

Tricky Words of the Day

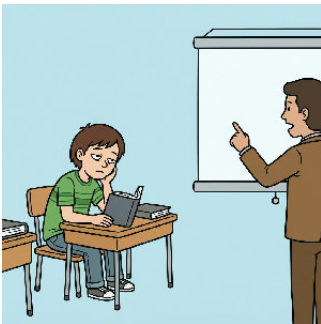
Saturday, June 6, 2026

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

Boar / Bore

Remember: 'Boar' with an 'a' is the Animal. 'Bore' with an 'e' is for Everything else (being dull, making holes, or carrying weight). If you are talking about being tired of something, always use 'bore'.



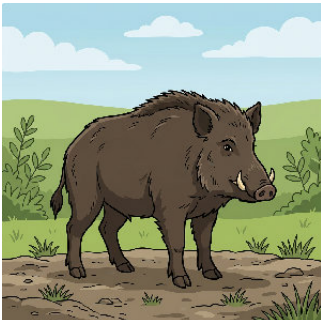
Meaning 1

Bore (Verb): To make someone feel weary or uninterested by being dull; or to make a hole in something.

This is the most common usage. Learners may struggle with the past tense 'bored' (feeling) vs 'boring' (characteristic) and the fact that it sounds exactly like the animal.

"I don't want to bore you with all the technical details of the project."

"The workers had to bore a hole through the rock to install the pipe."



Meaning 2

Boar: A wild pig, specifically a male pig that has not been castrated.

ESL learners often confuse this with 'bore' because they sound identical. It is a specific noun for an animal, often found in literature or nature documentaries.

"The hunters tracked the wild boar through the dense forest."

"A male pig is called a boar, while a female is called a sow."



Meaning 3

Bore (Noun/Past Tense): A person who is dull; or the past tense of the verb 'bear' (to carry).

This is a 'triple threat' for learners: it can be a person (a bore), a past tense verb (he bore the weight), or the homophone for the animal. The irregular past tense of 'bear' is particularly tricky.

"He is such a bore"

"he only ever talks about his stamp collection."

Related: boring; boredom; swine; bear; drill



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/boar-bore

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 9

Sake

The most important thing to remember is that the pronunciation changes based on context. If you are talking about a reason or benefit, it rhymes with 'lake.' If you are talking about the drink, it sounds like 'sah-kay.'

Meaning 1

The purpose, benefit, or interest of someone or something.

This is a common English noun used in phrases like 'for the sake of.' It is pronounced with a long 'a' and a silent 'e' (rhymes with 'cake'). ESL learners often confuse its pronunciation with the Japanese drink.

"They stayed together for the sake of the children."

"For goodness' sake, please turn down the music!"

**Meaning 2**

A Japanese alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice.

This is a loanword from Japanese. Unlike the English noun, it is pronounced with two syllables ('sah-keh'). Because it is spelled exactly like the English word 'sake,' learners often mispronounce it when reading menus.

"We ordered a bottle of warm sake with our sushi."

"Sake is often referred to as rice wine in Western countries."



Related: benefit; purpose; rice wine; beverage; motive



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/sake

Idiom · Lesson 3 of 9

A dime a dozen

This idiom originated in the 1800s when certain goods (like eggs or fruit) were actually sold for ten cents per dozen. Today, it is used exclusively as a figure of speech. It is almost always used with the verb 'to be' (e.g., 'They ARE a dime a dozen').

**Meaning 1**

Very common and of little value; easy to find and therefore not special.

ESL learners may try to interpret this literally as a price for a quantity of items. They might be confused why someone is talking about 'dimes' (10-cent coins) and 'dozens' (12 items) when discussing people, ideas, or objects that aren't for sale.

"In this city, coffee shops are a dime a dozen"

"there is one on every corner."

**Meaning 2**

Lacking uniqueness or originality.

Learners might not realize that this phrase is often used as a subtle insult or a way to dismiss the importance of something. It implies that because something is abundant, it is not worth much effort or attention.

"Action movies with no plot are a dime a dozen these days."

"People who have big ideas but no plan to execute them are a dime a dozen."

Related: commonplace; run-of-the-mill; ubiquitous; cheap; plentiful



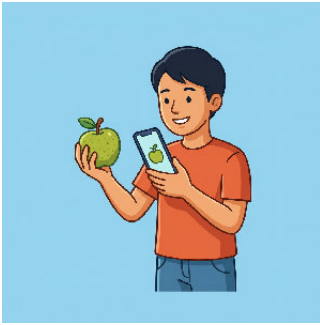
Read the full lesson

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Slang · Lesson 4 of 9

Irl

While originally used in gaming and internet chat rooms, IRL is now commonly used in spoken English among younger generations. It is almost always written in capital letters in text, but can be lowercase (irl) in casual messaging.

