

Nit Won, Pearl Too

A Reader of Homophones, Not Necessarily for Knitters and Others Who Purl

In an otherwise well-reported and -written major project for a beginning news writing course, a student wrote:

"After receiving a flier, Areensely Garcia through hers away."

This college sophomore apparently had studied her stylebook enough to know that "flyer" was incorrect, but "through"? Surely, this was a rare exception? It was not. Others wrote:

"The students loose interest."

"Teens' problems are being dealt with in a reactive manor."

"It keeps them combing back."

"My wife used to shoot up heroine all the time."

It would be convenient to blame the students' reliance on computer spelling checkers for these errors. And it's certainly a logical criticism, because no simple spelling software would find any errors in these sentences. "Through," "heroine," "combing," "manor" and "loose" are all spelled correctly. They just happen to be the wrong words.

Major League Baseball Manager Sparky Anderson's comments notwithstanding, it would also be easy to bemoan the deterioration of a nation's writing skills. After all, what good is thinking if the thinker can't write? But, did the introduction of the calculator destroy a nation's math skills? Apparently not. Scores on the quantitative half of the Scholastic Assessment Test are rising. So, if a computer can be programmed to write a novel, it certainly can be programmed to identify not only misspelled words, but also homophone errors, or those so close to sound-alikes that they invite confusion. Why not just make that software available? Those programs are available, but they take great volumes of memory on a personal computer's hard disk and they are distressingly slow. In most such programs, the sound-alike words are identified, and the user is asked to decide which is correct. Stopping for every "to" in a term paper because it might be "too" or "two" can be maddening.

Whatever the cause, the problem can be fixed with some study and some extra attention to detail. This

reader contains a list of homophones, two or more words that sound alike but have different meanings. Some of you might know them as homonyms.

For many, the word homonym is an umbrella term that covers homographs, homophones, heteronyms and stressonyms. For a few, its meaning is more narrow; they believe homonyms are words that are both spelled and pronounced the same way, as in *bear*, the animal, and *bear*, to give birth or carry; if the derivation of the words is different, they form a homonym. Because this narrow definition covers so few words in the English language, this sense of the word renders it of little use. Moreover, *bear*, or any homograph for that matter, won't cause any spelling difficulties. On the other hand, *bare*, which forms a homophone with *bear*, can be useful in a spelling helper.

For the record, lexicographers don't agree on the definitions of homograph, homonym, homophone, heteronym and stressonym. Most agree that homographs are spelled alike but pronounced differently, as in *tear* (TAYR), to rip, and *tear* (TIHR), to cry. Some contend that homophones and homonyms are synonymous. Some argue that heteronyms are just different voices, tenses or parts of speech of the same base word, as in *content*, which as a noun is pronounced (KAHN-tent) and as an adjective (kuhn-TENT). Others include homographs in the heteronym definition. Stress-onyms usually eliminate everything but stress.

Stress, however, is what this reader is designed to alleviate. It is compiled in dictionary form with not only pure homophones, but also problem couplets, triplets and quadruplets in slightly varying pronunciations. The reader notes dictionary disagreements, as in *HAH-muh-fohn* vs. *HOH-muh-fohn*.

In the reader, letters take their normal sound, except for these, at right, which conform to the Associated Press guide for its broadcast members. Typographically, the pure homophone entries are in *this type* of boldface, the almost homophones in *this type* of italics. The pronunciations are in *this type* of italics, with the accented syllable in small capital letters (*ih-TAL-ihks*). When an entry is listed under another letter of the alphabet, **THIS KIND** of small capitals is used. In the body of the definitions, the entry words and the examples are in *this*

a , as in bat
ah = father
aw = raw
ay = fate
e , eh = bed
ee = feel
i , ih = pin
y , eye = ice
oh = go
oo = food
ow = scout
oy = join
u = foot
uh = puff
yoo = few
g = got
j = job
k = keep
ch = chair
sh = shut
zh = vision
th = thin
thh = the

type of italics.

Mack Lundstrom, San Jose, Calif., September 1993

A

accede (ak-SEED), **exceed** (ek-SEED): It takes sloppy diction to create confusion between these words. *Accede* means giving in, *acceding* to demands, while *exceed* means going beyond, *exceeding* the speed limit.

accept (ak-SEPT), **except** (ek-SEPT): More poor diction is required to make these into homophones. *Accept* can only be a verb meaning to receive something willingly. *Except* can be a verb meaning to exclude or omit, or it can be a preposition meaning other than and a conjunction meaning only or were it not for.

acclamation, acclimation (ak-luh-MAY-shuhn): If a performer hears loud applause, that's *acclamation*. But if that same performer hears little applause, it might require some *acclimation*, or psychological adjustment. *Acclimation* can also be weather-related, adjusting to a change in climate. Think *acclaim*, for *acclamation*, when you mean acceptance by voice vote.

acetic (uh-SEET-ihk), **acidic** (uh-SIHD-ihk): *Acetic* is related to the acid that is the main ingredient in acetic acid or vinegar, which is sour. *Acidic* just means acid-forming.

ad, add (AD): Newspapers sell advertisements, which some pronounce *ad-vur-TYZ-ments* and others pronounce *ad-VUR-tis-ments* and many just shorten to *ads*. *Add* is just *ad* with an added *d* and means just that: to increase or to say more or to combine numbers into a sum. In the plural, these words also form a homophone with **adz** or **adze** (ADZ), an axlike tool used in smoothing wood.

affect, effect (uh-FEKT): One grammarian deplored the smudging of vowels required to make these words sound alike, but in normal discourse, a difference in pronunciation is hardly discernible. Moreover, their misuse is so widespread as to

demand attention. It may help to treat these words alphabetically. If you *affect* the *effect*, you influence the result. *Affect* is rarely used as a noun; occasionally in psychological terms it can mean an emotional response. *Effect* as a verb means to bring about. The safe solution is to use *affect* as a verb and *effect* as a noun.

aid, aide (AYD): Synonyms for *aid* are help and assist. An *aide* is an assistant, the shortened form of *aide-de-camp*.

ail, ale (AYL): One who drinks too much *ale*, an alcoholic beverage very much like beer, might *ail*, feel

ill.

air, ere, err, heir (EHR): *Air* is what we breathe, but it has half a dozen other definitions. *Ere* is a preposition and conjunction meaning before. *Err* (also *UHR*) means to make an error. An *heir* inherits property or a title on the death of an ancestor.

aisle, I'll, isle (EYEL): An *aisle* is a passageway between rows of seats. *I'll* is the contraction for I will. An *isle* is a small island.

all ready, already (AWL RED-ee, awl-RED-ee), **all right** (AWL RYT), **all together** (AWL too-GEH-thhur), **altogether** (awl-too-GEH-thhur): These are not technically homophones, because when two words, the pronunciations are slightly different. Nevertheless, the differences are worth noting. We are *all ready* means everyone is prepared. He is *already* late means even now he is behind schedule. Everything is *all right* means it is OK. Or it can mean no errors. *Alright* is not considered a word. We were *all together* means everyone was in a group. He had *altogether* too much time means completely or entirely.

all, awl (AWL): *All* is the ultimate, complete adjective, adverb and noun: entire, full, whole. *Awl* is just a leather punch with a point.

allusion (uh-LOO-zhun), **illusion** (ih-LOO-zhun): An *allusion* is a casual, indirect reference; an *illusion* is a misleading, false reference.

allowed, aloud (uh-LOWD): *Allowed* is the past tense of the verb *allow*, which means to permit. *Aloud* is an adverb meaning to speak or read in a normal voice.

altar, alter (AWL-tur): An *altar* is a place from which a religious ceremony is conducted. *Alter* means to change or modify: *After he visited the altar to get married, he altered his ways*.

analyst, annalist (AN-uh-list): An *analyst* examines a problem or contentious situation to provide an interpretation of the methods available to find its solution. An *annalist* writes year-by-year accounts chronologically.

ant, aunt (ANT): An *ant* is an insect with six legs and no wings. An *aunt* is either a sister of your mother or father or the wife of your uncle, and, depending upon her beneficence toward nephew or niece, certainly can appear to have wings.

ante, anti, auntie (ANT-ee): An *ante* is the amount of chips or money required to enter a game of poker; as a preposition, it can also mean before. *Anti* means against. Both *ante-* and *anti-* are common prefixes. *Auntie* is the affectionate form of aunt.

arc, ark (ARK): *Arc* is a bowlike curved line or object. *Ark* is the boat Noah built in the Bible to save all the animals during the Flood, and it also is a place in a synagogue where the Torah is kept.

ascent, assent (uh-SENT): *Ascent* is a noun meaning a climb. *Assent* is a verb or noun meaning to agree.

ate, eight (AYT): *Ate* is the past tense of the verb *eat*, which means to ingest food. *Eight* is the number

"The teacher of this ESL class has had such an affect on all of her students."

after seven and before nine.

auger, augur (AW-gur): An *auger* is a tool used to bore holes in wood. *Augur* is a verb meaning to foretell or presage, by using omens.

aught, ought (AWT): An *aught* is a zero. *Ought* is an auxiliary verb compelling obligation or duty.

aural, oral (OH-ruhl): *Aural* is information heard; *oral* is information spoken. (Verbal means using words, whether spoken or written, but a verbal contract is spoken rather than written, hence, a relationship also between *oral* and *verbal*.)

aureole, oriole (OHR-ee-ohl): *Aureole* is the halo of radiance surrounding the head in a religious painting. An *oriole* is a bird.

auricle, oracle (OHR-uh-kuhl): The *auricle* is the external part of the ear. An *oracle* is an icon of wisdom and knowledge.

away, aweigh (uh-WAY): *Away* means absent, some distance off. *Anchors aweigh* means hoisting the anchor off the sea floor to the side of or onto the ship.

awed, odd (AWD): *Awed* is the past tense of *awe*, which means wonderment. *Odd* means strange, or it is the alternate of even (single-digit even numbers are divisible by two, but only one single-digit odd number, nine, is divisible — by three).

awn, on (AWN): The *awn* is the barley's beard — or wheat's or oat's. *On* is that ubiquitous preposition that the language would be lost without.

awful, offal (AW-fuhl): *Awful* means inspiring awe but also terrifying, appalling, ugly. *Offal* is / are garbage, waste parts, entrails.

aye, eye, I (EYE): *Aye* is an affirmative vote meaning yes. An *eye* is the organ of sight. The word *I* is the first-person singular pronoun.

B

baa, bah (BAH): A sheep's bleat may sound more like *BA* than *BAH*, but some lexicographers hear it as a prefix to *humbug*, which is how *bah*, the interjection, looks as well as sounds.

Employees, who know that planning reflects politics, are "waiting with baited breath."

put up money to free a prisoner. To *bale* means to bundle cotton or straw.

bait, bate (BAYT): Cheese on a trap is *bait* for the

mouse. *Bate* and *abate* are related, meaning to lessen (i.e. *with bated breath*); *bate* also means to soften leather in tanning.

baize, bays (BAYS): That green cloth on the pool table might be felt, but more than likely it's *baize*, a thick woolen material dyed green. *Bays*, in the plural, is a laurel or wreath of bay leaves given to honor a poet, for example. It's also what a hound does.

bald, balled, bawled (BAWLD): A *bald man* has no hair on his head and a *bald eagle* from afar appears to have none. *Bald* can mean blunt, as in a *bald-faced lie*. *Balled* is the past tense of *ball*, which when used with *up* means to form a sphere. *Bawled* is the past tense of *bawl*, which is what a frustrated child does.

balm (BAWM, BAWLM), **bomb** (BAWM): Many people sound the *l* in *balm*, but the preferred pronunciation is without, so it rhymes with *bomb*, unless you speak "New England." *Balms* soothe; *bombs* don't. *Balm* is aromatic ointment that can heal; there are no healing effects from a *bomb*, which explodes and kills.

band, banned (BAND): *Band* can mean a strip that binds or a finger ring, as in *wedding band*, or it can mean a group of people joined together for a common purpose, as in a *band of musicians*. *Banned* is the past tense of *ban*, which means to prohibit someone from doing something, i.e. banishment.

bands, banns, bans (BANS): For *bands*, see BAND, BANNED above. *Banns*, a plural noun, means a proclamation in church of an engaged couple's intention to marry. The *banns* a couple proclaim are not the *bands* the couple exchange. *Bans* is the plural of *ban*, a prohibition.

bang, bhang (BANG): *Bang* can be a loud noise or a thrill. *Bhang*, also spelled *bang*, is hemp.

bar, barre (BAR): *Bar* has more than a dozen meanings, including a rod, a solid hunk of soap or candy, a system of courts or collection of lawyers, a barrier, an insignia or rank. *Barre* is the handrail held while doing ballet exercises.

bard, barred (BARD): William Shakespeare was known as a *bard* of *Avon*, an epic poet. *Barred* is the past tense of *bar*, which means to obstruct or prevent.

bare, bear (BEHR): This combination includes a homophone and a homonym. *Bare* means to expose, or it can substitute for naked as in legs, empty as in room or plain as in facts. *Bear* means to carry or tolerate or to produce or sustain. It is also a large animal, or a person who is clumsy, gruff, terrifying or even lovable, as in *teddy*.

baron, barren (BEHR-un): A *baron* is the lowest rank in the British peerage, and if it were a title, *barren* would be a step below, devoid of rank or literally the

Or
better
still,
bearing
your
soul to a
lover
over
that
perfect
bottle of
wine.

ability to produce vegetation, as in *barren soil*. A baroness is the wife of a *baron* and barrenness is the state of being *barren*, the companion of Wasteland TV.

base, bass (BAYSS): Go back far enough and *bass* has the same root as *base*, the thing on which something rests. *Base* can be a center of military operations, a position on a baseball diamond, the first coat of paint, the principal ingredient in a mixture. But it can also be an adjective denoting a lack of decency, courage or honor. On the other hand, *bass* is the lowest singing voice, the lowest stringed, brass or woodwind instrument. **bass** (BASS): Alphabetically, this is the first homograph, this pronunciation meaning a scaly fish of large mouth, or small mouth, black or striped.

based, baste (BAYST): *Based* is the past tense of *base*, and has the specific meaning of having headquarters in: *The group was based in Rome*. *Baste* means either loose sewing merely to keep two pieces of cloth together or roast drippings used to keep the meat moist.

bazaar (buh-ZAR), **bizarre** (bi-ZAR, buh-ZAR): In Persia, a *bazaar* was a market, hence a sale of miscellaneous items usually conducted for charitable purposes. In the Basque region of Spain, *bizarre* was a beard and came to mean weird.

be, bee (BEE): Pupils used to memorize *be am is are was were been* for the various forms of the most widely used verb. *To be* means to exist; it is also the auxiliary denoting tense. A *bee* is an insect known for its pollinating power, its honey and its buzz; it is also a working get-together, as in *quilting bee* or *spelling bee*.

beach, beech (BEECH): A *beach* is a stretch of sand alongside the sea. *Beech* is a type of tree.

beat, beet (BEET): A heart *beats* life into a body, and a thug can *beat* it to death. A couple of dozen other meanings include the specialty a newspaper reporter covers or the scoop one news competitor gets over another. *Beats* all, they are; on the other hand, it's *beet* red anger, symbolic of the vegetable whose top is as edible as its root, or sweet success, as in the sugar refined from the white *beet*.

beau, bow (BOH): Another homophone-homograph combo. A *beau* is an anachronistic term for a boyfriend. Its sound-alike, *bow*, is a curved weapon that shoots arrows. It can be a knot, utilitarian with a shoelace, decorative with a ribbon. A *bow* also makes music out of a violin. **bow, bough** (BOW): The homograph can be the *bow*, the front of a ship, or, with back straight, it can be what one does literally when bending at the waist, or figuratively in submission to authority. A *bough* is the branch of a tree.

beer, bier (BEER): *Beer* is an alcoholic beverage. *Bier* is a coffin and the platform on which it rests.

bell, belle (BELL): A *bell* is a metal, cup-shaped object that rings when struck by a clapper. A *belle* is a pretty woman.

berry, bury (BER-ee): The *berry* is the juicy fruit of a

blackberry, a blueberry, a cranberry or a strawberry. *To bury* is to place a body in a grave.

berth, birth (BURTH): A *berth* is a bed on a ship, or a place where ships dock. A *birth* is the beginning — of a child, a nation.

better, bettor (BET-ur): *Better* can be an adjective, adverb, noun and verb. It is the comparative for good and generally indicates more excellence, suitability, size. A *bettor* is one who bets or wagers.

bight, bite, byte (BYT): A *bight* is a curve in a river or coastline that forms a bay. A *bite* is the sting of an insect or the wound by the teeth of an animal. In electronics, a *byte* is a string of bits or binary digits, usually eight.

billed, build (BILD): *Billed* is the past tense of *bill*, which means to send a customer an invoice for goods or services received, or it can be a listing. *Build* means to construct.

birr, bur (BUR): A *birr* is force, energy, or a whirring sound. A *bur* is a prickly seed casing, as in *a bur under his saddle*.

bit, bitt (BIT): A *bit* is a morsel or a boring tool or that part of the bridle placed in the horse's mouth. It is also an acronym for B(inary) (dig)IT. And it is the past tense of *bite*. *Bitt* is a double-post arrangement on the deck of a boat around which rope is wound to moor the vessel.

blew, blue (BLOO): *Blew* is the past tense of *blow*. *Blue* (technically, cyan) is one of the three primary colors, the color of clear sky. It also means sad and soulful, and in the plural that kind of music.

bloc, block (BLAHK): A *bloc* is a group of people or organizations or nations with enough common interest to act as one. A *block* can be a solid rectangular chunk of wood, metal or stone with numerous specialized variations — a metal casting containing an engine, a mental paralysis in the thought process, a maneuver in a football game, for example.

