

# A seven-step instructional plan for teaching English-language learners to comprehend and use homonyms, homophones, and homographs

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The instructional process described in this article can be used to teach all students, but it especially accommodates the challenges encountered by English-language learners.

“Do You *Here* or *Hear* What I Hear?”

Words can be quite deceiving  
I have found  
Words can have a double meaning  
And sometimes a double sound

We have *there* and *their* and *here* and *hear*  
Watch what you’re choosing  
If it’s not very clear,  
It can all be quite confusing!

Can you tell me, if the clerk keeps *records*  
And a song the musician can *record*  
How can I make sense of words  
like these that can’t be ignored?

Although a lawyer yells  
I *contest!*”  
It’s in a *contest* of words, he tells  
Where he is at his best

I must declare  
As I try to glean each word  
That some words of a pair  
Are the strangest I’ve ever heard!

Learning more day by day  
So many words I can now read  
Yet sounds and meanings, I must say  
Have not always agreed

(By Jacobson, Lapp, & Flood, 2006)

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Mr. Ryan’s awareness of the difficulties mentioned in this poem was heightened as he and his middle school students discussed the short story, “The Mayan Civilization,” that he had selected from *Latino Read-Aloud Stories* (Suarez-Rivas, 2000). As the students

silently read a section, Mr. Ryan noticed that Juan (all names are pseudonyms), a student who had scored at the Early Intermediate level on his English-language proficiency test looked particularly frustrated.

Like teachers who scaffold instruction from their formative and continual evaluation of student performance, Mr. Ryan initiated the following conversation to gain more insight about Juan’s thinking:

Mr. Ryan: I notice that you have written a few words in the Difficult Words section of your vocabulary journal.

Juan: I’m having trouble with the words *feat* and *reigned*. I understood that we should sound out new words, but I still can’t understand these words. I know *f-e-e-t* and

*r-a-i-n-e-d*, but these words don't make sense in this story.

Mr. Ryan: You are right when you say these words sound like *feet* and *rained*. You might be confused because even though they sound the same, they are spelled differently and have different meanings. Words like these are called *homophones*—same sounds with different spellings and meanings. I'm so glad that you are thinking about the word and what it would mean in a particular sentence. If it doesn't make sense to you, it may be that even though it sounds like a word you know, it has a different meaning. That's the case with *feat* and *reigned*. In this story, the word *f-e-a-t* means an accomplishment or a completed task. *R-e-i-g-n-e-d* means ruled. Let's use your dictionary to check the meaning of these words, and then we'll go back to the text to see if it makes more sense to you.

After Mr. Ryan demonstrated how to search for words in the dictionary and showed Juan the spelling of each word, he drew a picture of a king on a throne and explained that the illustration showed that a ruler reigns over a specific group of people. Mr. Ryan pointed to a poster he had in the room of a pole-vaulter and explained that the athlete was accomplishing a difficult feat that could help him to be a record setter. He further explained that

there are also words like *record* and *recrod* that share the same spelling but are pronounced differently. These are called *homographs*. Words and phrases can have many meanings or connotations. This often de-

pends on either their spelling or the context of the sentence in which they occur.

As Juan wrote the definitions of *feat* and *reigned* with pictures and sentences in his vocabulary journal, Mr. Ryan praised his careful reading and invited him to take some time to polish his pictorial representation of the words and to share his examples later in the day when the class would be discussing homophones and homographs.

This interaction reminded Mr. Ryan that although many of his beginning and intermediate English-language students knew one meaning of a word, they didn't realize the concepts of homonym, homophone, or homograph or further understand into which category a word goes. Most of Mr. Ryan's students read at first-through sixth-grade levels and often experienced difficulty grasping the vocabulary in their school texts.

Of the 10 English-language learners in Mr. Ryan's class, 3 had scored at the Beginning level, 5 at the Early Intermediate level, and 2 at the Advanced level. This distribution is similar to that of many middle school classrooms involving English-language learners. Because of these needs, Mr. Ryan's instruction included explicit vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies designed to expand students' understanding of word meaning.

To help his students understand the phenomenon of homonyms, homophones, and homographs, Mr. Ryan presented sentences (see Figure 1) containing either a pair or group of homonyms, homophones, or homographs. He

### Figure 1 Sentence pairs

Is it *fair* that the *fair*-haired child should attend the county *fair*? (homonyms)

How is it that a carpenter measures the length of a doorway in *feet* and can then accomplish a *feat* with the tools on his belt? (homophones)

And why do we say a boy can hear the *wind* blow, and another boy can *wind* his string around a stick for his kite? (homographs)

