



Hard to hear

# Homophones 1

## Objectives:

To learn to distinguish between pairs of homophones and near-homophones.

## Subject knowledge / Conventions

**Please note: This unit does not take a traditional (teaching homophone pairs together) approach.**

Increasingly, there is a view that traditional methods may actually increase homophone confusion. This unit takes an alternate approach and tackles each word in a homophone pair/grouping as a word in its own right - concentrating on spelling patterns, word families and, crucially, meaning to embed the spelling of these words. This approach involves concentrating first on those homophone words that are most commonly used (see below) and encouraging children to train themselves to really link the spelling of the word with its meaning. Linking the spelling with thinking about meaning should ideally become such a habit that it shouldn't be easily disrupted when children learn new and completely different words (in terms of meaning and spelling) that just happen to sound the same. If you prefer a more traditional approach to teaching homophones, this unit may not be for you but you will find many other resources that may suit your needs better on the internet.

### HFW that have homophones (in some accents):

First 100 HFW, Next 200HFW, Not HFW

of/have(off), him(hymn), not(knot), to/too(two), no(know), see(sea), be(bee), for(four), we(wee), are(our), it's(its), so(sew, sow), some(sum), were(whirr), there/their(they're), one(won), by(buy), I(eye), time(thyme), made(maid), here(hear), where(wear), or(awe), our(hour), new(knew), through(threw), been(bean), red(read), right(write), need(knead), night(knight), three(free), great(grate), which(witch)

Homophones vary by accent. E.g. In some accents **our** and **hour** are homophones. In others **our** and **are** are homophones. In certain accents **have** and **of** are homophones. This is particularly true in contracted words like could've. This often needs a lot of discussion.

Homophones need to be taught and rehearsed within sentences. Without context, it is impossible to know how to spell homophones correctly.

This unit includes some words that aren't homophones themselves but share letter strings or patterns with words that are homophones.

Many homophone words are very simple to spell in their own right and children may question whether they need to focus on learning them. You may need to point out that this unit is really all about learning the meaning and uses of these words. In spite of their simple appearances, they are commonly misspelt.

## Children should already be able to:

- Confidently segment words, including Phase 5 words
- Confidently read and write Phase 5 words
- Confidently read and spell all HFW taught in Phases 1-5
- Understand that the same phonemes can be represented by more than one grapheme

## Revisit, assess and adapt – suggested activities

Investigate how confidently children can spell HFW homophones that they learned to spell in phonics sessions. Dictate sentences and analyse which words children can spell.

**Printable dictation, cloze and analysis sheets available**

I want **to** come and **see your** house.  
**There** will not **be** much dancing **here**.  
**We** are **so** happy.  
**No**, he can't go home yet.  
**Their** dog is **one** of the best.  
**It's too** hot **by** far for me.

If children are making mistakes (other than confusing homophone pairs) with these HFW. They might benefit from continuing to learn to spell these high frequency homophones using methods from Letters and Sounds. Adapt planning to reflect this.

Investigate how confidently children can spell some of the other homophones from this unit. Dictate sentences and analyse which words children can spell.

**Printable dictation, cloze and analysis sheets available**

**You're** not going to believe **our** luck! It's a baby **sea** dragon. **Its two** tiny nostrils are smoking.

**Three** more dragons are bursting from the waves. Now there are **four** dragons. I wonder **where** they **could've** come from. All **eight** nostrils are now sniffing and searching. **They're** very sweet but I don't think I **would** like to get any closer.

Use this as a guide to whether children are confusing some of the homophones tackled in this unit. It may well also be worth looking in children's books because some children may be able to spell some homophones correctly when they are really thinking about them in a spelling session but still not have a solid enough grasp to get them right in their independent writing when they

have other distractions. If children are confident with many of the words, assess them on other homophones.

**Blank analysis sheet available**

As the words in this unit are some of the most commonly used and also most commonly misspelt words in English, it is worth taking time to ensure that children have really mastered both their spellings and their meanings before moving on.

## Supporting and extending



To support – look back to  
**Phase 5 planning**  
[phonicsplay.co.uk](http://phonicsplay.co.uk)

To extend – look ahead to  
**Suffixes 2**



## Teach & Practise – suggested activities

Orally teach the clapping rhyme 'A sailor went to sea sea sea'.

A sailor went to sea sea sea,  
To see what he could see see see,  
But all that he could see see see,  
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea sea sea.

Ask children to sing the rhyme performing the right action at the right time.

See = Hand above eyes (as if looking into the distance).

Sea = Hand making wave motions.

Ask children to try to say the rhyme more and more quickly without getting confused about the meaning of see/sea in each instance. Explain that words like **sea** and **see** are called homophones. Explain that while you can use soundtalking to figure out the phonemes in the word, the only possible way to know how to spell the /ee/ phoneme correctly is to know the word's meaning and know which spelling matches that meaning. Explain that thinking about homophones together can easily get us into a muddle (as with the sea/see rhyme).