... in
Xiangkhoang,
a city just
south of the
Vietnam
border.

... Dorothy
Puente, the
woman
accused of
killing nine
borders.

boar, bore (BOHR): A *boar* is an uncastrated male pig. To *bore* is to drill a hole or to cause indifference, and it is also the past tense of *bear*, which means to carry or endure.

board, bored (BOHRD): A piece of wood is a *board*. *Board* is also the meals a landlord provides. It is a group of individuals who run a company as a *board* of directors. It can be a place where bulletins are placed. *Bored* is what one gets when listening to a dull speaker.

boarder, border (BOHR-dur): A *boarder* is one who pays for meals at a boarding house. A *border* is the boundary that separates two countries.

bode, bowed (BOHD): *Bode* means to portend, i.e. *The development bodes well for him*. *Bowed* is the past tense of *bow*, which is drawn across the strings of a violin to make music. *Bowed* also means curved.

bogey, bogie, bogy (BOH-gee): For a golfer, a *bogey* is one over par for a hole. For a soldier, a *bogie* is a type of tank suspension that maintains traction. A *bogy* is an imaginary evil spirit, as in *bogeyman*.

bold, bowled (BOHLD): *Bold* is daring. *Bowled* is the past tense of *bowl*, to roll a ball down a lane.

bole, boll, bowl (BOHL): *Bole* can be a tree trunk or a reddish clay. *Boll* is the seed pod of cotton, subject to the dread weevil. A *bowl* is a deep dish.

born, borne (BOHRN): Both are past participles of the verb *bear*, but *born* means by birth and *borne* means endured or carried.

borough, burro, burrow (BUR-oh): In some states, a *borough* is a self-governing area of a larger city, e.g. the *borough* of Queens in New York City. A *burro* is a donkey. To *burrow* means to dig. The old United Press International stylebook said a *burro* was an ass and a *burrow* was a hole in the ground and a reporter should know the difference.

bouillon, bullion (BOOL-yahn, BOOL-yuhm), **buillon** (BOOL-yuhm): *Bouillon* is a clear meat broth. *Bullion* is gold or silver, usually in ingot form.

boy (BOY), **buoy** (BOY, BOO-ee): A *boy* is a male child. A *buoy* is a floating object anchored to provide a warning to ships.

braid, brayed (BRAYD): *Braid* is woven hair, thread or string. *Brayed* is the past tense of *bray*, which is the sound a burro makes.

braise, brays, braze (BRAYZ): To *braise* is to brown meat in a skillet. *Brays* is the plural of *bray*. To *braze* is to join metals using an alloy that becomes molten at a lower temperature than the metals being joined.

brake, break (BRAYK): A *brake* stops a vehicle. A *break* splits or shatters an object, or it interrupts an action.

breach, breech (BREECH): A failure to meet terms of an agreement is a *breach*. The *breech* is the rump, or it is the back end of the barrel of a gun. In the plural, breeches are a pair of pants.

bread, bred (BRED): *Bread* is baked from grain, the staff of life. *Bred* is the past tense of *breed*, which means to cause reproduction, or to hatch from an egg or deliver from a womb.

brewed, brood (BROOD): *Brewed* is the past tense of *brew*, which means to steep or boil or ferment. A *brood* is all the offspring in a family, or it means to mope or worry.

brews, bruise (BROOZ): *Brews* is the plural of *brew*. A *bruise* is a black and blue spot on the skin caused by a blow, or figuratively a blow to one's feelings.

bridal, bridle (BRY-duhl): *Bridal* is an adjective

relating to brides and weddings. To *bride* means to rein a horse or to take offense at a remark; a *bridle* is the leather and metal headpiece for guiding a horse.

broach (BROHCH), **brooch** (BROHCH, BROOCH): To *broach* a subject means to bring it up; it is also a metal-cutting tool or a spit. A *brooch* is a pin usually worn by a woman at the neck.

brows, browse (BROWZ): *Brows* is the plural of *brow*, the part of the forehead over the eye, as in *eyebrows*. To *browse* is to roam casually around a book-store, for example.

bruit, brute (BROOT): A *bruit* is a rumor; as a verb with about, it means to spread one. A *brute* is a human who acts like an animal, with no apparent ability to reason; as a cliche, used with strength or force, it means considerable.

bus, buss (BIHSS): A *bus* is a vehicle capable of carrying a score or so of people. To *bus* means to set and clear tables in a restaurant. To *buss* means to kiss playfully.

bused, bussed, bust (BUHST): To be *bused* is to be carried by bus, as in a means of desegregating schools. To be *bussed* is to be kissed. A *bust* is a raid or an arrest, often by narcotics agents; it is also a sculpture of the head, shoulders and chest.

but, butt (BUHT): *But* is a conjunction. *Butt* is short for buttocks, as in the target of a joke or ridicule. It is the stub of a cigarette or cigar and the charging thrust of a ram.

buy, by, bye (BEYE): *Buy* means to purchase. *By* is a preposition and an adverb. When a team moves to a higher bracket in a tournament without competing, it is said to have drawn a *bye* in that round (incidentally, it's *by the bye*).

C

cache, cash (KASH): It would be simple to link these words by saying a *cache* is a secret place where *cash* can be hidden. That may work as a memory device, but remember that a *cache* can contain all sorts of other things of value, not necessarily only currency or coin, which is what *cash* is, of course.

caddie, caddy (KAD-ee): A French *cadet* who served his officer gave rise to the Scottish *caddie*, who did the same by hauling a golfer's bag of clubs. Dictionaries do acknowledge that a *caddy* is a small container for tea, but lexicographers now seem to prefer *caddie* for both. A *cadi* (KAHD-ee) is a Turkish judge.

caesar, seizer (SEE-zhur): Julius Caesar, who ruled the Roman Empire as a dictator, was supposedly born by surgical incision, which produces the term Caesarean section. Here we're interested in the lowercase *caesar*, which is an eponym for dictator. What's more, Julius Caesar was not the origin of Caesar salad. It came from a Mexican restaurateur who invented it. An egg is the distinguishing ingredient, but some recipes say it should be raw, others say cod-dled. One who seizes or grabs is a *seizer*. You could

say a *caesar* seizes power.

Cain, kain [also *cain, kane*], **cane** (KAYN): Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, killed his brother Abel out of jealousy, giving us the expression *raising Cain*, which means creating a ruckus, usually without murderous intent. *Kain* used to be the small animals or produce tenants gave to the landlord as rent. A *cane* is a stick designed to help a hobbled walker, or a woody plant stem that can be bamboo, rattan or sugar.

calendar, calender (KAL-en-dur): *Calendar* is a schedule, usually of weeks/months, forming a year. A *calender* is a machine that smooths and glosses paper or cloth. Remember that the *calendAr* has dATes. Don't confuse the latter with *colander* (KAHL-en-dur), which is a kitchen utensil used, for example, to drain the water from spaghetti.

calk, caulk, cock (KAWK): A *calk* is a bur on the toe or heel of a horseshoe designed to keep the horse from slipping. To *caulk* is to seal cracks, usually with an acrylic latex compound. A *cock* is an adult male chick, or a penis, or the hammer in a gun, or the tilt of a hat.

call, caul (KAHL): A *call* is a shout or a summoning. *Caul* is the membrane enclosing the fetus.

callous, callus (KAL-uhs): A *callus*, which is a noun, is that spot of skin that becomes thickened and hardened from repeated use in manual labor. *Callous*, an adjective, shifts such physically toughening or emotionally hardening to one's attitude.

canape, canopy (KAN-uh-pee): *Canape* is also pronounced *KAN-uh-pay*: A *canape* is a cracker with a topping of cheese or meat or spread. A *canopy* is a little roof, or a clear plastic bubble over a plane's cockpit, or the top of a billowed parachute.

cannon, canon (KAN-uhn): A *cannon* is a big gun that shoots projectiles. A *canon* is a religious, legal or ethical code or standard.

canter, cantor (KAN-tur): A *canter* is a horse's gait between a trot and a gallop. A *cantor* is the soloist in a synagogue.

canvas, canvass (KAN-vuhs): *Canvas* is a heavy, tightly woven fabric. A *canvass* is a poll, or a solicitation for opinion, political support or sales.

capital, Capitol (CAP-ih-tuhl): A *capital* is the city where the seat of government is situated; *Capitol*, normally capitalized because it refers to a specific building, is where a national or state legislature assembles.

carat, caret, carrot, karat (KAR-et): A *carat* is a unit of weight for diamonds equal to 200 milligrams. A *caret* is a proofreading and copyreading symbol. A *carrot* is an orange root vegetable. A 17-*karat* gold bracelet means it is 17/24 pure gold and 7/24 alloy.

carpal, carpel (CAHR-puhl): *Carpal* is the wrist bone, affected in the repetitive strain injury known as carpal tunnel syndrome. *Carpel* is a part of the seed-bearing organ of a flowering plant.

cask, casque (KASK): A *cask* is a barrel. A *casque* is a helmet.

cast, caste (KAST): A *cast* is a deposit, or a mold, or a hue, or a throw; *Caste* is social or occupational grouping.

caster, castor (KAS-tur): A *caster* is one who casts, or a small bottle, or a set of rollers on which furniture can be moved about. *Castor* is a lubricative and cathartic oil made from the castor bean, or it is a hat made of beaver or rabbit fur.

cause, caws (KAWS): A *cause* is a reason or motive; *Caws* are cries of crows.

CB, Seabee (SEE-bee): *CB* stands for citizens band radio or Construction Battalion, which was shortened to *Seabee* to designate the servicemen who built harbor facilities as members of the Civil Engineer Corps of the U.S. Navy.

cedar, ceder, seeder (SEE-dur): A *cedar* is a pine tree. A *ceder* is one who transfers something to another. A *seeder* is one who plants seed.

ceiling, sealing (SEEL-ing): The *ceiling* is the top of a room. *Sealing* means to bind or fasten.

cell, sell (SEL): A *cell* is a prison or a jail cubicle where inmates are held, or a compartment in a honeycomb, or the smallest unit of a political organization, or a very small unit of protoplasm, or an electrical storage compartment. *Sell* means to exchange something of value for money or barter.

cellar, seller (SEL-ur): A *cellar* is an underground room or space. A *seller* is one who sells.

cense, cents, scents, sense (SENS): To *cense* is to perfume with incense. *Cents* is the plural of cent, a penny. *Scents* is the plural of scent, a smell that invites or leads, as in *The hound caught its scent*. Humans have five senses — hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling — and an unspecific sixth, which relates to intuition. To *sense* is to read another's body language, demeanor.

censer, censor, sensor (SEN-sur): A *censer* is a container in which incense is burned. A *censor* is one who prohibits publication or broadcast. A *sensor* is a device used to detect, measure or record such things as heat or radioactivity; *censure* (SEN-shur), often confused with *censor*, is a resolution condemning one's misconduct.

cent, scent, sent (SENT): A *cent* is a penny, which is 1/100 of a dollar. A *scent* is stronger than a whiff, weaker than a smell. *Sent* is the past tense of send, which means to dispatch.

cerate, sear, seer, sere (SIHR-ayt), **serrate** (SEHR-ayt): *Cerate* is a thick ointment consisting of fat and resin wax often used as a medicine. *Serrate* means sawlike notches along the edge of a knife, or leaf.

cere, sear, seer, sere (SIHR): *Cere* is the fleshy area at the base of a bird's beak. *Sear* means to scorch a surface. A *seer* is a prophet. *Sere* is a back formation from series and in environmental terms, it means the whole history in stages of plants and animals to cli-

max.

cercus, circus (SUR-kuhs): A *cercus* is an appendage on the stomach of an insect. A *circus* is a traveling show of trained animals, clowns, etc.

cereal, serial (SEER-ee-uhl): *Cereal* is breakfast food made from grains. A *serial* is a story published or broadcast in episodes.

cereus, serious (SEER-ee-uhs): A *cereus* is a night-blooming cactus. *Serious* means sober, solemn or gravely important.

cession, session (SEH-shuhn): A *cession* is a ceding of one's rights to another. A *session* is a meeting or series of meetings.

cetaceous, setaceous (seh-TAY-shuhs): Whales, porpoises and dolphins are *cetaceous*, i.e. water mammals. *Setaceous* means bristle-like.

chalk (CHAWK), **chock** (CHOK): (The subtle difference in the pronunciation of these words isn't enough to prevent their confusion.) *Chalk* is limestone that can be used as a writing instrument on a blackboard. A *chock* is a wedge used to prevent a wheel from moving.

chance, chants (CHANTS): *Chance* is by luck or accident. *Chants* are melodious sayings often offered in religious services.

chantry, shanty (SHAN-tee): A *chantry* is a song sung by sailors, as in sea *chantry*. A *shanty* is a lean-to or shack, as in *shantytown*, a poor section of the city filled with such shanties.

chary, cherry (CHAYR-ee): *Chary* means cautious. A *cherry* is a small, round fruit with a pit ranging from yellow to very dark red.

cheap, cheep (CHEEP): *Cheap* means inexpensive, or someone not soon to part with his or her money. A *cheep* is a soft, high-pitched sound made by a chick or a small bird.

check, cheque, Czech (CHEK): A *check* is a restraint on action, or a typographical mark, or a bill presented in a restaurant, or a written order to a bank to pay a specified amount from one's account, or an examination to see if something is all right. *Cheque* is the British spelling. A *Czech* is an inhabitant or a native of Czechoslovakia.

chic, sheik (SHEEK): *Chic* means stylishly elegant. A *sheik* is the chief of an Arab village.

