazed by the bright light.
dear	beloved	You are so dear to me.
deer	ruminant mammal	Several deer are grazing in that field.
dew	condensation	There was dew on the petals of the flowers.
do	perform	Do your homework on the computer.
due	owed	That bill was due on the first of the month.

EXERCISE

3-1

Choose the word that is the correct completion of each sentence.

1. Be a dear/deer and close the window for me.
2. That is a capital/capitol idea.
3. There was an unusual cent/scent/sent in the air.
4. He was hit by the ball and left in a days/daze.
5. How many karats/carrots did you use in the stew?
6. This is a rather refreshing ail/ale.
7. Martha was the only air/heir to her father's fortune.
8. The final payment is dew/do/due on March 1.
9. The bald/bawled gentleman ordered a toupee.
10. An immature dear/deer is called a fawn.

