

Tricky Words of the Day

Wednesday, June 10, 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

Canvas / Canvass

Remember the 'Double S' rule: 'Canvass' with two S's is for Seeking (votes, opinions, or information). 'Canvas' with one S is for the Surface (the cloth). Both words are pronounced exactly the same, so context is the only way to distinguish them when speaking.



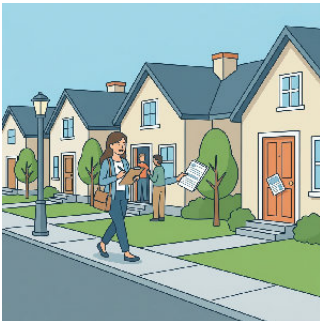
Meaning 1

Canvas (noun): A strong, heavy, woven cloth used for making sails, tents, and as a surface for oil paintings.

ESL learners often confuse this with the verb 'canvass' because they sound identical. This version refers to a physical material. It is also used as a verb meaning to cover something with this cloth.

"The artist painted a beautiful landscape on a large canvas."

"We slept in a tent made of heavy waterproof canvas."



Meaning 2

Canvass (verb): To systematically go through an area or group to solicit votes, conduct a survey, or gather opinions.

The double 's' at the end changes the meaning entirely to an action involving communication or investigation. Learners often misspell this as 'canvas' when writing about politics or marketing.

"The political campaign volunteers will canvass the neighborhood to find more voters."

"The police began to canvass the area for witnesses after the accident."



Meaning 3

Canvass (verb): To discuss a subject thoroughly or examine it in detail.

This is a more formal usage of the double-s spelling. It can be confusing because it sounds like a physical action, but it refers to a mental or verbal examination of ideas.

"The committee met to canvass all the possible options for the new project."

"Before making a decision, we need to canvass the views of the entire staff."

Related: fabric; textile; poll; survey; solicit; scrutinize



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/canvas-canvass

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 9

Sliver

The most important thing for ESL learners is to double-check the spelling to ensure they don't mean 'silver' (the metal). Additionally, while 'splinter' usually refers to wood or glass that gets stuck in skin, a 'sliver' is a more general term for any thin slice of material.

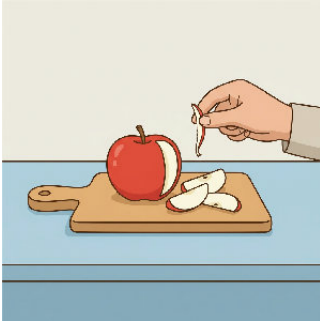
Meaning 1

A small, thin, narrow piece of something that has been cut or broken off.

ESL learners often confuse this with 'silver' because the spelling is nearly identical, differing only by the placement of the letter 'l'. It is also frequently confused with 'splinter'.

"I only want a tiny sliver of cake because I am not very hungry."

"A sliver of light shone through the gap in the curtains."

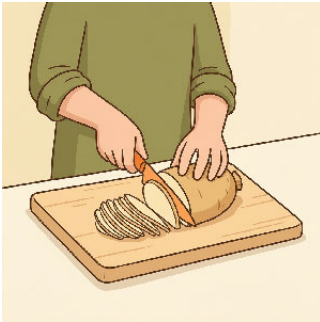
**Meaning 2**

To cut or split something into small, thin pieces.

Learners may not realize that 'sliver' can function as a verb as well as a noun, which can lead to grammatical confusion in cooking or woodworking contexts.

"The chef began to sliver the almonds to garnish the dessert."

"The wood began to sliver under the pressure of the dull blade."

**Meaning 3**

A continuous strand of loose, untwisted fiber produced in carding textiles.

In the textile industry, this word is spelled the same but is often pronounced with a long 'i' (SLY-ver). This technical usage is rare in daily conversation but creates a homograph trap.

"The machine draws the wool into a long sliver before it is spun into yarn."

"The quality of the sliver determines the strength of the final thread."



Related: shaving; splinter; fragment; shard; silver



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/sliver

Idiom · Lesson 3 of 9

Out of sorts

This phrase is a very common euphemism. Instead of saying 'I am angry' or 'I am sick,' native speakers use this to be less direct. It is almost always preceded by the verb 'to be' or 'to feel.'

Meaning 1

Feeling slightly ill, unwell, or physically uncomfortable.

