Tricky Words of the Day

Sunday, June 21, 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

Days / Daze

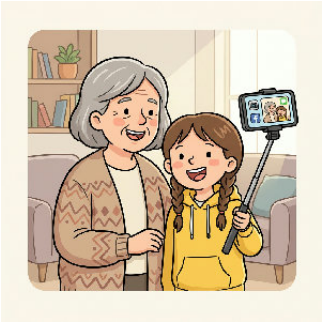
The most important thing to remember is that 'days' is almost always related to time, while 'daze' is related to a mental state or feeling confused. If you hear 'in a...', it is likely 'in a daze' (singular noun). If you hear a number before it, it is likely 'days' (plural noun).

Meaning 1

Days: The plural of 'day,' referring to periods of 24 hours or the time when it is light outside.

ESL learners often confuse this because it is a very common, basic noun. Because it sounds identical to 'daze,' learners may struggle to distinguish them in spoken conversation without clear context.

"I will be on vacation for five days."
"In the winter, the days feel much shorter."



Meaning 2

Dog days / Nowadays

The word 'days' appears in several idiomatic compounds that can be confusing. 'Nowadays' means 'at the present time,' while 'dog days' refers to the hottest period of summer.

"Nowadays, most people use their phones to tell the time."
"We spent the dog days of August swimming in the lake."

Meaning 3

Daze: A state of confusion or being stunned; also a verb meaning to stun or bewilder someone.

This is a less common word than 'days.' Learners may hear 'in a daze' and mistakenly think the speaker is saying 'in a days,' which is grammatically incorrect but sounds identical.

"After the car accident, he walked around in a daze."
"The bright lights of the stadium seemed to daze the young player."

Related: dazed; dazzle; daily; confused; stunned

Read the full lesson
eslwordwiz.com/words/days-daze

Homograph · Lesson 2 of 9

Accent

Pay close attention to word stress. As a noun (a person's voice), the stress is on the first syllable (AC-cent). As a verb (to emphasize), the stress usually shifts to the second syllable (ac-CENT). In writing, 'accent marks' like the acute (é) are common in many languages but rare in English, except for borrowed words like 'café'.

Meaning 1

A distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area, or social class.

ESL learners often confuse 'accent' with 'dialect.' While a dialect includes different grammar and vocabulary, an accent refers strictly to the sound and pronunciation of words.

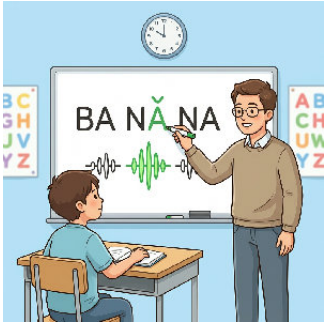
"She has a very strong British accent."
"It can be difficult to understand a thick regional accent when you first arrive."

Meaning 2

A small decorative feature that stands out from its surroundings.

In design or fashion, 'accent' is used as an adjective or noun to describe something that contrasts. This is confusing because it moves away from linguistics into visual aesthetics.

"The room was painted white with a green accent wall."
"She wore a red scarf as an accent piece for her black dress."



Meaning 3

To emphasize a particular syllable, note, or detail; or a mark used in writing to indicate stress or vowel quality.

As a homograph, the pronunciation changes when used as a verb. The stress shifts to the second syllable (ak-SENT). Learners may struggle to hear the difference between the noun and the action.

"You should accent the first syllable of the word 'pancake'."

Related: dialect; pronunciation; stress; emphasis; inflection; highlight

Read the full lesson
eslwordwiz.com/words/accent

Idiom · Lesson 3 of 9

Bite the dust

This is a very common informal expression. While it can refer to death, it is often used humorously or lightheartedly when talking about broken electronics or failed projects. However, be careful not to use it in formal or sensitive situations (like a funeral) as it can sound disrespectful.

Meaning 1

To die, especially in a sudden or violent way.

ESL learners may take the phrase literally and imagine someone physically eating dirt. In reality, it refers to a person falling face-down on the ground at the moment of death, particularly in battle or Western movies.

"Many brave soldiers bit the dust during that historic battle."
"The villain in the movie finally bit the dust in the final scene."

Meaning 2

To fail, break down, or stop functioning.

This usage is confusing because it applies the concept of 'death' to inanimate objects or abstract plans. Learners might not realize that a machine or a business can 'bite the dust' when it stops working permanently.

"My old laptop finally bit the dust after ten years of use."
"Our plans for a summer vacation bit the dust when the flights were canceled."

Meaning 3

To be defeated or surpassed by a competitor.

In a competitive context, it implies losing a contest or being eliminated from a competition. A learner might think it refers to a physical injury rather than just losing a game.

"Another championship contender bit the dust in the second round of the tournament."
"The small local shop bit the dust once the giant supermarket opened nearby."

