

## Never Mix Up These Words (Homophones)

In this lesson, you'll master pairs of **homophones** – words that sound identical but have completely different meanings and spellings. These aren't rare words. They're everyday terms like hair/hare, whole/hole and aisle/isle that can lead to hilarious (or embarrassing!) misunderstandings if you mix them up. You'll learn exactly when to use each spelling, plus clever tricks to remember the differences. By the end, you'll confidently tell the difference between a leek in your kitchen (no problem at all!) and a leak in your kitchen (time to panic!). Let's get started!

### Horse vs Hoarse

"She woke up feeling a little /hɔ:s/ after the concert."

	<b>horse</b>		<b>hoarse</b>
a large animal we can ride		having a rough or strained voice, often because you've been shouting or have a sore throat	

### Cereal vs Serial

"I always start my mornings with the same /'sɪəriəl/ drama."

	<b>cereal</b>		<b>serial</b>
the food people eat for breakfast, e.g. cornflakes		describes sth. published / broadcast in several parts, e.g. "The Crown" and "Peaky Blinders"	



## Pea vs Pee

"The dog left a little /pi:/ by the door."

	<b>pea</b>	<b>pee</b>	
a small, round green vegetable		urine (liquid waste from the body)	

## Leek vs Leak

"There's a /li:k/ in the kitchen."

	<b>leek</b>	<b>leak</b>	
a long, green and white vegetable related to the onion		a small hole that lets liquid or gas escape	

## Aisle vs Isle

"Come to the biscuit /aɪl/."

	<b>aisle</b>	<b>isle</b>	
the passage between the shelves in a shop		island	

I'll (the contraction of I + will)  
is also pronounced /aɪl/.



The **aisle** is also the narrow passage between seats on a train or plane.



## Bare vs Bear

"That's a /'beəfeɪst/ lie!"

	<b>bare</b>		<b>bear</b>
not covered by anything; open and unashamed		a large, heavy mammal with thick fur	

'Barefaced' /'beəfeɪst/ means open and not ashamed. A barefaced lie is a deliberate and shameless lie, told without any attempt to hide that it's untrue.

You might also know the phrase '**the bare necessities**', meaning the basic essentials. It's the title of a song in "The Jungle Book", sung by Baloo – who's a bear!

Let's stick with our bears for this next one.

## But vs Butt

"I think that's a /bəə/ /bʌt/ I'm not sure."

Well, there's a lot going on there! We have 2 sets of homophones: '**bear**' and '**but**'.

	<b>but</b>		<b>butt</b>
introduces a contrast (like 'however')		the part of the body you sit on ('bum' or 'bottom' in British English)	

So, how do you tell the difference between:

- "I think that's a **bare butt**... I'm not sure."
- and
- "I think that's a **bear but**... I'm not sure."



 "I think that's a **bare butt!**  [longer pause] I'm not sure."

- 'Bare butt' said together quickly with no pause
- Voice goes down
- Maybe it's someone's naked bum!

 "I think that's a **bear**  [pause] **but** I'm not sure."

- Voice rises slightly on 'bear'
- Small pause after 'bear'
- Maybe it's a bear (the animal)



'**Butt**' is more common in North American English, while '**bum**' is the typical British term.

## Hole vs Whole

"We need to address the /həʊl/ issue."

hole	whole
an empty space in a solid surface	entire or complete



Well, I might have a problem with a **hole**. In that case, we would often put more emphasis on 'hole'.

- We need to address the **HOLE** issue.

Or I might want to address the entire or complete issue - that's spelt with a silent 'w' at the beginning. Then, I might put more emphasis on 'issue':

- We need to address the **whole** ISSUE.



## Hair vs Hare

"He pulled a /haɪə/ out of his hat."

	<b>hair</b>	<b>hare</b> 
the thin threads that grow on a person's head		an animal like a big rabbit

## Extra Homophones

"I love working in a restaurant, but the /steɪks/ are just too high!"

<b>stake</b>	<b>steak</b>
a strong wooden or metal post; money risked on a bet or outcome	a thick slice of meat or fish

"I heard a /kri:k/ in the distance."

<b>creek</b>	<b>creak</b>
a small stream or narrow inlet	a harsh squeaking sound (like an old door)

"What an incredible /terl/!"

<b>tale</b>	<b>tail</b>
a story (especially an imaginative or fictional one)	the rear part of an animal's body; the back or end part of something



"Can you pass me the /'flaʊə/?"

flower	flour
the colourful part of a plant that produces seeds	powder made from grain, used for baking

"There's a /seɪl/ in that shop!"

sail	sale
a piece of fabric that catches wind to move a boat; to travel in a boat	the act of selling something; a period when shops sell items at reduced prices

## Extra Exercises

If you'd like to practise what you've just learnt, click the link below for interactive activities designed to help you master each of these homophones!

 Click here to access the exercises!





## Quiz

For each question, choose the correct answer from the options provided.

**1. Which word completes this sentence correctly?**

"I can't believe I just found a grey \_\_\_\_\_. "

- a) hair
- b) hare
- c) either could be correct

**2. Choose the sentence that is spelt correctly:**

- a) I managed to catch a fish through a hole in the ice.
- b) I managed to catch a fish through a whole in the ice.
- c) Both are correct

**3. Which spelling makes sense?**

"That new \_\_\_\_\_ you bought is delicious!"

- a) serial
- b) cereal
- c) either could work

**4. If someone has a "hoarse" voice, what does that mean?**

- a) Their voice sounds like the large animal you can ride.
- b) Their voice sounds rough or strained.
- c) They can't speak at all.

**5. Which sentence uses "bare" correctly?**

- a) I saw a bare in the forest.
- b) The bear necessities of life will come to you.
- c) She's wearing a bare shoulder dress... in this weather?

**6. Which two words sound exactly the same?**

- a) leek and lick
- b) isle and aisle
- c) bear and beer

**7. Choose the sentence where /bʌt/ is spelt correctly:**

- a) I wanted to go, but it was raining.
- b) She sat on her but.
- c) I might be able to go, butt let me know what time it starts.

**8. Match the definition: "a small, round green vegetable".**

- a) pee
- b) leek
- c) pea

### Answers:

1c, 2, 3, b, 4, b, 5c, 6, b, 7, a, 8, c



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