ESL learners may be confused because 'sorts' usually refers to categories or types. They might try to translate it literally as being 'out of categories,' which makes no sense in a medical context.

"I think I'm coming down with a cold"

"I've been feeling a bit out of sorts all morning."

**Meaning 2**

Feeling irritable, grumpy, or in a bad mood without a specific reason.

This is used as a polite euphemism to describe someone being difficult or moody. Learners might not realize that the speaker is indirectly saying the person is being unpleasant to be around.

"Please excuse the manager"

"he's a little out of sorts today because of the missed deadline."

Meaning 3

Not in the usual state of order or proper condition; disorganized.

Historically, this referred to a printer's type being out of order. While less common now, learners might encounter it when describing a system or situation that isn't functioning correctly.

"The whole office schedule is out of sorts since the power outage."

"My internal clock is completely out of sorts after that long flight from London."

Related: under the weather; grumpy; off-color; unwell; irritable



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/out-of-sorts

Slang · Lesson 4 of 9

Mood

When used as slang, 'Mood' is often synonymous with 'Relatable' or 'Same.' It is most commonly used by younger generations on social media. In standard English, remember that 'mood' usually requires an adjective (e.g., bad mood, happy mood) unless using the slang version.

Meaning 1

A temporary state of mind or feeling.

This is the standard dictionary definition. It is confusing because it can describe a general feeling (good mood) or a specific atmosphere in a room or piece of art.

"I am in a great mood today because the sun is shining."

"The dark lighting in the movie created a somber mood."

Meaning 2

A slang expression used to indicate that something is relatable or reflects one's current state.

In modern internet slang, 'Mood' is used as a one-word sentence. ESL learners may be confused because it lacks a subject or verb and doesn't describe the speaker's emotion directly, but rather agrees with a situation.

"A: 'I just want to stay in bed all day and eat pizza.' B: 'Mood.'"

"Seeing that tired cat sleeping on the keyboard is such a mood."

Meaning 3

A grammatical category that indicates the modality of a verb (e.g., indicative, imperative, subjunctive).

This technical linguistic use is very different from emotional states. Students of English grammar may find it difficult to connect the idea of 'feeling' with the structural 'mood' of a sentence.

"The imperative mood is used to give commands like 'Sit down!'"

"The subjunctive mood is often used for hypothetical situations."

Related: vibe; relatable; temperament; atmosphere; feeling



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/mood

Contronym · Lesson 5 of 9

Terrific

This is a classic example of 'amelioration,' where a word's meaning shifts from negative to positive over time. If you hear someone say 'terrific speed' or 'terrific force,' they usually mean 'extreme' rather than 'good.' However, if they say 'You look terrific,' it is always a compliment.

Meaning 1

Extremely good, wonderful, or excellent.

In modern English, this is the most common usage. ESL learners may be confused because the word shares the same root as 'terror' and 'terrible,' yet it is used as a high compliment.

"You did a terrific job on your presentation!"

"We had a terrific time at the party last night."

Meaning 2

Causing terror, intense fear, or being very great in size/intensity (often negative).

This is the original, literal meaning of the word. It is confusing because it is the exact opposite of the modern 'positive' meaning. While less common today, it is still used to describe the overwhelming power or intensity of something scary.

"The explosion went off with a terrific roar."

"The ship was battered by a terrific storm at sea."

Related: terrible; awesome; formidable; tremendous; wonderful



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/terrific

Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 9

Break new ground

This phrase is often used in professional and academic settings. When you hear it, determine if the speaker is talking about a physical building (literal) or a new idea (figurative). It is synonymous with 'blazing a trail' or 'pushing the envelope.'

Meaning 1

To begin the physical process of digging or excavating for a new building project.

This is the literal origin of the phrase. It is confusing because it is often used in news headlines to mean both the start of a construction project and the start of a metaphorical 'new era.'

"The company will break new ground on the new headquarters downtown next Monday."

"A ceremony was held to break new ground for the city's first public library."

Meaning 2

To do something innovative or pioneering that has never been done before.

ESL learners may be confused because the phrase sounds like it refers to physical construction or farming. In a figurative sense, it describes making a discovery or starting a new method in science, art, or business.

"The researchers are breaking new ground in the fight against cancer with this new vaccine."

"Her latest novel breaks new ground in the way it uses interactive technology to tell a story."