Related: kick the bucket; pass away; conk out; go belly up; meet one's end

Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/bite-the-dust

Slang · Lesson 4 of 9

Facts

While the literal meaning is formal and academic, the slang usage is very common in social media and casual conversation among younger generations. It is often used interchangeably with 'True' or 'Period'.

Meaning 1

Information that is known or proven to be true.

This is the standard plural noun form. ESL learners may struggle with the final consonant cluster /kts/, which can sound like 'fax' or 'facks'.

"The lawyer presented the facts of the case to the jury."
"It is a known fact that water freezes at zero degrees Celsius."

Meaning 2

An interjection used to express strong agreement or to emphasize that what someone just said is true.

In modern slang, 'Facts' is used as a standalone sentence. Learners may be confused because it lacks a subject or verb and functions as a synonym for 'I agree' or 'That is the truth'.

"Person A: 'That movie was way too long.' Person B: 'Facts!'"
"Facts, we really need to start studying for the final exam."

Meaning 3

Used as a synonym for 'truthfully' or 'no lie' (often phrased as 'Big facts' or 'Straight facts').

Learners might be confused when 'facts' is used as an adjective or an intensifier to validate a statement's sincerity rather than just referring to data.

"I'm telling you, that was the best pizza I've ever had, straight facts."
"Big facts, I'm definitely going to be late if I don't leave now."

Related: Truth; Fax; Real talk; Indeed; Word

Read the full lesson
eslwordwiz.com/words/facts

Contranym · Lesson 5 of 9

Pitted

Pitted is a classic contranym (or Janus word) because it can mean both 'having the pits removed' and 'having pits or holes added.' To tell the difference, look at the object: if it is a fruit, the pit is gone; if it is a road or skin, the holes are there.

Meaning 1

Having the stone or seed removed from a fruit.

In this context, the suffix '-ed' acts as a privative, meaning the 'pit' has been taken away. ESL learners often find it confusing that adding a word can mean subtraction.

"Please buy a jar of pitted olives for the salad."
"The recipe calls for two cups of pitted cherries."

Meaning 2

Having many small dents, holes, or scars on a surface.

In this context, the word describes a surface that is full of pits (holes). This is the opposite of the first meaning because it describes the presence of pits rather than their removal.

"The old road was pitted with deep potholes after the storm."
"The surface of the moon is heavily pitted from meteorite impacts."

Meaning 3

Set in opposition or competition against someone or something else.

This usage comes from 'pit' referring to an enclosed area for fighting (like a cockfighting pit). It is confusing because it transforms a noun for a hole into a verb for conflict.

"The tournament pitted the reigning champion against a young newcomer."
"It was a battle that pitted brother against brother."

Related: deseeded; pockmarked; rivalry; hollowed; stoned

Read the full lesson
eslwordwiz.com/words/pitted

Figure of Speech · Lesson 6 of 9

Pyrrhic victory

Formal. Common in business, sports, and politics.

Meaning 1

A win achieved at such great cost that it's almost a defeat.

From King Pyrrhus, whose battlefield wins destroyed his army. Today: winning the battle but losing the war.

"The lawsuit was a Pyrrhic victory they won but lost most of their clients."

"Beating the rival cost so much that it was a Pyrrhic victory."

Related: costly win; hollow victory; lose-win; expensive triumph; bittersweet

Read the full lesson

eslwordwiz.com/words/pyrrhic-victory

Multi-Meaning · Lesson 7 of 9

Lit

While 'lit' is a standard grammatical word (past tense of light), its popularity in pop culture as slang makes it tricky. In professional settings, stick to the literal meaning. In social settings, 'lit' is almost always used to mean 'exciting'.

Meaning 1

Slang used to describe something that is exciting, excellent, or high-energy.

This is a modern slang usage that has no literal connection to fire. Learners might hear someone say 'the party was lit' and think there was a fire, rather than understanding it was a fun event.

"The concert last night was so lit!"
"You should come to the game"

Meaning 2

The past tense and past participle of the verb 'light'.

ESL learners may be confused because 'light' has two acceptable past tense forms: 'lit' and 'lighted'. 'Lit' is the more common version used when referring to starting a fire or turning on a lamp.

"She lit the candles on the birthday cake."
"The street was lit by old-fashioned lanterns."

Meaning 3

Slang used to describe someone who is intoxicated by alcohol or drugs.

This is a more specific, informal usage. It can be confusing because the same word 'lit' can mean 'fun' (positive) or 'drunk' (potentially negative) depending on the context of the person being described.

"He got way too lit at the wedding and started dancing on the tables."
"They were already lit by the time they arrived at the club."

Related: ignited; illuminated; fire; hype; intoxicated

Read the full lesson
eslwordwiz.com/words/lit

Euphemism · Lesson 8 of 9

Little white lie

While a 'lie' is generally considered bad, a 'little white lie' is often seen as socially acceptable or even 'good manners' in English-speaking cultures. However, the boundary between a 'white lie' and a 'real lie' is subjective and can vary between people.

