

Tricky Words of the Day

Thursday, May 7, 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

Sew / So

Good for showing function words versus action verbs in context.

Meaning 1

Sew: to join pieces of cloth together using a needle and thread.

These words share a sound, but one is a practical skill and the other is a common linking word.

"She learned to sew her own clothes."

"He will sew a button on the shirt."

Meaning 2

So: used to introduce a result, reason, or degree.

Same sound as 'sew', but used in many everyday sentences to connect ideas.

"It was raining, so we stayed inside."

"The story was so interesting that I read it twice."



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/sew-so

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 8

House

Pay attention to the ending sound. If you are talking about the building (noun), use a soft 's' sound. If you are talking about the action of providing shelter (verb), use a vibrating 'z' sound.

Meaning 1

A building where people live.

This is the most common noun form. It refers to the physical structure of a home.

"They are building a new house on our street."

"Would you like to come over to my house for dinner?"

Meaning 2

To provide someone with a place to live or to store something.

This is the verb form. It is confusing for ESL learners because the pronunciation changes: the 's' sounds like a 'z'.

"The museum houses a collection of ancient artifacts."

"The government is working to house the displaced families."

Related: home; housing; household; shelter; residence



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Idiom · Lesson 3 of 8

Cold feet

Usually used for big life events like weddings or major business deals.

Meaning 1

To suddenly become too nervous or scared to do something you had planned.

It doesn't mean your temperature is low. It describes the feeling of wanting to run away from a big commitment.

"He was going to go bungee jumping, but he got cold feet at the last minute."

"The bride got cold feet the night before the wedding."

Related: nervous; hesitant; anxious; fearful



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Slang · Lesson 4 of 8

Gamer / Gaming

Often used ironically or humorously by Gen Z and Alpha.

Meaning 1

To perform very well or put in maximum effort to succeed at a difficult task.

While usually referring to video games, this slang uses the noun as a verb or adjective to describe someone 'playing' a real-life situation perfectly.

"He stayed up all night to finish the project"

"he's really gaming right now."

Related: Locked in; Try-hard; Grinding



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Contronym · Lesson 5 of 8

Splice

The primary confusion stems from 'splice' being a contronym: it can mean to join (connect) or to cleave (separate). Additionally, ESL learners often confuse 'splice' with 'slice' (to cut) because they sound very similar, even though 'splicing' often involves the opposite of 'slicing'. Always look at the context-if it's about ropes or wires, it means joining; if it's about genetics, it often involves cutting/removing.

Meaning 1

To divide or separate something into parts (specifically in genetics or linguistics).

This is the 'opposite' meaning that makes it a contronym. In biology, 'splicing' often refers to the process of removing or cutting out segments (like introns from RNA). This creates confusion because the same word describes both the act of joining and the act of cutting away.

"Gene splicing allows scientists to remove a specific segment of DNA from a chain."

"The researcher explained how the cell splices out unnecessary genetic information during transcription."

Meaning 2

To join or connect two things together to form a single unit.

In technical contexts like film editing, electrical work, or sailing, this means merging two ends (like wires or ropes) so they become one continuous piece. ESL learners may find it confusing because it sounds like 'slice,' which means to cut apart.

"The technician had to splice the broken fiber optic cables to restore the internet connection."

"In the old days, film editors would physically splice pieces of film together to create a scene."

Meaning 3

A marriage or the act of joining two people together.

This is a metaphorical use of the 'joining' definition. The phrase 'to get spliced' is an old-fashioned or nautical slang term for getting married, which can be confusing for learners who only know the technical or biological definitions.

"After dating for five years, they finally decided to get spliced last weekend."

"He's no longer a bachelor"

Related: merge; join; sever; cleave; slice; unite; hybridize



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/splice

Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 8**Beggars can't be choosers**

This is a common proverb. It is often used as a mild rebuke when someone is being ungrateful. Note that 'can't' is the standard contraction used, but 'cannot' is also acceptable in formal writing.

Meaning 1

When you are in a position of need or are receiving something for free, you should not complain about the quality or specify exactly what you want.

ESL learners may take this literally and think it only applies to homeless people (beggars). In reality, it is used in any situation where someone is receiving a favor or a gift and tries to be picky or demanding.

"I wanted a blue car, but my uncle gave me his old red one for free"

"I guess beggars can't be choosers."

Meaning 2

Accepting an unsatisfactory option because it is the only one available.

The confusion lies in the word 'choosers.' Learners might think they still have a choice, but the phrase implies that the lack of alternatives removes the right to be selective.

"The job pays very little, but I've been unemployed for six months and beggars can't be choosers."

"It's not the best pizza in town, but it's the only place open at midnight, so beggars can't be choosers."

Related: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth; Take it or leave it; Make do; Grateful; Necessity



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/beggars-can-t-be-choosers

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 8**Pool**

Can also be used as a verb: 'to pool resources' (to group money or effort together).

Meaning 1

An artificial area of water for swimming.

Short for 'swimming pool.' The most common usage.

"The hotel has an outdoor pool."

"Do you want to go for a swim in the pool?"

Meaning 2

A game played on a table with 16 balls and a stick (cue).

Often confused with 'billiards' or 'snooker.' Common in bars and social clubs.

"Let's play a game of pool at the pub."

"He's very good at aiming the balls when he plays pool."

Meaning 3

A small amount of liquid lying on a surface.

Used for non-artificial liquids like rain, blood, or spilled milk.

"There was a pool of oil under the car."

"After the rain, there were pools of water on the sidewalk."

Related: swim; billiards; puddle; reservoir



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Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 8

Not exactly a rocket scientist

Be careful using this; it can still be considered rude depending on the tone.

Meaning 1

An indirect, often sarcastic way to say someone is not very smart or is doing something simple.

English speakers use 'rocket science' as a benchmark for high intelligence. This 'litotes' (denying the opposite) acts as a soft insult.

"Look, he's a nice guy, but he's not exactly a rocket scientist."

"You just have to push the red button"

Related: not the sharpest tool in the shed; dim



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