

Tricky Words of the Day

Saturday, April 25, 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

Cell / Sell

Mark multiple meanings of 'cell' at higher levels.

Meaning 1

Cell: a small room, part of a body, or a mobile phone (informal).

These words sound alike, so learners can mix science, phones, and business ideas when listening.

"A prison cell is very small."

"Each cell in the body has a function."

Meaning 2

Sell: to give something to someone for money.

Same sound as 'cell', but used in business, shops, and markets.

"They sell fresh fruit at the market."

"She wants to sell her old car."



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/cell-sell

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 8

Present

Always check if the word is a thing (noun) or an action (verb) to know where to put the stress.

Meaning 1

Existing or happening now.

Adjective form. Usually pronounced like the noun (PRE-zent).

"The present moment is all we have."

"All students are present today."

Meaning 2

A gift given to someone.

Noun form. Stress is on the first syllable (PRE-zent).

"I received a beautiful birthday present."

"We bought a present for our teacher."

Meaning 3

To show, give, or explain something to an audience.

Verb form. Stress is on the second syllable (pre-ZENT).

"I have to present my project to the class tomorrow."

"Let me present the award to the winner."

Related: gift; current; show; give



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Idiom · Lesson 3 of 8

Miss the boat

Similar to 'miss the bus' in some dialects.

Meaning 1

To be too late to take advantage of an opportunity.

Used even if you are nowhere near water. It means the 'window of opportunity' has closed.

"I wanted to buy tickets, but I waited too long and missed the boat."

"If you don't apply for the scholarship now, you'll miss the boat."

Related: too late; passed up; overlooked



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Slang · Lesson 4 of 8

The ick

You 'get the ick' or something 'gives you the ick.' It has become a very popular term in discussions about dating and relationships.

Meaning 1

A sudden feeling of cringe or disgust towards someone you were previously attracted to, often triggered by a small, specific action or behavior.

This is confusing because 'ick' is just a sound of disgust (like 'eww'). As slang, 'The Ick' is a very specific feeling. It's not just general dislike; it's a sudden turn-off that you can't control, and it often ruins the attraction completely.

"I really liked him until I saw him chase a pigeon. It gave me the ick."

"She got the ick when he used a baby voice to talk to his dog."

Related: turn-off; cringe; disgust; grossed out



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Contronym · Lesson 5 of 8**Bill**

A bill is both the paper you use to pay and the paper telling you what you have to pay.

Meaning 1

A statement of money owed for goods or services.

What you receive at a restaurant or from the electric company.

"The waiter brought the bill after we finished dessert."

"I forgot to pay my phone bill this month."

Meaning 2

A piece of paper money (currency).

In American English, a 'bill' is also the money itself (e.g., a ten-dollar bill).

"He pulled a twenty-dollar bill out of his wallet."

"Do you have change for a large bill?"

Meaning 3

A proposed law.

A document presented to a parliament or congress to be voted on.

"The new education bill was passed by the Senate."

"The government introduced a bill to increase taxes."

Related: invoice; currency; law; check



Read the full lesson

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Multi-Meaning · Lesson 6 of 8**Patient**

Think of it this way: to be a 'patient' in a hospital, you often have to be very 'patient' while waiting for the doctor.

Meaning 1

Able to wait for a long time without getting angry.

An adjective describing a personality trait. Very important for classroom and social behavior.

"You need to be patient while waiting in line."

"The teacher is very patient with her students."

Meaning 2

A person who is receiving medical care from a doctor or hospital.

A noun. This is confusing because the spelling and pronunciation are exactly the same as the adjective.

"The doctor is seeing a patient right now."

"The hospital has many patients with the flu."

Related: Calm; Sick; Doctor; Enduring



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/patient

Euphemism · Lesson 7 of 8

Pre-owned

Commonly used in advertising for cars, electronics, and clothing.

Meaning 1

A polite way to say 'used' or 'second-hand'.

Salespeople use this because 'used' can sound like the item is old or broken.

"We just bought a certified pre-owned car from the dealership."

"This shop sells high-quality pre-owned designer bags."

Related: second-hand; used; vintage



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/pre-owned

Figure of Speech · Lesson 8 of 8**The tip of the iceberg**

This is a metaphorical 'figure of speech' based on a 'metaphor.' It is almost always used with the verb 'to be' (e.g., 'This is just the tip...'). It is very common in business and news reporting to describe scandals or financial issues.

Meaning 1

The initial sign of a hidden trend or a massive amount of information yet to be revealed.

In a neutral or positive context, it can refer to the beginning of a discovery. Learners might be confused because the phrase is most often used for negative problems, but it can also describe a vast topic of study where one has only learned the basics.

"We found a few gold coins, but we believe this is just the tip of the iceberg for the shipwreck's treasure."

"Learning basic greetings is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to mastering the Japanese language."

Meaning 2

A small, visible part of a much larger, more complex, or more serious problem or situation.

ESL learners may take this literally and look for actual ice or cold weather. The confusion stems from the scientific fact that 90% of an iceberg is underwater; the idiom uses this physical reality to describe abstract problems where the 'hidden' part is much bigger than what is seen.

"The \$100 fine is just the tip of the iceberg"

"the company is actually facing millions in lawsuits."

Related: underlying; hidden; symptom; indicator; depths



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