

# Tricky Words of the Day

Tuesday, June 16, 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

### Clause / Claws

To distinguish these in writing, remember that 'clause' (legal/grammar) ends in '-se' like 'sentence,' while 'claws' (animal) ends in '-ws' like 'paws.' In speech, you must rely entirely on the context of the conversation.

#### Meaning 1

**Claws:** The sharp, curved nails on the feet of animals like cats, birds, or bears. While the sound is the same as the legal term, the spelling 'claws' refers to the physical anatomy of an animal, which can lead to confusion in spoken English contexts.

"The cat sharpened its claws on the new sofa."

"The eagle used its powerful claws to grip the branch."



#### Meaning 2

**Santa Claus:** The legendary figure who brings gifts to children at Christmas.

This is a proper noun that is pronounced exactly like 'clause' and 'claws.' Learners may be confused when hearing 'The Santa Claus clause' in a legal comedy or holiday context.

"Do you still believe in Santa Claus?"

"He dressed up in a red suit to play Santa Claus for the party."



#### Meaning 3

**Clause:** A specific section of a legal document or a group of words in grammar containing a subject and a verb.

ESL learners often struggle with this word because it has two very different technical uses (legal and grammatical) and sounds identical to a common animal body part.

"The contract includes a termination clause that allows either party to cancel."

"A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence."



Related: provision; phrase; talons; nails; contract



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/clause-claws](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/clause-claws)

## Homograph · Lesson 2 of 9

**Transplant**

Pay close attention to the word's position in the sentence. If it follows a subject (I transplant), stress the end. If it follows an article or adjective (a transplant, the successful transplant), stress the beginning.

**Meaning 1**

To move a plant, organ, or person from one place to another (Verb).

As a verb, the stress is on the second syllable (trans-PLANT). ESL learners often struggle with the shift in emphasis when the word changes from an action to a thing.

"The surgeon will transplant the kidney tomorrow morning."

"We need to transplant these flowers into a larger pot."

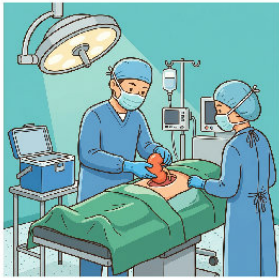
**Meaning 2**

The actual organ or plant that has been moved, or the medical operation itself (Noun).

As a noun, the stress shifts to the first syllable (TRANS-plant). This is confusing because the spelling remains identical, but the rhythm of the sentence changes.

"The heart transplant was a complete success."

"The gardener checked the new transplant for signs of wilting."

**Meaning 3**

A person who has moved from one area or country to live in another (Noun).

This is a figurative use of the noun. ESL learners might be confused when a person is called a 'transplant,' as it sounds like a medical term rather than a description of a new resident.

"She is a New York transplant living in Los Angeles."

"The city is full of transplants who moved there for tech jobs."



Related: graft; relocate; uproot; implant; migration



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/transplant](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/transplant)

Idiom · Lesson 3 of 9

# Barking mad

This is primarily a British English expression. In American English, people are more likely to say 'stark raving mad' or just 'crazy.' Note that 'mad' in British English frequently means 'insane,' whereas in American English it almost always means 'angry.' The phrase is often used lightheartedly or as an exaggeration, but it can be offensive if used to describe someone with actual mental health issues.

## Meaning 1

Completely crazy, insane, or behaving in a very eccentric and irrational way. ESL learners may be confused because the phrase combines 'barking' (the sound a dog makes) with 'mad' (which usually means angry in American English, but means crazy in British English). The literal image of a dog barking does not logically connect to the figurative meaning of being insane.

"You want to skydive without a parachute? You must be barking mad!"

"The neighbors think he's barking mad because he talks to his plants for three hours every morning."