**Meaning 1**

An abbreviation for 'In Real Life,' used to distinguish between the digital/online world and physical reality.

ESL learners may be confused because it is an acronym often pronounced as individual letters rather than a word. It is used to describe activities, people, or meetings that happen offline, which can be confusing if the learner assumes 'life' always includes digital interactions.

"We have been friends on Instagram for years, but we finally met IRL yesterday."

"He seems very confident in the game, but he is actually quite shy IRL."

Meaning 2

Used to contrast a person's online persona or filtered social media image with their actual appearance or personality.

Learners might find this confusing because it implies that the 'online' version of a person is a separate or even 'fake' entity compared to the physical person.

"The sunset was beautiful in the photo, but it was even more amazing IRL."

"Does she look the same IRL as she does in her profile picture?"

Related: offline; in person; face-to-face; AFK; meatspace



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/irl

Contronym · Lesson 5 of 9

Original

The word is a contronym because it can mean 'the first of its kind' (old/source) or 'the only one of its kind' (new/unique). To distinguish them, look at the context: if discussing history, it usually means 'first'; if discussing creativity, it usually means 'new.'

Meaning 1

A person who is eccentric or unusual in a creative way.

When used as a noun to describe a person, it can be confusing because it doesn't mean they were 'the first person,' but rather that they are unique or 'one of a kind.'

"He's a bit of an original"

"he wears a tuxedo to the grocery store."

**Meaning 2**

The very first version of something; existing from the beginning.

ESL learners often struggle because this meaning refers to the past and the source material. It implies something old or the starting point of a series.

"The original manuscript was written by hand in 1920."

"The car still has its original engine from the factory."

**Meaning 3**

Something new, fresh, and creative that has never been done before.

This is the 'opposite' meaning that makes it a contronym. While the first definition looks backward to the start, this definition looks forward to innovation and uniqueness.

"That is a very original idea for a movie plot!"

"The artist has a very original style that no one has ever seen."



Related: Initial; Unique; Innovative; Authentic; Prototype



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/original

Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 9

Touch base

This is extremely common in corporate and professional environments. Note that the phrase is 'touch base' (singular), not 'touch bases' (plural), which is a common mistake even for native speakers.

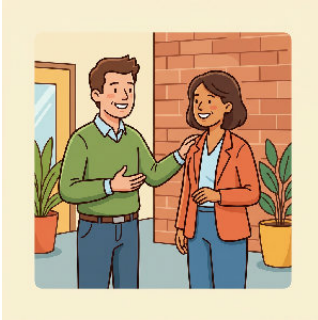
Meaning 1

To reconnect with someone after a period of time has passed.

The confusion lies in the brevity of the action; learners might think it implies a long meeting, but 'touching base' usually suggests a very short, informal interaction just to maintain a connection.

"It was great to touch base with my old colleagues at the conference."

"I'll touch base with you after my vacation to catch up on what I missed."

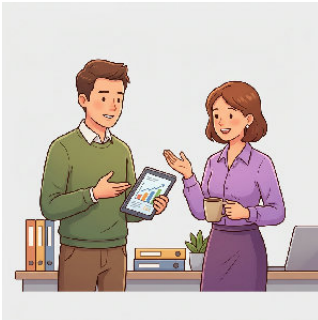
**Meaning 2**

To briefly contact or talk to someone to stay informed or updated on a situation.

ESL learners may take the phrase literally, imagining physical contact with a physical object. It is a metaphor derived from baseball, where a player must touch a base to be 'safe,' but in business, it simply means a quick check-in.

"I just wanted to touch base with you regarding the project deadline."

"Let's touch base next Monday to see how the negotiations are going."



Related: check in; follow up; circle back; reconnect; drop a line



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/touch-base

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 9

General

The confusion usually stems from the word being both an adjective (broad) and a noun (a specific person). Also, watch out for the phrase 'in general,' which functions as an adverb meaning 'usually' or 'as a whole.'

Meaning 1

Affecting or concerning all or most people; not specialized or specific.

This is an adjective used to describe something broad or common. ESL learners often use it when they want to say 'usually' or 'mostly' (e.g., 'In general...').

"The general consensus is that we should start the meeting at 9 AM."

"I have a general idea of how the machine works, but I don't know the details."

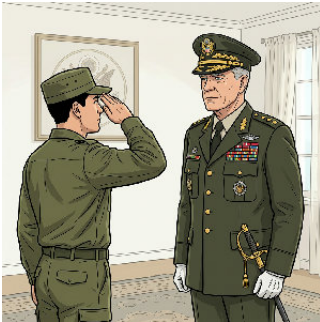
**Meaning 2**

A very high-ranking military officer.

In this context, the word is a noun. It refers to a specific position of authority in the army. This can be confusing because the noun form is very specific, while the adjective form is very broad.