Related: innovate; pioneer; groundbreaking; cutting-edge; excavate



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/break-new-ground

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 9**Fit**

The word 'fit' can be confusing because it functions as a verb (to fit a size), an adjective (to be healthy), and a noun (a 'fit' of anger or a medical seizure). Additionally, in modern internet slang, 'fit' is often used as a short version of 'outfit'.

Meaning 1

To be the right size or shape for someone or something.

This is the most common literal usage, often used when talking about clothing or physical space.

"These shoes don't fit me"

"they are too small."

Meaning 2

Healthy, strong, and in good physical condition.

In this context, 'fit' is an adjective. In British English, it is also common slang to describe someone as physically attractive.

"She runs every morning to stay fit."

"You need to be very fit to climb that mountain."

Related: fitness; fitting room; outfit; suitable; seizure



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/fit

Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 9

Strategic withdrawal

This phrase is common in business, politics, and military contexts. It is a 'face-saving' expression. When you hear it, look for the underlying failure that the speaker is trying to minimize.

Meaning 1

A polite or professional way to describe a retreat, defeat, or the act of quitting a failing situation.

ESL learners may take the words literally, thinking it refers to a clever military plan. In reality, it is often used to hide the embarrassment of losing or being forced to leave.

"The company announced a strategic withdrawal from the European market after losing millions of dollars."

"The general described the chaotic retreat of his troops as a strategic withdrawal to save face."

Meaning 2

A planned decision to stop an activity or move away from a conflict to protect resources for the future.

The word 'strategic' makes the action sound positive and intentional, which can confuse learners who expect words like 'retreat' or 'exit' to carry a negative tone.

"Sometimes, a strategic withdrawal from a heated argument is the best way to maintain a relationship."

"The investor made a strategic withdrawal from the tech sector before the stock prices crashed."

Related: retreat; tactical retreat; exit strategy; damage control; pulling back



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/strategic-withdrawal

Phrasal Verb · Lesson 9 of 9

Cut off

Separable. Multiple meanings.

Meaning 1

To stop the supply of something suddenly.

Common confusion with physically cutting.

"The power was cut off during the storm."

"They cut off my phone service for non-payment."

Meaning 2

To interrupt someone while speaking.

Conversation context.

"She cut me off in the middle of my sentence."

Related: disconnect; interrupt



Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/cut-off

Quick Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which sentence uses 'Sliver' correctly according to this definition: A small, thin, narrow piece of something that has been cut or broken off?

- A. I only want a tiny sliver of cheese on my cracker, please.
- B. The mirror broke into a sliver of large, heavy chunks on the floor.
- C. He won a sliver medal for coming in second place during the race.
- D. After the carpentry accident, the doctor used tweezers to remove a sliver from his hand.

2. Which sentence uses 'out of sorts' correctly according to this definition: Feeling slightly ill, unwell, or physically uncomfortable.?

- A. The librarian asked us to leave because our books were out of sorts on the table.
- B. I've been feeling a bit out of sorts all morning with a headache and a scratchy throat.
- C. I felt very grumpy after the long flight, so I went straight to the hotel to sleep.
- D. He is a very out of sorts person who always helps others when they are in trouble.

3. Which sentence uses 'Mood' correctly according to this definition: A temporary state of mind or feeling.?

- A. He has a very angry mood and always gets into fights with his coworkers.
- B. The mood of the restaurant was very vintage and relaxing with soft jazz playing.
- C. After hearing the good news, Sarah was in a much better mood for the rest of the day.
- D. The weather was mood today, so we decided to stay inside and watch a movie.

4. Which sentence uses 'Terrific' correctly according to this definition: Extremely good, wonderful, or excellent.?

- A. The news about the accident was terrific and left everyone in the office feeling very sad.
- B. I feel terrible today because I didn't get enough sleep last night.
- C. The storm was terrific, so we stayed indoors because we were afraid of the loud thunder.
- D. You did a terrific job on the project; the manager was very impressed with your results!

5. Which sentence uses 'Break New Ground' correctly according to this definition: To do something innovative or pioneering that has never been done before.?

- A. Before the construction crew could build the house, they had to break new ground with their shovels.
- B. The company decided to excavate a new market strategy to increase their sales this year.
- C. I need to break new ground in my backyard because I want to plant a very small row of flowers.
- D. The scientists hope to break new ground in renewable energy with their latest solar panel design.

6. Which sentence uses 'fit' correctly according to this definition: To be the right size or shape for someone or something?

