

Tricky Words of the Day

Sunday, May 3, 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

Seen / Scene

Helpful in entertainment and storytelling contexts.

Meaning 1

Seen: past participle of 'see', used with 'have' or 'had'.

These words sound alike, but one is a verb form and the other is a noun.

"I have seen this film before."

"She had never seen snow until last year."

Meaning 2

Scene: a part of a play, movie, or event.

Same sound as 'seen', but refers to a place or moment in a story or real life.

"The last scene of the movie was very emotional."

"They filmed the scene in a small village."



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/seen-scene

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 8

Produce

The noun form is uncountable; we don't say 'produces'.

Meaning 1

To make, manufacture, or create something.

Verb stress is on the second syllable. This is the most common usage.

"The factory produces 500 cars every day."

"Our team needs to produce a report by Friday."

Meaning 2

Fresh fruits and vegetables that have been grown for sale.

Noun stress is on the first syllable. You will see this sign in grocery stores.

"The local market sells organic produce."

"Put the fresh produce in the bottom drawer of the fridge."

Related: create; manufacture; vegetables; crops



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Idiom · Lesson 3 of 8

Jump on the bandwagon

Sometimes used slightly negatively to imply someone is only doing something because it's popular, not because they truly care.

Meaning 1

To join an activity or support a cause that has become very popular.

A 'bandwagon' was a wagon for a band in a parade. If people liked the music, they followed it. Now it means following a trend.

"Everyone is starting to use that new app, so I decided to jump on the bandwagon too."

"Many companies are jumping on the bandwagon of eco-friendly packaging."

Related: trend; follow; fad



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/jump-on-the-bandwagon

Slang · Lesson 4 of 8**Living for**

Very common in fashion and entertainment commentary.

Meaning 1

To love or admire something intensely.

Not about survival. It means the person finds something so good that it gives them life/energy.

"I am living for your new outfit! You look amazing."

"Everyone is living for this new Netflix documentary."

Related: obsessed; loving; adoring



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Contranym · Lesson 5 of 8

Aught

Aught is a classic example of a 'rebracketing' error in English. It is mostly found in older literature or when naming years in the early 1900s. The most important thing for ESL learners is to distinguish it from 'ought' (duty/advice) and to recognize that in modern contexts, it almost always refers to the number zero.

Meaning 1

Nothing; zero (a cipher).

This is the 'contranym' aspect. Due to a historical linguistic error (mishearing 'a naught' as 'an aught'), the word is frequently used to mean zero, especially when referring to years or calibers.

"The year was nineteen-aught-four (1904)."

"He used a double-aught (.00) buckshot for the hunt."

Meaning 2

Should or must (as a misspelling of 'ought').

While technically a misspelling, many English speakers mistakenly write 'aught' when they mean the modal verb 'ought.' This creates confusion between a noun meaning 'anything/nothing' and a verb meaning 'should.'

"You aught to be careful (Incorrect spelling of 'ought')."

"He aught to have told us the truth."

Meaning 3

Anything or all; whatever.

In archaic or literary contexts, 'aught' means 'anything at all.' ESL learners may confuse it with 'ought' (should) because they sound identical, or fail to realize it represents a positive quantity.

"For aught I know, she has already left the building."

"If you have aught to say, speak now or forever hold your peace."

Related: naught; nil; ought; zero; cipher



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/aught

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

Also a noun for a weighing scale in science labs.

Meaning 1

The amount of money in a bank account.

This is the most common meaning in business and daily life.

"What is the remaining balance on my credit card?"

"I need to check my account balance."

Meaning 2

The ability to stay upright and not fall over.

A physical skill.

"You need good balance to ride a bike."

"The gymnast lost her balance and fell."

Meaning 3

A state where different things are equal or in the right amounts.

Used for 'work-life balance' or chemical equations.

"It is hard to find a balance between work and family."

"A healthy diet requires a balance of different nutrients."

Related: stability; remainder; equilibrium



Read the full lesson

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Euphemism · Lesson 7 of 8

Restructuring

This is classic 'corporate speak.'

Meaning 1

Changing the way a company is organized, often resulting in people losing their jobs.

Companies use this formal word to avoid the negative reaction associated with 'firing' or 'layoffs.'

"Due to the merger, the company is undergoing a major restructuring."

"My position was eliminated during the corporate restructuring."

Related: downsizing; reorganization



Read the full lesson

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Phrasal Verb · Lesson 8 of 8

Run into

Pair with bumped into for variety. Past tense is ran into (irregular). Watch for L1 transfer: many learners say "I met with my friend by accident" - model "I ran into my friend" as the natural choice.

Meaning 1

To meet someone unexpectedly.

Two everyday meanings: (a) meet someone by chance, (b) collide with or hit something. Context disambiguates - with a person, learners usually mean the chance-encounter sense.

"I ran into my old teacher at the grocery store yesterday."

"Guess who I ran into on the bus this morning?"

Meaning 2

To encounter a problem or difficulty.

This meaning is about obstacles.

"We ran into some technical issues during the presentation."

Related: bump into; encounter



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