

# Homophones: Words That Sound Alike but Mean Different Things

## Author

Enago Academy

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In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet says, "that which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." She means that since her family and Romeo's family are enemies, if either she or Romeo changed their names, they would still be lovers in love. A name change wouldn't change who they, as individuals, were. But exchanging one word for another sometimes *does* change the meaning, especially in the English language, which Shakespeare near invented. This often happens when two (or more) words that sound alike are spelled differently. We call these words *homophones*. And unlike the names of Romeo and Juliet, your love...errr, your *writing* will be erroneous if you put in the wrong word!\*

## Do You Know Your Homophones?

Read the sentences below and choose the correct homophone. Then check your answers and get the definitions of the word's homophones below.

- |   |            |            |       |
|---|------------|------------|-------|
| 1. My collar is _____.                                      | LOSE       | LOOSE      |       |
| 2. My car is over _____.                                    | THEY'RE    | THERE      | THEIR |
| 3. _____ coat is missing.                                   | YOUR       | YOU'RE     |       |
| 4. _____ color was gone.                                    | ITS        | IT'S       |       |
| 5. That's _____ of cheese!                                  | A LOT      | ALOT       |       |
| 6. After you clean your room, _____ you can go to the park. | THAN       | THEN       |       |
| 7. You can go, _____.                                       | TO         | TOO        | TWO   |
| 8. I'm not going to cheat because I have _____.             | PRINCIPLES | PRINCIPALS |       |
| 9. We saw 10 whales. It was quite a _____.                  | SIGHT      | SITE       |       |
| 10. Speak now or forever hold your _____.                   | PIECE      | PEACE      |       |

## Answers and Definitions

- 1. LOOSE = not tight. LOSE means to misplace something. How would you misplace your collar?
  - Don't *lose* your keys.
- 2. THERE = indicating a spot at some distance. THEY'RE is a contraction of "they are." THEIR is 3rd person plural possessive (they own something).
  - *Their* pants are ripped.
  - *They're* going to Hawaii.
- 3. YOUR = 2nd person possessive (you own something). YOU'RE is a contraction of "you are."
  - *You're* looking swell.
- 4. ITS = 3rd person possessive (it owns something). IT'S is a contraction of "it is."
  - *It's* getting hot.
- 5. A LOT = a large amount of
  - Alot – not actually a homophone. Not even a word!
- 6. THEN = shows order of events. THAN compares things.
  - I'd rather have cake *than* ice cream.
- 7. TOO = also. TWO is a number. TO either indicates direction or is part of the infinitive version of a verb.
  - The *two* of you should go.
  - You should go *to* the store. (directional)
  - I want *to* run. (with infinitive verb form)
- 8. PRINCIPLES = morals, beliefs that guide one's activities. PRINCIPALS are the heads of schools in the U.S.
  - I was sent to the *principal's* office.
- 9. SIGHT = something worth seeing or viewing. SITE = place or short for "website."
  - We are looking for the *site* of our next home.
  - The *site* won't load.
- 10. PEACE... this is a tricky one. It's an idiom, which means it generally can't be literally translated or defined. But, in years gone by, "to hold your PEACE" was to keep quiet. Essentially, to keep things peaceful by not speaking. But, confusingly, "to speak your PIECE" means to say what your opinion is or say what you are really thinking. Similarly, "give him a piece of your mind" means to tell someone what you really think.

How did you do? 8 or over means you're a homophone whiz. 5 to 7 correct is about average. Below 5 means you might want to study this list—it will make your writing much more clear! And, if you'd like to study more homophones, there are plenty of website resources. Just Google "English homophones." Good luck!

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