Meaning 1

A small, harmless, or trivial lie told to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to be polite.

ESL learners may be confused because 'lie' usually has a very negative, immoral connotation. The addition of 'little' and 'white' changes the moral weight of the word, suggesting that the lie is actually a kind or necessary social tool rather than a betrayal of truth.

"I told a little white lie and said I liked her new haircut, even though I didn't."
"He told a little white lie about being stuck in traffic because he didn't want to admit he overslept."

Meaning 2

A polite way to describe a minor deception that avoids a social conflict.

The word 'white' in this context is used as a euphemism for 'innocent' or 'pure.' Learners might find this confusing if they associate colors with literal objects rather than symbolic moral qualities.

"It's better to tell a little white lie than to tell your grandmother you hate the sweater she knitted for you."
"She didn't want to go to the party, so she told a little white lie about having too much homework."

Related: fib; half-truth; social grace; tall tale; soften the blow

Read the full lesson
eslwordwiz.com/words/little-white-lie

Phrasal Verb · Lesson 9 of 9

Go ahead

Inseparable.

Meaning 1

To proceed or start doing something, or to get permission to do so.

Often used as permission or encouragement.

"Go ahead and start without me."
"You can go ahead with the plan."

Related: proceed; continue

Read the full lesson
eslwordwiz.com/words/go-ahead

Quick Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which sentence uses 'go ahead' correctly according to this definition: To proceed or start doing something.?

A. If you are ready to present your ideas, please go ahead.
B. You should proceed the street and turn left at the bank.
C. The price of bread will go ahead by fifty cents next week.
D. I need to go ahead my homework before I can play video games.

2. Which sentence uses 'Accent' correctly according to this definition: A distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area, or social class?

A. Even though he has lived in London for ten years, he still speaks with a thick Italian accent.
B. The manager decided to accent the positive aspects of the new policy during the meeting.
C. When you say the word 'computer,' the accent is usually on the second syllable.
D. She uses a lot of local dialect when she speaks to her family back in her hometown.

3. Which sentence uses 'bite the dust' correctly according to this definition: To die, especially in a sudden or violent way?

A. The computer was so old that it finally bit the dust in the middle of my presentation.
B. The outlaw was hit by a flurry of bullets and bit the dust on the spot.
C. Our business is about to bite the dust because we don't have enough customers.
D. My grandmother bit the dust peacefully in her sleep at the age of ninety-five.

4. Which sentence uses 'little white lie' correctly according to this definition: A small, harmless, or trivial lie told to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to be polite?

A. The company was caught in a little white lie after hiding millions of dollars from the tax office.
B. I told a little white lie and said the soup was delicious because I didn't want to upset my host.
C. He always uses a social grace to cover up the fact that he arrived late to the meeting.
D. The sailor told a little white lie about fighting a giant sea monster during his trip across the ocean.

5. Which sentence uses 'pitted' correctly according to this definition: Having the stone or seed removed from a fruit.?

A. The local athletes were pitted against the national champions in the final race.
B. The chef used a hollowed knife to carefully remove the core from the apple.
C. The recipe suggests using pitted cherries so you don't have to worry about the hard seeds.
D. The old road was badly pitted after the winter storms, making it very bumpy to drive on.

6. Which sentence uses 'days' correctly according to this definition: The plural of 'day,' referring to periods of 24 hours or the time when it is light outside?

A. The bright lights left him in a complete days, and he couldn't remember where he was.
B. Living in the city center has many days, such as being close to all the shops.
C. She was so shocked by the news that she walked around in a days for hours.
D. We are planning to stay in London for at least three days next week.

7. Which sentence uses 'lit' correctly according to this definition: The past tense and past participle of the verb 'light'?

A. The streetlights lit the whole neighborhood with a soft orange glow.
B. As soon as the sun went down, he lit a small fire to keep warm.
C. The party last night was totally lit and everyone had a great time.
D. He felt a bit lit after drinking only one glass of strong cider.

8. Which sentence uses 'facts' correctly according to this definition: Information that is known or proven to be true.?

A. I really like your new fax; it makes you look very professional in the office.
B. Before we make a decision, we need to gather all the facts about the budget.
C. The movie was so facts that I cried during the final scene.
D. He always facts his friends when he is feeling happy or excited.

9. Which sentence uses 'Pyrrhic victory' correctly according to this definition: A win achieved at such great cost that it's almost a defeat.?

A. The company celebrated a Pyrrhic victory after their sales doubled and everyone received a huge bonus.
B. It was a hollow victory because the other team didn't even show up to play the match.
C. The athlete suffered a Pyrrhic victory when she tripped at the finish line and came in last place.
D. Winning the legal battle was a Pyrrhic victory; they won the small fee but spent their entire life savings on the lawyer.

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