




Homophones or Minimal Pairs


Pronunciation

- Teacher's Insights -

At a Glance

-  30-60 minutes (adapt to your class time)
-  **multilevel**, suitable for A2+ to C1
-  pronunciation, new vocabulary

Preparation

-  0-5 minutes
- Read and understand the game before playing.
- Download the presentation & print the insights.

Exercise Summary

Game: Students have to decide whether pairs of words are homophones or minimal pairs (explained below). Information to help students with particular differences is given below, as well as useful extra information, examples, and explanations.

① Today's ESL speaking game focuses on homophones and minimal pairs. In the presentation version, students will encounter the following explanatory text, which you may read to them if you are not using the presentation:

What are 'homophones' and 'minimal pairs'?

Ever mix up words that sound the same but have different meanings, like 'pair' and 'pear'? They are called homophones. ① The word 'homophone' comes from the Greek 'homo' which means 'the same', and 'phone' which refers to sound or voice.

Then, what about those words that sound almost the same but with one small difference, like 'fun' and 'fan'? They are called minimal pairs.

Today's activity focuses on identifying whether pairs of words are homophones (sound exactly the same) or minimal pairs (sound almost the same, but there is a small difference).

Are you ready? Let's go!

① If your students need some examples of common homophones before they begin, here are a few:

one / won peace / piece by / bye / buy

① If your students need some examples of common minimal pairs before they begin, here are a few:

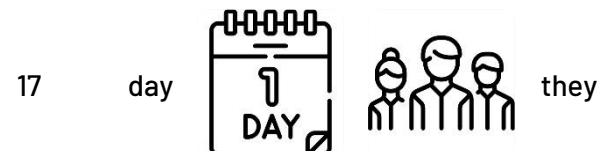
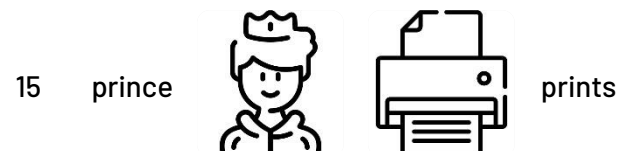
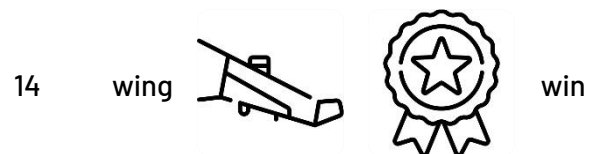
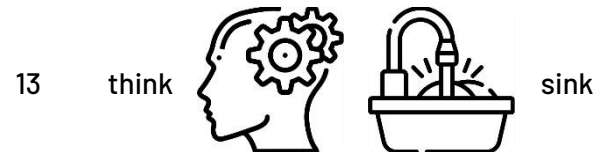
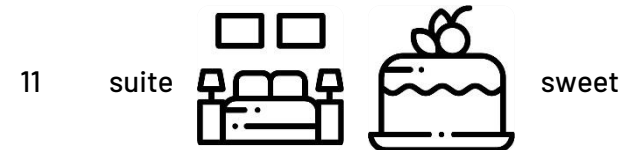
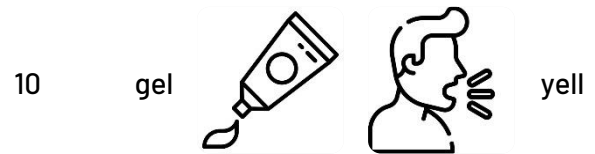
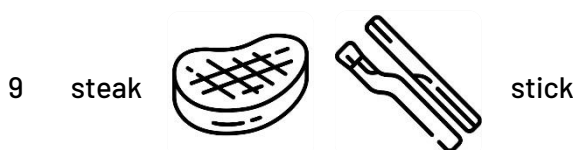
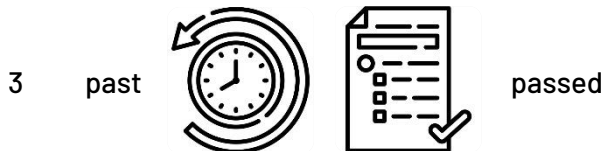
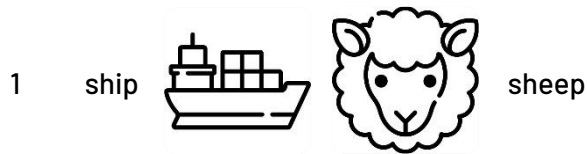
cat / cut seat / sit pull / pool

① On the next page, which is the student worksheet, there are 18 pairs of words. Students will have to identify whether they are homophones (the same) or minimal pairs (small difference). You will find the answers and extra information on the following page.

