

# THE WAYS TO TEACH HOMONYMS WITHIN SPEAKING SKILLS

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## Abstract

Two or more words identical in sound and spelling but different in meaning, distribution and in many cases origin are called homonyms.

## Keywords:

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One of the great things about learning a foreign language is discovering its quirks. Homonyms – words which have the same spelling and pronunciation, but have different meanings – are one of those eccentricities. In the strictest sense, a homonym must have both the same spelling and pronunciation, however, the term is sometimes used to describe words which share one of those characteristics, (such as plane/plain or bow/bow). In this article, we're referring to strict homonyms. Introducing homonyms to your learners: If your students are resistant to the idea of homonyms, paint them in a positive light by likening them to scoring a two-for-one deal at the checkout (only, you know, with vocabulary!). It might also help your students to identify any homonyms that their native language has. Videos and awesome role models don't hurt either – which is why Olympic gold and bronze medalist Dee Dee Trotter has teamed up with Education First to help you teach homonyms to your class. Read on for eight classroom activities to use right away.

**1. "Train with Trotter" videos and worksheet.** Relax, we're not asking you to make these resources – they're on us! Being the superstar athlete that she is, Dee Dee Trotter's videos feature homonyms with one foot in the world of sports. The five videos introduce the homonyms GOAL, HURDLE, TRACK, RACE, and DRIVE, which you can use in class and deepen with these free worksheets – one for each video.

**2. Class discussion and brainstorm.** Brainstorm homonyms with your class or have your learners work in pairs – you may be surprised how many homonyms your students already know. Write their contributions on the board, identify parts of speech, meaning, and give and ask for examples in use. After all that board work, invite your class to get silly with some charades in small groups, acting out one definition and winning points for each one correctly guessed.

Here's a list to get you started:

Fine (good, thin)

Pen (place for holding animals, writing instrument)

Die (pass away, singular of "dice")

Wave (at the beach, with your hand)

Blue (color, feeling sad)

Spring (the season, a coil of metal)

Book (something you read, making a reservation)

Stalk (part of a plant, to harass by following)

Bear (animal, withstand difficulties)

Rose (past tense of rise, the flower)

Fair (equitable, beautiful)

Bark (the sound dogs make, a tree's outer layer)

Current (modern, flow of water)

Left (not right, past tense of leave)

**3. Memory.** Always a classic, memory (or Pelmanism) is very effective learning activity. Adapt it for homonyms by writing each definition on its own card, then scrambling and arranging the cards face down. Students pick up two cards and keep any matches they find. (For example, if a student turns over "color" and "feeling sad", they can keep both cards – the homonym in question is BLUE.)

**4. Find your match.** Another card-matching activity. Hand out the cards to your class and explain that students must mingle and talk together to find their partner – that is, the student with the other meaning for their homonym. When they find their partner, they stand aside until only one pair is left.

**5. Race to the board.** Write two homonyms on the board, e.g., GOAL and HURDLE. Divide your class into two teams and have each team form a line at the other end of the classroom. Choose a homonym in your mind and read out one of its meanings, e.g., “A problem that you need to overcome.” Both students will run to the board to select the correct word – the first to hit it with their hand, or rub it off with a cloth, wins. (If there is no space to run in your classroom, go outside or have teams call out the words instead.)

**6. Hidden homonyms.** Create three cards per homonym: one for the homonym and two definition cards.

Version 1: Before class starts, hide the homonym cards in your classroom. In class, hand out the definition cards, one per student. Learners must search for their homonym card. In this version, two students will be competing for one card (for example, if Sofia has “thin” and Pablo has “good”, both will be searching for the FINE card).

Version 2: Hide the definition cards and distribute one homonym card to each student or pair. Students then race to find both definitions hidden throughout the room.

**7. Bingo.** Fill play boards with homonym definitions, gap fill sentences, or simple images if the definitions are too wordy. Ensure that both meanings for a given words are included on the play board (i.e., in this way you’ll use a 12 space play boards for six homonyms). As you read out the homonyms, students will cross off the meanings they have. E.g., when a student hears DRIVE, she will cross of “motivation and ambition” and “I \_\_\_ my car to work”. The first student or pair to cross off their entire play board, wins.

**8. Real life collection.** Ask students to create a page in their notebooks where they record the homonyms they come across both in their studies outside class (in books, on the news, in advertising, or in conversation). Teach them to record not just the words themselves, but also their meanings and parts of speech: GOAL: 1. (n) In sport, to place a ball over the line – “Bayern Munich scored four goals last game.” 2. (n) An objective – “My goal is to always complete my homework the same day I get it.”. Use this list throughout the semester to revisit the topic of homonyms, by giving pop quizzes, asking students to compare their lists with their classmates and adding other words as they come.

#### References:

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