

What are heteronyms?

Heteronyms are words that are spelled identically but have different meanings when pronounced differently. For example:

Lead, pronounced *LEED*, means to guide. However, lead, pronounced *LED*, means a metallic element.

Compare *heteronyms* to *homographs*, *homophones*, and *homonyms*.

Homographs are words that are spelled the same but differ in meaning, derivation, or pronunciation. *Homophones* are words that are pronounced the same but differ in meaning, derivation, or spelling. *Homonyms* are words that are spelled and pronounced the same but have different meanings. There is overlap among these categories.

Heteronyms are specific types of homographs in which the different pronunciations are associated with different meanings. Many heteronyms are the result of one pronunciation being a verb and another being a noun.

Well, let's see what we have!

Our lists of heteronyms are shown below. We are limiting ourselves to words commonly used in the English language. Some of our heteronyms have completely different meanings while others have somewhat related meanings. (We also [list words that have nearly the same meanings](#).) We also are including heteronyms in which at least one of the words is a foreign word (as long as it is commonly used in English).

Not every meaning of every word is given. The numbers after the definitions indicate the source of the heteronym; see the [Acknowledgments](#).

As of 1/1/99, we have begun listing words only, without pronunciations and meanings, and the acknowledgment immediately follows.

Heteronyms

Affect *ehFEKT*- to change; *AFFekt*- a person's feelings or emotion (1)

Alternate *ALternit*- the next choice; *ALternait*- switch back and forth (9)

Are *AHR*- plural present tense of "to be"; *AIR*- 100 square meters (1/100th of a hectare) [although may also be pronounced *AHR*] (15)

Ares *AIRS*- 100 square meter units [plural]; *AIReez*- Greek god of war [capitalized] (15)

Attribute *ahTRIByoot*- to consider resulting from; *AHtribyoot*- a characteristic of someone (12)

August *AUGust*- month [capitalized]; *auGUST*- important, eminent (9)

Axes *AKsiz*- more than one ax or axe; *AKseez*- the plural of axis (13)

Bass *BASE*- a string instrument; (*rhymes with mass*)- a fish (1)

Bow *BAU*- to lower one's head or the front of a ship; *BOH*- used to shoot arrows (7)

Bowed *BAU-d*- to bend over; *BOH-d*- bent (12)

Buffet *BUFFet*- to pound or bump; *booFAY*- place where you serve yourself (9)

Close *CLOZE*- to shut; *CLOS*- near (9)

Combine *komBYNE*- put together; *KOMbyne*- a threshing machine (1)

Conduct *KONduckt*- behavior; *kunDUCKT*- to lead (see this heteronym below) (12)

Conflict *kunFLIKT*- to act against; *KAHNflict*- a fight or disagreement (1)

Console *KAHNsole*- an upright case; *kunSOLE*- to comfort (2)

Content *KAHNtent*- meaning; *kunTENT*- satisfied (1)

Contest *kunTEST*- to argue; *KAHNtest*- a match of skill (1)

Contract *CONtract*- an agreement; *conTRACT*- to shrink or to agree on a project (2)

Convert *conVERT*- to change one's belief; *CONvert*- one whose belief was changed (11)

Converse *KAHNvers*- the opposite; *kunVERS*- to talk (1c)

Convict *kunVIKT*- to find guilty; *KAHNvikt*- a prisoner (1)

Crooked *KROOKt*- to bend your neck; *KROOK-ed*- having a curve (3)

Deliberate *dilIBerit*- carefully considered; *dilIBerATE*- to consider (12)

Desert *dihZURT*- to leave ; *DEZert*- arid region (18, and [below](#))

Digest *DYEjest*- collection of published material; *dieJEST*- absorb nutrients (6)

Do *DOO*- to accomplish; *DOE*- a musical note (1)

Does *DUZ*- performs; *DOZE*- more than one female deer (1)

Dove *DUV*- a bird; *DOEV*- jumped off (1)

Drawer *DROR*- the compartment you pull out from the dresser; *DRAWer*- one who draws (1j)

Excuse *EKskyooz-* to let someone off; *EKskyoos-* a reason or explanation (17)

House *HAUS-* a building that serves as living quarters; *HOWZ-* to provide with living quarters (10)

Incense *INsens-* burnt aromatic; *inSENS-* to make angry (9)

Intern *INtern-* a physician in training; *inTERN-* confine to prescribed area (14)

Invalid *inVALLid-* not valid; *INvallid-* an ill person (1)

Laminate *LAMinate-* to construct by adding layers; *LAMinit* [although both pronunciations are listed]- the cover itself (1)

Lather (*rhymes with rather*)- foam or suds; (*rhymes with bath fur*)- a worker who installs lath (lattice work) (15)

Lead *LEED-* to guide; *LED-* a metallic element (1)

Minute *MINNit-* 60 seconds; *myNOOT-* tiny (1)

Moderate *MODerit-* keeping within reason; *MODerATE-* to preside over (1)

Mow *MOH-* to cut grass; *MAU-* a pile of hay (17)

Multiply *MULLtihPLIE-* multiply two numbers; *MULLtihplee-* in a multiple manner (15)

