

# Homograph

## Definition of Homograph

The word *homograph* originated from the Greek word “homos,” which means “the same,” and *graph*, which means “to write,” and it is used extensively in language. It can be defined as words that are used in such a manner as to give two or more different meanings, where the words have the same spelling, but different meanings, and sometimes different pronunciations as well.

For instance, the word “bear” (verb) means “to endure,” and “bear” (noun) is the name of an animal. This can be considered one example of homograph. This literary device is one of the types of pun ([paronomasia](#)).

## Similarity with Homonym

Homonym is a bigger category of which homographs are a part. All homograph examples are also identified as homonym examples, since a homograph is a specific term, but a homonym is a generalized term. Homographs are words with different meanings but the same spelling, such as tire (fatigue), and tire (wheel tire).

## Difference Between Homograph and Homophone

The basic difference between [homophone](#) and homograph is that homographs are words that have the same spelling, such as “He is my **close** relative,” and “Please **close** the door.” Homophones, on the other hand, are words that sound the same and are spelled differently, such as “That speech was **read**,” and “That dress was **red**.”

## Examples of Homograph in Literature

---

Example #1: *Great Expectations* (By Charles Dickens)

---

“They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to **point** the conversation to me, every now and then, and stick the **point** into me”

Here, in this excerpt, both words in bold are identical in spelling, but they have different meanings. The first “point” means direction, and second “point” means the idea.

---

**Example #2: *When Words Don't Fit – A Multiple Meaning Words Poem* (By Unknown)**

---

“I have such a **fit** (tantrum)  
When these words don't **fit** (match)!  
Like when all through the **spring** (season)  
All the deer jump and **spring** (bounce),  
And the lions feel they **might** (perhaps)  
Want to show I have such a **fit** (tantrum)  
When these words don't **fit** (match)!  
Like when all through the **spring** (season)  
All the deer jump and **spring** (bounce),  
And the lions feel they their strength and **might** (power),  
When the monkeys **swing** (sway)  
From a vine like a **swing**(hanging seat),  
And the roar of the **bear** (animal)  
Is too loud for me to **bear** (endure),  
And I can't try to **pet** (stroke)  
One, since it's not a **pet** (domesticated animal)!  
I'm not trying to be **mean** (cruel),  
But what do these words **mean** (imply)?”

This poem is probably the best piece to use if you are teaching Homographs 101, as the words used are very familiar. Using [context](#) clues, the meanings (enclosed in parentheses) of the homographs are easy to decipher.

---

**Example #3: *Lolita* (By Vladimir Nabokov)**

---

Vladimir Nabokov has used multilingual and unique homographs in his novel *Lolita*. For instance, a [character](#)'s name, "Humbert," is used as a pun in different languages. In Spanish, its meaning is "man," and in French its meaning is "shadow." Similarly, the name of the character "Lolita" is changed to "Dolores." In Latin its meaning is "pain," and the meaning of her nickname "Dolly" is a toy in English.

---

#### Example #4: *A Hymn to God the Father* (By John Donne)

---

"When Thou hast **done**, Thou hast not done for I have **more**.  
That at my death Thy Son  
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore  
And having done that, Thou hast **done**;  
I fear no **more**..."

Donne has played on both his and his wife's last names, "Donne," and "More," with the words "done" and "more." These are homographs that have the same pronunciations. Donne has used it for wry effect.

---

#### Example #5: *Much Ado About Nothing* (By William Shakespeare)

---

**Beatrice:**

"The count is neither sad, nor sick,  
nor merry, nor well: but **civil**, count; **civil** as an  
orange, and something of that jealous complexion..."

Here, Beatrice is mocking Claudio, saying he is "civil" like a bitter orange, which describes the bitter feelings of Claudio. This is a pun on the name "Seville," which is pronounced as "ci-VIL," and is the place from where these oranges had come.

### Function of Homograph

Homographs are used as a word play to create humorous and comic effects in literary writings, in theater, and in [limerick](#) form of poetry. Frequently, in literary works, these make readers think and laugh, and increase the

voluntarily to create [humor](#) and wryness. It also increases the vocabulary of readers by introducing secondary or multiple meanings of the terms.