- A. This blue tie doesn't fit your suit very well; you should wear a red one instead.
- B. The manager said I wasn't seizure for the job because I didn't have enough experience.
- C. I need to go to the gym because I want to fit my health before summer starts.
- D. I tried on the jacket in the shop, but it didn't fit me because the sleeves were too long.

7. Which sentence uses 'strategic withdrawal' correctly according to this definition: A polite or professional way to describe a retreat, defeat, or the act of quitting a failing situation?

- A. The athlete made a strategic withdrawal by stretching her legs and drinking water to prepare for the next round of the race.
- B. The company used damage control from the project because they wanted to start a different advertising campaign in the summer.
- C. Before the meeting started, the manager made a strategic withdrawal of cash from the bank to pay for the office lunch.
- D. After three years of declining sales, the board decided on a strategic withdrawal from the electronics industry to save the remaining capital.

8. Which sentence uses 'cut off' correctly according to this definition: To stop the supply of something suddenly.?

- A. The company decided to cut off the old employee because he was too slow.
- B. The manager decided to disconnect the meeting because the internet was very poor.
- C. The water company will cut off our supply if we don't pay the bill by Friday.
- D. He used a sharp knife to cut off the bread into thin slices for the guests.



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.

SLWordWiz.com

Quiz

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

1. Which sentence uses 'Sliver' correctly according to this definition: A small, thin, narrow piece of something that has been cut or broken off?

- A. I only want a tiny sliver of cheese on my cracker, please.
- B. The mirror broke into a sliver of large, heavy chunks on the floor.
- C. He won a sliver medal for coming in second place during the race.
- D. After the carpentry accident, the doctor used tweezers to remove a sliver from his hand.

Target: Sliver · CEFR B1

2. Which sentence uses 'out of sorts' correctly according to this definition: Feeling slightly ill, unwell, or physically uncomfortable.?

- A. The librarian asked us to leave because our books were out of sorts on the table.
- B. I've been feeling a bit out of sorts all morning with a headache and a scratchy throat.
- C. I felt very grumpy after the long flight, so I went straight to the hotel to sleep.
- D. He is a very out of sorts person who always helps others when they are in trouble.

Target: out of sorts · CEFR B1

3. Which sentence uses 'Mood' correctly according to this definition: A temporary state of mind or feeling.?

- A. He has a very angry mood and always gets into fights with his coworkers.
- B. The mood of the restaurant was very vintage and relaxing with soft jazz playing.
- C. After hearing the good news, Sarah was in a much better mood for the rest of the day.
- D. The weather was mood today, so we decided to stay inside and watch a movie.

Target: Mood · CEFR B1

4. Which sentence uses 'Terrific' correctly according to this definition: Extremely good, wonderful, or excellent.?

- A. The news about the accident was terrific and left everyone in the office feeling very sad.
- B. I feel terrible today because I didn't get enough sleep last night.
- C. The storm was terrific, so we stayed indoors because we were afraid of the loud thunder.
- D. You did a terrific job on the project; the manager was very impressed with your results!

Target: Terrific · CEFR B1

5. Which sentence uses 'Break New Ground' correctly according to this definition: To do something innovative or pioneering that has never been done before.?

- A. Before the construction crew could build the house, they had to break new ground with their shovels.
- B. The company decided to excavate a new market strategy to increase their sales this year.
- C. I need to break new ground in my backyard because I want to plant a very small row of flowers.
- D. The scientists hope to break new ground in renewable energy with their latest solar panel design.

Target: Break New Ground · CEFR B1

6. Which sentence uses 'fit' correctly according to this definition: To be the right size or shape for someone or something?

- A. This blue tie doesn't fit your suit very well; you should wear a red one instead.
- B. The manager said I wasn't seizure for the job because I didn't have enough experience.
- C. I need to go to the gym because I want to fit my health before summer starts.
- D. I tried on the jacket in the shop, but it didn't fit me because the sleeves were too long.

Target: fit · CEFR B1

7. Which sentence uses 'strategic withdrawal' correctly according to this definition: A polite or professional way to describe a retreat, defeat, or the act of quitting a failing situation?

- A. The athlete made a strategic withdrawal by stretching her legs and drinking water to prepare for the next round of the race.
- B. The company used damage control from the project because they wanted to start a different advertising campaign in the summer.
- C. Before the meeting started, the manager made a strategic withdrawal of cash from the bank to pay for the office lunch.
- D. After three years of declining sales, the board decided on a strategic withdrawal from the electronics industry to save the remaining capital.

