

Tricky Words of the Day

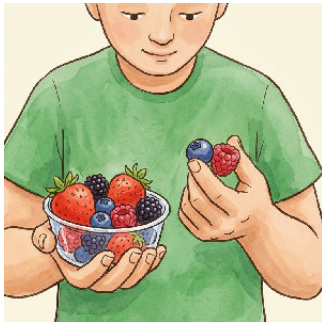
Thursday, June 4, 2026

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 8

Berry / Bury

Remember that despite the different vowels in their spelling (e vs u), these words are pronounced exactly the same. 'Berry' is always a noun (the fruit), while 'bury' is always a verb (the action). If you hear 'berry' at the end of a word like 'strawberry,' it is the fruit; if you hear it as an action, it is 'bury.'



Meaning 1

Berry: A small, round, soft fruit without a stone, such as a strawberry or blueberry.

ESL learners often expect the 'e' in berry to sound different from the 'u' in bury. Because they sound identical, learners may struggle to distinguish them in spoken conversation without context.

"I added a fresh red berry to the top of the cake."

"The bushes are full of ripe berries this summer."



Meaning 2

Bury: To put something into the ground and cover it with earth, or to hide something deep inside something else.

The spelling of 'bury' is highly irregular. Most English words with a 'u' are pronounced like 'cup' or 'put,' but 'bury' is pronounced exactly like 'berry' (with a short 'e' sound), which is counterintuitive for non-native speakers.

"The dog likes to bury his bones in the backyard."

"They decided to bury the time capsule under the old oak tree."



Meaning 3

Bury (figurative): To involve oneself deeply in something or to hide a feeling/memory.

This figurative use can be confusing because it implies a mental action rather than a physical one, yet it maintains the same 'berry' pronunciation.

"She tried to bury her head in her work to forget her problems."

"He chose to bury his anger rather than talk about it."

Related: fruit; inter; hide; strawberry; blueberry; underground



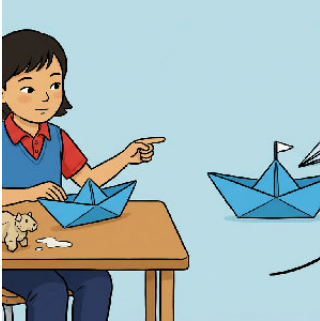
Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/berry-bury

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 8

Remake

The primary confusion for ESL learners is the 'noun-verb' stress shift. In English, many two-syllable words are stressed on the first syllable when they are nouns and the second syllable when they are verbs. Additionally, 'remake' implies doing the same thing over again, whereas 'remodel' or 'renovate' implies improving an existing structure.

**Meaning 1**

To make something again or differently (verb).

As a verb, the stress is usually on the second syllable. ESL learners may find it confusing because it can refer to physically rebuilding an object or simply changing a decision, like 'remaking' a bed or 'remaking' a choice.

"I had to remake the bed because the sheets were messy."

"The director decided to remake the entire scene after seeing the first draft."

Meaning 2

A new version of an existing movie, song, or story (noun).

As a noun, the stress shifts to the first syllable. Learners often confuse the noun 'remake' with 'reboot' or 'sequel,' which have different meanings in the entertainment industry.

"The 2019 version of The Lion King is a live-action remake of the original cartoon."

"Many fans prefer the original film over the modern remake."



Related: reboot; reconstruction; adaptation; revision; re-do



Read the full lesson

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Slang · Lesson 3 of 8

Tbh

While 'tbh' is extremely common in digital communication, it is informal. ESL learners should avoid using it in academic or professional writing. In speech, it is more common among younger generations. It can be placed at the beginning or the end of a sentence.

Meaning 1

An abbreviation for 'to be honest,' used to introduce a frank or sincere statement.

ESL learners may be confused because it is an initialism often used in text-based communication that has transitioned into spoken English. It is frequently used as a 'filler' phrase and doesn't always mean the speaker was lying before; it simply signals a shift to a more personal or direct opinion.

"Tbh, I didn't really like the movie that much."

"I'm not feeling very well today, tbh."

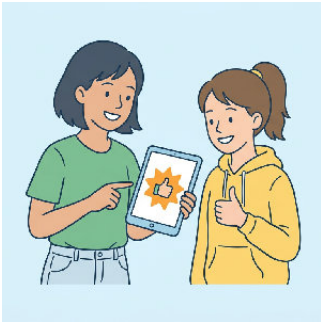
**Meaning 2**

Used on social media to give a compliment or a 'rating' to a friend or follower.

In social media contexts (like Instagram or Snapchat), 'tbh' is often used as a noun or a prompt. A user might post 'Like for a tbh,' which means they will provide a short, honest, and usually positive comment about whoever likes the post. This usage differs from the standard adverbial use.

"She gave me a really nice tbh on my latest photo."

"I'll do a tbh for everyone who comments on this story."

**Meaning 3**

Used to soften a disagreement or deliver bad news politely.

Learners might find it confusing that 'honesty' is being invoked when the speaker is actually trying to be polite. It acts as a linguistic buffer to make a negative opinion sound less aggressive or confrontational.

"Tbh, I don't think that color suits you."

"I'm too tired to go out tonight, tbh."



Related: imo; ngm; frankly; to be fair; in all honesty



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Contronym · Lesson 4 of 8

Shelled

Context is the only way to distinguish these meanings. If you are in a kitchen, it usually means the shell is removed. If you are in a science lab, it means the animal has a shell. If you are reading the news about a conflict, it refers to an explosion. Also, note the phrasal verb 'shell out,' which means to pay a lot of money.

