

Tricky Words of the Day

Friday, April 24, 2026

Note: Illustrations appear only on meanings where a picture genuinely helps ESL/ELL learners grasp the word. Abstract or context-dependent meanings are intentionally shown as text only.

Homophone · Lesson 1 of 8

Mail / Male

Useful in everyday life and basic biology topics.

Meaning 1

Mail: letters and packages delivered to homes or businesses.

These words share a sound, but one is about communication and the other is about gender.

"The mail arrived early this morning."

"She sent the documents by mail."

Meaning 2

Male: relating to men or boys, or the sex that can make sperm cells.

Same sound as 'mail', but refers to people or animals.

"The male birds have brighter colors."

"They are studying the male and female groups separately."



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/mail-male

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 8

Minute

When the word means 'small', the stress moves to the second syllable.

Meaning 1

A unit of time equal to 60 seconds.

Pronounced (MIN-it). This is the most common usage for daily life.

"Wait for one minute, please."

"There are sixty minutes in an hour."

Meaning 2

Extremely small or tiny.

Pronounced (my-NYOOT). Used in scientific or formal contexts to describe size or detail.

"The dust particles were so minute they were hard to see."

"He explained the plan in minute detail."

Related: tiny; moment; second; microscopic



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Idiom · Lesson 3 of 8

Let the cat out of the bag

This describes an accidental reveal rather than a purposeful betrayal.

Meaning 1

To accidentally reveal a secret.

There is no actual cat. Learners should associate 'the cat' with the secret information that should have stayed hidden in 'the bag'.

"I was trying to keep the party a surprise, but Tim let the cat out of the bag."

"Don't let the cat out of the bag about the surprise promotion!"

Related: reveal; disclose; blab



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eslwordwiz.com/words/let-the-cat-out-of-the-bag

Slang · Lesson 4 of 8

Fire

Often used to describe music, food, fashion, or any experience that is top-quality. You can also use fire emojis to express this.

Meaning 1

An adjective meaning amazing, excellent, cool, or incredible.

This is confusing because 'fire' is a dangerous element that burns. The slang meaning is a metaphor: something is 'so hot' and exciting that it's 'on fire.' It is a very high compliment.

"This new album is absolute fire."

"Your new haircut is fire!"

Related: lit; amazing; awesome; dope



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Contronym · Lesson 5 of 8**Root**

Think of it as 'becoming part of the ground' vs. 'pulling out of the ground'.

Meaning 1

To dig up or pull out by the roots; to remove completely.

Often used with the word 'out' (root out). It means to discover and eliminate.

"The police are trying to root out corruption."

"We need to root out the weeds in the garden."

Meaning 2

To fix firmly in place; to establish deeply.

Derived from the roots of a plant that hold it in the ground.

"Fear rooted him to the spot."

"The tradition is deeply rooted in their culture."

Related: establish; eliminate; foundation; uproot



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Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 8

Henpecked

This term is considered somewhat old-fashioned and can be seen as sexist or offensive because it implies that a woman's influence over her partner is inherently negative or 'nagging.' It originates from the way a dominant hen in a flock will peck at weaker birds to show authority.

Meaning 1

To be continually harassed or nagged by someone (verb form: henpeck).

Learners may be confused by the suffix '-ed'. While it looks like a past-tense verb, it is most commonly used as an adjective to describe a person's character or current state in a relationship.

"He felt henpecked after a weekend of constant chores and complaints."

"No one wants to be henpecked into doing things they don't want to do."

Meaning 2

A man who is constantly criticized, nagged, or controlled by his wife or female partner.

The term is confusing because it uses animal imagery (a hen) to describe human behavior. ESL learners might literally imagine a chicken attacking someone rather than the figurative social dynamic of a dominant partner and a submissive one.

"He is so henpecked that he has to ask permission just to go out for a coffee with his friends."

"The sitcom features a henpecked husband who is constantly hiding his purchases from his wife."

Related: nagged; submissive; browbeaten; whipped; under the thumb



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eslwordwiz.com/words/henpecked

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 8**Match**

A 'matchmaker' is someone who tries to bring two people together for a relationship.

Meaning 1

A sports game or competition.

Noun. Very common in British English for soccer (football).

"Who won the tennis match yesterday?"

"I'm going to watch a football match."

Meaning 2

A thin wooden stick used to start a fire.

A simple household object. Be careful with 'match' and 'lighter'.

"Don't play with matches!"

"He struck a match to light the candle."

Meaning 3

When two things are the same or look good together.

A verb or noun used in fashion or comparison.

"Your socks don't match"

"one is blue and one is black."

Related: Game; Fire; Pair; Equal



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Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 8

Powder my nose

Mostly used by women. It is considered very formal and slightly humorous in modern times.

Meaning 1

A polite way to say you are going to use the restroom.

This is an old-fashioned idiom. Beginners might think someone is actually putting makeup on their nose.

"Excuse me, I need to go powder my nose before dinner starts."

"She stepped away to powder her nose."

Related: restroom; lavatory; freshen up



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