Target: strategic withdrawal · CEFR B1

8. Which sentence uses 'cut off' correctly according to this definition: To stop the supply of something suddenly.?

- A. The company decided to cut off the old employee because he was too slow.
- B. The manager decided to disconnect the meeting because the internet was very poor.
- C. The water company will cut off our supply if we don't pay the bill by Friday.
- D. He used a sharp knife to cut off the bread into thin slices for the guests.

Target: cut off · CEFR B1

Answer Key

1. A. I only want a tiny sliver of cheese on my cracker, please.

B is correct because a sliver describes a small, thin piece of food or material. A is a misspelling of 'silver'; C uses 'sliver' for 'large chunks', which contradicts the definition of a small/thin piece; D uses 'sliver' as a verb instead of using the common verb 'slice' or 'shred'.

2. B. I've been feeling a bit out of sorts all morning with a headache and a scratchy throat.

the correct answer (I've been feeling a bit out of sorts all morning with a h) correctly uses 'out of sorts' to describe someone feeling slightly unwell. a distractor (The librarian asked us to leave because our books were ou) incorrectly uses it to mean 'disorganized,' a distractor (He is a very out of sorts person who always helps others) uses it as a positive personality trait which is incorrect, and a distractor (I felt very grumpy after the long flight, so I went strai) uses a synonym (grumpy) but the question tests the use of the target idiom.

3. C. After hearing the good news, Sarah was in a much better mood for the rest of the day.

the correct answer (After hearing the good news, Sarah was in a much better m) correctly describes a temporary emotional state. a distractor (The mood of the restaurant was very vintage and relaxing) describes 'atmosphere' rather than a person's feeling. a distractor (He has a very angry mood and always gets into fights with) confuses mood with 'temperament' (a permanent personality trait). a distractor (The weather was mood today, so we decided to stay inside) uses 'mood' as an adjective, which is grammatically incorrect in this context.

4. D. You did a terrific job on the project; the manager was very impressed with your results!

the correct answer (You did a terrific job on the project; the manager was ve) correctly uses 'terrific' to mean excellent or wonderful. Options A and C use 'terrific' in its archaic or negative sense related to fear or terror, which is incorrect for this definition. a distractor (I feel terrible today because I didn't get enough sleep I) uses a confusable word 'terrible' instead of the target.

5. D. The scientists hope to break new ground in renewable energy with their latest solar panel design.

B is correct because it uses the idiom to describe an innovative achievement. A and C use the phrase literally to mean digging, which is incorrect for this sense. D uses 'excavate' incorrectly as it does not fit the context of a business strategy.

6. D. I tried on the jacket in the shop, but it didn't fit me because the sleeves were too long.

the correct answer (I tried on the jacket in the shop, but it didn't fit me b) uses 'fit' correctly to describe a garment being the right size. a distractor (I need to go to the gym because I want to fit my health b) incorrectly uses 'fit' as a verb for 'improve.' a distractor (This blue tie doesn't fit your suit very well; you should) should use 'match' (style/color) rather than 'fit' (size). a distractor (The manager said I wasn't seizure for the job because I d) uses the confusable 'seizure' incorrectly instead of 'suitable'.

7. D. After three years of declining sales, the board decided on a strategic withdrawal from the electronics industry to save the remaining capital.

the correct answer (After three years of declining sales, the board decided o) correctly uses the term as a professional way to describe quitting a failing market. a distractor (Before the meeting started, the manager made a strategic) uses it for a literal bank transaction, and a distractor (The athlete made a strategic withdrawal by stretching her) uses it wrongly to describe preparation or recovery. a distractor (The company used damage control from the project because) uses 'damage control' which refers to managing a crisis rather than a planned exit.

8. C. The water company will cut off our supply if we don't pay the bill by Friday.

the correct answer (The water company will cut off our supply if we don't pay) correctly uses 'cut off' to describe stopping a utility supply. a distractor (The company decided to cut off the old employee because h) uses it incorrectly for firing someone; a distractor (He used a sharp knife to cut off the bread into thin slic)

uses the literal sense of removing a piece from a whole; a distractor (The manager decided to disconnect the meeting because the) uses a confusable word 'disconnect' for an event, which is incorrect in this context.