



We will read about words that sound the same but are written differently and about words that have the same spelling but different pronunciation.

Written the Same but Sound Differently? Hmm...

Understanding oral English is hard. Why? Different speakers mean different accents. It's difficult to know which words are important. Conversations don't always follow grammar rules.

Today, however, we will read about how identical pronunciations can have different spellings and how the same spelling can be pronounced differently.

Homophones

(Same pronunciation;
different spelling)

HERE & HEAR

ONE & WON

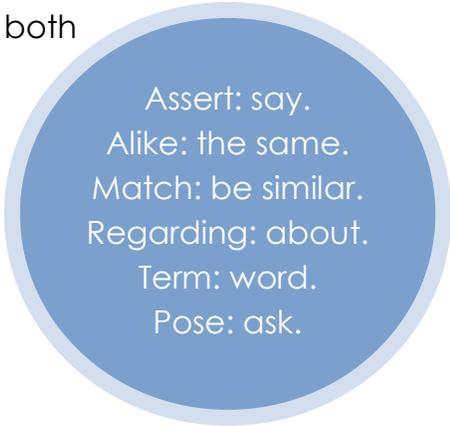
WRITE & RIGHT

MEAT & MEET

BUY & BY

We have the verb *to read* for instance. When it's in present you say /rid/; when in past you say /red/ but the spelling does not change. Isn't that peculiar? Well, peculiarities also include homophones such as *weak* and *week* which mean very different things but are both pronounced /wiik/. Or terms like *route*, which is the UK rhymes with *boot* but in the US rhymes with *doubt*.

Why is this so? There are several theories on why English spelling is not phonetic. One says that English tends to keep the original sound in foreign words that are absorbed into the language. Another asserts that around the 15th century pronunciation started to change but spelling stayed the same, so sound and writing did not evolve together. Anyhow, the problem is still the same: it's hard to know how a word will be pronounced.



What to do?

1. Be aware of the problem

Don't panic if what you read doesn't match what you hear. A good exercise is to watch films with subtitles so your mind learns that not all words follow the same pronunciation rules.

2. Pay attention to context

Sale and *sail* sound the same but will appear in very different situations. One is the opposite of *buy* and the other is a synonym of *navigate* so there's not much chance they can be confused. Therefore, when you have doubts check the word against the context and discard what makes no sense.

3. Listen to different accents

Hearing people from different regions will teach you that English spelling and sound don't always go together.

4. Study pronunciation

When you learn a new word ask your teacher if there's another way to pronounce it. Always pose the same questions: How do you say this word? Is there another possible pronunciation? This will help you recognise the sounds and link them to their meaning.

Would you like to learn more about listening comprehension? Click on the link below to discover nine reasons why understanding spoken English is so hard: <http://www.englishfb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Why-Listening-Is-So-Hard-by-AD-Miles.pdf>



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