

Tricky Words of the Day

Monday, May 4, 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

Blew / Blue

Good for simple weather and clothing examples.

Meaning 1

Blew: past tense of 'blow', to move air.

These words share a sound, but one describes wind and the other describes color.

"The wind blew all night."

"She blew on the soup to cool it."

Meaning 2

Blue: a color between green and purple.

Same sound as 'blew', but relates to color in objects, clothes, and nature.

"The sky is blue today."

"He bought a blue jacket."



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/blew-blue

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 9

Well

Though pronounced the same, the meanings are vastly different. Context usually makes it clear.

Meaning 1

In a good or satisfactory way; in good health.

Used as an adverb or adjective. It's the opposite of 'sick' or 'badly'.

"I hope you are feeling well today."

"She plays the piano very well."

Meaning 2

A deep hole in the ground from which people get water, oil, or gas.

A noun. In children's stories, you often see characters wishing at a well.

"The farmer drew water from the well."

"They threw a coin into the wishing well."

Meaning 3

An expression used to pause or show surprise.

Used as an interjection at the start of a sentence.

"Well, I didn't expect to see you here!"

"Well, let me think about it."

Related: healthy; spring; hole; fine



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/well

Idiom · Lesson 3 of 9

Hit the hay / Hit the sack

Very common informal way to say 'goodnight' or 'I'm going to bed.'

Meaning 1

To go to sleep.

In the past, mattresses were often bags (sacks) filled with hay. 'Hitting' them meant laying down to sleep. It does not mean to strike something with your hand.

"I'm exhausted after that long flight"

"I'm going to hit the hay."

Related: turn in; go to bed; sleep



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/hit-the-hay-hit-the-sack

Slang · Lesson 4 of 9

Slapping

Mostly used for things that affect the senses (taste and hearing).

Meaning 1

Used to describe something (usually music or food) that is impressively good or high quality.

Normally means hitting with a hand. In slang, it means the quality 'hits' you in a good way.

"This new beat is honestly slapping."

"These tacos are slapping! Where did you get them?"

Related: excellent; great; amazing



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/slapping

Contronym · Lesson 5 of 9

Dike

Learners should be aware that 'dike' (also spelled 'dyke') is a contronym because it can mean a raised bank or a sunken ditch. Additionally, be very cautious: in some regions, the word is used as a derogatory slang term for a lesbian; while some in the LGBTQ+ community have reclaimed it, it remains offensive when used by others.

Meaning 1

A barrier or embankment built to prevent flooding from the sea or a river.

In this context, a dike is an additive structure (a wall or mound) used to keep water out. ESL learners may confuse it with a 'dam,' which usually holds water back to create a reservoir rather than just preventing a flood.

"The engineers reinforced the dike to protect the coastal village from the rising tide."

"The Netherlands is famous for its extensive system of dikes that keep the land dry."

Meaning 2

A ditch or long, narrow excavation dug into the earth to channel water away.

This is the 'contronym' aspect: while the first meaning is a raised wall to block water, this meaning is a hollowed-out trench to carry water. The same word describes both a 'mound' and a 'hole'.

"The farmers dug a dike along the edge of the field to improve soil drainage."

"Rainwater collected in the dike and flowed toward the local stream."

Meaning 3

A long, thick wall of igneous rock that cuts across layers of surrounding rock.

In geology, this refers to a specific natural formation. It can be confusing because it describes a natural vertical intrusion rather than a man-made structure for water management.

"The hikers observed a volcanic dike cutting vertically through the sedimentary cliff face."

"Geologists studied the composition of the magmatic dike to date the region's volcanic activity."

Related: levee; embankment; trench; ditch; barrier; dam



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/dike

Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 9**The pen is mightier than the sword**

This phrase is a famous proverb coined by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839. It is often used in political discussions or when advocating for peaceful protest and journalism over violent conflict. Note that 'mightier' is the comparative form of 'mighty' (powerful).

Meaning 1

Communication and intellectual influence have a more lasting impact on history than military conquest.

Learners might be confused by the word 'mightier,' which usually refers to physical strength. In this context, it refers to 'power' in terms of influence, law-making, and social change rather than muscle or weaponry.

"Dictators often fear poets and writers because they know the pen is mightier than the sword."

"Through his letters, the activist changed the minds of millions, demonstrating that the pen is mightier than the sword."

Meaning 2

Writing and ideas are more effective tools for change than physical force or violence.

ESL learners may take this literally and imagine a physical pen being stronger or heavier than a metal sword. The confusion lies in the metonymy: the 'pen' represents the written word/diplomacy, and the 'sword' represents military power/war.

"The journalist hoped her article would expose the corruption, proving that the pen is mightier than the sword."

"Instead of fighting, the two nations signed a treaty, showing that the pen is mightier than the sword."

Related: metonymy; diplomacy; propaganda; influence; advocacy; proverb



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/the-pen-is-mightier-than-the-sword

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

In bars, 'draft beer' (or draught) means beer served from a large container (keg) rather than a bottle.

Meaning 1

A first or preliminary version of a piece of writing.

It's not the final version. You have to edit it later.

"I need to finish the first draft of my essay tonight."

"This is just a rough draft"

Meaning 2

A cold current of air blowing through a room.

Spelled 'draught' in British English. It makes you feel chilly indoors.

"Can you close the window? There's a terrible draft."

"The house is old and full of drafts."

Meaning 3

To recruit someone for military service or a sports team.

Compulsory service in the army is 'the draft'. In sports, it's how teams pick new players.

"He was drafted into the army when he was 18."

"The young player was the first pick in the NBA draft."

Related: sketch; breeze; recruit; version



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/draft

Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 9**The facilities**

Very helpful for travelers who want to sound formal and polite.

Meaning 1

A polite, indirect name for a public restroom or toilet.

In English, 'facility' usually means a building or equipment. Using the plural with 'the' specifically refers to the bathroom in a polite way.

"Could you tell me where I can find the facilities?"

"I'd like to use the facilities before we start the tour."

Related: restroom; lavatory



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/the-facilities

Phrasal Verb · Lesson 9 of 9

Take off

This is a highly versatile phrasal verb. A key point of confusion is that 'take off' can be separable when referring to clothing (take your hat off), but it is inseparable when referring to an airplane or sudden success (the plane took off).

Meaning 1

To remove clothing or something attached.

Common literal meaning.

"Take off your shoes before entering the house."

Meaning 2

To become suddenly successful or popular; or to leave a place suddenly.

This is a figurative use. It uses the imagery of a plane rising quickly to describe a business or an idea gaining momentum. It can also informally mean to depart quickly ('I'm going to take off now').

"Her career really started to take off after she won the award."

"The new social media app took off overnight."

Meaning 3

To leave the ground and begin to fly (for an aircraft or bird).

Learners often confuse this with 'start' or 'leave.' While it means leaving, it specifically refers to the vertical transition from ground to air, which is a specialized use of the verb 'take.'

"The plane is scheduled to take off at 8:00 PM."

"I felt a bit nervous as the helicopter began to take off."

Related: depart; remove; strip; flourish; launch



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/take-off



Scan to visit

eslwordwiz.com

© 2026 ESL Word Wiz. This PDF may be shared freely as long as ESL Word Wiz branding and all links remain intact.

ESLWordWiz.com