Chile, chili, chilly (CHIHL-ee): *Chile* (CHEE-lay in Spanish) is a country in western South America. *Chili* is a hot pepper, or the mean, bean and tomato dish (sometimes with meat) flavored with powder from the pepper. *Chilly* is between cool and cold.

choir, quire (KWYR): A *choir* is a group of singers. A *quire* is 24, sometimes 25, sheets of paper of the same size, or 1/20 of ream.

choler, collar (KAHL-ur): *Choler* is anger or bile. A *collar* is the part of a garment that encircles the neck, or a restraining or identifying band around an animal's neck.

choral, coral (KOR-uhl): *Choral* means music sung

... a harp
and flute duo
and Christ-
mas coral
music.

by a chorus. *Coral* is a rock-like marine organism that grows to form a reef or island.

chorale, corral (kuh-RAL): *Chorale* is a harmonized hymn, or a small choir. A *corral* is an enclosure for livestock, usually horses.

chord, cord (KORD): A *chord* is several harmonious notes played at the same time. A *cord* is a heavy string, or an insulated wire carrying electricity, or 128 cubic feet of stacked firewood, or a part of the anatomy such as a spinal *cord*.

chute, shoot (SHOOT): One *chute* is a trough down which something slides; another is short for parachute. *Shoot* means to fire a weapon, or throw or strike a ball or puck toward a scoring objective, or it is a plant sprouting.

cite, sight, site (SYT): *Cite* means to mention meritoriously or exemplarily, or to summon before a court. *Sight* means vision. A *site* is a place.

clack, claque (KLAK): *Clack* means to chatter thoughtlessly and endlessly, as a hen does. *Claque* is a group of people hired to clap at a performance.

clause, claws (KLAWS): A *clause* is a provision of a document, or a group of words with both subject and predicate. *Claws* are the sharp, curved nails on the toes of an animal or any device that resembles them.

clew, clue (KLOO): A *clew* is a ball of yarn. A *clue* is a fact that helps solve a mystery.

click, clique (KLIHK): A *click* is a sharp sound lacking resonance, or it means to function well together. A *clique* (also KLEEK) is an exclusive, informal group.

climb, clime (KLYM): *Climb* means to ascend. *Clime* is short for climate.

clod, clawed (KLAHD): A *clod* is a chunk of earth, or an oaf. *Clawed* means scratched.

close, clothes (KLOHS): *Close* means to shut. *Clothes* are articles of wearing apparel.

coal, cole (KOHL): *Coal* is decayed matter used as fuel. *Cole* is a cabbage dish.

coarse, course (KORS): *Coarse* means rough. A *course* is a path, or a series of directed study, or a prescribed method of action.

coat, cote (KOHT): A *coat* is a garment for the upper body. A *cote* is a small shed or shelter for fowl.

coco, cocoa (KOH-koh): *Coco* is short for the coconut palm tree and its fruit. *Cocoa* is the powder made from cacao seeds, i.e. powdered chocolate, or the milk drink made from it. It is also the color brown, with the reddish-yellow cast.

coddling, codling (KAHD-ling): *Coddling* is gently boiling eggs. *Codling* is a elongated variety of apple, or a type of moth that damages apples and pears, or a young cod.

coffer, cougher (KAW-fur): A *coffer* is a chest for holding money. A *cougher* is one who coughs, or

expels air from the lungs with a hack.

coin, quoin (KOYN): A *coin* is money. A *quoin* is a wedge used for locking metal type in a form or chase.

colonel, kernel (KUR-nuhl): *Colonel* is a military rank. A *kernel* is a seed, as in corn, or an essence.

color, culler (KUHL-ur): *Color* is the hue or shade of the spectrum one sees. A *culler* sorts or chooses.

complacent, complaisant (kuhm-PLAY-sent): *Complacent* means satisfied or smug. *Complaisant* means obliging or accommodating.

complement, compliment (KAHM-pluh-ment): To *complement* is to work well with or add to an endeavor. To *compliment* is to praise.

confidant (KAHN-fih-DAHNT), **confident** (KAHN-fih-dent): These aren't homophones, but their similarities are worth noting. A *confidant* is a trusted friend with whom one shares secrets. *Confident* means assured, certain of success in an endeavor.

coolie, coolly (KOO-lee): A *coolie* is a person who does heavy labor for little pay. *Coolly* is an adverb for one who acts calmly.

coo, coup (KOO): *Coo* means to make dovelike sounds. A *coup* is a masterful stratagem or a decisive action, and is short most often for a *coup de grace*, which is a mortal blow, or *coup d'etat*, which is the non-violent overthrow of a government.

coop, coupe (KOOP): A *coop* is a cage for chickens. A *coupe* (also KOO-pay) is an enclosed two-seated car.

core, corps (KOHR): The *core* is the hard center of a fruit containing the seeds, or soft center of a tree. A *corps* is a military unit, or a group of people working together. **CORE** is the Congress of Racial Equality.

cosign, cosine (KOH-syn): *Cosign* means to sign a document with another person. *Cosine* is a trigonometric term.

council, counsel (KOWN-suhl): A *council* is a legislative or deliberative body. *Counsel* is advice, or an adviser, usually a lawyer; **consul** (KAHN-suhl) is a diplomatic envoy.

courier, currier (KUR-ee-ur): A *courier* is a messenger. A *currier* rubs down horses or prepares tanned leather.

cousin, cozen (KUH-zuhn): One's *cousin* is the child of one's uncle or aunt. *Cozen* means to deceive.

coward, cowered (KOW-urd): A *coward* lacks courage. *Cowered* is the past tense of cower, which means to hide fearfully.

coy, koi (KOY): *Coy* means affected shyness. A *koi* is a Japanese carp.

craft, kraft (KRAFT): A *craft* is an artistic skill or trade, or it means cunning. *Kraft* is a type of thick, brownish paper.

creak, creek (KREEK): A *creak* is a grating noise. A *creek* is a small stream.

crewel, cruel (KROO-uhl): *Crewel* is an embroidery yarn. *Cruel* means pain inflicted by someone who enjoys it.

cruise, cruse (KROOZ): *Cruise* means to travel, especially on a ship, or to look for a sex partner. A *cruse* is a small pot for wine or oil.

cue, queue (KYOO): A *cue* is a tapered stick used to strike a billiard ball, or it is a word or action used as a prompt in the theater. *Queue* means to line up.

come, cum (KUHM): The first meaning of *come* is moving from there to here, the place where the writer is writing. Do not confuse with *comb* (KOHM), which means to tidy your hair with such a device. *Cum* is the Latin for with, *cum laude*, with praise.

currant, current (KUR-uhnt): A *currant* is the berry of a small, sour fruit, usually made into jelly. *Current* means existing or continuing, or it is the flow of water or electricity.

cygnet, signet (SIHG-net): A *cygnet* is a young swan. A *signet* is a seal or stamp.

cymbal, symbol (SIHM-buhl): A *cymbal* is a percussion instrument. A *symbol* is a sign representing another concept or thing.

D

dam, damn (DAM): A *dam* is a structure or barrier built to hold back, or *dam*, water. It's also the mother of a four-legged animal. To *damn* is to curse or condemn to punishment, or hell.

days, daze (DAYZ): A year has 365, or 366, 24-hour periods called *days*. *Daze* means to stun into confusion.

dear, deer (DEER): *Dear* is a term of affection meaning loved, precious, valued. Cud-chewing animals with hoofs include moose, elk, caribou, members of the *deer* family.

depravation, deprivation (dep-ruh-VAY-shuhn): *Depravation* is corruption, perversion. *Deprivation* is a loss or dispossession.

desert, dessert (dih-ZURT): To *desert* means to leave a post without permission. (In the plural it can mean deserving of reward or punishment, as in getting one's *just deserts*.) *Dessert* is the final course of a meal, usually sweet. **desert** (DEZ-urt): A *desert* is a dry, sandy region.

Mrs. Gonder
died
Wednesday.
She was a
bookkeeper
for Rex
Cleaning
and Dying..

dew, do, due (DOO): Plants collect *dew*, condensation, during the night. *Do* takes up nearly a column in dictionaries; among its meanings are to perform a task, as in *I'll do it*, or get along, as in *I'll make do*. *Due* means owed. The first note in a musical scale, *do*

(DOH), forms a homograph with *do*.

die, dye (DEYE): To *die* means to cease living. To *dye* means to change the color — of cloth, for exam-

ple. The present participles are *dying* and *dyeing*. As a noun, one type of *die* is a marked cube used in a game usually using two or more *dice*, the plural of *die*. Another *die* (plural, *dies*) is a tool or an engraved piece of metal used for stamping medals.

dinghy, dingy (DING-ee): A *dinghy* is a small boat, sometimes rubber and inflatable, used as a life raft on a ship, or it is a single-masted racing boat. The normal dictionary pronunciation for *dingy* (DIN-jee) means dark and grimy, but when it is used as a slang term for a person appearing as if his bell had been run, as in *ding-dong*, *dingy* is pronounced DING-ee.

dire, dyer (DEYER): *Dire* is an adjective meaning a dreadful circumstance calling for urgent action. A *dyer* is one who dyes clothing.

disburse (dis-BURS), **disperse** (dis-PURS): Just try, once, to tell the difference when you hear the normal pronunciation of these words. They do not form a homophone, but they should, because they are usually misused. *Disburse* means to distribute money. *Disperse* means to break up a mob or scatter a crowd. The words are further confused because a *bursar* is a treasurer of an organization and a *purser* is a ship's officer who takes care of accounts, freight and tickets.

disc, disk (DIHSK): A radio announcer who once played phonograph records and now plays *compact discs* is a *disc jockey*. The flat plate on which computer data are stored is a *disk*.

discreet, discrete (dihs-CREET): If actions are *discreet*, they are careful and considerate; if they are *discrete*, they are separate and distinct, as in e-t-e.

do, doe, dough (DOH): As above, *do* is the first or last note in the diatonic or chromatic scale. A *doe* is a female goat, rabbit or deer. *Dough* is unbaked bread, or money.

doc, dock (DAHK): *Doc* is short for doctor. *Dock* has numerous meanings, including a landing pier for ships, or a shortening of a worker's pay.

does, doze (DOHZ): *Does* is the plural of *doe*. *Doze* means to catch a short nap.

done, dun (DUHN): *Done* is the past participle of *do*, meaning finished, as in *The roast is done*. *Dun* can be the persistent demanding of payment for a debt or it is the brownish-gray color that seems to characterize the process.

dual, duel (DOO-uhl): *Dual* is the adjective meaning two, or double. *Duel* is ultimately a fight to the death between two persons with weapons, but has been diminished even to mean merely a verbal argument between two people.

The pot that attracted most of the people . . . is \$472 million waiting to be dispersed this year.

ducked, duct (DUHKT): *Ducked* is the past tense of *duck*, which means to lower the body to avoid being hit. *Duct* is a passageway for heat or tears, among many others.

E

earn, urn (URN): To *earn* means to receive or deserve a paycheck, or an honor, or interest on an investment. An *urn* is a vase with a base; it can hold coffee, for example, or the ashes of a cremated body.

eave, eve (EEV): An *eave* is the lowest point of a roof overhang. *Eve* is the evening or day before a holiday or special event.

effect, see **AFFECT**.

eight: see **ATE**.

ell, l (EL): An *ell* is an L-shaped extension on a building or pipe fitting; *l* is the 12th letter of the English alphabet.

emigrate (EHM-ih-grayt), **immigrate** (IHM-ih-grayt): These two are close enough to homophonic that some explanation is warranted. *Emigrate* means to migrate from, or leave, while *immigrate* means to migrate to, or enter.

When two places are used, syntax is the key, as in *He emigrated from Italy to the United States* or *He immigrated to the United States from Italy*.

In a U.S. newspaper, then, it would be *He is an Italian immigrant*. In an Italian newspaper it would be *He is an Italian emigrant*.

... drivers are telling them a strike or lockout is eminent.

eminent (EHM-ih-nent), **imminent** (IHM-ih-nent). *Eminent* means distinguished, noteworthy, as in *She was an eminent author of history*, or possessing a higher power, as in *The government exercised its power of eminent domain and seized the property, paying the owner fair market value for it*. *Imminent* means on the verge of, and usually modifies a negative word, as in *He was in imminent danger*.

ensure (ehn-SHUR), **insure** (ihn-SHUR): *Ensure* means to put some power behind a promise: *He took the steps necessary to ensure the victory he had predicted*. To *insure* means to guarantee replacement of an automobile, for example, if it is destroyed, i.e. *The insurance policy premium he paid each month gave him the peace of mind he needed to know that fire would never leave him permanently homeless*. On the other hand, **assure** (uh-SHUR) usually rides on the reputation of the maker, as in *He assured his class that he would have the papers graded by Monday*.

epic (EP-ik), **epoch** (EP-uhk): Pronunciation should differentiate these words, but it doesn't. An *epic* is a narrative poem, such as Shakespeare wrote, with a hero however tragic he usually was; the adjective *epic* refers to the heroism, the majesty of the story. *Epoch* is the beginning of a distinguishable period of history.

ere, err: see AIR.

erupt (ee-RUHPT), **irrupt** (ih-RUHPT): Volcanoes *erupt*, populations *irrupt*; same idea, growing rapidly or violently.

ewe, yew, you (YOO): A *ewe* is a female sheep, a *yew* is an evergreen tree and *you* is you.

ewes, use, yews (YOOZ): see EWE, YEW, YOU. *Use* means to employ, or it can mean take advantage of, as in *He uses her*.

exceed, see ACCEDE.

except, see ACCEPT.

exercise (EK-suhr-sihz), **exorcise** (EK-sohr-sihz): *Exercise* means exerting the muscles of the body, or it is the performance of duties. To *exorcise* means to drive out, as in *He exorcised the evil spirits*.

eye, see AYE.