**Homophone habits – A sailor went to sea**

Explain that we can avoid getting in a muddle by ensuring that we get into a 'homophone habit' when we learn these words. In this unit, we will do this by working hard to learn the spellings of some of the most commonly confused homophones by thinking about word families, letter strings, word history (or any other strategies that work well for particular individuals). We will then really train our brains to confidently link the spelling to the meaning of the word and/or how the word is used. Once we are securely in the habit of linking a particular meaning with a particular spelling, encountering a new (completely different) word that just happens to sound the same is much less likely to trip us up.

**Homophone habits – About homophones**

**Location words** – Look at the words **here**, **there** and **where**. Ask children to notice which bit(s) of these words are the same. Help them see that all the words contain 'here'. Ask them what the words mean and agree that they are all about location. Explain that we want to train our brains to relate the spelling of these three words containing the letter string 'here' with location. Play 'Hunt the treasure'. Ask the class to close their eyes. Quickly and silently, hide some 'treasure' (anything will do) at the front of the classroom. Ask the class to open their eyes and write, 'Where is it?' on their whiteboards. Refuse to help them find the treasure until everyone has spelt 'where' correctly – encourage them to help one another if there are some mistakes. Stand in either the location where you hid the treasure or another random location. Ask the class, "Do you think the treasure is here or there (pointing to the real location of the treasure if you are not already standing there or a random location if you are). The class all write either 'here' or 'there' on their whiteboards. When all children have spelt the word correctly, reveal the location of the treasure. Repeat quickly as many times as you can. Remind children that whilst these words seem easy on their own, they are regularly spelt wrong even by adults (especially 'there') so we need to train our brains to match these spellings with their meanings as location words.

**Numbers** – Write numbers on the whiteboard. Ask children to write the numbers on their own whiteboards and try adding sound buttons. Talk about any tricky bits. Concentrate on **one**, **two**, **three**, **four** and **eight** from a homophone point of view). Roll a dice (or generate a random number from the interactive activity). Children write the number (as a word) on their whiteboards. Show boards to the teacher. If not all are correct ask children to work with partners to check and help each other.

### **Spelling numbers**

Alternatives:

To extend the maths aspect of this give sums which have **1**, **2**, **3**, **4** or **8** as answers (they can be easy or complex as appropriate) instead of rolling the dice.

Adapt to make a PE warm up. Take whiteboards/pens to the hall/playground. Ask children to place whiteboards and pens at one side of the hall/playground then stand on the opposite side. Call out one of the numbers. Children race to the other side, write the word and race back to the starting position. Check the spelling of the words on the boards. Repeat with other numbers.

**Would** – Look at the word **would** on the board. Soundtalk the word and point out the unusual spelling of the vowel. Ask children whether they know of any other words containing the letter string 'ould' and add **should** and **could** to the board. Rub the words off the board. Consider some activities:

Cleaning their teeth.

Flying to the moon.

Climbing a tree.

Becoming a doctor.

Swimming with sharks.

For each one ask, children to decide whether it is something that they personally **should** (definitely) do, **would** choose to do (if possible), **could** do (if they really had to) or **would not** do (under any circumstances), **could not** do or **should not** do. Ask them to write the appropriate word(s) on their whiteboard to show everyone. Check each time that words are spelt correctly by reading out correct letters used and asking children to tick each letter that they got right.

### **Contractions**

Several words that are contractions are also homophones. Encourage children to think about what the extended form of the contraction is.

### Homophone habits - Contractions

(N.B. These demonstrations will make more sense if children have previously covered the Apostrophes 1 unit)

**Contractions (it's)** – Look at the word **it's**. Ask children what this word is short for. Point out that while it is usually short for **it is**, it can also be short for **it has**. Explain that the challenge with spelling this word is to always check in your head that the sentence still makes sense if you replace it's with **it is**. If it does, then an apostrophe is needed. Play 'It's a...'. Secretly choose an object in the class that is easy to describe. Write a clue to the object (beginning with **it's**) on the board. E.g. It's quite tall. Ask all the children to guess what they think the object is by writing on their whiteboards (again beginning with **it's**). E.g. It's a door. Ask children to check that the person next to them has included the apostrophe and that the sentence makes sense with it is. Continue adding clues and having guesses until someone correctly guesses what the object is.

**Contractions (they're)** – Look at **they're** and ask children what the word is short for. Point out that, as with it's, **they're** should only be spelt like this when it is short for **they are**. Name some football teams, bands or other groups that pupils are likely to have strong feelings about (but avoid people they know personally). Name a group and ask children to write on their whiteboards either **They're great** or **They're not that great**. Depending on how they feel. Each time ask partners to check that all words are spelt correctly (**great** and **not** are also homophones) and especially that the apostrophe is present and in the correct place. Reinforce the idea that this spelling (which is used a bit less frequently than **there** or **their**) should only be used when sentence still makes sense if you replace **they're** with **they are**.

