Identifying words that sound the same

Some words in English sound the same when they’re spoken but have different spellings and different meanings. For example, the words write and right sound the same but mean different things and are spelt differently. These words are called homophones.

To work out the spelling of a homophone, you first need to check the meaning of the word. It can help to find particular words when you’re reading, or you can use the word in a sentence. For example:

- They write poems and plays to get their ideas across.
- I agree, what you say is right.

There are no spelling rules to help you remember homophones. Don’t try to learn the spellings of two or three homophones at the same time, as it can be confusing. It’s best to practise one word at a time.

For example, if you want to write the word there, there’s only one way of sounding out the word, but there are three homophones: there, their and they’re. So there are three possible spellings! Rather than try and learn the spellings and the use of all three words, start with one word (eg there). The first thing is to check that you know the meaning, and notice the spelling, of the word there.

It helps to make a list of words with the same spelling pattern: eg here, there, everywhere. This is a word family. Try to remember a phrase or make up a story with words in the same word family to help you remember the spelling pattern for there. This also helps to link the spelling and the meaning of the word in your mind.

Andrea wanted to remember the homophone right. She made a list of words with the -ight pattern. Here’s a story she wrote with the words:

There was a fight right outside my flat last night. It was dark as one of the street lights was broken. However, I caught sight of one man who looked like he was wearing a tight scarf around his neck. The sun was shining brightly the next morning when the police came round to question everybody in my block.

The words with the -ight pattern in the story are: fight, right, night, lights, sight, tight, brightly.

It helps to learn word patterns as you’re learning more than one word at the same time. When you’re sure of the spelling and meaning of one homophone, it makes it easier to learn the spelling of other words that sound the same.
Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelt differently and have different meanings. e.g. to, too and two.

Activity 1

Match the words below to the correct picture.

- knight
- flower
- hair
- bare
- hare
- bear
- night
- flour

Activity 2

Choose the correct homophone to complete this sentence.

(a) The boy put shampoo on his (hare/hair).
(b) Mum put some (flower/flour) in the cake mix.
(c) James didn't have a very good (nights/knights) sleep.
(d) A rabbit is a bit like a (hare/hair).
(e) Tony got chased by a large (bare/bear).
Activity 3

The words below have homophones. Can you think of them?

plane  right  see  there  which  where  
be  for  here  knew  no  so

Activity 4

Choose the correct homophone to complete the sentences.

(a) Lucy couldn't wait to (meet/meat) her friend.
(b) Andrew (missed/mist) the bus.
(c) The mouse got his (tale/tail) caught.
(d) Glen has a long (wait/weight) for the bus.
(e) The cat hurt its (pour/poor/paw).
(f) The old man had no money, he was (pour/poor/paw).
(g) "Could you (pour/poor/paw) the orange juice, please?"
(h) Mark got a letter in the (mail/male).

Activity 5

Explain the differences between these words.

(a) or and oar  (b) sail and sale  (c) saw and sore  
(d) maid and made  (e) main and mane

Challenge: Try and find homophones for some of these words.
The word **homophone** is made from two combining forms:

- **homo-** (from the Greek word "homos", meaning "same")
- **-phone** (from the Greek word "phone", meaning "voice" or "sound")

You will see many English words using one or other of these combining forms.

The following list of 70 groups of homophones contains only the most common homophones, using relatively well-known words. These are headwords only. No inflections (such as third person singular "s" or noun plurals) are included.

Are you clear about each of the different meanings? Can you spot any you are not sure about?

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**NB:** In a few cases, a third homophone, although possible, has not been included for simplicity. Different varieties and accents of English may produce variations in some of these pronunciations. The homophones listed here are based on British English.
# Usage of There, Their, and They’re

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>When to Use</strong></th>
<th><strong>Examples</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>There</strong></td>
<td>Naming a place, a thing, or the existence of something</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The bus stop is over there.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• There are any biscuits left in the jar.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Their</strong></td>
<td>Showing possession (plural)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Their car is in the garage at the moment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• They have forget their coats in the cloakroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>They’re</strong></td>
<td>Contraction of “they are” into “they’re” (informal)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They’re very excited about their holiday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Test Yourself

1. The teacher told them to leave ........ books on the desk.
2. Billy is often late to school, but Freddie is always ........ on time.
3. .......... are over 900 students at our school.
4. Ask them if ........... coming round tomorrow.
5. Dad was pleased the girls had done so well in ........... exams.
6. We’ll go to McDonalds if ........... is time.
7. ........... baking a cake for their Grandma today.
8. Can you give me ........... telephone number?
9. My parents won’t be coming as ........... both working on Saturday.
Directions: For each sentence, write their, they're, or there in the blank line.