**Table 1**  
**Tricky Words word wall**

	Same sounds	Different sounds	Same spelling	Different spelling	Same meaning
Homonyms:					
<i>fair</i>	X		X		
<i>fair</i>					
<i>fair</i>					
Homophones:					
<i>feet</i>	X			X	
<i>feat</i>					
Homographs:					
<i>wind</i>		X	X		
<i>wind</i>					

first asked students to read each word after he modeled the pronunciation within the sentence context. This was followed by a discussion about the sound similarities and spelling and semantic differences between homophones such as *feet* and *feat*; a discussion of how sounds and meaning can be different although the spelling is the same as in the example of homographs such as *wind* (like *pinned*) and *wind* (like *kind*); and how homonyms such as *fair*, *fair*, and *fair* have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings. Mr. Ryan and the students discussed the meanings of each italicized word in Figure 1. Then he read the questions aloud to the students and invited them to read the questions for themselves. Once he was sure that his students understood the similarities and differences, he asked that they use these academic labels when referring to homophones, homographs, and homonyms. He also placed these words in their appropriate categories on the classroom Tricky Words word wall (see Table 1).

## How are homonyms, homophones, and homographs alike and different?

Homonyms are words that have the same pronunciation and the same spellings but different meanings or

connotations and, in most cases, different etymological origins. A *bank*, for example, can mean a place or organization where money is kept, loaned, or invested, but it can also mean the land alongside a river, creek, or pond. Homophones are words that share a single phonological representation connected to two meanings with different spellings.

Homophones, according to Gottlob, Goldinger, Stone, and Van Orden (1999), are words that have the same pronunciation but different meanings and perhaps different spellings, such as

*there* (adverb: direction)—*their* (possessive pronoun)  
*air* (noun: atmosphere)—*heir* (noun: a person)  
*knew* (verb: to know)—*new* (adjective: recent)  
*cord* (noun: rope)—*chord* (noun: three tones in harmony)

Homographs are words that are spelled the same way but have different meanings and may have different pronunciations (Smith, 2002).

*tear* (verb: to rip)—*tear* (noun: shed a tear)  
*does* (verb: to do)—*does* (plural noun: doe)  
*minute* (noun: unit of time)—*minute* (adjective: small)

## Why should second-language learners develop academic language proficiency?

Many experts who research the language-proficiency development of second-language students make a distinction between language that is used for basic social interaction and language that is needed for meeting the challenges of academic coursework and communication (Cummins, 1980). Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are language skills needed for daily conversational purposes, whereas Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency refers to the vocabulary students encounter in academic texts and that they hear in course lectures. Peregoy and Boyle (2000) suggested that students might demonstrate basic social competence in a second language within 6 months to 2 years after arrival in a new country. The skills related to talking with friends or managing daily affairs cannot be equated with the ability to comprehend and express oneself where knowledge of academic vocabulary is required (Cummins, 1981; Thomas & Collier, 1995). Thomas and Collier (1995) added that students who lack prior schooling and who may have very weak or non-existent primary-language skills may require from 7 to 10 years to master academic language. Time needed to become proficient in cognitive academic language is exacerbated by the peculiarities of learning homonyms, homophones, and homographs.

For decades, researchers (Hawkes, 1972; Hudelson, Poyner, & Wolfe, 2003; Readence, Baldwin, & Head, 1986) have suggested that both native and nonnative English-speaking students encounter difficulties with reading comprehension as a result of not understanding the meanings of many words, including homonyms, homophones, and homographs. This difficulty is compounded if the second-language speaker's oral proficiency in English has not been acquired before reading instruction begins (August &

Hakuta, 1997; Strickland, Ganske, & Monroe, 2002).

## How can homonyms, homophones, and homographs be effectively taught?

The earlier example of Mr. Ryan illustrates how to effectively provide instruction that extends students' understanding of a single correct meaning for a target word. This scaffolded instruction is often referred to as a cognitive-constructionist approach to vocabulary or word study because it builds upon a learner's acquisition of the denotative (e.g., a *cat* is a feline animal) to connotative constructions or connections (e.g., *catlike*, *lion*, *tiger*, *leopard*, *stealthy*) when learning to comprehend, distinguish, and express ideas in the English language.

As Mr. Ryan modeled, students were supported during their reading as he invited them to analyze words that interfered with their comprehension by noting sounds and sound/letter correspondences among familiar and unfamiliar words; by connecting and categorizing words with common sounds, spellings, and different meanings; and by practicing vocabulary within a larger language context. This word analysis support illustrates (a) how to compare new words with one another; (b) how to reinforce previously learned words; and (c) how to use personal morphological insights about words, context, and the dictionary to figure out the meaning of words that are interfering with comprehension.

Mr. Ryan implemented this process when he worked with Juan. He explained to him that learning is maximized when examples of familiar words as well as examples of words that represent contrasts to a target known word are presented together. He further explained that language and reading comprehension are enhanced because the new vocabulary and information are built or scaffolded from the meaning of a known word to the new word (Salus & Flood, 2003).

