

Homophones:

a key to writing success

by
Betsy Lockhart



Which witch



writes with her right hand,



knows she has a wart on her nose, and

buys four shoes for her bear's bare



paws?

Does this give you pause?

Are you already confused? Or are you all
ready to begin? Fear not!

You will be at peace 
when you finish this piece! 

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Third Edition

A Spelling Update for Parents

from Your Elementary Faculty

Homophones (*homo-* same, *-phone* sound) are words that sound alike but have very different meanings and spellings. Writing the wrong homophone evokes a strong reaction from readers who know the difference, so it is an important skill set to master! (Note: not all pairs that we study are strictly homophones, but all are frequently confused word pairs.) True mastery requires lots of practice and application. One week focusing on a particular set of homophones will not be sufficient for the children to master them! But it is a solid beginning.

What is the parents' part? Dictate practice quizzes! Practice quizzes may be given in class or assigned as homework. If it is the latter, your child will be asked to find an older (and wiser) person to dictate the words as a pre-quiz. Since these words are homophones, it is vital that the reader use each word in a sentence! Refer to the list given at the beginning of each week for definitions / examples. You and your child can then check the words to be sure that they are properly used and properly spelled. For any word that your child misses, he should write the word, correctly spelled and correctly used, in 3 different sentences. For example:

Dictated:	Child writes:	Child corrects by writing:
I have 2 eyes.	<i>to</i>	<u>Two</u> is a number.
		One plus one makes <u>two</u> .
		<u>Two</u> shoes make a pair.

Nightly, your child will engage with homophones. It is entirely acceptable for him to collaborate with others for ideas as long as he completes the written work himself.

Once a child has studied and been quizzed on a set of homophones, those words become “no excuse” words. They must be spelled correctly on all work from that point forward. If you notice that your child has written a “no excuse” word incorrectly, regard this as a teachable moment. Rather than tell him, “You misspelled this word. It should be *where* instead of *were*.” simply tell him that he has misspelled a “no excuse” word and allow him to find it.

For this purpose, and to make dictations easier, many families find it simplest to photocopy or remove the master words list at the back of the book and attach them to the refrigerator.

Another form of practice that we use because of its effectiveness for kinesthetic and visual learners is having the children draw a colorful picture that conveys the meaning of the word. The concept is to create a snapshot in children’s brains linking the meaning and appearance of each word. The adage “a picture is worth a thousand

words” is especially true for visual learners. Kinesthetic learners associate the spelling and word meaning through the activity of writing and drawing. For these children, the drawing the picture is a start: tracing or rewriting the word in their picture will aid retention. Auditory learners may find homophones more challenging than standard spelling words. One thing that will help these children is making sure that they are properly pronouncing sound-alikes (not true homophones). For example, in casual conversation, we often draw no distinction between hour, our and are. While *hour* and *our* are pronounced alike (ou-er), *are* should be pronounced slightly differently (ahr).

Some children love drawing pictures and will spend hours on this, left to their own devices. These children may need to work with a timer, to limit each drawing to 2-3 minutes. Other children do not fancy themselves artists. They should be assured that no one is judging the quality of their drawing, and as long as it conveys a message to the viewer, is colorful and is thoughtful, it is GREAT!

Sometimes homophones can be tricky to draw. Consider, their, there and they’re:

there



Go there!

their



It is their gift.

they’re



They’re doing something.

NOTE: For the purpose of this letter, pictures are clipart, small, and in black. Children’s pictures will be hand-drawn, big and multi-colored!

Children have the option of drawing these pictures in their books or on 3” x 5” cards. The advantage to drawing on cards is that they can be used later in the week for study or review. (Write the word alone on one side, and the word with a picture on the other to use them as flash cards. The advantage to drawing in the books is that these drawings are harder to misplace! Either is perfectly acceptable!

Directions for other forms of practice can be found in your child’s Homophones book.

As previously mentioned, once the homophone pair has been studied, they become “no excuse” spelling words in our classroom. In this way, children will get multiple opportunities to correctly apply these words. For some children and some words, 6-8 applications will be enough to retain and begin to apply their knowledge. For others, 16-28 (or more) applications may be required. Patient, insistent, gentle corrections will ultimately result in sophisticated linguists. As always, if you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us.

Directions for Weekly Homophones Work

Homophones are words that sound alike, but have different spelling and meaning. In a homophone week, you will receive a list of 20 homophones. In general, they are not hard to spell. The only trick is remembering which word is which (witch?).

Assignment #1 - Practice Quiz. This may be given in class or as homework. If done as homework, please be sure to ask whomever reads these words to you to put them into sentences! That way, you really know if you know them or not! Check your words with the person that read the words to you. For any word(s) that you missed, make up three sentences that use the word correctly and write each on a piece of paper or note card. Staple the paper / note card into your book.

Assignment #2 – pictures. Please make your pictures reflect the meaning of the word. They must be colorful, detailed and as big as possible in the space provided. The only word that may appear in your picture is the homophone being illustrated! You are creating a visual image that will train your brain to match the way the word looks with the picture that you draw. The more detailed and colorful your picture is, the more successful you will be in remembering which word is which (yea!), and the less you will have to memorize (yuck!) If you would prefer, you may use 3” x 5” cards rather than sheets from your book. If you choose this option, write the word alone on one side and draw the picture with the word on the other, so that you can use them to quiz yourself. In either case, beware of using markers that bleed through!

Assignment #3 – sentences. Write sentences showing that you understand which word is which. Again, the more interesting your sentences, the more you engage your visual memory, the more you will remember the meaning of the words. “I like witches” will not be as memorable as “The spindly, scraggly wart-covered witch flew through the air at midnight.” Even better, if you can make up a sentence that helps you remember the spelling, you will often remember the word for life, “The beautiful witch sipped tea with the fairies.” (Notice: the witch sips tea (T) reminds us that there is a t in this homophone, and not in the other word, which) Want more challenge? Write a single sentence that uses the homophone pair (or trio) correctly, such as, “Three of the bears were wearing flannel shirts, but the fourth bear was bare naked – except for his fur, of course!”

Assignment #4 – “How Do You Know?” For each pair / trio of homophones, write down a clever way to remember which word is which. For example, in week one, for the homophone pair *ant* and *aunt*, you might write the following:

And ant is little, so it has only three letters. An aunt is related to you (u) so it has a u in it. Some of these are hard, so please feel free to ask parents, siblings, and friends for ideas!

Assignment #5 – crossword puzzle. If you can answer each clue before checking to see how many letters are in a word, you will do beautifully on the quiz! If not, practice that word a bit more before the quiz! Not all words are used each week in the puzzle.