F

fain, fane, feign (FAYN): It's no use *feigning* — pretending — much need for this entry. *Fain* and *fane* are rarely used. The verb *fain* means eager, as in the Elizabethan style, *He would fain eat*. *Fane* is also archaic, meaning a church or a temple.

faint, feint (FAYNT): One who feels *faint*, or dizzy, might swoon, or actually pass out. *Faint* also means dim or unlikely. *Feint*, on the other hand, is a valuable deception for an athlete, as a basketball player making a false move to shoot as a means of throwing his opponent off guard. An exhausted hiker, for example, might *feint* a *faint* to entice a free lift to the top of the hill.

fair, fare (FAYR): *Fair* is one of those highly useful nouns and adjectives that have dozens of meanings — *fair* (blond or light) hair or complexion; *fair* (sunny) weather; a *fair* (just) decision; a county *fair* is a festival or exhibition. A *fare* is the price charged to ride a train, a bus or a plane; it can also mean happen: *He didn't fare well*. It might be well to remember that *fair* is not a verb and *fare* is not an adjective.

falter, faulter

(FAWL-tur): *Falter* is a verb meaning to hesitate as if about to fail to achieve a goal or pronounce a word. A *faulter* is one who criticizes another's actions.

fate, fete (FAYT): *Fate* is destiny, the final outcome. *Fete* (also FEHT) is a festival or celebration, or it can mean to honor someone at such an event.

faze, phase (FAYZ): *Faze* means to disconcert or disturb, i.e. *The heckling did not seem to faze the performer*. *Phase* is a stage in the development of something; it can also mean to move gradually, i.e. *He*

"Alarms do not seem to phase him," Angus said. "We have tracked him with blood-hounds . . ."

phased into his new role.

feat, feet (FEET): A *feat* is an accomplishment showing exceptional skill, or daring. *Feet* is the plural of foot, which animals and humans walk with. *Feet* is also a term of measurement, equalling 12 inches.

fern, firn (FURN): A *fern* is a non-flowering plant with roots, stems and fronds, reproducing by spores instead of seeds. *Firn* is granulated snow atop a glacier.

few, phew (FYOO): *Few* means not many. *Phew* is an interjection expressed breathlessly as a sign of disgust or surprise.

file, filet, fillet (fee-LAY, fih-LAY, fihl-LAY): *File* is powdered sassafras leaves used in Creole cooking. *Filet* is lace with a simple pattern on a square background. *Fillet* is a piece of fish or meat sliced to avoid bones.

filter, philter (FIHL-tur): A *filter* screens or separates solid particles from liquid. A *philter* is a magic potion used for sexual arousal.

find, fined (FYND): To *find* is to discover. *Fined* is the past tense of fine, which is a penalty for violation of a rule or law.

fir, fur (FUR): A *fir* is an evergreen tree. *Fur* is the soft, thick hair covering many animals.

fisher (FIHSH-ur), **fissure** (FIHSH-ur, FIH-zhur): *Fisher* is a non-sexist term for one who fishes. A *fissure* is a long, deep narrow crack, especially in the earth.

fizz, phiz (FIHZ): A *fizz* is a hiss that doesn't stop. To make a *phiz* is to make a face.

flack, flak (FLAK): Calling a public relations practitioner a *flack* is akin to calling a reporter a hack. *Flak* is antiaircraft gunfire, or clamorous criticism.

flair, flare (FLAYR): *Flair* means one has a talent, often stylish, for some endeavor. A *flare* is a bright signal or burst; if tempers *flare*, they erupt in anger.

flea, flee (FLEE): *Fleas* are wingless, bloodsucking insects that drive dogs and cats buggy. To *flee* means to escape apparent danger.

He was admitted after suffering severe flue symptoms.

fleche, flesh (FLEHSH): A *fleche* is a slender spire. *Flesh* is the substance of the body between the skin and the bones, or animal meat, or the edible pulp of fruit and vegetables.

flew, flu, flue (FLOO): *Flew* is the past tense of fly. *Flu* is a respiratory or intestinal illness caused by a virus. A *flue* is a shaft, as in a chimney, through which smoke may pass.

flier, flyer (FLEYER): This is clearly a 20th century homophone combination. *Flier* means one who flies an airplane, or it is a printed handbill or leaflet promoting some business or cause. *Flyer* now is limited to the names of trains, buses and some bicycles.

flour (FLOWR), **flower** (FLOW-ur): *Flour* is a fine

powdery substance made by grinding grain, used in making bread. A *flower* is a tulip is a petunia is a orchid is a rose.

for, fore, four (FOHR): *For* — the ever useful preposition, occasional conjunction — can mean instead of, representative of, in favor or support or honor of or because. *Fore* is an adverb and adjective meaning preceding or in front of, or it can be the first syllable in such words as forearm, forebear, forecast, all with the first-syllable sense of before. It can also be an interjection of warning on a golf course that a ball has been hit. *Four* is the cardinal number 4, the Roman numeral IV and the amount that precedes five and follows three. Four aces drawn in a pure poker game, wins every time. The same pronunciation and reasoning follows for *forth*, to go forward, and *fourth*, the adjectival, or ordinal, for 4.

forbear, forebear (FOHR-bayr): To *forbear* is to endure. A *forebear*, not a forebearer, is an ancestor.

forego, forgo (FOHR-goh): *Forego* means to go before. It most often is used in the past participle, as a *foregone conclusion*, one that was obvious before the fact. *Forgo* means to relinquish or do without.

foreword, forward (FOHR-wurd): The text at the beginning of a book, often written by someone who is familiar with the work of the book's author, is the *foreword*. To go *forward* means to advance. To look *forward* means to look to the future. A *forward* person is one who is bold, pushy, presumptuous.

fort, forte (FOHRT): If it is an enclosure designed to be easily defended from military attack, it's a *fort*. If it's some skill one does particularly well, add the "e" but don't pronounce it. If an orchestra thunders, the score is marked with an *f*, which is short for *forte* (FOHR-tay) and instructs the musicians to play loud.

foul, fowl (FOWL): *Foul* can mean disgusting, or it can be an offense committed in violation of the rules of an athletic contest. *Fowl* are birds used as food: chickens, geese, ducks, turkeys.

franc, frank (FRANK): The coin of France is the *franc*. *Frank* can mean candid, or it can be the mark signifying postage has been paid, or is free.

freeze, frieze (FREEZ): To *freeze* a liquid is to cool it to its solid state. *Frieze* is that horizontal strip, sometimes plain, sometimes filigreed, just below the roof or cornice of a building, as molding just under the ceiling around a room or under a mantel. It is also a heavy wool cloth with uncut nap on one side.

friar, fryer (FRY-ur): A *friar* is Roman Catholic member of an order. A *fryer* is a chicken, young and tender enough to be fried.

fungous, fungus (FUNG-uh): *Fungous* is the adjective for *fungus*, which is mildew, rust — a mushroom.

G

gaff, gaffe (GAF): A *gaff* is a hook on a long pole used to land fish. *Gaff* is also taunts or foolish talk. A *gaffe* is a blunder.

gage, gauge (GAYJ): A *gage* is security to back up a pledge or obligation. A *gauge* is a meter for measuring capacity, size or amount.

gait, gate (GAYT): A horse's *gait* is its own style of walking. A *gate* is an opening through a fence or wall, or a numbered exit at an airport, or the total amount of money received in admission prices at an athletic contest.

gamble, gambol (GAM-buhl): To *gamble* is to play games of chance for money or to risk-taking to gain advantage. *Gambol* (sometimes GAM-bohl) is to skip about in play.

Despite the jibes of critics, it's easy to imagine Eaton finishing his nightclub in another month.

gantlet, gauntlet (GAHNT-let): A *gantlet* is a passage of punishment, in medieval days administered to a victim forced to run along between two lines of club-wielding punishers. In modern days it has allegedly been preserved in such sexual-battery incidents as the Tailhook Scandal. A *gauntlet* is a glove with long cuff once used to slap an opponent as a challenge to a duel.

gibe, jibe (JYB): A *gibe* is a taunt or a jeer. *Jibe* means to fit or mesh properly or act in harmony. *Jibe* also is a nautical term meaning that as the sail boom moves from one side of the ship to the other, the crew does likewise; it should not be confused with *jib* (JIB), which is a triangular sail, and is idiomatic in the expression, the cut of his *jib*, or the way he dresses.

gild, guild (GIHLD): To *gild* is to overlay with gold, which is not what actually happened to the lily in Shakespeare's King John. The oft-misquoted line was "to gild refined gold, to paint the lily," but as with many idioms, the corrupted quotation has survived as *gilding the lily*, meaning to try to improve on something that is already just about perfect. A *guild* is an association of dues-paying members organized to achieve or defend a mutual goal or common interest.

gilt, guilt (GIHLT): *Gilt* is the adjective for *gild*, in other words, overlaid with gold, or it is also a young female pig. *Guilt* is remorse in the form of painful second-guessing for unethical or immoral actions that caused another harm or grief.

glair, glare (GLAYR): *Glair* is the raw white of an egg used for glazing. A *glare* is a bright reflection or dazzling light, or it is a penetrating look of anger or disapproval.

gneiss, nice (NYS): *Gneiss* is a rock similar to granite. *Nice* is one of those adjectives and adverbs with meanings so carelessly applied as to handicap their effectiveness. It can mean precise or discriminating; it can mean delicately skillful, or minutely accurate, or having high standards of conduct. Too often it's used as a catchall term of approval meaning agreeable,

pleasant, delightful, attractive or respectable.

gnu, knew, new (NOO): A *gnu* is an African antelope. *Knew* is the past tense of know, meaning to understand. *New* is the opposite of old.

gored, gourd (GOHRD): *Gored* is the past tense of *gore*, which means pierced with a horn or tusk. A *gourd* is the inedible fruit of a plant in the squash or pumpkin family.

gorilla, guerrilla (goh-RIH-la): A *gorilla* is the largest of the manlike apes. A *guerrilla* is a fighter who belongs to a small volunteer force that uses surprise raids as a tactic.

grade, grayed (GRAYD): A *grade* is a stage of development, as a level in school or it means to level, as in to smooth a road. *Grayed* is the past tense of *gray*, which means to turn that color, or the gradual change of brunet to gray hair as one grows older.

grate, great (GRAYT): To *grate* is to grind into shreds, or to irritate or annoy, or it is a metal mesh covering. *Great* means larger than normal, or distinguished or superior.

grays, graze (GRAYZ): *Grays* is the plural of the color. When cattle *graze*, they move about in a pasture eating grass. It also means to touch in passing.

grill, grille (GRIHL): A *grill* is a framework of bars or a solid piece of metal on which food may be cooked. A *grille* is an open grating of metal.

grisly, grizzly (GRIHZ-lee): A *grizzly* bear's rampage through a campsite might *grisly*, i.e. ghastly.

groan, grown (GROHN): To *groan* is to utter a deep disapproving or painful sound. *Grown* means fully developed or adult.

grocer, grosser (GROH-sur): A *grocer* is one who sells food in a store. *Grosser* is the comparative of *gross*, which means excessive.

guessed, guest (GEHST): *Guessed* is the past tense of *guess*, which means to estimate. A *guest* is a person invited to enjoy the hospitality of a host.

guise, guys (GYZ): *Guise* is appearance, usually false. *Guys* is the plural of *guy*, which is a man.

H

hail, hale (HAYL): One of the trickiest of homophones: *hail*, first of all, is frozen raindrops. Its figurative verb form means what those marble-size missiles can do, as in *The derisive hoots hailed down from the balcony*. Use it also as the verb in *He hails from Montana*. *Hail* is a welcome, for example, *hail fellow well met*, describing a man who carries his gregarious greetings to excess, as in *backslapper*. *Hail* can also be a summons, as in *hail a cab*. On the other hand, *hale* is the proper word when being forced to appear before a judge, as *hale into court*. Finally, *hale* can mean vigorous and healthy, usually applied to an elderly person: *He was hale and hardy — or hearty*, depending on which slang dictionary you consult.

hair, hare (HAYR): *Hair* grows like thread from the pores in human skin and thus is applied as the

thinnest measure, as in *missed by a hair*. It is also applied in all sorts of idioms, *letting one's hair down* to describe relaxing with abandon or *making one's hair stand on end* to describe fright. A *hare* is very swift brother of the rabbit, which has a very small brain, thus the term *harebrained*.

hall, haul (HAWL): A *hall* is a passageway, or a large room for gatherings, or a college building. To *haul* is to transport by vehicle, thus the *haul* is the amount carried — gained when reaping a profit — or the distance covered.

halve, have (HAV): To *halve* is to split into two equal parts, *halves*, or to reduce by 50 percent, *half*. *Have* denotes possession, connotes ownership. It also is the auxiliary, which, when used with the past participle of a verb, shows recently completed action, as in *We have won the game*.

handsome, hansom (HAN-suhm): *Handsome* means good-looking in appearance, generous in amount. A *ansom cab* is a two-wheeled horse carriage.

hangar, hanger (HANG-ur): A *hangar* is a building or shelter for an airplane. A *hanger* is a heavy wire bent with a hook for hanging clothes.

hart, heart (HAHRT): *Hart* is the male of a European red deer. The *heart* is the vital organ of humans and animals. It also has a wide range of figurative meanings going to the crux of emotions.

hay, hey (HAY): *Hay* is grass, alfalfa, clover cut and dried to use as cattle feed. In slang, *to hit the hay* means to go to bed. *Hey* is an interjection, usually shouted to gain attention.

heal, heel, he'll (HEEL): To *heal* is to cure or to free from grief or dissension. The *heel* is the back of the foot, or the end of a loaf of bread, or the end of just about anything. A *heel* is a jerk, the lowest form of human being. *He'll* is the contraction for he will.

hear, here (HEER): To *hear* is to use the ear to perceive sound, to listen. *Here* is an adverb denoting the location from which the writer writes.

heard, herd (HURD): *Heard* is the past tense of *hear*. A *herd* is a group of animals.

heed, he'd (HEED): *Heed* means to pay attention to. *He'd* is the contraction for he had or he would.

heir, see AIR.

heroin, heroine (HAYR-oh-ihn): *Heroin* is the drug, the dope, the illegal habit-forming narcotic. A *heroine* is a woman who has shown unsurpassed courage and nobility, or the central exemplary female character in a novel or play.

hew, hue (HYOO): *Hew* means to chop with an ax. *Hue* is a shade or tint of a specified color; it is also the clamor in *hue and cry*.

**"If the council
senses a big
hew and cry
one way or
the other, they
will sense that
as some sort
of mandate."**

hide, hied (HYD): To *hide* means to find a place where one cannot be discovered; it is also an animal's skin. *Hied* means hurried.

hi, hie, high (HY): *Hi* is a greeting meaning hello. *Hie* means to hurry. *High* is an adjective meaning taller than normal or up in the air; it can also mean drunk.

higher, hire (HYR): *Higher* is the comparative of high. *Hire* means to give someone a job.

him, hymn (HIHM): *Him* is the objective case of he. A *hymn* is a sacred song.

ho, hoe (HOH): *Ho* is an exclamation of surprise, or pleasure. A *hoe* is a garden tool used to turn soil or cut weeds.

hoard, horde, whored (HOHRD): A *hoard* is a cache, usually an unnecessarily large amount of hidden supplies or money. A *horde* is a huge crowd or throng. *Whored* is the past tense of the verb *whore*, which means to engage in sexual intercourse for pay, or promiscuously for no pay.

hoarse, horse (HOHRS): To be *hoarse* is to have a husky voice. A *horse* is a four-legged animal.

hoes, hose (HOHZ): *Hoes* is the plural of *hoe*. *Hose* are stockings, or a *hose* is a rubber tube used for watering plants.

hole, whole (HOHL): A *hole* is a cavity or a circular deep depression, or it is a squalid place. *Whole* means complete.

holey, holy, wholly (HOH-lee): *Holey* means full of holes. *Holy* means sacred. *Wholly* means completely.

hostel, hostile (HAHS-tuhl): A *hostel* is an inn, as in *youth hostel*. *Hostile* means unfriendly.

hour, our (OWR): An *hour* is 60 minutes. *Our* is the possessive of we, meaning it belongs to us.

humerus, humorous (HYOO-mur-uhs): The *humerus* is the bone of the upper arm. *Humorous* means funny.

I

I, see AYE.

idle, idol, idyll (EYED-uhl): *Idle* means worthless as in talk, unproductive as in activity, futile as in wish or unfounded as in rumor. It's also the fuel rate designed to allow an engine to operate most efficiently out of gear. An *idol* is any object, usually a person, held in ardent admiration. *Idyll* is brief poetry or prose describing peaceful, simple life.