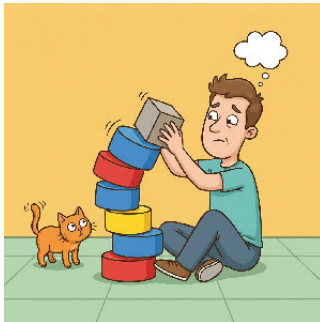
## Meaning 2

Extremely foolish or nonsensical; used to describe an idea or plan that is bound to fail.

In this context, it describes an action or a situation rather than a person's mental state. Learners might struggle to distinguish between a person being mentally ill and a plan simply being a bad or 'crazy' idea.

"The boss's new plan to double production while cutting the staff in half is barking mad."

"It's barking mad to try and drive through this blizzard."



Related: stark raving mad; bonkers; nuts; crackers; off one's rocker; loopy



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/barking-mad](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/barking-mad)

## Slang · Lesson 4 of 9

# Yikes

This word is very informal and should be avoided in professional writing or formal speeches. It is often dragged out for emphasis (e.g., 'Yiiiiikes') to show more intense shock or judgment. It is similar to 'Ouch' when used metaphorically for someone else's misfortune.

## Meaning 1

An exclamation used to express mild shock, alarm, surprise, or embarrassment.

ESL learners may find this confusing because it is an 'interjection' that doesn't function as a standard noun or verb. It is often used as a one-word reaction to someone else's bad news or a mistake, and the tone can range from genuine concern to playful teasing.

"Yikes! I didn't realize the meeting started ten minutes ago."

"You spent \$500 on a pair of shoes? Yikes."



## Meaning 2

A reaction to something cringeworthy, awkward, or socially uncomfortable.

In modern slang, 'yikes' is frequently used to acknowledge a 'cringe' moment. Learners might struggle to distinguish when it is being used to show sympathy versus when it is being used to highlight how awkward a situation is.

"He actually said that to his boss? Yikes, that's awkward."

"Yikes, I can't believe I sent that text to the wrong person."

## Meaning 3

A way to express fear or physical startle.

It can be used as a milder version of a scream. For learners, it is difficult to know the 'intensity' of the word; it is usually too informal for serious tragedies but perfect for small scares like seeing a spider.

"Yikes! You scared me jumping out from behind the door like that."

"Yikes, look at the size of that bug!"

Related: Whoops; Oof; Uh-oh; Cringe; Zoinks



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/yikes](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/yikes)

## Contronym · Lesson 5 of 9

**Factoid**

The word 'factoid' is a contronym because it can mean both a 'true fact' and a 'false fact.' When you hear it, you must use context to determine if the speaker is sharing a fun piece of trivia or warning you that a piece of information is actually a myth. To avoid confusion, many writers prefer the term 'trivia' for true things and 'myth' for false things.

**Meaning 1**

A brief, interesting, or trivial item of information that is true.

In modern, casual conversation, people use 'factoid' to mean a 'small fact.' ESL learners may be confused because the suffix '-oid' usually means 'resembling but not being,' yet here it is used to describe something that is actually true.

"Here is a fun factoid: honey never spoils."

"The newsletter includes a weekly factoid about local history."

**Meaning 2**

An invented or false statement presented as a fact, which becomes accepted as true because it is repeated often.

This is the original definition. It is the exact opposite of the first definition. ESL learners might hear someone call a statement a 'factoid' to discredit it as a lie, while another person uses the same word to highlight a truth.

"The idea that we only use ten percent of our brains is a persistent factoid."

"The biography was criticized for being full of baseless factoids rather than researched truths."

Related: trivia; misconception; tidbit; urban legend; nugget



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/factoid](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/factoid)

**Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 9****Flat out**

This phrase is very common in both British and American English. When used to describe work, it is often followed by the preposition 'to' (e.g., 'flat out to finish'). When used to describe a lie or refusal, it functions as an adverb meaning 'completely'.

**Meaning 1**

**At maximum speed or with maximum effort.**

ESL learners may be confused because 'flat' usually describes a surface, but here it describes the intensity of an action. It implies a person or machine is working as hard as possible.

"The factory has been working flat out to meet the holiday demand."

"He ran flat out but still missed the bus."

