

Tricky Words of the Day

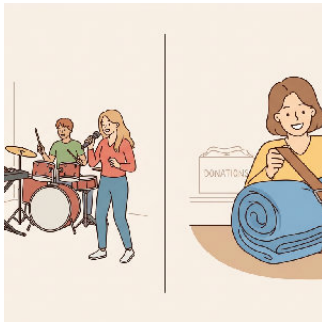
Tuesday, June 2, 2026

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 8

Band / Banned

Since these words are homophones, you must rely on the context of the sentence to distinguish them. 'Band' is usually a noun (a thing or group), while 'banned' is a verb or adjective indicating that something is illegal or forbidden. A helpful tip: 'Banned' has two 'n's and ends in '-ed,' which is a common marker for past tense verbs.



Meaning 1

band (noun): a group of musicians who play music together, or a thin strip of material used to hold things together.

ESL learners may find this confusing because 'band' can refer to a social group (like a rock band) or a physical object (like a rubber band). It is a very common noun with multiple physical and social applications.

"My favorite rock band is going on tour next summer."

"She used a small rubber band to tie her hair back."



Meaning 2

banned (verb/adjective): the past tense of 'ban,' meaning to officially or legally prohibit something.

This is confusing because it sounds identical to 'band' but has a completely different grammatical function and meaning. It describes something that is forbidden or not allowed.

"The athlete was banned from the competition for cheating."

"Smoking is banned inside all public buildings in this city."



Meaning 3

band (verb): to join together in a group for a specific purpose.

This usage is often seen in the phrasal verb 'band together.' It can be confused with 'banned' because both can function as verbs in the past tense ('banded' vs 'banned'), though their meanings are opposites (joining vs excluding).

"The neighbors decided to band together to clean up the local park."

"Small businesses often band together to compete with larger corporations."

Related: prohibited; forbidden; orchestra; ensemble; strap; ring



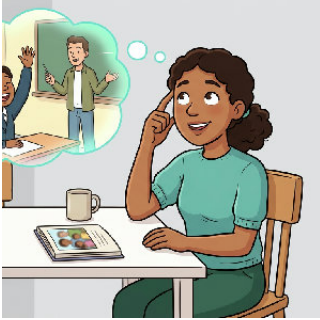
Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/band-banned

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 8

Recall

Pay attention to the word stress. As a verb (to remember), the stress is on 'call'. As a noun (a product recall), the stress often moves to 'Re'. Also, do not confuse 'recall' with 're-call' (to call someone on the phone again).

**Meaning 1**

To remember something from the past.

In this context, it is a verb where the stress is usually on the second syllable. ESL learners often confuse it with 'remember,' but 'recall' implies a more formal or effortful process of bringing a fact back to mind.

"I cannot recall where I left my car keys."

"As far as I can recall, the meeting was scheduled for Tuesday."

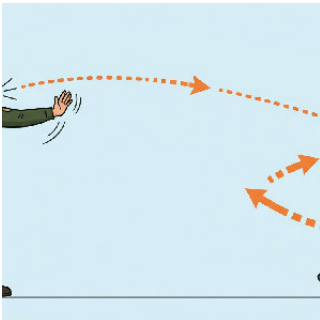
**Meaning 2**

An official order to return a defective product to the manufacturer.

In this context, it is often used as a noun with the stress on the first syllable. It can be confusing because the word changes from a mental action to a legal/commercial procedure.

"The car company issued a massive recall due to faulty brakes."

"Check the news to see if there is a recall on the lettuce you bought."

**Meaning 3**

To officially order someone to return to a place.

This usage is common in military, diplomatic, or sports contexts. It is confusing because it describes a physical movement of people rather than a thought or a product.

"The ambassador was recalled to his home country for consultations."

"The team decided to recall the player from the minor leagues."

Related: remember; recollect; withdraw; summon; memory



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/recall

Idiom · Lesson 3 of 8

On the bright side

This idiom is often used with the verb 'look' (e.g., 'Look on the bright side'). It is synonymous with finding a 'silver lining.' It is very common in both casual conversation and professional settings to soften the blow of bad news.

Meaning 1

An expression used to introduce a silver lining or a consoling fact.

The phrase functions as a transition marker. Learners might struggle with where to place it in a sentence or fail to realize it is used to shift the tone of a conversation from pessimistic to optimistic.

"The car repair was very expensive. On the bright side, it runs like new now."

"We missed the train, but on the bright side, there is another one coming in ten minutes."

**Meaning 2**

To look at the positive aspects of a bad or negative situation.

ESL learners may take the word 'bright' literally, thinking it refers to light, sunshine, or physical brightness. They might be confused why someone is talking about 'sides' of a situation as if it were a physical object with a lit and dark side.

"I lost my job today, but on the bright side, now I have more time to spend with my family."

"It's raining and our picnic is canceled, but on the bright side, the garden really needed the water."



Related: silver lining; optimism; every cloud has a silver lining; glass half full; count your blessings



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/on-the-bright-side

Slang · Lesson 4 of 8

Vibing

This is a very common Gen-Z and Millennial term. It is almost always positive. While it comes from 'vibration,' it is never used in a scientific context; it is strictly for social and emotional 'energy.'

Meaning 1

To relax and enjoy the atmosphere, music, or company in a passive, peaceful way.

ESL learners may be confused because it turns the noun 'vibe' (vibration) into a verb. It describes a state of being rather than a specific physical action.

"We were just sitting on the porch, vibing to the music."

"I'm not doing much today, just vibing at home."