I'll, see AISLE..

illusion, see ALLUSION.

immigrate, see EMIGRATE.

imminent, see EMINENT.

in, inn (IHN): *In* is a preposition so fundamental that it is almost impossible to define it without using some form of the word itself. *In* can mean within or inside, or it can mean wearing, as *She was in cotton*; and it can be quite slangy, as in *He was with the in crowd*, the currently powerful or popular. An *inn* is a small hotel, or a tavern.

insure, see ENSURE.

incite (ihn-SYT), **insight** (IHN-syt): Different accent here, but similar enough to include: *Incite* means to provoke, as in riot. *Insight* is the ability to see clearly the meaning of something.

indict, indite (ihn-DYT): *Indict* usually refers to handing up to a judge a formal accusation of the commission of a crime. A grand jury *indicts* after hearing evidence. *Indite* is infrequently used but means to put in writing or to compose or to dictate.

intercession, intersession (ihn-tur-SEH-shuhn): *Intercession* is the noun for the verb *intercede* and is a plea in behalf of one person in a dispute by another person not directly involved. *Intersession* is the period between college semesters, often filled by short courses.

invade, inveighed (ihn-VAYD): To *invade* is to intrude or cross the borders of a country in a military attack. *Inveighed* is the past tense of the intransitive verb *inveigh*, which means to attack someone bitterly in writing or speech, used with the preposition against, as in *He inveighed against the persecution of his people*.

irrupt, see ERUPT.

isle, see AISLE.

its, it's (IHTS): *Its* is the possessive of it. *It's* is the contraction for it is. Think *That apostrophe is right where i would normally be*.

J

jam, jamb (JAM): *Jam* is sugared fruit cooked thick and spreadable (in preserves the fruit is left whole). *Jam* means to squeeze more into a space than it will comfortably hold, as in a *traffic jam*. It can also mean a group of jazz musicians improvising, as in *jam session*. A *jamb* is the side framing for an opening in a wall, as in *door jamb*.

jellied, (JEL-eed), gelid (JEL-ihd): *Jelly*, like jam, is sugared fruit, cooked and spreadable, but strained without the pulp. So *jellied* means clear and viscous like Jell-O, or sweet gelatin. *Gelid* means frozen, and relates to gelato, which is Italian sherbet, and to sorbet, which is French sherbet.

jest, gest (JEST): A *jest* is a witticism or joke. A *gest* is a romantic story, or deportment. Both are derived from the Middle English *geste*.

jibe, see GIBE.

jinks, jinx (JIHNKS): The first is idiomatic, as in *high jinks*, and means boisterous fun or lively pranks. A *jinx* is an omen foretelling bad luck, or a person whose presence seems to assure misfortune.

K

kane, see CAIN.

karat, see CARAT.

kernel, see COLONEL.

key, quay (KEE): A *key* is a piece of die-cut metal

used to open and close a lock, as in car *key* or door *key*; in music. *Key* also means the note on the chromatic scale a piece of music is written in, as in the *key of C*. A *key* is one of the white and black levers that make piano music. A *quay* is a concrete wharf used for loading and unloading ships.

knave, nave (NAYV): A *knave* is a deceitful person, or the playing card Jack. *Nave* is the main section of a church.

knead, kneed, need (NEED): To *knead* is to press and fold bread dough. *Kneed* is the past tense of *knee*, which in a contact sport means sticking one's knee in the groin of an opponent. *Need* means to want or require, as in *I need help*.

knew, see **GNU**.

knickers, nickers (NIHK-urs): *Knickers* are short for knickerbockers, which are plus fours or breeches, or for women, bloomers. *Nickers* are the soft whinnying sounds of a horse.

knight, night (NYT): A *knight* is a title of honor, or in the game of chess a piece shaped like the head of a horse, which a *knight* rode in medieval times. *Night* is the period from sundown to sunup.

knit, nit (NIHT): To *knit* is to weave yarn or thread into cloth. A *nit* is the egg of a louse or a young louse, or it is short for nitwit. It finds its most common usage today in the phrase *picking nits*, meaning one who is preoccupied with insignificant details. If you try to delouse an animal by picking out the lice one at a time, you are a nit-picker.

knob, nob (NAHB): A *knob* is usually round, often a piece of metal attached through a door or drawer and when turned or pulled opens it. A *nob* is a cribbage term, and is also means wealthy or socially prominent, hence *He wanted to hobnob with the rich*.

knot, not (NAHT): A *knot* is the looping and tying that joins two or more ropes or cords or strings. The idiom *to tie the knot* means to marry. *Not* is negative, meaning refusal or denial.

know, no (NOH): To *know* means to be sure or well informed about something. *No* is also negative, meaning refusal.

knows, nose (NOHZ): *Knows* is the verb form of *know* used with third person. The *nose* is the organ of smell.

koi, see **COY**.

kraft, see **CRAFT**.

knew, see **GNU**.

L

l, see **ELL**.

lac, lack (LAK): *Lac* is a resinous substance from South American trees used in making shellac. *Lack* means to need or face a deficiency.

lacks, lax (LAKS): *Lacks* is the singular form of *lack*. *Lax* means slack or not taut. It also means falling short of acceptable performance.

lade, laid (LAYD): To *lade* means to load and is

most often used in *bill of lading*, which details the contents of a shipment. *Laid* is the past tense of the verb *lay*, which means to place. It is also, confusingly, the past tense of *lie*, which means to recline. The present, past tense and participle of the two verbs are *lie, lay, lain* and *lay, laid, laid*.

lain, lane (LAYN): For *lain*, see **LADE, LAID**. A *lane* is a narrow roadway for vehicles or a passageway among competitors in an athletic contest. It is also one of two or more segments in a multiple-lane highway or a single alley in a bowling center.

lam, lamb (LAM): A fugitive is *on the lam*, in other words, trying to escape apprehension or punishment. A *lamb* is a young sheep, and by extension, any gentle, innocent child.

lama, llama (LAH-mah): A *lama* is a Tibetan monk. You could say a *llama* is spit and image of a camel, smaller and without the hump, but generally with the same disdainful disposition, despite being widely domesticated.

laps, lapse (LAPS): A swimmer does *laps* up and down the pool, as does a runner around an oval track. *Laps* are what children and small animals climb into. *Laps* are what waves do to a shore. As a verb, it is what a dog does while drinking water. A *lapse* is a slipping away. When a license has expired, it has *lapsed*.

lay, lei (LAY): For *lay*, see **LADE, LAID**. A *lei* in Hawaii is a wreath of flowers, generally placed around the neck.

lays, laze (LAYZ): One exaggerates if one *lays it on*. To *laze* is to while away the time, as in *lazy*.

lea, lee (LEE): Poets use *lea* to refer to a meadow. *Lea* is also a measure of yarn. *Lee* means the sheltered side, or in nautical terms, the side or direction away from the wind.

leach, leech (LEECH): Confusion about these two derives from the beneficial and detrimental effects both words can have. To *leach* is to remove by washing one solid substance from another. Sometimes the material leaching is not intended and the leached material is harmful, as when natural liquefaction in soil leaches a toxic substance into an aquifer, thereby endangering the water supply. To *leech* is to suck blood, which is what the worm does. In some cultures leeches were attached to a patient to suck out infected blood and thereby cure the patient. Today a *leech* has come to mean someone who clings, taking a victim's vitality or wealth.

lead, led (LED): When *lead* is a noun, it is a soft heavy metal. When it is a verb it is pronounced *LEED* and means to act as a guide or perform as an example. *Led* is the past tense.

lead, lede (LEED): See above for **LEAD**. *Lede* is a newspaper term that refers to the beginning of a news story.

leak, leek (LEEK): When a liquid seeps out of a pipe or a container, that's a *leak*. When an official,

purposefully or not, lets a newspaper reporter have information previously secret, it is also a *leak*. If the official did so while slicing a *leek* in his kitchen, you might say the whole thing stinks, which is what some believe the onion-family root vegetable does naturally.

lean, lien (LEEN): *Lean* describes a thin, often athletic person. *Lean* also means a time of Spartan existence. A *lien* is a legal encumbrance attached to a piece of property, stipulating that a debt be paid when the property changes owners. It is similar to a mortgage on a house.

leased, least (LEEST): *Leased* is the past tense of lease, which is a contract to rent. *Least* means fewest or smallest, or it can mean not at all, as in *It didn't bother him in the least*.

lessen, lesson (LES-uhn): *Lessen* is a verb meaning to decrease or minimize. A *lesson* is a learning experience, and when preceded by the word *hard*, it usually means an experience the learner vows not to repeat. It also can mean an assignment or an exercise.

lets, let's (LETS): This combination is almost as vexing as the *its/it's* fault. *Lets* is the singular present tense of the verb *let*, which means to allow. *Let's* is a contraction in direct discourse meaning *Let us go*.

levee, levy (LEH-vee): A *levee* is an embankment built alongside a river and designed to prevent the flooding of land behind it. A *levy* is a tax.

liar, lyre (LYR): A *liar* is a person given to telling falsehoods. A *lyre* is a musical instrument, usually preceded by bell and played by mallets.

lie, lye (LY): A *lie* is a falsehood. For *lie*, to recline, see **LADE, LAID**. *Lye* is a strong alkaline solution used in making soap.

lightening (LY-ten-ing), **lightning** (LYT-ning): *Lightening* reduces the weight of the load. *Lightning* strikes during thunderstorms as a bolt of light in the sky.

links, lynx (LIHNKS): The *links* are the connected metal segments in a chain. When preceded by *cuff*, they are also the two pieces of jewelry that fasten the cuffs on a shirt. They can be sausage in a *chain of links*. Finally, *links* can be applied to a golf course that borders on the sea. They are properly the *Links* at Pebble Beach but not the *Links* at Augusta. A *lynx* is a wildcat, usually a bobcat.

lo, low (LOH): *Lo* means look or see, as in *lo and behold*. *Low* is an adjective meaning short, light, dim, depressed.

load, lode, lowed (LOHD): A *load* is a burden or cargo. It can mean to fill a freight car or a semitrailer, to put *film* in a camera or bits and bytes into a computer's memory. *Lode* is a vein of ore. *Lowed* is the past tense of the sound of a cow, its moo.

loan, lone (LOHN): A *loan* is cash or property given in exchange for a promise of repayment. *Loan* has come into use as a verb meaning to lend, but many purists object to that usage. *Lone* means single, as in *The pasture had a lone pine*.

loath, loathe (LOHTHH): *Loath* is an adjective meaning unwilling or reluctant. *Loathe* is a verb meaning a feeling of intense dislike.

locks, lox (LAKS): *Locks* are curls or ringlets of hair, or the barriers used to move a ship through a channel from a body of water at one level to another body of water at another level. *Lox* is a variety of smoked salmon usually eaten on a bagel with cream cheese. It is also oxygen in a liquid state.

loop, loupe (LOOP): A *loop* is a circle formed by a rope or a circular drive. A *loupe* is a small high-powered magnifying lens used by jewelers or photoengravers.

loose, luce (LOOS): *Loose* is an adjective meaning unrestrained, a verb meaning to let fly. Do not confuse with *lose* (LOOZ), which means to meet defeat. A *luce* is a fish, a full-grown pike.

loot, lute (LOOT): *Loot* is stolen goods. A *lute* is a stringed instrument that predates the guitar.

M

made, maid (MAYD): *Made* means produced, invented and is the past tense of the verb *make*. As slang it can mean successful, as in *He's got it made*. A *maid* is a young unmarried woman, or a servant, as in *house maid* or *bar maid*. An old *maid* is a woman who never married.

mail, male (MAYL): Letters, newspapers, magazines, packages sent by the Postal Service are *mail*. The masculine sex — men and boys — is *male*.

main, mane (MAYN): *Main* is the principal part, as in *main street*, *water main*. *Mane* is the long hair on the neck of a horse or lion.

One of their
early projects
was mantles for
track homes.

maize, maze (MAYZ): *Maize* is another name for corn. A *maze* is an intricate network of passageways, usually with only one path through.

mall, maul (MAWL): A *mall* is an enclosed shopping center. To *maul* means to paw injuriously, as what a lion might do.

manner, manor (MAN-ur): The way a person carries on normal activities, the way he or she acts, is called his or her *manner*. In the plural, *manners* means etiquette. The *manor* is the main residence in an estate.

mantel, mantle (MAN-tuhl): A *mantel* is the (e-l) shelf above a fireplace; *mantle* is a cloak of secrecy.

marshal, martial (MAR-shuhl): A *marshal* is an official, a fire *marshal*, a deputy *marshal*, a field *marshal*, a *parade marshal*. *Martial* means warlike, as in *Martial law was invoked*, or it means violation of military conduct resulting in *court-martial* or *courts-martial*.

marten, martin (MAR-tuhn): A small flesh-eating mammal similar to a weasel is a *marten*. A bird from

the swallow family, often purple, is a *martin*.

mean, mien (MEEN): The *mean* is derived by adding the highest score and the lowest score on a test and dividing by two, as opposed to the average, which is derived by adding all the scores and dividing by the number of test takers. The median is derived by finding the middle score, half the test takers scored higher and half lower. *Mean* can also mean cantankerous or nasty. It can be how a word or a concept is defined. *Mien* is how one carries oneself.

meat, meet (MEET): *Meat* is the flesh of animals used as food. *Meat* can also mean the essence of a idea. To *meet* is to convene or to face a challenge or to come face to face with someone. A *meet* is an athletic contest.

medal, meddle (MED-uhl): A *medal* is a metal token given as an honor. To *meddle* means to interfere in somebody else's affairs. A *medal* is metal, but ...

metal, mettle (MET-uhl): A *metal* is a class of basic elements like iron, copper, brass, gold, often used in making, yes, medals. *Mettle* is the measure of one's character or temperament when tested by adversity or opposition.

mewl, mule (MYOOL): To *mewl* is to cry weakly like a baby. A *mule* is a cross between a jackass and a mare, a female horse.

mews, muse (MYOOZ): A *mews* was once a stable where royal hawks were kept, but now is a stable converted into living quarters. To *muse* is to think or meditate.

mite, mite (MYT): *Might* means power. It is also a verb expressing a conditional doubt that something will happen. A *mite* is a tiny parasitic insect that infests some animals.

mince, mints (MIHNS): As a verb, *mince* means to chop finely, or it can mean given to using euphemisms, as in *You won't win if you mince words*. *Mints* are herbs like spearmint, peppermint, bergamot and basil, and they are fine sugar candy. *Mints* are also where money is coined.

miner, minor (MYN-ur): A *miner* digs ore from a pit or a cave, a mine. A *minor* is a person not of legal age, which in some places is 21, in others 18. A course of study of secondary importance is a *minor*, as opposed to a *major*. *Minor* is a key in music.

missal, missile (MIHS-uhl): A *missal* is a prayer book. A *missile* is a weapon ranging from a primitive spear to a sophisticated rocket powered projectile.

moan, mown (MOHN): A *moan* is a groan or mournful sound of pain, or it can mean to complain about one's troubles. *Mown* is the participle of *mow*, which means to trim the grass in a lawn or hay in a

field.

moat, mote (MOHT): A *moat* is a ditch filled with water to protect a castle or fortress. A *mote* is a speck of dust or tiny particle.

mode, mowed (MOHD): The *mode* or method of travel was by rail. *Mowed* is the past tense of *mow*, which means to cut grass.

morning, mourning (MOHRN-ihng): The dawn brings *morning*, which lasts until noon. *Mourning* is grieving, usually for one who has died.

mucous, mucus (MYOO-kuhs): *Mucous* means slimy. *Mucus* is the thick, slimy secretion of the mucous membranes.

muscat, musket (MUHS-kuht): *Muscat* is a raisin grape, which also makes muscatel wine. A *musket* is a long-barreled firearm used before the invention of the rifle.

mustard, mustered (MUHS-turd): *Mustard* is a puckering condiment. *Mustered* is the past tense of muster, which means to summon the troops for inspection.