**Meaning 2**

**Completely, absolutely, or directly (often used with negative statements).**

In this context, 'flat out' acts as an intensifier for a lie or a refusal. Learners might struggle to see how 'flat' relates to the truth or a direct statement.

"I asked him for a loan, but he flat out refused."

"That statement is a flat out lie."

**Meaning 3**

**Lying stretched out at full length.**

This is the most literal version of the phrase, referring to physical posture. It can be confused with the metaphorical meanings of working hard or being direct.

"After the marathon, she was lying flat out on the grass."

"The cat was stretched flat out in front of the fireplace."

Related: full throttle; bluntly; utterly; prostrate; at full tilt



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/flat-out](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/flat-out)

## Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 9

**Bridge**

Beyond these three, 'bridge' can also mean the platform from which a captain commands a ship, a dental appliance to replace missing teeth, or a card game. It is also frequently used as a verb meaning 'to connect' (e.g., 'to bridge the gap').

**Meaning 1**

A structure built to span a physical obstacle (such as a river, road, or valley) for the purpose of providing passage.

This is the most common literal meaning. Confusion arises because learners may not realize it can apply to small footpaths as well as massive highway structures.

"The Golden Gate Bridge is a famous landmark in San Francisco."

"We walked across the wooden bridge to get over the small stream."

**Meaning 2**

The upper part of the nose, or the part of a pair of glasses that rests on the nose.

This is confusing because it refers to anatomy and fashion. A learner might be confused if someone says their glasses are 'hurting the bridge,' as they might look for a physical structure nearby.

"He pushed his glasses back up to the bridge of his nose."

"The bridge of this frame is too wide for my face."

**Meaning 3**

The part of a song that connects two main sections, usually the verse and the chorus, often having a different melody.

ESL learners often struggle with this because it is a technical musical term. They might expect the word to only refer to physical objects rather than a segment of time or sound.

"The bridge of the song features a beautiful guitar solo."

"The transition from the second chorus to the bridge was very smooth."

Related: span; connection; overpass; viaduct; transition



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/bridge](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/bridge)

## Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 9

**Late**

The word 'late' is confusing because its meaning changes completely when used as an adjective before a person's name. In the phrase 'the late [Name]', it always refers to someone who is dead. Also, be careful with 'lately,' which means 'recently' and is not the adverb form of 'tardy'.

**Meaning 1**

Arriving or happening after the expected or usual time.

This is the most common usage. It describes someone who is not on time for an appointment or an event that happens near the end of a period.

"I am sorry for being late to the meeting."

"It happened in the late afternoon."

**Meaning 2**

A polite way to refer to someone who has recently died.

This is a euphemism often used in formal contexts or when showing respect. ESL learners may be confused when they see 'the late Mr. Smith' because it doesn't mean he is tardy; it means he is deceased.

"The late king was loved by everyone."

"She inherited the house from her late husband."

Related: tardy; deceased; delayed; lately; behind schedule



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/late](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/late)

**Phrasal Verb · Lesson 9 of 9****Put up with**

Inseparable. Often used with negative situations.

**Meaning 1**

To tolerate or accept something unpleasant.

ESL learners often confuse this with literally putting something up. It means enduring without complaint.

"I can't put up with his constant complaining anymore."

"She has to put up with a long commute every day."

Related: tolerate; endure; stand



**Read the full lesson**

[eslwordwiz.com/words/put-up-with](https://eslwordwiz.com/words/put-up-with)

## Quick Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Which sentence uses 'Yikes' correctly according to this definition: An exclamation used to express mild shock, alarm, surprise, or embarrassment?**

- A. Yikes! I didn't realize the repair would cost five hundred dollars.
- B. Whoops! That spider on the wall is absolutely enormous and scary.
- C. I was very Yikes when I saw how expensive the electricity bill was this month.
- D. Yikes! I just won the lottery and I am so happy for my family!