**Table 2**  
**California state standards related to homonyms,  
 homophones, and homographs**

English language arts substrand	Learner level	Grade level	State standard
Vocabulary and concept development	Beginning	Grades 3–5	Spell correctly common homophones (e.g., <i>hair/hare</i> )
Vocabulary and concept development	Early Intermediate	Grades 6–8	Recognize that some words (e.g., homonyms, homophones, and homographs) have separate meanings and apply this knowledge to written text.
Vocabulary and concept development	Advanced	Grades 9–12	Apply knowledge of multiple meanings of words—including homonyms, homophones, and homographs—consistently in reading literature and texts in content areas.

*Note.* This is a configured adaptation of state standards.

Explicit instruction like that of Mr. Ryan is critical when teaching students who are learning English as a second or additional language because they frequently encounter unfamiliar words with dual sounds and multiple meanings. Although languages such as Spanish include homophones and homographs (e.g., *mañana*/tomorrow and *mañana*/morning), the English language has the most with over 600 homophone families (Pryle, 2000). While multiple-meaning words can also cause confusion for native language speakers, this phenomenon is often extremely difficult for English-language learners (Readence, Baldwin, & Head, 1986).

As noted in the California State English Language Development Standards (California Department of Education, 2002), language should be taught explicitly through explanations, translations, analogies, paraphrases, and references to context. Table 2 provides a summary of the California standards that relate to the learning

of homonyms, homophones, and homographs, including the English language arts substrand, learner level, grade level, and specific standard.

These standards can be addressed through instruction of words and word families, which incorporate the use of illustrations and realia such as pictures and photographs that are readily available in picture books, magazines and newspapers, personal items, and videos. Instruction that models ways to acquire the meaning of an unknown word provides a foundation of knowledge and a set of procedures from which students can draw to independently identify and categorize words according to sound and meaning when reading, writing, listening, and conversing (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004).

Homonyms, homophones, and homographs can be directly taught as students compare and contrast words in poetry, fictional literature, or within the context of content area textbooks

**Table 3**  
**A seven-step plan for teaching homonyms,  
 homophones, and homographs**

Steps 1–7	Purpose	Example
1. Read or listen to a story with homonyms, homophones, or homographs.	Listening and reading words within a story or text provide students with a meaningful academic language context and models.	A teacher creates a passage based on her students' familiarity with the struggles between the North and South before the U.S. Civil War and reads it aloud.
2. Define and visualize the words through illustrations.	Visuals help learners to draw language from their knowledge and personal experiences.	The teacher defines each word. Students copy the definition and create a pictorial image of the word.
3. Identify the grammatical structure of each word.	Understanding grammatical structure helps students discern and evaluate when and how to use words.	The teacher explains grammatical characteristics of each word. Students underline words and symbols.
4. Categorize words grammatically.	Analyzing and categorizing words enhances word recognition and spelling skills and helps focus on meanings.	Students use symbols to categorize words according to grammar.
5. Analyze word meanings to complete sentences through the completion of a cloze activity.	Cloze activities provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate comprehension.	The teacher creates sentences that require discerning the meaning and correct usage of words in context.
6. Produce a skit, pantomime, or create a visual for individual sentences.	Speaking provides an opportunity to organize words. Visualizing facilitates learning and easy retrieval of new concepts.	In pairs or groups, students present a skit or a visual depicting a word. Classmates infer meanings.
7. Determine word meaning.	Metacognitive activities help students plan, monitor, transfer, and evaluate their learning.	Students play a game requiring knowledge of words.

and other supplementary texts that a teacher may incorporate into the curriculum (Foster, 2003; Rog & Kropp, 2004). We wish to note the importance of ensuring students' comprehension of at least one word of a pair or series before attempting to teach unknown word meanings. If students do not have this knowledge prior to instruction, they may become overwhelmed with the learning of new vocabulary.

### **A seven-step plan for teaching homonyms, homophones, and homographs**

The seven-step model presented in Table 3 provides (a) an instructional sequence for teaching homonyms, homophones, and homographs; (b) the rationale for each step; and (c) examples of

implementation that help teachers effectively teach targeted vocabulary including homonyms, homophones, and homographs (Jacobson, Lapp, & Flood, 2003).

The activities included in this seven-step lesson are designed to help students recognize, understand, and produce homonyms, homophones, and homographs in reading and writing. These vocabulary-based lessons should be derived from meaningful contexts, which provide opportunities to see and hear words used in students' literacy exchanges, (Fisher, Lapp, & Flood, 2003). As learners interact with written and spoken language they begin to improve their vocabulary, decoding, and encoding skills and develop enhanced reading comprehension and writing proficiencies, (Jacobson, Lapp, & Mendez, 2003; Jacobson, Moore, & Lapp, 2007).