N

naval, navel (NAY-vuhl): *Naval* refers to a navy and its ships. *Navel* refers to the bellybutton. It is also a type of seedless orange with a bellybutton.

nave, see KNAVE.

nay, neigh (NAY): *Nay* is an old-fashioned no, reserved only for formal voice votes. A *neigh* is a horse's whinny.

need, see KNEAD.

new, see GNU.

nice, see GNEISS.

nickers, see KNICKERS.

night, see KNIGHT.

nit, see KNIT.

no, see KNOW.

nob, see KNOB.

none, nun (NUHN): *None* is no one, nothing, normally taking a singular verb. A *nun* is a woman devoted to religious life, particularly a Roman Catholic, often living in a convent.

nose, see KNOWS.

not, see KNOT.

O

oar, o'er, or, ore (OHR): An *oar* is a wooden pole, which is wide and flat on the end and is dragged through the water to propel a boat, canoe, skiff or raft. To *oar* means to row. *O'er* is a contraction for over and is usually found only in poetry and lyrics. *Or* is a conjunction often used with either. *Ore* is a mineral, often a metal, in rock form.

odd, see AWED.

ode, owed (OHD): An *ode* is a lyric poem, written either to be sung or to express the poet's emotions or feelings. *Owed* is the past tense of *owe*, which means

to be in another person's debt, either by fund or favor.

offal, see **AWFUL**.

oh, owe (*OH*): *Oh* is an exclamation of shock or pain or wonder; see **OWED** above.

oleo, olio (*OH-lee-oh*): *Oleo* is short for oleomargarine. Margarine is the more common term today. *Olio* is a spiced meat stew or a musical medley.

one, won (*WUHN*): *One* is the first number and is used as a pronoun to avoid being gender-specific. *Won* is the past tense of *win*, which means victorious.

oracle, see **AURICLE**.

oral, see **AURAL**.

ordinance (*OHRD-ih-nans, OHRD-nans*), **ordnance** (*OHRD-nans*): An *ordinance* is a municipal law. *Ordnance* is military weaponry and ammunition.

oriole, see **AUREOLE**.

ought, see **AUGHT**.

our, see **HOUR**.

overdo, overdue (*OH-vur-doo*): When someone issues a warning about not exerting yourself while healing from an injury, they say *Don't overdo it*. When you miss a payment on your car, the loan agency sends a notice marked *Payment overdue*.

oxeyed, oxide (*AHKS-eyed*): *Oxeyed* means with huge eyes. *Oxide* is a chemical compound.

P

paced, paste (*PAYST*): *Paced* is the past tense of *pace*, which means to control the rate of action in a performance or a contest or a race. *Paste* can be the stiff cream used to brush teeth or the mixture that fastens one object to another.

packed, pact (*PAKT*): *Packed* is the past tense of *pack*, filling a container with items. When a performance hall is filled, with standing room only, it is said to be *packed*, as with sardines in a can. A *pact* is an agreement between people or nations.

pail, pale (*PAYL*): A *pail* is a bucket. *Pale* means wan, ready to faint, and yields the expression, *pale by comparison*. It also is the stake in picket fences, hence the term *impaled*.

pain, pane (*PAYN*): *Pain* ranges from discomfort to agony, also gives us the idiom, *He took great pains to do it right*. A *pane* is the glass surface of a window.

pair, pare, pear (*PEHR*): *Pair* means two, as in shoes, gloves, socks. *Pare* means to trim, as the skin on a piece of fruit, as one does with a paring knife. It also means to reduce expenses, for example. A *pear* is a type of fruit.

palate, palette, pallet (*PAL-uht*): The *palate* is the roof of the mouth, and how well one tastes, as *He has an experienced palate*. A *palette* is a flat board with a thumb hole used by artists for holding their colored oils. A *palette knife* has a flexible metal blade and is used by artists to mix oils on the *palette*. A *pallet* is a wooden frame built so a forklift can lift the *pallet* and the contents on it onto a truck for shipment. A *pallet*

is also a small bed.

pall, pawl (*PAWL*): A *pall* is piece of cloth draped over a coffin, and in combination yields *pallbearer*. It also produces the expression, *It cast a pall over the event*. A *pawl* is a mechanical device that allows a cogged wheel to rotate in one direction only.

par, parr (*PAHR*): *Par* equates value, standing, performance. Shooting *par* on the golf course means taking the number of strokes the course was designed to require. A *parr* is a young salmon before it enters salt water.

passable, possible (*PAS-uh-buhl*): A *passable* grade is just barely acceptable. A *possible* soul is one who is sensitive, who is able to suffer.

passed, past (*PAST*): *Passed* is the past tense of *pass*, which means to meet the requirements of the course or exam. It also means to meet going in opposite directions, or to accelerate one's vehicle, for example, to move from behind to in front of another vehicle. In sports, it means to throw, kick or hit the ball or puck to another competitor. A *passed* ball in baseball means the catcher failed to catch or

**"For me it's . . .
being able to
go to a place
where you can
find piece of
mind."**

stop a pitch. The *past* is history.

pause, paws (*PAWS*): A *pause* is a momentary break in the music, the speaking, the action. *Paws* are the feet of many animals.

peace, piece (*PEES*): *Peace* is the absence of war, or it is harmony among nations, individuals or one's own thoughts,

as in *peace of mind*; but it is *He gave him a piece of his mind*, or *She spoke her piece*. *Piece* has a myriad of meanings and forms all sorts of idioms and cliches: *Piece* means part of something:

That was a beautiful piece (of music, of writing); *he wanted a piece of the action* (a gambling term meaning a desire to make a bet on the odds offered).

peak, peek, pique (*PEEK*): The *peak* is the mountaintop, the highest point on a roof, the ultimate in performance, the maximum of efficiency. A *peek* is a furtive glance, often around a corner or through a peephole. A *pique* is a fit of resentment; as a verb, it means to provoke or arouse.

But a peak behind the scenes at this year's 52nd annual Santa Cruz County Fair . . .

The different ways of doing similar problems peaked Jeremy's interest enough . . .

peal, peel (PEEL): When bells *peal*, they ring. When oranges are *peeled*, they should lose all the rind. When skin *peels*, it probably has been sunburned.

pearl, purl (PURL): A *pearl* is a gemstone made when a grain of sand inside an oyster's shell causes the oyster to form a lustrous cover around the sand. A *purl* is a knitting stitch.

pedal, peddle (PED-uhl): A rider *pedals* a bicycle. A merchant *peddles* goods or services.

peer, pier (PEER): A *peer* is an equal, a classmate, a contemporary. To *peer* is to stare steadfastly as if to achieve greater understanding or clarity. A *pier* is the structure supporting a bridge or a landing dock for ships.

pencel, pencil, pensile (PEN-suhl): A *pencel* is a narrow flag. A *pencil* is a graphite writing instrument, mechanical or wooden. *Pensile* means hanging, a bird having such a nest.

pend, penned (PEND): The active verb form *pend* isn't used often, but as *pending* it means waiting, as in *A decision is pending*. *Penned* as caged is OK, but *penned* as the past tense of the verb *pen* is a "verbed" noun many purists find objectionable. Nevertheless *penned* means written, as in *He penned his autobiography*.

pendant, pendent (PEN-duhnt): A *pendant* is usually a piece of hanging jewelry, as a earring and shouldn't be confused with *pennant*, which is a flag. *Pendent* means undecided, today more often written as *pending*.

pervade, purveyed (pur-VAYD): To *pervade* is to spread throughout. *Purveyed* is the past tense of *purvey*, which means to supply.

phase, see FAZE.

phew, see FEW.

philter, see FILTER.

phiz, see FIZZ.

phrase, see FRAYS.

pi, pie (PEYE): *Pi* (the symbol π) is the name of the 16th letter of the Greek alphabet and, mathematically equaling 3.1416, is used in equations such as *circumference = $2\pi r$* . *Pi* also means a disaster in printing, when metal type falls from a form in jumbles, or letters in a line are out of order. On the other hand, *pie* is often just the opposite, a pleasurable tasting experience — for example, apples, sugar and cinnamon in an envelope of dough baked in a tender crust.

pica, pika (PEYE-kuh): A *pica* is a printing measure equal to one-sixth of an inch. A *pika* is a member of the rabbit family (lagomorph).

picks, pyx (PIHKS): *Picks* is the plural of *pick*, which is a choice. A *pyx* is a container used for holding the consecrated water in a service of Holy Communion.

pidgin, pigeon (PIHJ-uhn): *Pidgin* is a mixture of languages, resulting in such combinations as *pidgin English*. A *pigeon* is a bird in the dove family.

pistil, pistol (PIHS-tuhl): The *pistil* is the seed-bear-

ing organ of a flowering plant. A *pistol* is a handgun.

place, plaice (PLAYS): A *place* is a locality, as in *The time was the Great Depression; the place was Oklahoma*. It can also mean a situation, as in *It wasn't his place to tell me what to do*. And it is the No. 2 finish in a horse race, for wagering purposes, as in *win, place or show*. A *plaice* is a type of flounder.

plain, plane (PLAYN): *Plain* means ordinary, simple, as in *She wore a plain dress*. It can also mean clear or obvious, as in *It was plain to see that he was the better speaker*. A *plain* is a flat surface, as in *the Great Plains*. A *plane* is an aircraft, or it is a woodworking tool used to shave a surface smooth. To *plane* usually means that a boat is riding high on the surface of the water or that the wheels of a car on wet pavement lose contact with the road surface.

plait, plate (PLAYT): To *plait* is to fold or interweave. A *plate* is a flat dish for food, or a flat piece of metal on which images are etched, as in an engraving *plate*, or the scoring place in baseball, *home plate*. In dentistry, *plate* means upper or lower false teeth.

pleas, please (PLEEZ): *Pleas* is the plural form of *plea*, which means a request for some course of action, often in a legal proceeding. As a verb it takes on an urgency, as in *His pleas for help went unanswered*. *Please* is the mother of all entreaties and courtesies. In direct discourse, it can range from a polite request to an imploring appeal. As a verb it usually implies satisfaction or pleasure.

plum, plumb (PLUHM): A *plum* is a sweet, juicy fruit with a large pit. To *plumb* is to rig a building to carry water to faucets and sinks and showers and waste to septic tanks and sewers, and it's what a plumber does. A *plumb bob* is a weight at the end of a string that helps a plumber arrive at the perfect vertical drop.

... taller
crops such
as corn or
tomatoes
grown on
polls. . .

pole, poll (POHL): A *pole* is a rod, as in *fishing pole, light pole, flag pole*. To *poll* means to canvass a group of people for their opinions. A *polling place* is a location for voting. *Poling* a skiff in shallow water means

using a long pole that can reach the swamp bottom and pushing on it to move the boat.

pore, pour (POHR): To *pore* means to study carefully. A *pore* is an opening in the skin through which a human or animal hair grows. To *pour* means to tip a spouted container so as

to transfer liquid to another container. *Pour* also refers to the intensity of rainfall, as in *It's pouring*, or

... drinking
coffee and
pouring over
Sunday's
paper.

It's a downpour, both of which imply a real rainstorm. **Poor** (POOR) isn't closely homophonic, but it's worth mentioning that it means needy, without the financial means to live comfortably.

praise, prays, preys (PRAYZ): *Praise* means the expression of approval or admiration. In religious context, it means to glorify, as in *Praise the Lord*. With singular nouns, *prays* means *He worships*, often on bended knee. It also means hope. When a hawk *preys* on a rodent, it means hunting for the kill; a hawk is, after all, a bird of *prey*. In its figurative use, *preys* means *The con artist preys on innocent victims*.

pride, pried (PRYD): *Pride* is the sense of one's own dignity. In others, it means the high respect one has for their accomplishments. A *pride* is also a family of lions. *Pried* is the past tense of *pry*, which means usually to use a lever and fulcrum to move an object.

prier, prior (PRYR): A *prier* is one who *plies*, see above, **PRIDE, PRIED**. *Prior* means before or preceding.

pries, prize (PRYZ): *Pries*, see **PRIDE, PRIED**. A *prize* is an award, a premium.

prince, prints (PRIHNTS): A *prince* is the son of a king and/or queen. *Prints* is the plural of *print*, which can be a photographic image, a lithograph, a reproduction of a painting. To *print* is to make an image on paper or some other surface.

principal, principle (PRIHN-sih-puhl): As a noun, a *principal* is the top official in a school, or the leader of an organization. As an adjective, it means of the first order or primary, as in the *principal violinist* in an orchestra. In finance, it is the amount of debt on which interest is figured, or it is the face value of a stock or bond. *Principle* is a guideline or the basis and system on which morals or ethics are based.

profit, prophet (PRAH-filt): *Profit* is the difference between the sales price and the cost to acquire or produce. If the cost is lower, it's a *profit*; if not, it's a loss. In general usage, *profit* means gain. A *prophet* is a religious teacher or leader who predicts.

pros, prose (PROHZ): *Pros* is the plural of *pro*, which is short for professional, meaning an athlete or person who is highly skilled and accomplished at his or her calling and makes a living at doing it. In figurative terms, it means a person who is really good at what he or she does. *Prose* is writing without conscious rhyme or meter, writing that is not poetry.

... for the
musical
'No, No,
Nanette.'
There are
principle
and chorus
parts ...

or one-fourth of a gallon. *Quartz* is a mineral, rock crystal.

quay, see **KEY**.

queue, see **CUE**.

quire, see **CHOIR**.

quoins, see **COIN**.

R

rabbit, rabbit (RAB-uht): In carpentry, a *rabbet* joint is a groove in one piece of wood cut so another fits to form a joint, similar to a dado joint. A *rabbit* is a small animal with long, floppy ears.

rack, wrack (RACK): At one time, grammarians made a distinction between the two spellings, but today they are differentiated only by the term *wrack and ruin*. All the other meanings — a frame or shelf, a triangle for setting up billiard balls, a device for lifting vehicles so repairs can be made, a pair of antlers, and trouble and torment, as in *rack one's brain* — are spelled without the *w*.

radical, radicle (RAD-ih-kuhl): A *radical* is an extremist, one advocating fundamental change in laws and society, and the adjective supports that definition. A *radicle* is a botanical term meaning a rudimentary root.

rain, reign, rein (RAYN): *Rain* is drops of water falling from clouds. Figuratively, the verb *rain* means to shower down any substance — praise, criticism, taunts, bullets. To *reign* is to rule by monarchy, normally, but also in a prevailing sense. To *rein* in means to use leather straps attached to horses to stop or guide them. If someone is given *free rein*, it means he or she has been freed to act without restraint. Conversely, if a person has *the reins on government*, he or she has it in check.

raise, rays, raze (RAYZ): A *raise* is an increase in employment pay. To *raise* is to increase or husband or care for until maturity. It can be applied to children (although many old-fashioned grammarians maintain that children are reared and pigs are raised), to crops, to animals. In slang, *to raise Cain* is to *raise hell*, or *raise the roof*, in causing a disturbance. *Rays* are sunbeams, and also combine to name some fish, as in stingrays. To *raze* means to level or tear down a building.

raiser, razor (RAY-zuhr): A farmer is a *raiser* of crops. A *razor* is a sharp instrument used in shaving one's beard.

rancor, ranker (RANG-kur): *Rancor* is hate or bitterness. *Ranker* is the comparative of rank, which means a particularly offensive smell.

rap, wrap (RAP): To *rap* is to strike sharply, as in *rap his knuckles*. It is given to idioms, as in *take the rap*, meaning accept blame or punishment for something you aren't guilty of. *Rap* is also verse or poetry spoken in rhythm to music. To *wrap* means to enclose a package with paper, or to bring to conclusion, as in *wrap it up*. It is also a coat or a shawl.

