

Sound matters: Homographs and homophones

Level: All

Target age: Adults and teenagers

Time needed: 30–45 minutes

Summary: This lesson focuses on homophones and homographs from the perspective of pronunciation.

Note: One of the biggest problems with English is that there often isn't a correlation between spelling and pronunciation. Two words that are written the same way can be pronounced completely differently – these are known as *homographs*. Two words that are spelt completely differently can be pronounced the same – these are known as *homophones*.

Exercise 1

1. On the board write up the following two words (with the phonemic script): *close* /kləʊz/, *close* /kləʊs/.
2. Explain to the students that although the two words have the same spelling, they are pronounced differently and have different meanings – these are homographs.
3. Get students to say each word and notice the difference in pronunciation.
4. Check that the students understand the difference in meaning, i.e. *close* /kləʊz/ as in 'to shut something' and *close* /kləʊs/ as in 'near'.
5. Tell the students you will give them a worksheet with eight homographs. You will then play eight sentences and they need to decide which of the words they hear. The context will also help, but don't say anything about that yet.
6. Hand out the worksheet and give the students time to read and say the eight sets of homographs.
7. Play the recording, stopping after each sentence if necessary.
8. Put the students in pairs and get them to check their answers together.
9. Play the recording again.
10. Check the answers as a class.
11. At this stage you might want to play each sentence again and get the students to repeat what they hear.

Key:

1. b) *close* /kləʊs/; 2. a) *minute* /maɪ'nju:t/;
3. b) *tear* /tɪə/; 4. b) *row* /raʊ/;
5. a) *excuse* /ɪk'skju:s/; 6. a) *wind* /waɪnd/;
7. a) *invalid* /ɪ'nvəlɪd/; 8. b) *content* /'kɒntent/

Exercise 2

1. On the board write up the following:
Just a minute! (/ˈmɪnɪt/)
It's minute. (/maɪ'nju:t/)
2. Ask the students to say each sentence and make sure that they are pronouncing the two key words correctly.
3. Explain that you will give them a worksheet with eight sentences. You want them to read out the sentences and to think carefully about the pronunciation of the underlined words.
4. Hand out the worksheet and get the students to work with a partner, taking turns to read out each sentence.
5. Monitor and help where necessary. You might want to point out that the correct pronunciation is given in Exercise 1 (the words that weren't used in that activity).
6. Finally, play the recording for students to listen and check their pronunciation. If necessary, pause and drill each sentence, paying particular attention to the pronunciation of the underlined words.

Exercise 3

1. On the board write up the following two words (with the phonemic script): *see* /si:/, *sea* /si:/.
2. Explain to the students that although the two words have different spellings, they are pronounced the same – these are homophones.
3. Tell the students you will give them a worksheet with eight homophones. You will then play eight sentences and they need to decide which of the words fits into each sentence. Of course, context is the only thing that will really help as the words are pronounced the same.
4. Hand out the worksheet and give the students time to read the eight sets of homophones.
5. Play the recording, stopping after each sentence if necessary.
6. Put the students in pairs and get them to check their answers together.
7. Play the recording again.
8. Check the answers as a class.
9. At this stage you could ask students to write a sentence for each of the pair of words not used in the recording.

Key:

1. b) *sea*; 2. b) *stare*; 3. a) *piece*; 4. a) *hour*;
5. b) *knew*; 6. b) *allowed*; 7. a) *week*; 8. b) *too*;
9. b) *weather*; 10. a) *eight*

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Worksheet

Exercise 1



Listen to the sentences and **circle** the word you hear.

- a) **close** /kləʊz/ b) **close** /kləʊs/
- a) **minute** /maɪ'nju:t/ b) **minute** /'mɪnɪt/
- a) **tear** /teə/ b) **tear** /tɪə/
- a) **row** /rəʊ/ b) **row** /raʊ/
- a) **excuse** /ɪk'skju:s/ b) **excuse** /ɪk'skju:z/
- a) **wind** /waɪnd/ b) **wind** /wɪnd/
- a) **invalid** /'ɪnvəlɪd/ b) **invalid** /ɪn'vælɪd/
- a) **content** /kən'tent/ b) **content** /'kɒntent/

Exercise 2

Now say these sentences and phrases.

- Please **close** the door behind you.
- Just a **minute**!
- Careful! You'll **tear** it.
- I think our seat is in the second **row**.
- Excuse** me!
- The **wind** is very strong today.
- I'm sorry, but this ticket is **invalid**.
- You don't seem very **content** with things.



Listen and check.

Exercise 3



Listen and tick ✓ the word that fits in each sentence.

- a) see b) sea
- a) stair b) stare
- a) piece b) peace
- a) hour b) our
- a) new b) knew
- a) aloud b) allowed
- a) week b) weak
- a) two b) too
- a) whether b) weather
- a) eight b) ate

Now make sentences with the other words.