1. Nathan ate dinner at _____________ house.
2. Carter said _____________ coming over tonight.
3. Olivia set up the computer over _____________.
4. My friends cannot find _____________ jackets.
5. _____________ are four squirrels in the yard.
6. _____________ is an exciting movie playing tonight.
7. _____________ always late!
8. The house over _____________ is made of stone.
9. You can have another cookie if _____________ is one left.
10. Can you help me fix _____________ computer?
There, Their, They're

**they're** — a contraction for the words they are

*They're going to the airport.*

**their** — something that belongs to people

*We rode in their car.*

**there** — a place; or used with the word are or is

*The box is over there.*  
*There are five coins in the bag.*

Directions: For each sentence, write their, they're, or there in the blank line.

1. Nathan ate dinner at their house.
2. Carter said they're coming over tonight.
3. Olivia set up the computer over there.
4. My friends cannot find their jackets.
5. There are four squirrels in the yard.
6. There is an exciting movie playing tonight.
7. They're always late!
8. The house over there is made of stone.
9. You can have another cookie if there is one left.
10. Can you help me fix their computer?
To, Two and Too

These three are occasionally muddled. Luckily, it is easy to sort out when to use them.

- **Two** is the number. In academic writing it is better to use the written form than to write the numeral ‘2’.

  When I looked in the tin, there were only **two** biscuits left.
  Tim has only got **two** friends: Colin and Donald.
  **Two** cars passed the building shortly before the explosion.
  We were stopped by **two** angry-looking policemen.

- **Too** is used with adverbs and adjectives in sentences like these:

  English grammar is far **too** complicated for me.
  I'm not buying this car; it is far **too** expensive.
  The French speak **too** quickly for me to understand them completely.
  The match was none **too** exciting until the final few minutes.

- **To** is the most common of these three words. It has several different uses.

  It is used with verbs in their infinitive form.
  I think it is going **to rain** today.
  Paul and Steve both had ambitions **to become** professional bowls players.
  When I win the lottery, I would like **to spend** a year travelling the world.
  There is no need **to shout**.

  Remember that you should not put anything in between the 'to' and the rest of the verb infinitive. This is known as a split infinitive.

  - 'To' is also used in the sense of 'towards'.

    I walk **to** school every day.
    Next month I am travelling **to** India and then **to** Thailand.
    'Get **to** the back of the queue!'
    'Are you going **to** the shops later on today?'

  http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_15.htm
To, Too, and Two

Use the word too, to, or two to complete each sentence.

1. Kate and Jan went _______________ a football game.
2. James said, “I ate _______________ much ice cream.”
3. Please pick up _______________ gallons of milk from the store.
4. May I play _______________?
5. Madison likes _______________ ride horses.
6. We will all go _______________ the beach on Sunday.
7. My teacher said, “Your voices are _______________ loud.”
8. Dexter wants _______________ be in the school play.
9. Grandma bought me _______________ birthday presents.
10. Would you like _______________ have beef stew for dinner tonight?
11. Next month, my little sister will turn _______________ years old.
12. You have _______________ many toys in your bedroom.
13. When Pablo started school, he learned _______________ count up to ten.
To, Too, and Two

Use the word too, to, or two to complete each sentence.

1. Kate and Jan went to a football game.
2. James said, “I ate too much ice cream.”
3. Please pick up two gallons of milk from the store.
4. May I play too?
5. Madison likes to ride horses.
6. We will all go to the beach on Sunday.
7. My teacher said, “Your voices are too loud.”
8. Dexter wants to be in the school play.
9. Grandma bought me two birthday presents.
10. Would you like to have beef stew for dinner tonight?
10. Next month, my little sister will turn two years old.
11. You have too many toys in your bedroom.
12. When Pablo started school, he learned to count up to ten.
The word you’re is a contraction for the words you are.
The word your is a word to describe something that belongs to you.

Use the word your or you’re to complete each sentence.

1. May I borrow ____________ baseball mitt?
2. ____________ my best friend.
3. Is ____________ homework finished?
4. If you misbehave in school, ____________ going to be grounded.
5. I think ____________ the best grandpa in the whole world.
6. Is this ____________ first trip to California?
7. ____________ going to have a great time here.
8. Paul, ____________ friend called on the phone.
9. I haven’t been to any of ____________ basketball games this year.
10. After dinner, ____________ going to help clear the table.

★ Challenge ____________ going with ____________ father to pick up ____________ friends at the park.
**You're and Your**

The word *you're* is a contraction for the words you are.

The word *your* is a word to describe something that belongs to you.

Use the word *your* or *you're* to complete each sentence.

1. May I borrow *your* baseball mitt?
2. *You're* my best friend.
3. Is *your* homework finished?
4. If you misbehave in school, *you're* going to be grounded.
5. I think *you're* the best grandpa in the whole world.
6. Is this *your* first trip to California?
7. *You're* going to have a great time here.
9. I haven't been to any of *your* basketball games this year.
10. After dinner, *you're* going to help clear the table.

★ **Challenge**

*You're* going with *your* father to pick up

*your* friends at the park.