**2. Which sentence uses 'transplant' correctly according to this definition: To move a plant, organ, or person from one place to another (Verb)?**

- A. We need to transplant the young trees from the small pots into the garden soil.
- B. The doctor decided to implant the medication directly into the muscle to help the pain.
- C. The workers will transplant the old building to make room for a new parking lot.
- D. We need to uproot the young trees from the small pots into the garden soil.

**3. Which sentence uses 'late' correctly according to this definition: Arriving or happening after the expected or usual time?**

- A. The late Mr. Johnson donated his entire library to the city before he passed away.
- B. We need to late the deadline because the project is not finished yet.
- C. I have been seeing him very late because we work in the same office.
- D. The bus was late this morning because of the heavy snow, so I missed the first lesson.

**4. Which sentence uses 'bridge' correctly according to this definition: A structure built to span a physical obstacle (such as a river, road, or valley) for the purpose of providing passage?**

- A. The engineer decided to bridge the gap between the two separate computer systems.
- B. To reach the island, we had to drive across a massive stone bridge over the water.
- C. The dentist checked the bridge on my back molar to ensure it was still biting correctly.
- D. They used a metal span to ensure the two ideas were connected in the presentation.

**5. Which sentence uses 'clause' correctly according to this definition: A specific section of a legal document or a group of words in grammar containing a subject and a verb?**

- A. The lawyer pointed out a specific clause in the contract regarding late payments.
- B. The detective found a clause at the crime scene that helped him solve the mystery.
- C. I need to clause the door before the cold air comes inside.
- D. The cat used its sharp clause to climb the tree quickly.

**6. Which sentence uses 'put up with' correctly according to this definition: To tolerate or accept something unpleasant?**

- A. The organization works to put up with the rights of workers in the factory.
- B. The local museum decided to put up with a new exhibition of modern art this month.
- C. My roommate is so messy, but I have to put up with it until our lease ends.
- D. If you are coming to the party, I can put up with you at my house for the night.

**7. Which sentence uses 'barking mad' correctly according to this definition: Completely crazy, insane, or behaving in a very eccentric and irrational way?**

- A. After running the marathon in the pouring rain, my muscles were barking mad for several days.
- B. The crowd at the stadium was barking mad when the home team scored the winning goal in the final few seconds.
- C. If you think you can finish this entire project in twenty minutes, you must be barking mad!
- D. Whenever a stranger approaches the gate, the guard dog is barking mad to protect the property.

**8. Which sentence uses 'factoid' correctly according to this definition: A brief, interesting, or trivial item of information that is true?**

- A. The professor wrote a long factoid of over fifty pages regarding his complex scientific theories.
- B. Did you know this fun factoid? The heart of a shrimp is located in its head.
- C. She shared a factoid of chocolate with me, even though I told her I wasn't hungry.
- D. Many people believe that it is dangerous to wake a sleepwalker, but that is actually a common misconception.

**9. Which sentence uses 'Flat Out' correctly according to this definition: At maximum speed or with maximum effort.?**

- A. The witness gave a flat out answer that left no room for doubt or confusion.
- B. After the tire went flat out, we had to pull over to the side of the road to change it.
- C. The engine broke because he was driving flat out for three hours on the motorway.
- D. After the long hike, he lay flat out on the grass because he was so tired.



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# Quiz

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

**1. Which sentence uses 'Yikes' correctly according to this definition: An exclamation used to express mild shock, alarm, surprise, or embarrassment?**

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- B. Whoops! That spider on the wall is absolutely enormous and scary.
- C. I was very Yikes when I saw how expensive the electricity bill was this month.
- D. Yikes! I just won the lottery and I am so happy for my family!

Target: Yikes · CEFR B1

**2. Which sentence uses 'transplant' correctly according to this definition: To move a plant, organ, or person from one place to another (Verb)?**

- A. We need to transplant the young trees from the small pots into the garden soil.
- B. The doctor decided to implant the medication directly into the muscle to help the pain.
- C. The workers will transplant the old building to make room for a new parking lot.
- D. We need to uproot the young trees from the small pots into the garden soil.