Number *NUMber-* one, two, three ...; *NUMMER-* more numb [many dictionaries do not list this use, which suggests that "more numb" is preferred; however, the listed use is given in The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, Electronic version.] (18)

Nun *NUN-* women in religious order; *NOON-* 14th letter in Hebrew alphabet (9)

Object *ubJEKT-* to complain; *AHBjekt-* a thing (1c)

Pasty *PAstee-* like glue; *PASStee-* a meat pie (1)

Pate *PAIT-* a bald head; *paTAY-* a minced food; *PAHT-* a porcelain paste [diacritics in *pâté* and *pâte* don't count!](1)

Perfect *PERfekt-* exactly correct; *perFEKT-* to make correct (17)

Periodic *PEEReeODDik-* occasional; *PUREeyeODDik-* an iodine compound (15)

Permit *perMIT-* to allow some event to occur; *PERmit* [although both pronunciations are listed]- a document giving permission (8)

Polish *POElish-* from Poland; *PAHLish-* shine [capitalization doesn't count!](4)

Present *PREZent*- a gift; *preeSENT*- to give a talk (9)

Primer *PRIHMer*- an elementary book; *PRYmer*- the preparatory coat of paint (1c, 12)

Produce *PROdoos*- vegetables; *proDOOS*- bring forth (1)

Project *proJEKT*- to show a movie; *PRAHjekt*- a task (1)

Pussy *PUHSee*- having pus; *POOHSee*; a kitten (18)

Raven *RAYven*- black bird; *RAVen*- hungry (9)

Rebel *REBBell*- a resister; *rihBELL*- to resist (2)

Record *RECKord*- a list; *reKORD*- to write down (1)

Recreation *rek-ree-Ashun*- pastime; *REEcreeAshun*- remake (also, **recreate**) (12)

Refuse *reFUSE*- to deny; *REFFyoos*- garbage (1)

Relay *reeLAY*- to put it down again, such as a carpet; *REELay*- a race by teams; *rihLAY*- to pass along, such as information [One of our dictionaries gives these pronunciations, but does not distinguish meanings among the latter two. The pronunciation may vary among individuals.] (12)

Rerun *reRUN*- to race again or to repeat a show on television; *RErun*- a repeated TV show (12)

Reside: *reZIDE*- to stay put; *RE-SYD*- [Slang] to change places (change teams) [usu. hyphenated as *re-side*] (20) [**N.B.:** This is also a [antagonym!](#)] {X}

Resign *reZYN*- to quit; *reSYN*- to sign again (e.g., a contract) [usu. hyphenated as *re-sign*] (20) [**N.B.:** This word is also an [antagonym!](#)]

Resume *reeZOOM*- to restart; *REHZoomay*- a document of experience [also *résumé*; diacritics don't count!] (1)

Row *ROH*- a line; *ROUW*- a fight (1)

Sake *SAHkey*- alcoholic drink; *SAYK*- a purpose (5)

Secrete *seeKREET*- to discharge; *sehKRET*- an armored skullcap [*secrète*, diacritics don't count!]

Secreted *seeKREETed*- having put out; *SEEkrehted*- placed out of sight (9) [**N.B.:** This word is also an [antagonym!](#)]

Separate *SEPerATE*- to divide into groups; *SEPreT*- not joined together (17)

Sewer *SOwer*- one who sews; *SOOwer*- place for human waste (9)

Slough *SLUFF*- the outer layer of skin of a snake; [*rhymes with OW!*]- a hole of deep mud or mire; *SLOO*- a marshy pond (19)

Sow *SOUW*- a pig; *SO*- to plant seed (1)

Subject *SUBjekt*- the theme; subJEKT- to force upon someone (12)

Tear *TARE*- to rip; *TEER*- fluid in eye (1)

Wind *WHINEd*- to coil up; *WINd*- the blowing air (1)

Wound *WOOND*- to injure; *WOWND*- coiled up (1)

Heteronymic Sentences

Mary & Harry Baldwin of San Diego (12) are collectors of heteronyms. When they find a word, they compose a sentence that uses the different meanings. For example:

- When the brush fire was *close*, the authorities had to *close* the road.
- I *subject* my friends to pain when I discuss the *subject* of my operation.

The Baldwins found an article in the Smithsonian Magazine (vol. 19, p. 244, November 1988) by Felicia Lamport entitled "The bass swam around the bass drum on the ocean floor" in which heteronyms are the subject. One nice example: "She wished she could *desert* him in the *desert*." Although not known for word games, the website of the [Smithsonian Magazine](#) is provided here for your convenience. (Note: The referenced article is not available through the Smithsonian website but there is a link for it [here](#).)

Heteronyms with highly related meanings

Some heteronyms are so closely related that we have decided to give them a [separate](#) list. For example:

Live *LIHV*- [verb] to be alive; *LIEV*- [adjective] alive [The two meanings of this heteronym couldn't be much closer to each other!] (16)

Others include:

Access (some people pronounce the "a" differently for the noun and verb) (1)

Read (9,17)

Use (17)

RESOURCE:

<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~cellis/heteronym.html>