Q

quarts, quartz (KWAHRTS): *Quarts* is the plural of quart, which is a measure of liquid equal to two pints

rapped, rapt, wrapped (RAPT): See RAP, WRAP above. *Rapt* means completely absorbed.

read, reed (REED): To *read* is to interpret the meaning of written word, silently or out loud. It can also mean understand, as in *I read you*. *Reed* is a type of grass, or it is a thin piece of cane when blown with a mouthpiece, vibrates to form musical sound. *Reed* instruments are the clarinet, the saxophone, the oboe, the bassoon.

read, red, redd (REHD): *Read* is the past tense of read, see READ, REED above. *Red*, in its various hues, is the color of rose, tomato, cherry, blood. At one time, it meant politically communistic. *Redd* means to put in order, as in *redd up*. It is also a spawning area of trout or salmon.

real, reel (REEL): *Real* is true, actual, extant. To *reel* is to fall back or stagger. It is also a lively dance, as in *a Virginia reel*. A *reel* is a spool on which wire or fishing line or tape or film is wound.

recede, reseed (ree-SEED): To *recede* is to move back or withdraw. *Reseed* means to sow again or replant.

reek, wreak (REEK): To *reek* is to stink. *Wreak*, usually used with havoc, means to vent one's anger destructively.

rest, wrest (REHST): To *rest* is to take it easy, to sleep. It can mean support or to lean, and it can mean conclude, as in *I rest my case*. It is also the remainder, what's left after something has been taken away. To *wrest* means to extract by force.

retch, wretch (REHTCH): To *retch* is to vomit without much success. A *wretch* is a miserable person.

review, revue (rih-VYOO): As a noun, a *review* is a report or survey or account, or specifically a critical assessment of a play or book. As a verb, it means to study or re-examine. A *revue* is a musical show of loosely connected skits and parodies.

rheum, room (ROOM): *Rheum* is the watery discharge from a mucous membrane. A *room* is a space enclosed by walls inside a building. It can also mean space, as in *We have room for one more person on the elevator*.

rhyme, rime (REYEM): A *rhyme* is a piece of verse or poetry in which the ends of each line have the same sound. *Rime* is the mass of tiny ice crystals on windows or grass.

rigger, rigor (RIHG-ur): A *rigger* is one who fits the rigging on a ship, or one who assembles the fuselage and wings of an airplane. *Rigor* means the strictness or hardships and stresses of life.

right, rite, wright, write (RYT): *Right* is correct, or the side opposite left. It is morally good; it is straight, as *Go right home*. A *rite* is a ceremony or formal observance. A *wright* is a worker, and the word is usually combined with a prefix, as in *millwright*, *playwright*, *shipwright*, *wheelwright*. To *write* is to form or inscribe or type letters to make words into sentences.

ring, wring (RIHNG): A *ring* is a clanging sound of a bell, or a tinkle of a telephone. It is a small circular

Montana was motivated enough to have his daily off-season work-outs begin at 5 a.m. He ran up hills in Redwood City, road a stationary bike ...

band, usually of gold or silver, sometimes set with precious stones, sometimes plain as in a *wedding ring*. To *wring* means to squeeze liquid from clothing, as in *wringer washer*, or to *wring one's hands*, or to *get caught in a wringer*.

road, rode, rowed

(ROHD): A *road* is a highway or a street. *On the road* means traveling; *one for the road* means one last drink before leaving; *rode* is the past tense of ride, which means to be transported by bus or train or automobile or horse or bicycle or boat; *rowed* is the past tense of row, which means to use oars to move a boat by paddling.

roc, rock (RAHK): A *roc* was a legendary bird of prey so big and powerful that it could pick up large animals. *Rock* is a boulder or large stone. It's also short for *rock 'n' roll*.

roe, row (ROH): *Roe* is fish eggs. A *row* is a line of people or things, as in seats in a stadium. To *row* is to paddle.

roes, rose, rows (ROHS): *Roes* and *rows* are the plurals; see ROE, ROW above. A *rose* is a flower and a color, and it is the past tense of rise, which means to climb up, get up or come up as the sun does.

role, roll (ROHL): A *role* is a part in a play or movie or musical. A *roll* is pastry or bread. A *roll* is a list of names. To *roll* is to move on wheels.

rood, rude (ROOD): *Rood* is the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified. *Rude* is unmannerly, curt. It can mean harsh, as in a *rude awakening*.

rookie, rooky (ROOK-ee): A *rookie* is a neophyte, a *rookie cop*, a *rookie ballplayer*. A *rooky* is full of rooks, a type of crow.

root, route (ROOT): A *root* is the plant part that extends into the soil, or the tooth part into the gum. It is the origin, *the root of all evil*. *Root* means to cheer one's team to a *rout* (ROWT), a huge victory. A *route* (ROOT, also ROWT) is a regular course traveled by a letter carrier or a newspaper carrier or a salesman.

rote, wrote (ROHT): To learn by *rote* is to use methodical repetition, or to memorize. *Wrote* is the past tense of write, see RIGHT, RITE, WRIGHT, WRITE above.

rough, ruff (RUHF): *Rough* is bumpy, uneven, or it is cursory, as in *rough estimate*. *Ruff* is a plaited collar, a kind of fish or a trump in the card game of bridge.

rouse, rows (ROWZ): To *rouse* is to wake up or stir up. *Rows* is the plural of row, which means a fight or brawl.

roux, rue (ROO): A *roux* is a mixture of melted but-

ter and flour used to thicken gravies and sauces. To *rue* is to regret, as in *I rue the day she went away*.

rung, wrung (RUHNG): The participles, see **RING**, **WRING**. *Rung* is also a step on a ladder.

rye, wry (REYE): Rye is a tough grain used in making *rye* bread and *rye* whisky. *Wry* means ironic, as in *wry wit*.

S

sac, sack (SAK): A *sac* is a pouch, usually one filled with fluid. A *sack* is a bag, often used to carry grain or flour. To *sack* is to dismiss one from a job. To *hit the sack* means to go to bed. To *sack* in football means to tackle the quarterback behind the line of scrimmage. It can also mean plundering a town. *Sack* is a dry white wine from Spain.

sail, sale (SAYL): To *sail* is to move in a ship propelled by the wind in the ship's canvas. A *sale* is an exchange of property, or it can mean a special event in which prices are market down on goods.

sailor, sailer (SAYL-ur): A *swift sailor* is a ship that goes fast. A *sailor* is a person in a navy. It's also a straw hat with flat top and brim.

sane, seine (SAYN): To be *sane* is to have a rational mind, as opposed to *insane*. A *seine* is a large fishing net with floats.

saver, savor (SAY-vur): A *saver* is one who regularly puts money away for the future, one who wastes not. To *savor* is to relish in the smell of some aromatic dish.

scene, seen (SEEN): A *scene* is a division in a play. It is a place where something occurs, as in a battle scene. It is also a view, a scenic panorama. *Seen* is the participle of *see*, to watch, to view.

scent, see **CENT**.

scents, sense, see **CENSE**.

scull, skull (SKUHL): A *scull* is a light narrow racing boat, or it is an oar. The *skull* is the bony framework of the head.

sea, see (SEE): The *sea* is the ocean, the vast body of salt water that covers most of the Earth. To *see* is to view, to understand, as in *I see what you mean*.

Seabee, see **CB**.

sealing, see **CEILING**.

seam, seem (SEEM): A *seam* is the line where two pieces of cloth are sewn together. In sports, it has come to mean a narrow opening among players where a football back can run or a basketball player can drive. To *seem* is to appear to be, as in *She seems to be satisfied*.

seaman, semen (SEE-muhn): A *seaman* is a male sailor. *Semen* is the thick fluid ejaculated by the penis, the male sexual organ, as orgasm.

sear, seer, sere, see **CERE**.

seas, sees, seize (SEEZ): For *seas*, *sees*, see **SEA**, **SEE**. *Seize* means to take power decisively, to take advantage of an opportunity.

seed, cede (SEED): A *seed* is a source of growth, lit-

erally for a plant, figuratively for anything. To *seed* means to provide the initial funds for a start-up company or to sow such little bits into the ground. It can also mean to dust clouds with silver iodide to produce rain. In slang, *gone to seed* means having turned useless. To *cede* means to give up or yield, as in *to cede territory to another nation*. The opposite would be *secede*, to withdraw territory from a nation, usually to become independent.

seeder, see **CEDAR**.

seizer, see **CAESAR**.

sell, see **CELL**.

seller, see **CELLAR**.

sensor, see **CENSOR**.

sent, see **CENT**.

serf, surf (SURF): A *serf* is at worst a slave, at best a person so disadvantaged as to be incapable of exercising basic freedoms. The *surf* is the sea's swell breaking onto shore. To *surf* is to ride a board on *surf* or waves as they flow toward shore or beach.

serge, surge (SURJ): *Serge* is a twilled fabric used in suits or coats. A *surge* is a precipitous boost in movement or electricity, as in *The lights burned bright in the power surge*.

serial, see **CEREAL**.

serious, see **CEREUS**.

serrate, see **CERATE**.

session, see **CESSION**.

setaceous, see **CETACEOUS**.

sew, so, sow (SOH): To *sew* is to make stitches in cloth to fasten it together into a garment. As an idiom, *to sew it up* means to bring to finish successfully. *So* is an adverb meaning as is, as in *just so*, or very, as in *so good*. To *sow* means to spread seeds, or to hint, as in *He sowed suspicion*.

sewer, sower (SOH-ur): See **SEW**, **SO**, **SOW** above for those who do so.

sewer, suer (SOO-ur): *Sewer* is one of those homographs not detailed here, but is an underground pipe, which is part of a waste delivery system. A *suer* is one given to bringing lawsuits.

shanty, see **CHANTEY**.

shear, sheer (SHEER): *Shear* means to cut with a scissorlike device. *Sheer* is a very thin, transparent material. It is also perpendicular or extremely steep, as in *It was a sheer drop of 50 feet*.

sheik, see **CHIC**.

shoe, shoo (SHOO): A *shoe* is wearing apparel, a piece of leather or canvas or synthetic material, sewn and molded to fit the foot. To *shoo* means to scat, an exclamation made to chase away a pest.

shone, shown (SHOHN): *Shone* is the past tense of *shine*, meaning to glisten. *Shown* is the participle of *show*, meaning to exhibit.

shoot, see CHUTE.

side, sighed (SEYED): A *side* is the part on the right, left, top or bottom of an object, or the edge. To *side with* means to team up. A *side issue* is a related

but not major issue. *Sighed* is a past tense of *sigh*, which means to exhale audibly in an expression of relief, longing or grief.

sigher, sire (SEYER): A *sigher* is a person who sighs. A *sire* is the father of a child or an animal. It is also a title of respect.

sighs, size (SEYEZ): For *sighs*, see **SIDE, SIGHED** above. *Size* is a number indicating how big or small should be to fit properly, as in *shoe size, dress size, type size, bolt size, bicycle size*. *Size* in the form of sizing is a pasty substance used as a glaze or stiffener.

sight, site, see CITE.

sign, sine (SEYEN): To *sign* means to affix one's name to a document. A *sign* is a surface, often flat, with words or symbols calling attention or explaining or identifying a place or street or business. It can also be an indication, *a sign of autumn*. A *sine* is a term used in trigonometry.

sink, sync (SIHNK): This homophone might not have happened if some performer had never mouthed a song into a microphone while a recording was fed through a sound system. Lip synchronization was a mouthful, so it became *lip sync*. It sounds the same as the water receptacle in the kitchen, so now there's a *sink* for washing and a *sync* for meshing.

slay, sley, sleigh (SLAY): To *slay* is to kill. A *sley* is a weaver's reed. A *sleigh* is a horse carriage with runners for snow instead of wheels for roads.

sleave, sleeve (SLEEV): *Sleave* is untwisted silk thread or floss. A *sleeve* is the tube of a garment that fits the arm. It is also a thin pocket.

sleight, slight (SLEYET): To *sleight* is to deceive, as in *sleight of hand*. *Slight* means of little meaning or substance or it can mean to treat discourteously.

sloe, slow (SLOH): *Sloe* gin is a liqueur made from the plumlike fruit of the blackthorn. *Sloe* also describes a wide, dark look, as in *sloe-eyed*. *Slow* is not fast and when applied to intelligence means neither clever nor bright.

soar, sore (SOHR): To *soar* is to sail high like a bird with wings spread, and by extension implies rising to unexpected heights, of achievement, or cost, as in *soaring prices*. *Sore* means painful, as in *sore throat*, but the ache in a backache hurts constantly and a *sore muscle* hurts only when exerted. *Sore* also means miffed or irked, and it can mean unsportsmanlike or ungracious, as in *sore loser*.

soared, sword (SOHRD): See **SOAR, SORE**. A *sword* is a pointed, sharp piece of steel — a saber — used long ago as a weapon, now ceremonially.

sodder, solder (SAHDR): A *sodder* is a person who lays sod or turf. *Solder* is a soft alloy melted to join two pieces of metal or patch holes or cracks in pipes.

sold, soled, souled (SOHLD): *Sold* means purchased, or convinced, as in *He was sold on the idea*. *Soled* is the past tense of *sole*, which is the bottom of a shoe under the arch and toes — *The cobbler half-soled his shoes*. *Souled* means emotional warmth, as in *He*

was a kind-souled person.

sole, soul (SOHL): See **SOLD, SOLED, SOULED** above. *Sole* also can mean lone or single, as in *He was a sole heir to the fortune*, and it is a type of fish related to the flounder and halibut. The *soul* is the spirit of humankind.

some, sum (SUHM): *Some* is more than a few, less than a lot — an indefinite amount and objectionable in news stories because of that. The *sum* is the total of a column of figures, or it is just an amount, also indefinite, as in *a sum of money*.

son, sun (SUHN): A *son* is the male offspring of a mother and a father. The *sun* is the star in the solar system that gives Earth light and heat.

spier, spire (SPEYER): A *spier* is one who spies or watches another person undetected. A *spire* is the tapered point on a steeple, or a mountain peak.

spits, spitz (SPIHTS): *Spits* is the plural of *spit*, as in depositing expectorant in a spittoon. A *spitz* is a small dog, usually with medium-length white hair.

staid, stayed (STAYD): One who is *staid in his ways* is not likely to change. *Stayed* is the past tense of *stay*, which means not to move, as in *She stayed put*. It can also mean delayed, as in *The execution was stayed*.

stair, stare (STAYR): A *stair* is a flight of steps. To gaze fixedly is to *stare*.

stake, steak (STAYK): If you have a *stake* in the outcome, you have something to gain or lose, so in the plural, it can mean a wager, as in *a high-stakes poker game*. If one *pulls up stakes*, it means one moves. A *stake* is a pointed stick meant to be driven into the ground. A *steak* is a cut of meat, as in *a T-bone steak*.

stationary, stationery (STAY-shuh-n-ayree): If something is *stationary*, it isn't meant to move or change. *Stationery* is writing material — paper, envelopes.

steal, steel (STEEL): To *steal* means to take something without permission. A thief *steals*. In baseball, *steal* means to take a base without being tagged out. In basketball, *steal* means to swipe the ball from an opponent, or to intercept a pass. As slang, an item purchased at a ridiculously low price is a *steal*. *Steel* is an alloy, stronger than iron.

stich, stick (STIHK): A *stich* is a style of versification identifiable to an author. A *stick* is a branch or twig from a tree, a piece of gum or candy, stalk of celery. It can mean every last thing, as in *The place was cleaned of every stick of furniture*. It can mean prick with a pin, to fasten, as in *Stick that gum somewhere else*, or hang in there, as in *Stick with it*. If you leave someone holding the bag, *you stick him with the bill*. It can mean stay alert, as in *Get on the stick*, or defend, as *Stick up for your rights*. On the other hand, *stick* should not be confused with *shtick* (SHTIHK), which is one's special flair for comedy or nonsense.

stile, style (STEYEL): A *stile* is a set of steps used to climb over a fence. *Style* means manner, panache, carriage, a musician's intonation, a writer's way with words. It is also an etching tool. In publishing, *style*

means grammatical and usage guidelines followed by a newspaper or magazine or news organization.

straight, strait (STRAYT): *Straight* means an unbending line. It means to vote only for one party in an election, as in *a straight ticket*. It means direct, as in *Go straight home*. It means unmixed, as in *straight shot of whisky*. Considerable confusion and disagreement surround the uses of *straight* and *strait* in combined words: A *strait* is a narrow waterway, so someone who is *strait-laced* is someone confined to one point of view, and someone who is *straight-laced* is one who requires very strict moral behavior. *Straitjacket* is the proper term, not *straightjacket*. In the plural, *Finding yourself in dire straits* mean facing major difficulties.

succor, sucker (SUHK-ur): To give *succor* means to give help or relief in a time of need. A *sucker* can be person or thing who sucks or inhales by forming a vacuum, but usually it means a person who is easily duped. It is also a lollipop.

suite, sweet (SWEET): A *suite* is a group of rooms connected in a hotel or office building. It can also be a set of matched furniture. In music it is composition with a number of movements. *Sweet* is having the taste of sugar, as in candy, cake. A *sweet victory* is one that is particularly pleasing. A *sweet person* is beloved, enjoyable.

summary, summy (SUIHM-ur-ee): A *summary* is a condensation of a report or article, covering only the main points. *Summy* means typical of that warmest season.

sundae, Sunday (SUIHN-dee): A *sundae* is a dish of ice cream with fruit, syrup, nuts as a topping. *Sunday* is the first day of the week, the Sabbath.

symbol, see CYMBAL.

