

Tricky Words of the Day

Saturday, May 2, 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

Sole / Soul

Use with care in beginner materials; clearer for intermediate learners.

Meaning 1

Sole: the bottom part of a shoe or foot; also can mean 'only'.

These words sound the same, but one is about the body or shoes and the other is about inner life or religion.

"The sole of my shoe is worn out."

"He was the sole winner of the prize."

Meaning 2

Soul: the spiritual or inner part of a person in many beliefs.

Same sound, but refers to feelings, music, or religion.

"The music touched her soul."

"Some people believe the soul lives on after death."



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/sole-soul

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 9

Refuse

Learners often mix this up with 'garbage' or 'trash' because 'refuse' (noun) is quite formal.

Meaning 1

To say that you will not do or accept something.

The verb ends with a 'z' sound and the stress is on the second syllable.

"I politely refuse to answer that personal question."

"The bank might refuse your application for a loan."

Meaning 2

Waste or garbage; things that have been thrown away.

The noun sounds like 'REF-yooss' with an 's' sound at the end. It is a formal word for trash.

"The city collectors pick up household refuse every Tuesday."

"Please do not leave refuse in the park."

Related: decline; reject; rubbish; waste



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/refuse

Idiom · Lesson 3 of 9

See eye to eye

Often used in the negative ('we don't see eye to eye') to be polite about a disagreement.

Meaning 1

To agree fully with someone; to have the same opinion.

Learners might think this means looking at someone. It actually means your 'visions' or thoughts are at the same level.

"My boss and I don't always see eye to eye on marketing strategies."

"I'm glad we finally see eye to eye on where to go for vacation."

Related: agree; concur; harmonize



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/see-eye-to-eye

Slang · Lesson 4 of 9

Glow up

Often used for puberty transformations or post-breakup improvements.

Meaning 1

A major transformation or improvement in someone's appearance, confidence, or style.

Think of it as the slang version of 'growing up.' It emphasizes an aesthetic or personal improvement.

"Did you see her high school photo? She had a total glow up!"

"I'm working out every day because I want a summer glow up."

Related: transformation; makeover; improve



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/glow-up

Contronym · Lesson 5 of 9

Off

When food is 'off' (UK English), it means it has gone bad/rotten.

Meaning 1

To stop or deactivate.

Commonly used for electronics or lights.

"Please turn the TV off before you go to bed."

"The power went off during the storm."

Meaning 2

To start or activate (usually an alarm or sound).

Specifically used with 'go off'. It's confusing because 'off' here marks the start of a noise.

"My alarm went off at 6:00 AM."

"The car alarm is going off in the street."

Related: deactivate; trigger; expired; shutdown



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/off

Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 9

Spitting image

The phrase likely evolved from 'spirit and image.' Some people mistakenly say 'split image' because it sounds similar and implies a person has been 'split' in two, but 'spitting image' is the standard accepted version. It is almost always used with the definite article 'the'.

Meaning 1

A perfect or exact likeness of something else.

The phrase is often used as a fixed idiom. Learners might hear 'spit and image' in older literature or 'split image' in casual conversation, leading to confusion about the correct preposition or verb form to use.

"The new building is the spitting image of the one that was destroyed in the fire."

"This digital recreation is the spitting image of the original painting."

Meaning 2

A person who looks exactly like another person, especially a relative.

ESL learners may be confused because the word 'spitting' usually refers to saliva. They might try to find a literal connection between saliva and physical appearance, which does not exist in modern usage.

"He is the spitting image of his grandfather when he was young."

"With that hat on, you are the spitting image of a famous movie star."

Related: doppelgänger; dead ringer; look-alike; carbon copy; chip off the old block



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/spitting-image

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 9**Spring**

Also a verb meaning to jump suddenly ('to spring into action').

Meaning 1

A place where water comes naturally from the ground.

Often used when talking about bottled 'spring water.'

"We drank fresh water from a mountain spring."

"This town is famous for its hot springs."

Meaning 2

The season between winter and summer.

Associated with growth and flowers.

"Flowers bloom in the spring."

"I love the cool weather in spring."

Meaning 3

A twisted piece of metal that returns to its shape after being pushed.

Found in mattresses, pens, and car suspensions.

"The mattress is old"

"I can feel the springs."

Related: coil; fountain; season



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/spring

Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 9

To lose one's lunch

Usually used in informal or slightly humorous contexts.

Meaning 1

A polite or humorous way to say someone vomited or threw up.

Learners might think someone literally misplaced their bag of food. It describes the physical action of getting sick indirectly.

"The roller coaster made me feel like I was going to lose my lunch."

"He almost lost his lunch when he saw the disgusting mess."

Meaning 2

To vomit or throw up.

ESL learners may interpret this literally as misplacing a physical meal or forgetting where they left their food. In reality, it is a polite way to describe getting sick to one's stomach.

"The roller coaster was so intense that I almost lost my lunch."

"He felt so seasick on the boat that he ended up losing his lunch over the side."

Meaning 3

To lose one's composure or become extremely upset (less common).

Sometimes used figuratively to describe a sudden loss of control or a strong emotional reaction, which can be confused with the physical act of being sick.

"When he saw the repair bill, he nearly lost his lunch out of pure frustration."

Related: get sick; toss your cookies



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/to-lose-one-s-lunch

Phrasal Verb · Lesson 9 of 9

Get along

Often used with 'with'.

Meaning 1

To manage or survive in a situation, often with limited resources.

This usage is confusing because it shifts from social relationships to personal survival or capability. It is often used when discussing money or work.

"We don't have much money, but we get along."

"How are you getting along with your new job responsibilities?"

Meaning 2

To have a friendly or harmonious relationship with someone.

ESL learners often try to translate 'get' and 'along' literally, which suggests physical movement. They may struggle to understand how these words combine to describe social harmony.

"I really get along with my new roommate"

"we never argue."

Meaning 3

To progress; to advance in an activity

Less common meaning.

"How are you getting along with your new job?"

Meaning 4

To leave a place or depart.

This is a more informal, slightly dated usage. Learners may confuse it with 'go' or 'leave' because 'along' implies a path or direction.

"It's getting late, I should be getting along now."

"The police officer told the crowd to get along."

Related: get on; be friendly



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