Target: Transplant · CEFR B1

**3. Which sentence uses 'late' correctly according to this definition: Arriving or happening after the expected or usual time?**

- A. The late Mr. Johnson donated his entire library to the city before he passed away.
- B. We need to late the deadline because the project is not finished yet.
- C. I have been seeing him very late because we work in the same office.
- D. The bus was late this morning because of the heavy snow, so I missed the first lesson.

Target: late · CEFR B1

**4. Which sentence uses 'bridge' correctly according to this definition: A structure built to span a physical obstacle (such as a river, road, or valley) for the purpose of providing passage?**

- A. The engineer decided to bridge the gap between the two separate computer systems.
- B. To reach the island, we had to drive across a massive stone bridge over the water.
- C. The dentist checked the bridge on my back molar to ensure it was still biting correctly.
- D. They used a metal span to ensure the two ideas were connected in the presentation.

Target: bridge · CEFR B1

**5. Which sentence uses 'clause' correctly according to this definition: A specific section of a legal document or a group of words in grammar containing a subject and a verb?**

- A. The lawyer pointed out a specific clause in the contract regarding late payments.
- B. The detective found a clause at the crime scene that helped him solve the mystery.
- C. I need to clause the door before the cold air comes inside.
- D. The cat used its sharp clause to climb the tree quickly.

Target: clause / claws · CEFR B1

**6. Which sentence uses 'put up with' correctly according to this definition: To tolerate or accept something unpleasant?**

- A. The organization works to put up with the rights of workers in the factory.
- B. The local museum decided to put up with a new exhibition of modern art this month.
- C. My roommate is so messy, but I have to put up with it until our lease ends.
- D. If you are coming to the party, I can put up with you at my house for the night.

Target: put up with · CEFR B1

**7. Which sentence uses 'barking mad' correctly according to this definition: Completely crazy, insane, or behaving in a very eccentric and irrational way?**

- A. After running the marathon in the pouring rain, my muscles were barking mad for several days.
- B. The crowd at the stadium was barking mad when the home team scored the winning goal in the final few seconds.
- C. If you think you can finish this entire project in twenty minutes, you must be barking mad!
- D. Whenever a stranger approaches the gate, the guard dog is barking mad to protect the property.

*Target: barking mad · CEFR B1*

**8. Which sentence uses 'factoid' correctly according to this definition: A brief, interesting, or trivial item of information that is true?**

- A. The professor wrote a long factoid of over fifty pages regarding his complex scientific theories.
- B. Did you know this fun factoid? The heart of a shrimp is located in its head.
- C. She shared a factoid of chocolate with me, even though I told her I wasn't hungry.
- D. Many people believe that it is dangerous to wake a sleepwalker, but that is actually a common misconception.

*Target: Factoid · CEFR B1*

**9. Which sentence uses 'Flat Out' correctly according to this definition: At maximum speed or with maximum effort.?**

- A. The witness gave a flat out answer that left no room for doubt or confusion.
- B. After the tire went flat out, we had to pull over to the side of the road to change it.
- C. The engine broke because he was driving flat out for three hours on the motorway.
- D. After the long hike, he lay flat out on the grass because he was so tired.

*Target: Flat Out · CEFR B1*

# Answer Key

## 1. A. Yikes! I didn't realize the repair would cost five hundred dollars.

*the correct answer ( Yikes! I didn't realize the repair would cost five hundre ) correctly uses 'Yikes' to show mild shock at a high price. a distractor ( Yikes! I just won the lottery and I am so happy for my fa ) is wrong because 'Yikes' is for negative shock, not joyful celebration. a distractor ( I was very Yikes when I saw how expensive the electricity ) uses it as an adjective instead of an exclamation. a distractor ( Whoops! That spider on the wall is absolutely enormous an ) uses 'Whoops', which is for small mistakes, not alarm or shock.*