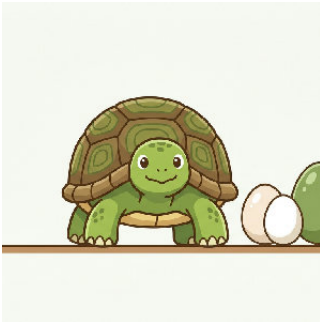
Meaning 1

To still be inside a shell or having a shell as a physical characteristic.

This is the opposite of the first definition. In biological contexts, it describes an animal that possesses a shell. This creates a 'contronym' where the same word can mean 'having a shell' or 'having the shell removed.'

"The turtle is a shelled reptile that carries its home on its back."

"Shelled creatures like snails and clams are common in this tide pool."

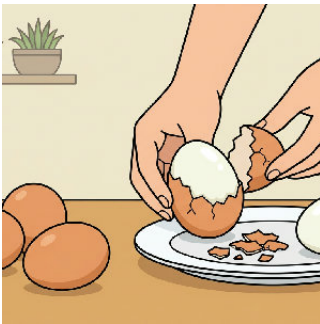
**Meaning 2**

To have a shell or protective outer layer removed.

This is confusing because the word 'shell' is used as a verb to mean the removal of the very object it names. An ESL learner might think 'shelled peanuts' are peanuts that still have their shells on, when it actually means the shells have been taken off.

"I bought a bag of shelled walnuts so I wouldn't have to crack them myself."

"The recipe calls for two cups of freshly shelled peas."

**Meaning 3**

To be bombarded or attacked with explosive artillery shells.

This meaning is entirely different from food or biology. It comes from the military noun 'shell' (an explosive projectile). ESL learners may confuse a 'shelled city' (one under attack) with something related to seafood or nuts.

"The coastal town was heavily shelled during the final days of the war."

"The troops retreated after their position was shelled by long-range artillery."



Related: shuck; hull; bombard; exoskeleton; shell out



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Figure of Speech · Lesson 5 of 8

Test the waters

This phrase is often used in business and social contexts. It is synonymous with 'dipping your toe in' or 'feeling things out.' It is important to note that 'waters' is almost always plural in this idiom.

Meaning 1

To explore the possibilities or potential of a new environment or relationship. This usage is confusing because it implies a 'trial period' without a formal agreement. Learners might confuse it with 'testing' an object for functionality, whereas this is about testing social or professional receptivity.

"She decided to test the waters of the dating world after being single for five years."

"He's testing the waters in the real estate market to see if it's a good time to sell his house."

**Meaning 2**

To try something out cautiously or check the situation before committing fully. ESL learners may take this literally and think it refers to checking the temperature or quality of physical water (like a pool or lake). In a figurative sense, it means gauging people's reactions to an idea before moving forward.

"Before launching the new product, the company decided to test the waters with a small focus group."

"I'm going to test the waters by asking my boss how he feels about remote work before I submit a formal request."



Related: gauge; probe; feel out; trial run; dip a toe in



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Multi-Meaning · Lesson 6 of 8

Pen

While 'pen' is a simple word, ESL learners may be confused when they hear it used for animals or prison instead of writing. Additionally, in some accents (like the Southern US), 'pen' and 'pin' sound identical, which is known as the 'pin-pen merger.'

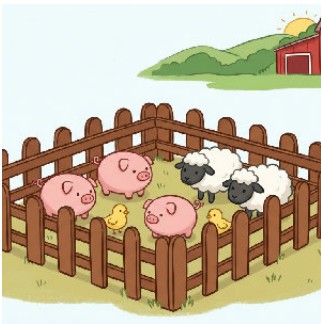
**Meaning 1**

A tool used for writing or drawing with ink.

This is the most common meaning taught to beginners. It refers to the physical object used on paper.

"I need a blue pen to sign this document."

"The ink in my pen has run out."

**Meaning 2**

A small fenced area for animals, or a slang term for a prison.

In a different context, a 'pen' is an enclosure for livestock (like pigs or sheep). In informal American English, 'the pen' is also short for 'penitentiary' (prison).

"The sheep are kept in a wooden pen at night."

"He spent five years in the pen for robbery."

Related: ballpoint; enclosure; cage; jail; ink



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Euphemism · Lesson 7 of 8

Seasoned professional

Think of a 'seasoned' cast-iron skillet; it has been used many times over many years, making it better and more reliable. In a business context, if you see 'seasoned' in a job description, they are looking for someone with significant seniority, not a recent graduate.

**Meaning 1**

A polite way (euphemism) to describe an older employee or job candidate.

In professional settings, calling someone 'old' can be seen as rude or ageist.

'Seasoned' is used as a positive-sounding substitute to imply that their age is an asset due to their years of experience.

"The company is looking for a seasoned professional to mentor the younger staff."

"He described himself as a seasoned professional on his resume to highlight his 30 years in the field."

**Meaning 2**

A person who has a lot of experience and skill in a particular job or field.

ESL learners may be confused because 'seasoned' literally refers to adding salt, pepper, or spices to food. They might think the professional is 'salty' or 'spicy' rather than experienced.

"We need a seasoned professional to lead this complex engineering project."

"As a seasoned professional in the hospitality industry, she handled the crisis calmly."

Related: veteran; experienced; expert; adept; old hand



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Phrasal Verb · Lesson 8 of 8

Get away

Inseparable.

**Meaning 1**

To escape or leave a place.

Often for vacation or from trouble.

"The thief got away from the police."

"We need to get away for the weekend."

Related: escape; leave



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