

Sound and spelling

Level: Pre-intermediate and above

Target age: Adults and teenagers

Time needed: 10 minutes (x6)

Summary: The relationship between spelling and pronunciation in English can be confusing for a number of reasons. This activity focuses on *homographs* (words with the same spelling but different pronunciation) and *homophones* (words with the same pronunciation but different spelling), as well as other pairs of words whose pronunciation learners tend to find confusing.

Procedure

There are six sets of words, which you can use on different occasions; one set is probably enough for one lesson but of course, if the class are keen, you could use more.

- Learners work on one set of words in pairs and try to decide whether each pair of words has the same pronunciation or not. Tell students to mark the pairs with *s* for 'same pronunciation' or *d* for 'different pronunciation'.
- Play the recording for the students to check.
- Finally, go through the answers as a class.

Note: In a few cases, the answer will be different in different accents of English, e.g. depending on whether 'r' is sounded in words like *court*. (See *rhotic* and *homophone* in the pronunciation glossary.)

Alternative procedure

Alternatively, you could do the activity as a team game in class. You could adjudicate yourself, or get learners to check each others' answers by looking the words up in dictionaries.

Answer key

s = same, *d* = different

Set 1

one / won s
sun / son s
eye / I s
too / toe d
chef / chief d
boat / bought d
caught / court s
live (I live here) / live (live music) d

led / lead (lead guitar) d
red / read (I've read it) s

Set 2

scene / seen s
knows / nose s
some / sum s
ski / sky d
once / ones d
suit / sweet d
sight / side d
feel / fill d
peach / pitch d
height / hate d

Set 3

way / weigh s
eyes / ice d
oven / often d
too / two s
out / ought d
want / won't d
fool / fuel d
bird / beard d
fun / fan d

leaves (plural of *leaf*) / leaves (the bus leaves soon) s

Set 4

guest / guessed s
weak / week s
place / plays d
meet / meat s
known / noun d
think / thing d
weather / whether s
not / knot s
taught / thought d

wind (a strong wind) / wind (wind / rewind) d

Set 5

by / buy s
new / knew s
there / their s
our / hour s
right / write s
check / cheque s
pear / pier d
born / burn d
wore / war s
curse / course d

Set 6

bay / by s
check / Czech s
cause / course d
higher / hire s
witch / which s
choose / chews s
beer / bear d
bored / board s
cent / scent s
wear / where s

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Worksheet

Are these pairs of words pronounced the same or differently? Write *s* for 'same' or *d* for 'different'.

Set 1

word

same or different?

one / won
sun / son
eye / I
too / toe
chef / chief
boat / bought
caught / court
live (*I live here*) /
live (*live music*)
led / lead (*lead guitar*)
red / read (*I've read it*)

Set 2

word

same or different?

scene / seen
knows / nose
some / sum
ski / sky
once / ones
suit / sweet
sight / side
feel / fill
peach / pitch
height / hate

Set 3

word

same or different?

way / weigh
eyes / ice
oven / often
too / two
out / ought
want / won't
fool / fuel
bird / beard
fun / fan
leaves (plural of *leaf*) / leaves
(*the bus leaves soon*)

Set 4

word

same or different?

guest / guessed
weak / week
place / plays
meet / meat
known / noun
think / thing
weather / whether
not / knot
taught / thought
wind (*a strong wind*) /
wind (*wind / rewind*)

Set 5

word

same or different?

by / buy
new / knew
there / their
our / hour
right / write
check / cheque
pear / pier
born / burn
wore / war
curse / course

Set 6

word

same or different?

bay / by
check / Czech
cause / course
higher / hire
witch / which
choose / chews
beer / bear
bored / board
cent / scent
wear / where



Now listen and check your answers.