"The general led his troops into battle."

"She was promoted to the rank of five-star general."



Related: generally; generic; universal; commander; broad



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/general

Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 9

Slipped away

Context is vital for this phrase. If used in a hospital or funeral setting, it almost always means death. If used in a social setting, it means leaving early. The word 'slip' implies a smooth, quiet motion, which is the common thread between all three meanings.

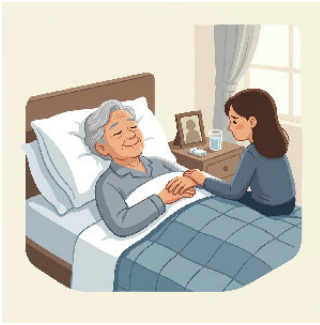
Meaning 1

To die peacefully or quietly.

This is a common euphemism used to avoid the harshness of the word 'died.' ESL learners may take it literally and think the person physically moved or fell, rather than understanding it refers to passing away.

"The elderly man slipped away in his sleep last night."

"She was surrounded by family when she finally slipped away."

**Meaning 2**

To leave a place quietly or secretly without being noticed.

This meaning is literal but figurative in its execution. Learners might confuse this with 'falling' (slipping on ice) because of the word 'slip,' but it actually describes a stealthy exit.

"The party was getting too loud, so we slipped away through the back door."

"He slipped away from the meeting before it was over to catch his flight."

**Meaning 3**

To be lost or to disappear gradually (often regarding time or opportunities).

This usage is abstract. It describes the sensation of losing control over time or a chance. Learners may struggle to visualize how 'time' can 'slip' like a physical object.

"I meant to finish my homework, but the afternoon just slipped away."

"The championship title slipped away from the team in the final minutes of the game."



Related: passed away; sneaked out; vanished; lost an opportunity; departed



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/slipped-away

Phrasal Verb · Lesson 9 of 9

Take after

This is a phrasal verb. Note that it is 'inseparable,' meaning you cannot put the object between 'take' and 'after.' You cannot say 'I take my father after'; it must be 'I take after my father.' It is almost exclusively used for family members.

Meaning 1

To resemble an older relative in appearance, personality, or behavior.

ESL learners often interpret this literally as 'following someone' or 'grabbing something after someone else.' The figurative meaning of inheriting traits is not intuitive from the individual words.

"He really takes after his father, they have the exact same laugh."

"I take after my mother in terms of my musical talent."

**Meaning 2**

To follow the example of someone.

This is confusing because it overlaps with 'imitate' or 'copy,' but it is specifically used for long-term characteristics or life choices influenced by a role model.

"She decided to take after her grandmother and become a doctor."

"Don't take after your brother's bad habits!"

Related: resemble; look like; inherit; follow in someone's footsteps; chip off the old block



Read the full lesson

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Quick Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. While camping in the European forest, the hikers were surprised to see a wild ____ searching for food near their site.

- A. bore
- B. board
- C. boar
- D. boars

2. What does the word 'sake' mean in the phrase: 'We need to reduce pollution for the sake of the environment'?

- A. the purpose or intended goal
- B. a traditional Japanese fermented beverage
- C. a hidden motive or private reason
- D. the benefit or well-being of something

3. In the sentence, 'Smartphones that use this old technology are a dime a dozen,' what does the idiom mean?

- A. Cheap
- B. Plentiful
- C. Ubiquitous
- D. Very common and of little value

4. In digital communication, what does the abbreviation 'IRL' mean?

- A. in person
- B. AFK
- C. In real life
- D. offline

5. What is the meaning of the word 'original' in this context: 'The museum displayed the original blueprints for the city park'?

- A. Exists from the beginning as the first version.
- B. Displays an innovative or creative quality.
- C. Possesses a unique or one-of-a-kind design.
- D. Represents an experimental or early prototype model.

6. What does it mean to "touch base" with someone?

- A. To make brief contact to stay informed or updated.
- B. To follow up by pursuing an unresolved task or issue.
- C. To circle back to a previous topic discussed in a meeting.
- D. To reconnect with someone after losing contact.

7. What is the meaning of the word 'general' in the phrase 'the general public'?

- A. Affecting or concerning most people rather than a specific group.
- B. Not specific; wide in scope or covering many different things.
- C. Existing everywhere or involving everyone in the entire world.
- D. Relating to a product that does not have a brand name.

8. In the sentence 'The patient slipped away during the night,' what is the meaning of the phrase 'slipped away'?

- A. To die peacefully or quietly
- B. To disappear suddenly and completely
- C. To miss a chance or possibility
- D. To leave a place secretly or quietly

9. What does the phrasal verb 'take after' mean in the sentence: 'Mark really takes after his grandfather'?

- A. resemble
- B. look like
- C. to care for an elderly family member
- D. to have a similar character or appearance as an older relative



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Quiz

Approved multiple-choice items for today. Answer key on the next page.