T

t, tea, tee, ti (TEE): *T* is the 20th letter in the English alphabet, and the letter often is associated with perfection, as in *It suits me to a T*. *Tea* is a beverage made by steeping dried leaves of any number of herbs. *Tea time* is usually about 4 p.m., when *tea* is served with crumpets in England. *Tee time* is the when a group of golfers is scheduled to *tee off* from a level marked area called the *tee*. From the *tee* on each hole, each golfer usually uses a *tee*, which is a wooden spike wedged to a cupped top; the *tee* is inserted into the turf, raising the golf ball, sitting on the cupped top, an inch or two off the grass so the golfer can strike it cleanly. A place kicker also uses a *tee* for holding a football upright. *Ti* is the seventh note in the diatonic scale, after *la* and before *do*.

tacked, tact (TAKT): *Tacked* is the past tense of *tack*, which means to pin a paper to a bulletin board with such an implement. To *tack* is also to change the course of the sailboat. It also means an approach, as in *He took a different tack*. And it can mean add, as in *It was tacked on to the bill*. *Tact* is a polite, appropriate response made so as not to offend.

tacks, tax (TAKS): See **TACKED, TACT** above. A *tax* is a levy added to the purchase price of an item or an assessment made to finance government.

tail, tale (TAYL): A *tail* is the appendage on the rear of an animal or an airplane. A *tail wind* blows from behind, in the same direction as a ship or vehicle is moving, also called a helping wind. A *tale* is a story.

taper, tapir (TAY-pur): A *taper* is a wax candle, which gradually decreases in thickness from bottom to top, which is what the verb *taper* means. A *tapir* is a large hog-like mammal with hoofs found in South America.

tare, tear (TAYR): *Tare* is a variety of vetch, which is a member of the pea family and is grown as fodder. It is also the process of deducting the weight of a container from the loaded weight of a semitrailer truck to determine the actual weight of the cargo to be sold. To *tear* means to rip, or it means to divide, as in *That tears me apart*, often applied in the participle: *He was torn between his admiration for both of the enemies*.

taro, tarot (TEHR-oh): *Taro* is a Polynesian plant with an edible root, the source of poi. *Tarot* is a type of playing card used in fortune telling.

taught, taut (TAWT): *Taught* is the past tense of teach, which means to instruct. *Taut* is an adjective meaning a tightly stretched wire.

team, teem (TEEM): A *team* is a group of horses or athletes or scientists working together toward a common goal. *Teem* means full, usually expressed as *The barn was teeming with flies*.

tear, tier (TIHR): A *tear* is a drop of salty water from the eye. A *tier* is a section of seats.

teas, tease (TEEZ): *Teas* is the plural of tea; see **T, TEA, TEE, TI**. To *tease* means to harass playfully. It also means to fluff the hair.

Is there any
help at
outside
linebacker?

tern, turn (TURN): A *tern* is a sea bird related to the gull. To *turn* is to rotate, also to change direction, as in *He took a turn for the worse*, or to alternate, as in *It's your turn to do the dishes*.

the, thee (THHEE): When the definite article *the* precedes a vowel, the *e* takes the long sound. *Thee* is Elizabethan spelling, sometimes still used in poetry.

their, there, they're (THHEHR): *Their* is the possessive pronoun of they. Grammatically, *there* is an expletive used often just to fill out a thought or a sentence, as in the line *There is no there there*. *They're* is the contraction for they are.

threw, through (THROO): *Threw* is the past tense of *throw*, which means to fling or toss or hurl. *Through* means in one side and out the other.

throe, throw (THROH): *Throe* most frequently is expressed in the plural, meaning the difficult midst or struggle, as in *He was in the throes of making a no-win decision*. *Throw*, see **THREW, THROUGH**.

throne, thrown (THROHN): A *throne* is a heavily adorned chair occupied by a king, and the power attendant thereto. *Thrown*, see **THREW, THROUGH**.

thyme, time (TEYEM): *Thyme* is an herb of the mint family and is used as a popular seasoning. *Time* is duration, also the appointed spot on a clock. It's the meter of a musical tune, i.e. three-four waltz time. It is a turn at bat in a baseball game.

tic, tick (TIHK): A *tic* is a noticeably nervous or involuntary contraction of a muscle. A *tick* is an insect. It is the sound of a clock. It is the cotton covering a feather pillow, usually *ticking*.

tide, tied (TYD): The *tide* is the alternating rise and fall of the ocean, so it can also mean a trend, as in *the tide of public opinion*. *Tied* is past tense for tie, which means to fasten two or more strings or ropes together. It also means that the score is even, 4-4.

'til, till (TIHL): Some grammarians allow '*til*' as short for until, but *till* is a legitimate word meaning until and is therefore preferable. *Till* is also a cash drawer, and it means to plow the soil to cultivate crops.

timber, timbre (TIHM-bur): *Timber* is wood, either cut from a forest or still growing in it. The personal character of a person is expressed as *timber*. *Timbre* is a quality of sound that differentiates one musical instrument from another, or one vowel sound from another.

to, too, two (TOO): *To* is prepositional and infinitive and omnipresent in the language. *Too* is the adverb that means also, in addition to, as well as, and excessive, as in *too much* or *too big*. *Two* means 2 means one plus one; it equals a pair, a couple, a duo, an item, which translates into gossip.

toad, toed, towed (TOHD): A *toad* is a frog with warts and the derisive reputation to match. *Toed* is the past tense of toe, which mostly in carpentry means to angle a nail through one board into one perpendicular to it. *Towed* is the past tense of tow, meaning to pull a disabled vehicle with a tow truck or another vehicle.

toe, tow (TOH): The human foot has five *toes*. To *tow* is to pull.

told, toled, tolled (TOHLD): *Told* is the past tense of tell, which means to inform orally. *Toled* is the past tense of tole, which means to entice. *Tolled* is the past tense of toll, which means to ring, as in bell.

tole, toll (TOHL): See **TOLD, TOLED, TOLLED** above.

ton, tun (TUHN): A *ton* is 2,000 pounds. A *tun* is a cask with a capacity of 252 wine gallons.

tool, tulle (TOOL): A *tool* is a hammer, a saw, and in the computer age a software program designed to accomplish specific tasks in the operation of the computer. *Tool* means to design in leather. *Tulle* is a thin, fine netting of silk or nylon used in veils.

tort, torte (TOHRT): A *tort* is legal, a wrongful act or damage over which a civil action may be filed. A

torte is a rich cake.

tough, tuff (TUHF): *Tough* means strong. A *tough break* means a bad one. *Tuff* is a porous volcanic rock.

tracked, tract (TRAKT): *Tracked* is the past tense of track which means to follow the trail of someone. A *tract* is a section of land, as in housing subdivision. It also is a propagandizing pamphlet.

tray, trey (TRAY): A *tray* is a flat device for transporting dishes or items. *Trey* is the side on a di with three dots on it, or the playing card with three on it.

troop, troupe (TROOP): A *troop* is a group of persons, as in Girl Scouts. A *troupe* is a group of actors or singers.

trussed, trust (TRUHST): *Trussed* is the past tense of truss, which means to bind as a prisoner. To *trust* is to believe in. It also is a document holding property owned by a person or estate. It is usually administered by a person who has no financial stake in the trust.

tucks, tux (TUHKS): *Tucks* is the plural for tuck, which means to gather or fold in sewing. It also means to put covers around, as in *She tucks her daughter in bed*. *Tux* is short for tuxedo, which is a semiformal evening suit.

U

undo, undue (uhn-DOO): To *undo* is to cancel. *Undue* means excessive, unreasonable, as in *undue criticism*.

urn, see EARN.

use, see EWES.

V

vail, vale, veil (VAYL): *Vail* most often is expressed as *avail*, to be of use to, but also can mean lower or let sink. *Vale* is a valley, expressed in poetry as *over hill and vale*. A *veil* is a piece of net or gauze worn by women in Middle Eastern nations to cover their faces. It can also mean a cloak, as in a *veil of secrecy*.

vain, vane, vein (VAYN): *Vain* means to have an excessively high opinion of oneself. A *vane* is mostly combined with weather to indicate the direction of the wind. A *vein* is a vessel that carried blood back to the heart, or it can mean a lode of ore, or a cast to writing, as in *humorous vein*.

vial, vile, viol (VYL): A *vial* is a little container. *Vile* means wicked, as in *vile weather*. A *viol* is a musical instrument usually combined with bass to make *bass viol*.

vice, vise (VYS): *Vice* is corrupt conduct, usually criminal, which brings the *vice squad* into play. You're said to have a *vice* if you smoke, drink, used drugs. A *vice president* stands in when the president is unavailable. A *vise* is a device used to grip wood or iron.

W

wade, weighed (WAYD): To *wade* is to walk through shallow water, or to plunge into a daunting task. *Weighed* is the past tense of *weigh*, which means to determine the number of pounds in an object. *Weighed* has a specific meaning of importance, as in *His testimony weighed heavily on the jury*.

wail, wale (WAYL): To *wail* is to cry pitifully and loudly. A *wale* is a welt.

wain, wane (WAYN): A *wain* is a wagon or cart. To *wane* means to subside or decline, as in *His power waned*.

waist, waste (WAYST): The *waist* is the point midway between hips and ribs. *Waste* is garbage, trash, effluent. It sometimes means a frittering away: *It was such a waste*.

wait, weight (WAYT): To *wait* is to remain ready for something to happen. *Weight* is the number of pounds in an object.

waive, wave (WAYV): If he *waives* his right to a jury trial, that means he gives it up. If he *waves* at the crowd, that means he holds up his hand and moves it back and forth. A *wave* is also a rise on a water surface that breaks over when hitting shore. A *crime wave* is a series.

wall, waul (WAHL): A *wall* is a vertical structure of wood, stone, brick, concrete. The sides of a room are *walls*. *Waul* means to wail and is used normally in combination, as *Those cats were sure caterwauling last night*.

want, wont (WANT): To *want* is to need, to crave, to wish for. When you hear *It was his wont to help the needy*, that means it was his habit or custom or mission.

ware, wear (WEHR): A *ware* is a piece of goods sold in a store, as in hardware store. To *wear* is to have clothes on, or jewelry, or firearms. It also can mean how one appears, as in *He always wears a smile*, or affects others negatively: *His whining wears on me*.

ward, warred (WARD): A *ward* is a child or person not able to care for himself or herself, as in *ward of the court*. It's also a district in a city, the *Fifth Ward*. It means to fend off, as in *ward off strangers*. *Warred* is the past tense of war, meaning to do battle.

way, weigh (WAY): *Way* means a path or a manner: *It was his way, feeding the ducks everyday*. It is a method, *a way to achieve success*. *Weigh* means to determine the number of pounds in an object.

we, wee (WEE): *We* is the plural of I, but because there can't be two, it means you and me. *Wee Willy was a fine lad*, meaning tiny, or as in *the wee hours of the morning*.

weak, week (WEEK): *Weak* means not strong in muscle, mind and determination. A *week* is seven days.

weather, wether (WEHTHH-ur): Everybody talks about the *weather*, but nobody can do anything about it. Nobody talks about the *wether*, and not very many people care that it's a castrated male sheep.

weave, we've (WEEV): To *weave* is to interlace threads or yarn, or to move from lane to lane in traffic. *We've* is the contraction for we have.

weir, we're (WIHR): A *weir* is a low dam on a river used to divert water to a mill. *We're* is the contraction for we are.

weld, welled (WEHLD): To *weld* is to use molten metal to secure one piece to another. *Welled* means to tear: *His eyes welled*.

whoa, woe (WOH): When yelled at horses, *whoa* means stop.

... a member of the
El Camino Hospital
board, whose retiring
after 31 years of
service.

Woe is sorrow, grief.

whole, see **HOLE**.

wholly, see **HOLEY**.

whoop, see **HOOP**.

who's, whose (HOOZ): *Who's* is the contraction for who is or who has. *Whose* is the possessive of who, as in *Whose pen is this?*

wind, wined (WYND): To *wind* is to turn a mainspring on a clock or a toy so it will run. *Wined* is used mainly in the expression *wined and dined*, which means to give someone food and wine.

won, see **ONE**.

wood, would (WOOD): *Wood* is timber is lumber. *Would* is an auxiliary verb denoting condition or the subjunctive mood.

wrack, see **RACK**.

wrap, see **RAP**.

wreck, see **RECK**.

wreak, see **REEK**.

wrest, see **REST**.

wretch, see **RETCH**.

wright, see **RIGHT**.

wring, see **RING**.

wrote, see **ROTE**.

wrung, see **RUNG**.

wry, see **RYE**.

Y

"I used to have a homophone, but PacTel charged \$3 for the damn thing."

*Jim Jeffress,
curmudgeon*

yew, see *EWE*.

yews, see **EWES**.

yoke, yolk (YOKH): *Yoke* is two oxen harnessed together, and a *yoke* is what does the harnessing. *Yolk* is the yellow center of an egg.

yore, your, you're (YOR): The old days mean *yore*. *Your* is the possessive of you. *You're* is the contraction for you are.

you, see **EWE**.

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Credits

The homogoofs shown as examples in boxes throughout the reader have been accumulated over several years from a variety of publications, some published and some nearly published, if it had not been for good catches. Most of them were supplied by Joan Bazar, San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News copy editor. Mercury News Managing Editor Jerry Ceppos wasn't far behind.

Roberta M. Lundstrom, a retired newspaperwoman and crossword-puzzle specialist from San Jose, Calif., conducted a dictionary search for an initial list of homophones.

The quote from George "Sparky" Anderson on the first page appeared in a Sports Illustrated profile by Steve Rushin.

The closing quote from Jim Jeffress, Mercury News copy editor, was made with smirk.

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