## 2. A. We need to transplant the young trees from the small pots into the garden soil.

*the correct answer ( We need to transplant the young trees from the small pots ) uses transplant as a verb to describe moving a plant to a new location. a distractor ( The patient successfully received a heart transplant afte ) uses it as a noun, a distractor ( The workers will transplant the old building to make room ) incorrectly applies it to a building (relocate) rather than a person, organ, or plant, and a distractor ( The doctor decided to implant the medication directly int ) uses a confusable related to putting something in rather than moving it from one place to another.*

## 3. D. The bus was late this morning because of the heavy snow, so I missed the first lesson.

*the correct answer ( The bus was late this morning because of the heavy snow, ) is correct as it describes a bus arriving after its scheduled time. A uses 'late' where 'lately' (recently) is required. C uses 'late' as a euphemism for 'deceased'. D uses 'late' as a verb, which is grammatically incorrect; 'extend' or 'delay' should be used.*

## 4. B. To reach the island, we had to drive across a massive stone bridge over the water.

*the correct answer ( To reach the island, we had to drive across a massive sto ) fits the definition of a physical structure spanning an obstacle (water). a distractor ( The engineer decided to bridge the gap between the two se ) uses 'bridge' as a verb for a metaphorical connection, a distractor ( They used a metal span to ensure the two ideas were conne ) uses 'span' as a noun for an abstract idea, and a distractor ( The dentist checked the bridge on my back molar to ensure ) uses the dental meaning of 'bridge'.*

## 5. A. The lawyer pointed out a specific clause in the contract regarding late payments.

*the correct answer ( The lawyer pointed out a specific clause in the contract ) correctly uses 'clause' to refer to a legal section. a distractor ( The cat used its sharp clause to climb the tree quickly. ) uses the homophone 'claws'. a distractor ( I need to clause the door before the cold air comes inside. ) uses 'clause' as a verb instead of 'close', and a distractor ( The detective found a clause at the crime scene that help ) confuses it with 'clue'.*

## 6. C. My roommate is so messy, but I have to put up with it until our lease ends.

*the correct answer ( My roommate is so messy, but I have to put up with it unt ) is correct because it shows someone tolerating an unpleasant situation (a messy roommate). a distractor ( The local museum decided to put up with a new exhibition ) uses 'put up' to mean display; a distractor ( The organization works to put up with the rights of worke ) confuses it with 'uphold' or 'support'; a distractor ( If you are coming to the party, I can put up with you at ) uses it to mean 'provide accommodation'.*

## 7. C. If you think you can finish this entire project in twenty minutes, you must be barking mad!

*the correct answer ( If you think you can finish this entire project in twenty ) uses 'barking mad' to describe an irrational idea. a distractor ( The neighbors' dog is barking mad whenever a car drives p ) uses the words literally regarding a dog. a distractor ( After losing the championship game, the coach was barking ) and D confuse 'mad' with 'angry' or 'annoyed', whereas 'barking mad' specifically refers to insanity or eccentricity.*

## 8. B. Did you know this fun factoid? The heart of a shrimp is located in its head.

*the correct answer ( Did you know this fun factoid? The heart of a shrimp is I ) correctly uses 'factoid' as a brief, interesting, and true piece of information. a distractor ( The professor wrote a long factoid of over fifty pages re ) is incorrect because a factoid is brief, not a long document. a distractor ( Many people believe that it*

*is dangerous to wake a sleepw ) uses a confusable related to false information. a distractor ( She shared a factoid of chocolate with me, even though I ) incorrectly uses the word as if it were a physical piece or 'nugget' of food.*

**9. C. The engine broke because he was driving flat out for three hours on the motorway.**

*the correct answer ( The engine broke because he was driving flat out for thre ) correctly uses 'flat out' to mean at maximum speed. a distractor ( After the long hike, he lay flat out on the grass because ) uses it to mean lying down horizontally. a distractor ( The witness gave a flat out answer that left no room for ) confuses it with being 'straightforward' or 'blunt'. a distractor ( I was utterly exhausted after the race, so I stayed home ) uses a confusable synonym ('utterly') instead of the target phrase.*