

Grammar

SLAM!

The ten most frustrating
grammar rules and how to
remember them

Elsa Neal

Grammar Slam!

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Lie and Lay

Quick fix:

I remember Lie and Lay by saying -

(Lie is subjective, lay is objective):

L i e is what **I** do. **L a y** is what I do to an **y** thing else.
I lie down, but the hen lays an egg. Or think of "getting laid" - there are two people involved, a subject and an object ;-)

(Lie is present tense, lay is past tense):

L i e is what **I** do today, **l a y** is what I did **y**esterday. Unless **I** lied about it.

*Always remember this rule! Get a mug that reminds you of the correct way to use "lie" and "lay"! Use it for your coffee, or to store your pens...
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More explanation:

Lie is a subjective verb, but confusion arises because it can mean both "to rest horizontally" or "to tell a fib". Many people familiar with the "fib" definition of "lie", assume, incorrectly, that "lay" is the term for "resting horizontally".

Lay, on the other hand, is an objective verb – ie, there must be an object in the sentence to which the laying is being done.

More confusion arises here, though, because "lay" is also the past tense of "lie" in the "resting" definition, in which case "lay" becomes a subjective past tense verb.

"Lied" is the past tense of "lie" in the "fib" definition, but many people try to use it as a synonym for "rested", because they have grasped the part about the "Lie=Subjective/Lay=Objective" rule, but not the Present Tense/Past Tense rule.

What about "lying", "laying", "lain", and "laid"?

Lying means both "resting" or "fibbing", depending on the context. (Lying is the present participle of "lie".)

Laying means "placing some object somewhere". (Laying is the present participle of "lay".)

Lain means "have rested". (Lain is the past participle of "lie".)

Laid means both "placed some object somewhere" and "have placed some object somewhere". (Laid is both the past tense and the past participle of "lay".)

Advice and advise

Quick fix:

You may need to say this one out loud for the first few times until you get used to the sound in your mind.

Advice sounds like **ICE** – **Ice** is a thing, a noun – and so is **Advice**.
You can only make this “ice” sound with a “c”, not an “s”.

Advise sounds like **IZE** – **Z** is close to **V** for **Verb** – **Advise** is a **verb**.
You can get a “z” sound from an “s” but not from a “c”.

Does this rule get to you? Keep a thinking cap by your PC to remind you when to use Advice or Advise! <http://www.cafepress.com/hearwritenow>



Affect and Effect

Quick fix:

I remember **Affect** and **Effect** by using the acronym **AV** (**A**udio **V**isual) - I think of my video recorder. **Affect** (**A**) is the **Verb** (**V**).

More explanation:

What makes this one difficult is that **Effect** can be either a noun or a verb, although the verb usage is usually only for formal documents. But this is why it has gotten in our brains that **affect** and **effect** both sound right in some sentences, so we battle to decide which one it is.

It's and its

Quick fix 1:

The apostrophe on “**it's**” looks like the dot of the missing **i** - so if the sentence goes “**it is**” then I need to use “**it's**”. If “**it is**” doesn't fit, then it must be “**its**”.

Quick fix 2:

Replace “its” with “his” – does it fit? There is no apostrophe in “his”, so if “his” fits the sentence, there should be no apostrophe in “its”.

Is this rule your nemesis? Pick up a throw pillow that will always remind you when to use It's or Its... and also Lay and Lie, Advice and Advise, and Who and Whom! <http://www.cafepress.com/hearwritenow>



More explanation:

Confusion arises with this one because we usually use an apostrophe to mark possession. We also use an apostrophe to mark contractions.

But remember that the possessive personal pronouns like his, hers, theirs, whose, ours, yours, and the troublemaker “its”, don't have apostrophes.

Stationary and stationery

Quick fix:

I remember stationary and stationery by saying:

A-eroplanes are station-**a**-ry but **E**-nvelopes are station-**e**-ry.

Who and whom

Quick fix:

Switch "who" and "whom" with "he" and "him" - if you can use “him” then you can use “whom”, in most cases.

Do you battle to remember this rule? How about a teddy bear who will remind you when to use Who and Whom? <http://www.cafepress.com/hearwritenow>



Whom is starting to fall away from general use. It's more acceptable to misuse "who" in a sentence than it is to get "whom" wrong. So if in doubt, use "who".

Who and that

Quick fix:

“Who” for people and pets, “**That**” for **things** and animals in general.

More explanation:

This one is easy. “Who” is always used for people. “That” is always used for things or animals. Use “that” every time you would refer to something as “it”.

You would never ask a person “What are you?” when you mean “Who are you?” You could risk offending someone if you say, “Are you the person ~~that~~ called earlier?” This is pretty much the same as calling someone “it”.

And, if you’re speaking to someone about a beloved pet, I recommend using “who” out of respect to their feelings. To them, their pet is not an “it”, no matter how you may feel about the creature.

Send postcards to help your friends remember when to use Who or That!
<http://www.cafepress.com/hearwritenow>

Which and that

Quick fix:

“That” clause is important. “Which” clause is extra? (Remember, “**Which**” has an extra “**H**”.)

More explanation:

“That” is used to add a clause to a sentence where all the information is necessary for clarity. “Which” is used to add extra information in a clause that could be left out of the sentence, and still make sense.

Remember all eight of these grammar rules with a Bag Your Grammar Tote Bag <http://www.cafepress.com/hearwritenow>



Past and passed

Quick fix:

“Passed” is the past tense of “pass”. “Past” is used for everything else.

To work this one out, turn the sentence into the present tense. If you still say “past”, then you need a “t”. If you say “pass” or “passing”, then use “ed”. (ie, if you have a double “ss” to start with, don’t change it to a single.)

Preposition sentence endings

This one’s even easier. There’s really no longer any need to worry about whether you’re ending a sentence with a preposition or not, because English has caught up with popular usage. The issue that Winston Churchill had to deal with (“That is something up with which I will not put”) is now considered to be too formal for everyday use.

In addition, clever grammarians have pointed out that while there is a single “postposition” in the English language (“ago”), some prepositions can be used as temporary postpositions or “intransitive prepositions” (ie, a preposition without an object following it).

If you do want to try to avoid a prepositional ending, just ask yourself “where?” (ie, in what position?). Many times you can add a description to qualify the preposition, which then creates a new ending for the sentence.

She climbed up (where?)

And to end, wrap your tongue around this quote by Professor Frank Palmer (five prepositions end this sentence!)

“What did you bring that book that I didn’t want to be read to out of up for?”

About the author

Elsa Neal is a storyteller, writer, and linguistics student based in Melbourne, Australia. She was formerly the Fiction Writing and Creativity Editor at BellaOnline.com. Visit <http://hearwritenow.com/> for more articles on everything from fiction writing to health and wellbeing.

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