
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Homophones



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Neil.

Sophie

And I'm Sophie. Hi, Neil, I've got a question for you.

Neil

OK...

Sophie

What's black and white and read all over?

Neil

What's black and white, and red all over? I don't know that. Go on, tell me...

Sophie

A newspaper.

Neil

Oh – I see... so it wasn't the colour red, but read [/red/] as in the past form of read [/ri:d/]. White paper, black writing and the 'read all over' bit means people read it. Very good, Sophie. You should go into comedy.

Sophie

I'm not too sure about that, Neil. Sorry for the bad joke everyone, but words that sound the same but have different meanings is actually our topic for today's show.

Neil

That's right – homophones, words that sound the same but have different spellings and different meanings... Let's listen to Mark and Jane.

Sophie

Mark's just had an accident in the kitchen.

Neil

And here's a question for you to think about while you listen: what has Mark got on his jeans?

INSERT

Jane

What's wrong, Mark? You look really angry.

Mark

What's wrong, Jane?! Can't you see? I've got flour all over my jeans.

Jane

You've got a flower on your jeans? I didn't know you liked pretty things...

Mark

Not a flower, Jane. Flour! Look.

Jane

Ahh, Mark! You're making me a birthday cake. Ahh...

Neil

So, that's Mark and Jane.

Sophie

And we asked you what Mark had got on his jeans.

Neil

And of course, the answer was **flour**. The kind of flour you use to make bread and cakes. And **flour** is spelt **f-l-o-u-r**.

Sophie

Jane thought it was a different kind of **flower**, f-l-o-w-e-r, the brightly coloured and sweet-smelling plant you might have in your garden.

Neil

That's right, **flour**, f-l-o-u-r, and **flower**, f-l-o-w-e-r, are homophones – words that sound the same, but have different spellings and different meanings. Now, homophones can be difficult to learn, and the reason is because they sound exactly the same.

Sophie

That's right. And here are some more examples...

Neil

Mail, m-a-i-l, meaning letters and parcels you send in the post, and **male**, m-a-l-e, the opposite of female.

Sophie

And here's another one: **right**, r-i-g-h-t, the opposite of left, and **write**, w-r-i-t-e, like write a letter.

Neil

Here's one: **peace**, p-e-a-c-e, when it's quiet and calm, and **piece**, p-i-e-c-e, a part of something – a piece of cake!

Sophie

And one more: **tail**, t-a-i-l, the long, narrow part that sticks out of the back of an animal's body and **tale**, t-a-l-e, a kind of story. What's your favourite fairy tale, Neil?

Neil

Well, I really like The Emperor's New Clothes. I think it's really relevant still today. Even for grown-ups.

Sophie

It's a great story.

IDENT

You're listening to bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

And we're talking about homophones.

Sophie

That's words which are spelt differently and have different meanings, but sound the same.

Neil

And now it's time for a quiz. I'm going to read a sentence with one of the homophones from today's show. Try to spell the word correctly as you listen and Sophie will tell you the answers afterwards.

Sophie

Good luck!

Neil

Are you ready? Number one. **Ben gave his girlfriend a flower for Valentine's Day.** Now how do you spell **flower** there?

Sophie

Unless she wanted to bake bread, he gave her a **flower, f-l-o-w-e-r.**

Neil

Correct. Well done if you got that one right. Number two. **The dog is wagging its tail.**
How do you spell **tail**?

Sophie

This is part of an animal's body, so it's **t-a-i-l.**

Neil

And well done if you got that one at home. Finally: **The postman put the letters on the table on the right.** How do you spell **right**?

Sophie

The table's on the **right**, not on the left, so it's **r-i-g-h-t.**

Neil

Well done to everyone at home who got those right.

Sophie

And that almost brings us to the end of the programme. But before we go, here's today's top tip for learning vocabulary. Homophones are difficult to spell correctly when you hear them because they sound the same. So, if you think a word might be a homophone, read or listen to the words around it very carefully. That will help you get a better idea what word it is and how to spell it.

Neil

There's more about homophones at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

red - the colour. 'I bought a red dress to wear at the party.'

read - the past of read. 'I read that book last year.'

flour - the main ingredient in bread. 'I need half a kilo of flour for this recipe.'

flower - the brightly coloured and sweet-smelling part of a plant. 'My favourite flowers are roses.'

mail - letters and parcels you send in the post. 'I haven't opened my mail yet.'

male - the opposite of female. 'This hospital has separate male and female wards.'

right - the opposite of left. 'Most people are right-handed.'

write - write a letter. 'I write to my sister in America every week.'

peace - quiet and calm. 'The war continued for several months while the peace agreement was finalised.'

piece - a part of something. 'Would you like a piece of cake?'

tail - the long, narrow part that sticks out of the back of an animal's body. 'Cats use their tails to help them balance.'

tale - a kind of story. 'My favourite fairy tale is Sleeping Beauty.'