1. While camping in the European forest, the hikers were surprised to see a wild ____ searching for food near their site.

- A. bore
- B. board
- C. boar
- D. boars

Target: boar / bore · CEFR B2

2. What does the word 'sake' mean in the phrase: 'We need to reduce pollution for the sake of the environment'?

- A. the purpose or intended goal
- B. a traditional Japanese fermented beverage
- C. a hidden motive or private reason
- D. the benefit or well-being of something

Target: Sake · CEFR B2

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- A. Cheap
- B. Plentiful
- C. Ubiquitous
- D. Very common and of little value

Target: a dime a dozen · CEFR B2

4. In digital communication, what does the abbreviation 'IRL' mean?

- A. in person
- B. AFK
- C. In real life
- D. offline

Target: IRL · CEFR B2

5. What is the meaning of the word 'original' in this context: 'The museum displayed the original blueprints for the city park'?

- A. Exists from the beginning as the first version.
- B. Displays an innovative or creative quality.
- C. Possesses a unique or one-of-a-kind design.
- D. Represents an experimental or early prototype model.

Target: Original · CEFR B2

6. What does it mean to "touch base" with someone?

- A. To make brief contact to stay informed or updated.
- B. To follow up by pursuing an unresolved task or issue.
- C. To circle back to a previous topic discussed in a meeting.
- D. To reconnect with someone after losing contact.

Target: Touch Base · CEFR B2

7. What is the meaning of the word 'general' in the phrase 'the general public'?

- A. Affecting or concerning most people rather than a specific group.
- B. Not specific; wide in scope or covering many different things.
- C. Existing everywhere or involving everyone in the entire world.
- D. Relating to a product that does not have a brand name.

Target: general · CEFR B2

8. In the sentence 'The patient slipped away during the night,' what is the meaning of the phrase 'slipped away'?

- A. To die peacefully or quietly
- B. To disappear suddenly and completely
- C. To miss a chance or possibility
- D. To leave a place secretly or quietly

Target: slipped away · CEFR B2

9. What does the phrasal verb 'take after' mean in the sentence: 'Mark really takes after his grandfather'?

- A. resemble
- B. look like
- C. to care for an elderly family member
- D. to have a similar character or appearance as an older relative

Target: take after · CEFR B2

Answer Key

1. C. boar

In this context, 'boar' refers to a wild pig. 'Bore' is a homophone but usually means an uninteresting person or to make a hole; 'boars' is the plural of 'boar' (a close morphological form that can confuse learners); 'board' is an orthographic distractor with similar letters.

2. D. the benefit or well-being of something

In this context, 'sake' refers to the benefit or interest of someone or something. While 'sake' is a homograph for a Japanese beverage, that meaning does not fit this grammatical structure or context. 'Purpose' and 'motive' are related concepts but do not correctly define the idiomatic use of 'for the sake of'.

3. D. Very common and of little value

While 'a dime a dozen' implies something is common, it carries a specific nuance of being unimportant or lacking in special value because it is so easy to find. The distractors 'cheap', 'plentiful', and 'ubiquitous' represent only single aspects of the idiom's full meaning.

4. C. In real life

'IRL' stands for 'In Real Life' and is used to distinguish the physical world from the online world. While 'offline' and 'in person' are related concepts, they are not what the abbreviation stands for.

5. A. Exists from the beginning as the first version.

In this context, 'original' refers to the very first version of a document. While something original can be innovative, unique, or a prototype, the primary definition here is about temporal priority existing from the start.

6. A. To make brief contact to stay informed or updated.

To 'touch base' means to make quick, brief contact to maintain communication or get an update. 'Reconnect' implies reestablishing contact after a long break, 'follow up' suggests pursuing an unresolved task or checking further, and 'circle back' means returning to a prior topic these are related but not the same as a brief check-in.

7. A. Affecting or concerning most people rather than a specific group.

In this context, 'general' refers to something that involves the majority or commonality of a group. The distractors are confusable words from the list: 'generic' (relating to products without a brand name), 'universal' (existing everywhere or involving everyone), and 'broad' (not specific; wide in scope). Note that 'generally' is an adverb and 'commander' is a noun, so those forms do not match the adjectival meaning used here.

8. A. To die peacefully or quietly

'Slipped away' is a common euphemism for a quiet, peaceful death. The distractors (sneaked out, vanished, and lost an opportunity) are incorrect meanings based on metaphorical interpretations of 'slip' or 'away'.

9. D. to have a similar character or appearance as an older relative

In a multiple-choice meaning question, the correct answer must be the definition. 'Resemble' and 'look like' are synonyms, not definitions according to the provided format rules, and 'to care for' is a common learner confusion with 'look after'. Only the correct answer provides the full definition of the phrasal verb.