**Contractions (you're)** – Look at **you're** and identify that it is the contracted form of **you are**. Ask children to imagine two dragons facing one another and having an argument. Ask children to write some things that they think each dragon might be saying to the other (they must begin with **You're** too...). E.g. **You're** too grumpy/loud/tall/smelly etc. Ask children to look at a partner's board and check that every use of **you're** can be replaced with **you are** and still make sense (watch out for children falling into the trap of using **your** e.g. **Your** wings are too... Show that swapping in **you are** does not make sense.

### Homophone habits - Dragon argument

**Contractions ('ve / of)** – Write **should've**, **would've**, **could've**. Say the words out loud and point out that when we say these words it sounds a bit like we are saying **should of**, **would of**, **could of**, (especially in some accents). Look at the words again and point out that they are in fact short for **should have**, **would have**, **could have** and that **should of**, **could of**, **would of** are not correct. Be prepared for this to come as a complete shock to some children – some may even try to argue that you are wrong. You may have to revisit this a few times and will need to really focus on it when applying across the curriculum.

**Words that show possession** (your, our, their, its, ours, theirs) – Write **my**, **your**, **his**, **her**, **our**, **their**, **its** on the board. Ask children what the words have in common. Hold up a pen and say 'This is **my** pen.' Ask a child to come out to the front and give them the pen. Look straight at them and say 'This is **your** pen.' Give the pen to a boy and again talking to rest of the class say, 'This is **his** pen.' Give it to a girl and say to the rest of the class, 'This is **her** pen.' Hold the pen together with the child at the front and say 'This is **our** pen.' Finally, give it to a group of children to hold together and say to the child at the front 'This is **their** pen'. Give it to an inanimate object (computer, plant etc) and say to the child at the front 'This is **its** pen'. Ensure that children are clear that these words show that something belongs to someone or something. Alternatively use the monster space hopper race examples on [Homophone habits - Words that show possession](#)

**Words that show possession (your)** – Ask children to think up the most weird and wonderful thing they can imagine that someone could have accidentally left behind in a shop. On cards write lost and found notices 'Stop! Is this **your**...?' Choose some children to be shopkeepers. Ask children to give the cards to the shopkeepers who will check that **your** is spelt correctly and stick them up on a board (in the shop window). Remind children that **your** should only be spelt in this way if it refers to something belonging to someone.

**Words that show possession (their)** - Look at the word **their**. Draw sound buttons and look at the unusual spelling of the /air/ phoneme. Remind children that they learned to spell this word as a HFW but that today we want to train their brain to always match this spelling of the word to the right meaning. Ask children to close their eyes and imagine an alien family living in an alien house, on an alien planet, with an alien vehicle, alien clothes and an alien pet. Ask the children to write sentences (it could be a paragraph or just separate sentences) about things that belong to the alien family using the word **their**. E.g. Their clothes are..., Their moon buggy is... You may need to discuss what counts as belonging to someone and that this isn't the same as someone owning something. E.g. We would say **their** planet even though it is unlikely that they own it. Ask partners to check one another's sentences.

**Words that show possession (its)** – Look at the word **its**. Note the lack of apostrophe. If children have already learned about possessive apostrophes they might expect it's to have 's to demonstrate the possession. Look back at the other words that we know that show possession **my your his her their** and point out that none of these words have 's. These words are special words that show possession all by themselves – no need for apostrophes. Think about the alien vehicle from the **their** activity and imagine specific parts of it. Write about all the parts that belong to this vehicle using the word **its**. E.g. Its wheels are... Its windows have... Ask partners to check one another's sentences. Watch out for children trying to squeeze in **it's (it is)** sentences e.g. It's big. If this happens encourage children to ask themselves whether big is something that belongs to the vehicle.

**Words that show possession (our)** – Look at **our**. Ask children to write sentences about things in 'our' classroom. Our carpet is blue. Our windows get stuck. Our book corner is cool etc. NB. In some accents **our** is a homophone with **are**. In others it is a homophone with **hour**.

## Apply and assess – suggested activities

Revisit the homophone dictations from the start of the unit.

**You're** not going to believe **our** luck! It's a baby **sea** dragon. **Its two** tiny nostrils are smoking.

**Three** more dragons are bursting from the waves. Now there are **four** dragons. I wonder **where** they could've come from. All **eight** nostrils are now sniffing and searching. **They're** very sweet but I don't think I **would** like to get any closer.

Ask children to work with partners to go through literacy books (and other books) and hunt for examples of the words learned in this unit. Encourage them to check whether or not they have been spelt correctly and used appropriately based on their meaning and if not, correct them.

Be clear with children that the words in this unit are some of the most commonly used and also some of the easiest to make mistakes with. You may wish to make these 'Non-negotiable' words that children are always expected to get right in their own writing.

## Applying across the curriculum

See the section of the website on applying across the curriculum for ideas. Try to build in lots of modelling, planned opportunities and support in the learning environment for applying across the curriculum. Without this, it is easy for children to simply forget what they have learned in spelling sessions.