

Tricky Words of the Day

Friday, May 1, 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 9

Write / Right

Multiple meanings make this a good example of context rules.

Meaning 1

Write: to form letters or words on paper or a screen.

These two words sound identical, so learners must pay attention to whether the sentence is about writing or about correctness or direction.

"Please write your name on the form."

"He likes to write short stories."

Meaning 2

Right: correct or exact.

Same sound, but talks about something being correct, which can confuse students when listening.

"Your answer is right this time."

"It is right to say thank you."



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eslwordwiz.com/words/write-right

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 9

Contract

Stress placement is key here: Nouns usually have first-syllable stress, and verbs have second-syllable stress.

Meaning 1

A formal, legal written agreement between two or more people or groups.

As a noun, the stress is on the first syllable (CON-tract). It is common in business and legal English.

"The player signed a five-year contract with the team."

"Always read the small print before signing a contract."

Meaning 2

To become smaller, shorter, or tighter.

As a verb, the stress shifts to the second syllable (con-TRACT). This is often used in science or to describe muscles.

"Metals contract when they get cold."

"The heart muscle contracts to pump blood."

Meaning 3

To catch a disease or illness.

This is a formal verb usage, also stressed on the second syllable.

"He contracted a rare virus while traveling abroad."

Related: agreement; shrink; illness; legal



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Idiom · Lesson 3 of 9

The best of both worlds

Used to describe an ideal or lucky compromise.

Meaning 1

A situation where you can enjoy the advantages of two very different things at the same time.

Learners may think this refers to planets. It just means having two benefits that don't usually go together.

"Working from home gives me the best of both worlds: a good salary and time with my kids."

"She lives in the countryside but works in the city, so she has the best of both worlds."

Related: win-win; ideal; perfect balance



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eslwordwiz.com/words/the-best-of-both-worlds

Slang · Lesson 4 of 9

Vibe

Very versatile; can be used for positive ('good vibes') or negative ('bad vibes') situations.

Meaning 1

The mood or atmosphere of a place, person, or situation.

Comes from 'vibration.' It is used as a noun to describe a feeling you get from your surroundings.

"This coffee shop has a really chill vibe."

"I didn't really like him"

Meaning 2

To enjoy a situation or to get along well with someone.

Used as a verb (vibing) to describe being in a relaxed state or connecting with someone.

"We were just vibing to the music all night."

"I'm really vibing with this new project at work."

Related: mood; atmosphere; energy



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Contronym · Lesson 5 of 9**Model**

Can be a noun, verb ('to model behavior'), or adjective ('a model citizen').

Meaning 1

An original or perfect example to be copied.

This is the 'standard' or the 'best version'.

"She is a model student who always finishes her work early."

"The city's recycling program is a model for the rest of the country."

Meaning 2

A small-scale copy or representation of something.

This is the 'copy' rather than the 'original'. It's usually smaller and simpler.

"The architect showed us a 3D model of the new building."

"I used to build model airplanes when I was a kid."

Related: example; replica; prototype; standard



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Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 9**Rome wasn't built in a day**

This is a very common proverb used to provide encouragement. It is often used when someone is feeling discouraged by slow progress. In casual conversation, people sometimes shorten it to just 'Rome wasn't built in a day' to imply 'be patient.'

Meaning 1

A reminder that one should not expect immediate results when starting a complex project.

The confusion often lies in the scale of the comparison. Learners might wonder why a small task is being compared to the construction of an entire ancient city.

"You've only been practicing the piano for a week"

"Rome wasn't built in a day!"

Meaning 2

Important work or great achievements take a long time and a lot of effort to complete.

ESL learners may take this literally and think the speaker is discussing Italian history or architecture. They might not realize it is a metaphorical way to encourage patience during a difficult process.

"I know you're frustrated that you aren't fluent in English yet, but remember, Rome wasn't built in a day."

"The manager told the new team not to worry about the slow progress on the software, saying that Rome wasn't built in a day."

Related: patience; persistence; gradual progress; great things take time; step by step



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/rome-wasn-t-built-in-a-day

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 9**Suit**

Don't confuse with 'sweet' (taste) or 'suite' (hotel room).

Meaning 1

A set of clothes made of the same fabric, usually a jacket and trousers/skirt.

Professional attire. Note the pronunciation is different from 'suite' (room).

"He wore a dark blue suit to the job interview."

"I need to get my suit cleaned before the wedding."

Meaning 2

To be convenient or acceptable for someone.

A common verb used when making plans or checking availability.

"Does 3:00 PM suit you for our meeting?"

"That color really suits you"

Meaning 3

One of the four sets in a deck of playing cards (hearts, diamonds, etc.).

Specific terminology used in games.

"Spades is my favorite suit in this game."

"You must play a card of the same suit if you have one."

Related: outfit; fit; appropriate; cards



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Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 9

Creative accounting

This is a sarcastic or polite way to describe cooking the books or cheating.

Meaning 1

Using legal but technically questionable methods to make a company's financial situation look better than it is.

The word 'creative' is usually positive, but here it implies a mild form of dishonesty or 'hiding' the truth about money.

"The firm was accused of creative accounting to hide its mounting debts."

"The investors were wary of the startup's creative accounting practices."

Related: cooking the books; loophole



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Phrasal Verb · Lesson 9 of 9

Give up

As a phrasal verb, 'give up' is inseparable when it means to stop trying (intransitive), but it can be followed by an object when it means to quit a habit. Learners should be careful not to confuse 'give up' with 'give in,' which specifically means to yield to someone else's demands.

Meaning 1

To stop trying to do something because it is too difficult or you are tired.

ESL learners often confuse this with 'give' (to hand something to someone). The addition of 'up' completely changes the verb into a phrasal verb meaning surrender or cessation of effort.

"The math problem was too hard, so I decided to give up."

"Don't give up on your dreams just because things are difficult right now."

Meaning 2

To stop a habit or a regular activity, often for health or personal reasons.

In this context, 'give up' is used as a synonym for 'quit.' Learners may struggle to know whether to use a noun or a gerund (-ing) after the phrase.

"My doctor told me I need to give up smoking immediately."

"She gave up sweets for a month to improve her health."

Meaning 3

To part with something or sacrifice something, often for the benefit of someone else.

This meaning is confusing because it involves 'giving' something away, but it implies a sense of loss or sacrifice rather than a simple gift.

"He had to give up his seat on the bus for the elderly woman."

"They gave up their weekends to volunteer at the animal shelter."

Related: quit; surrender; abandon; sacrifice; cease



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