Homophones or Minimal Pairs

Pronunciation

Vocabulary: Decide if each pair of words are homophones (with exactly the same pronunciation) or minimal pairs (with a small difference).



Homophones or Minimal Pairs

Pronunciation

① Answers

Key: HP = homophone MP = minimal pair

ship /ʃɪp/ vs sheep /ʃi:p/ - MP – the difference is the short vowel in ‘ship’ and the long vowel in ‘sheep’

pier /pɪə/ vs pear /peə/ - MP – the difference is the diphthongs in ‘pier’ and ‘pear’ (rhyming with ‘here’ and ‘hair’ respectively, also ‘fear’ and ‘fair’). It is also worth noting that ‘pear’ and ‘pair’ are homophones.

past /past/ vs passed /past/ - HP – they are pronounced the same, like ‘guest’ and ‘guessed’

boat /bəʊt/ and vote /vəʊt/ - MP – the difference is /b/ vs /v/ (for letter ‘v’ /v/, touch top lip and bottom teeth) which is particularly difficult for Spanish-speaking students who do not have the /v/ sound

sun /sʌn/ vs son /sʌn/ - HP – they are pronounced the same

save /seɪv/ vs shave /ʃeɪv/ - MP – the difference is the /s/ vs /ʃ/ sound, like ‘sandy’ and ‘shandy’

hut /hʌt/ vs hat /hæt/ - MP – it’s the same difference as ‘fun’ vs ‘fan’ or ‘lump’ vs ‘lamp’

back /bæk/ vs bag /bæg/ - MP – the final /k/ and /g/ sound very similar but the /g/ is a voiced consonant; ensure Spanish students are not pronouncing the final /g/ like a throaty /h/ (/x/)

steak /steɪk/ vs stick /stɪk/ - again, Spanish students have trouble with ‘steak’ /steɪk/ because they pronounce it wrongly as an anglicism in their own language

gel /dʒel/ vs yell /jel/ - the two words rhyme, but it is important to point out that the ‘g’ at the beginning of ‘gel’ is much stronger than the ‘y’ in ‘yell’. You can point out that the phoneme is /dʒ/ and really does start with the /d/ sound. Note that the phoneme /j/ represents the ‘y’ sound in English, like in ‘you’ /ju:/

suite /swi:t/ vs sweet /swi:t/ - HP – they are pronounced the same, unlike ‘suit’ which is /su:t/

state /steɪt/ vs estate /ɪˈsteɪt/ - MP – the difference is the ‘e’ in ‘estate’; again, this is a challenge for Spanish-speaking students who tend to pronounce this ‘e’ even when it doesn’t exist

think /θɪŋk/ vs sigh /saɪŋk/ - MP – the different consonant sounds tend to be a challenge for French, German, Italian, Portuguese and other speakers, as well as Latin American Spanish speakers

wing /wɪŋ/ vs win /wɪn/ - MP – the ‘ng’ at the end of ‘wing’ makes a nasal /ŋ/

prince /prɪns/ vs prints /prɪnts/ - HP – this one tends to surprise students; the unvoiced /s/ sound in ‘prince’ is the same as the plural ‘s’ in ‘prints’; the ‘t’ is usually lost when pronouncing the plural of ‘print’ (may vary in some accents)

rice /raɪs/ vs rise /raɪz/ - MP – the difference between /s/ and /z/ is difficult for Spanish speakers (among others); also mention ‘ice’ and ‘eyes’, ‘price’ and ‘prize’, ‘bus’ and ‘buzz’, ‘race’ and ‘raise’, etc.

day /deɪ/ vs they /ðeɪ/ - MP – ‘day’ has a hard /d/ whereas ‘they’ has a dental /ð/

flour /flaʊə/ vs flower /flaʊə/ - HP – these two are a fun example of homophones with very different spellings.