

Years 3 & 4 · Free resource

Homophones and near-homophones: Years 3/4

Year group: 3/4

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling*, National Curriculum for England (2013) — Years 3–4, Homophones and near-homophones

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

What is a homophone?

A **homophone** is a word that sounds identical (or nearly identical) to another word but has a different spelling and a different meaning.

hear and here — both pronounced /hɪə/ — but different meanings

affect and effect — near-homophones; slightly different sounds but easily confused

The key to spelling homophones correctly is **meaning**, not sound. Children must know which word they want to write before they can choose the right spelling.

The statutory Y3/4 homophone pairs

(DfE Appendix 1 specifies these pairs as statutory content for Years 3–4)

accept / except

accept (verb) — to receive willingly → *She will **accept** the prize.*

except (preposition/conjunction) — not including; apart from → *Everyone came **except** Tom.*

Memory hook: Accept with both hands. Except = excluding.

affect / effect

affect (verb) — to have an impact on → *The rain will **affect** the match.*

effect (noun) — the result or outcome → *The **effect** of the rain was a muddy pitch.*

Memory hook: Affect is the Action. Effect is the End result.

RAVEN: Remember **A**ffect **V**erb **E**ffect **N**oun.

(Note: effect can be a verb meaning "to bring about" as in "effect change" — this is rare and does not need to be taught at Y3/4)

ball / bawl

ball (noun) — a round object; a formal dance → *Kick the **ball**.*

bawl (verb) — to cry loudly; to shout → *The baby began to **bawl**.*

berry / bury

berry (noun) — a small fruit → *a **berry** on the bush*

bury (verb) — to put underground; to hide → *Dogs **bury** bones.*

brake / break

brake (noun/verb) — a device for slowing; to slow down → *Press the **brake**. The car **braked** sharply.*

break (verb/noun) — to smash; a pause → *Don't **break** it. Let's take a **break**.*

Memory hook: **Br-ake** → you **ake** (ache) when you stop suddenly. **Br-eak** → things that **break** create a gap.

fair / fare

fair (adjective/noun) — just; a funfair → *That's not **fair**. We went to the **fair**.*

fare (noun) — the price of a journey; food → *The bus **fare** was £2.*

grate / great

grate (noun/verb) — a frame of bars; to shred → *Cheese **grate**. **Grate** the carrot.*

great (adjective) — large; excellent; important → *A **great** achievement.*

groan / grown

groan (verb/noun) — to make a low sound of pain → *She let out a **groan**.*

grown (past participle of *grow*) — developed; become larger → *The plant has **grown** tall.*

here / hear

here (adverb) — in this place → *Come over **here**.*

hear (verb) — to perceive sound → *Can you **hear** me?*

Memory hook: You **hear** with your **ear**. (h + ear = hear)

heel / heal / he'll

heel (noun) — the back of the foot or shoe → *A blister on her **heel**.*

heal (verb) — to get better; to cure → *The wound will **heal** in time.*

he'll (contraction) — he will → ***He'll** be here soon.*

knot / not

knot (noun) — a tying of rope; a unit of speed → *Tie a **knot**. The ship sailed at 20 **knots**.*

not (adverb) — negation → *She is **not** coming.*

mail / male

mail (noun/verb) — letters and parcels; to send → *The **mail** arrived. **Mail** this letter.*

male (noun/adjective) — the masculine gender → *A **male** lion.*

main / mane

main (adjective) — most important → *the **main** road*

mane (noun) — the long hair on a horse's or lion's neck → *the lion's **mane***

meat / meet

meat (noun) — animal flesh used as food → *roast **meat***

meet (verb) — to come together → *Let's **meet** at noon.*

Memory hook: You **eat meat**. (m + **eat** = meat)

medal / meddle

medal (noun) — a decoration awarded for achievement → *a gold **medal***

meddle (verb) — to interfere in other people's affairs → *Don't **meddle** in my business.*

missed / mist

missed (past tense of *miss*) — failed to hit/catch; felt the absence of → *She **missed** the bus.*

mist (noun) — light fog → *morning **mist***

peace / piece

peace (noun) — freedom from war or conflict; calm → *peace and quiet*

piece (noun) — a part of something → *a piece of cake*

Memory hook: A **piece** of **pie**. (**piece** contains **pie**)

plain / plane

plain (adjective/noun) — simple; a flat area of land → *a plain answer; the grassy plain*

plane (noun) — an aircraft; a flat surface; a woodworking tool → *board a plane*

rain / rein / reign

rain (noun/verb) — water falling from clouds → *It will rain today.*

rein (noun) — a strap for controlling a horse → *She pulled on the rein.*

reign (noun/verb) — the period a monarch rules; to rule → *during the king's reign*

scene / seen

scene (noun) — a view; a section of a play or film → *a beautiful scene*

seen (past participle of *see*) → *Have you seen this film?*

weather / whether

weather (noun) — atmospheric conditions → *What's the weather like?*

whether (conjunction) — expressing a choice or doubt → *Whether we go or stay depends on you.*

whose / who's

whose (pronoun) — belonging to whom → *Whose bag is this?*

who's (contraction) — who is; who has → *Who's coming? Who's been eating my porridge?*

Strategies for teaching homophones

- 1. Meaning first, always.** The child must know what they want to say before choosing the spelling. Ask: "What does that word mean in your sentence?"
 - 2. Etymology and morphology hooks.** Many homophones can be unlocked by their spelling. *hear* contains *ear*; *peace* contains a different vowel pattern from *piece* of *pie*. Teach the logic, not just the pair.
 - 3. Sentence frames.** "I ___ with my ear" (hear). "A ___ of pie" (piece). Provide a sentence that makes the meaning unambiguous.
 - 4. Minimal pairs in context.** Present both words in sentences side by side so children must choose. Never present them on their own without context.
 - 5. Do NOT teach them as a pair to memorise.** Teach each word individually in context first. Confusion comes from presenting them as a pair before each one is secure.
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Word sort activity

Place each word in the correct sentence.

affect / effect

The weather will ____ the school sports day.

The ____ of too much sugar is a loss of concentration.

peace / piece

After the argument, they made ____.

Would you like a ____ of cake?

whether / weather

She wasn't sure ____ to bring an umbrella.

The ____ in March is unpredictable.

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). Statutory homophone pairs verified against the published document. Memory hooks are pedagogical devices, not statutory content.