**Meaning 2**

To have a good connection or immediate rapport with another person or a group.

This usage is confusing because it implies an invisible emotional or social frequency that two people share, which can be hard to translate literally.

"I really liked the new designer"

"we were totally vibing during the meeting."

**Meaning 3**

To agree with or like a specific idea, style, or aesthetic.

In this context, 'vibing' acts as a synonym for 'liking' or 'feeling a connection to' an object or concept, which can be confusing when compared to its other meanings.

"I'm really vibing with your new haircut."

"I wasn't vibing with the movie's dark ending."



Related: vibe check; good vibes; chilling; on the same wavelength; rapport



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/vibing

Contronym · Lesson 5 of 8

With

The word 'with' is a classic contronym. To determine if it means 'together' or 'against,' you must look at the verb. Verbs like 'fight,' 'argue,' or 'compete' usually trigger the 'against' meaning, while 'go,' 'stay,' or 'agree' trigger the 'together' meaning.



Meaning 1

In the company of, alongside, or supporting someone or something.

This is the most common usage, implying togetherness or alliance. ESL learners may find it confusing when the same word is used to describe the exact opposite (opposition).

"I am going to the cinema with my friends."

"I agree with your proposal entirely."



Meaning 2

In opposition to, against, or in competition with someone or something.

As a contronym, 'with' can mean 'against.' This is highly confusing because the preposition suggests joining, yet in contexts of conflict, it indicates separation or combat.

"The soldiers fought with the enemy for hours."

"England played with France in the final match."



Meaning 3

Using a specific tool, instrument, or means to complete an action.

Learners often confuse 'with' and 'by.' While 'by' refers to the method or agent, 'with' refers to the physical object held or used.

"He opened the locked door with a silver key."

"She wrote the entire letter with a fountain pen."

Related: against; alongside; via; accompanying; versus



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/with

Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 8

Run out of steam

This phrase originated during the Industrial Revolution when steam engines (trains and factory machines) would literally stop working if the pressure dropped. Today, it is used almost exclusively as a metaphor for human energy or the progress of an event.

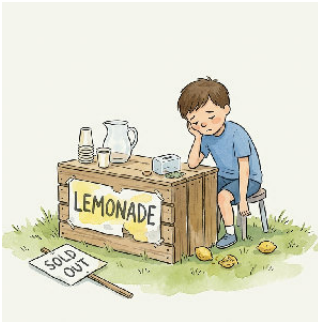
Meaning 1

To fail or stop progressing because of a lack of interest or resources.

This usage is confusing because it shifts from personal physical tiredness to the abstract failure of an organization or movement. Learners might think it only applies to people being tired.

"The protest movement ran out of steam after the government ignored their demands for months."

"The stock market rally ran out of steam by the end of the trading day."

**Meaning 2**

To lose momentum, energy, or enthusiasm for a task or activity.

ESL learners may be confused because the phrase implies a physical 'running' or actual 'steam' (water vapor). In reality, it is a metaphor comparing a person's energy to a steam engine that stops moving when it lacks fuel.

"I was doing great on my essay, but I ran out of steam around midnight and had to go to bed."

"The project started with a lot of excitement, but the team seems to have run out of steam lately."



Related: burn out; lose momentum; fizzle out; hit a wall; exhausted



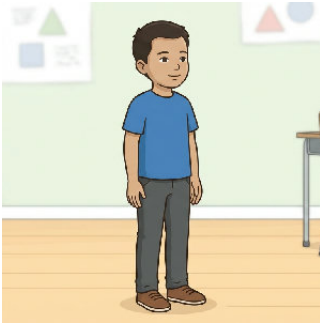
Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/run-out-of-steam

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 8

Stand

The word 'stand' is also used as a noun to describe a small stall or booth (like a 'lemonade stand') or a support structure (like a 'music stand'). Additionally, it appears in many phrasal verbs like 'stand by' (support) or 'stand out' (be noticeable).

**Meaning 1**

To be in an upright position on one's feet.

This is the most common literal meaning. It describes a physical posture where the body is supported by the feet.

"Please stand up when the judge enters the room."

"I had to stand on the bus because there were no seats left."

**Meaning 2**

To tolerate or endure something (often used in the negative).

This is a figurative use that often confuses ESL learners. If you 'can't stand' something, it means you hate it or find it unbearable.

"I can't stand the smell of cigarette smoke."

"How can you stand working in such a noisy office?"

Related: endure; tolerate; upright; stall; booth; position



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/stand

Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 8

Revenue enhancement

This is a classic example of 'doublespeak.' Politicians and executives use it to avoid the negative reaction associated with the word 'tax' or 'fee.' When you hear this in a news report, look for what is actually being charged to the consumer.



Meaning 1

A polite or indirect way of saying 'tax increase' or 'raising prices.'

ESL learners may be confused because the literal meaning sounds positive (improving income), but in political or corporate contexts, it actually means the public or customers will have to pay more money.

"The city council proposed a series of revenue enhancements to fund the new park system."

"The airline announced a revenue enhancement strategy that included new fees for carry-on luggage."

Meaning 2

The process of increasing the amount of money a company or government receives through improved efficiency or new sources.

In a strictly business sense, this can mean legitimate growth, making it hard for learners to distinguish between a genuine business improvement and a sneaky way to hide a price hike.

"Our consultant suggested revenue enhancement through better digital marketing and lead generation."

"The hospital focused on revenue enhancement by streamlining their billing department."



Related: tax hike; fiscal adjustment; surcharge; monetization; levy



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/revenue-enhancement



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