The foundations of the seven-step plan address students' needs to comprehend concepts, engage in meaningful tasks, and use analytical skills to build and demonstrate language and content knowledge. Through activities that require students to visualize concepts they augment their understanding with pictorial images. As words are organized into categories and labels added, a visual representation is created that becomes a network of associated words from which target words can be quickly retrieved from memory. The activities suggested in this seven-step plan involve analyzing the meanings of words that help students to understand semantic and linguistic connections among familiar and less familiar words and the meanings of unknown words (Schwartz & Raphael, 1985). Although the following example illustrates the teaching of homophones and homographs, similar strategies could also be used to teach homonyms.

## Implementing the seven-step plan

### ***Step 1: Reading or listening to the text***

Select or create a story or text passage that contains 5 to 20 homophones or homographs. The

passage selected for use with advanced students should be longer than for beginning-level students and should contain both homophones and homographs. The following paragraph example, which describes some of the reasons for the U.S. Civil War, contains both homophones and homographs. After the words have been selected, underline the words that have shared spelling patterns and sounds. Then invite students to read or listen to a shared reading of the selected text. An appropriate text for intermediate- to advanced-level second-language learners might look like the following example:

#### Causes of the U.S. Civil War

The divisions between the North and South began to tear at the southern states' collective commitment to being legally connected to the northern states. By the early 19th century, the northern and southern states, too, had begun to break apart as a result of economic factors and personal principles. In the North, industry, trade, and commerce had begun to wind through the states. In the South, however, where modern developments were sparse and smaller in size, expansive plantations filled the landscape. These manors depended greatly upon slave labor to grow cotton for export. Through laws that were passed in northern states, slavery had been banned in the region since 1820. When Abraham Lincoln became president in 1961, his party decided to lead a protest against every minute detail related to the practice of slavery.

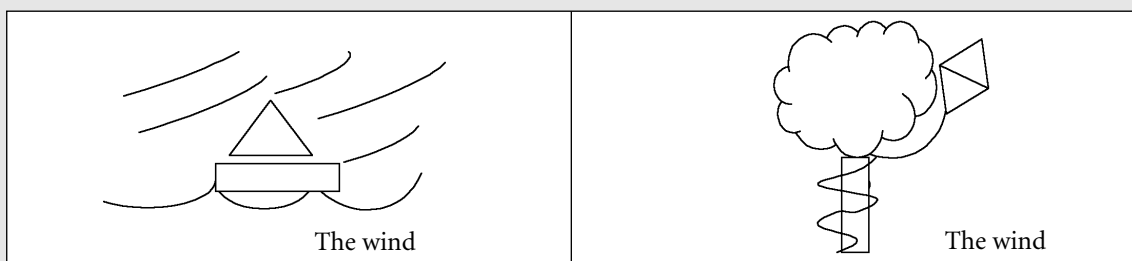
### ***Step 2: Visualizing the meaning***

Discuss the meaning of the passage with students and then model for them how to define and use each word in a sentence. To do so, ask students to write selected vocabulary words and definitions in a vocabulary journal. Provide several examples of each word as related to its specific meaning in the text and to familiar homophones (words with similar sounds) and homographs (words spelled the same) not present in the text (see Figure 2). Explain to students that visualizing is a strategy that can enhance both listening and reading comprehension. Ask students to illustrate the image the word creates in their mind. Invite students to practice the pronunciation of

**Figure 2**  
**Homophone and homograph examples**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Tear</i> (verb)—<i>tear</i> (noun)</li> <li>2. <i>Too</i> (adverb)—<i>two</i> (adjective)</li> <li>3. <i>Break</i> (verb)—<i>brake</i> (noun)</li> <li>4. <i>Principles</i> (noun)—<i>principals</i> (noun)</li> <li>5. <i>Wind</i> (verb)—<i>wind</i> (noun)</li> <li>6. <i>Through</i> (preposition)—<i>threw</i> (verb)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <i>Where</i> (adverb)—<i>wear</i> (verb)</li> <li>8. <i>Size</i> (noun)—<i>sighs</i> (noun [plural] and verb)</li> <li>9. <i>Manors</i> (noun [plural])—<i>manners</i> (noun [plural])</li> <li>10. <i>Export</i> (noun)—<i>export</i> (verb)</li> <li>11. <i>Lead</i> (verb)—<i>lead</i> (noun)—<i>led</i> (verb)</li> <li>12. <i>Minute</i> (adjective)—<i>minute</i> (noun)</li> </ol> |
|--|---|

**Figure 3**  
**Visualizing homographs**



each word as they engage in this activity. An example of this is shown in Figure 3.

### **Step 3: Identifying grammatical structures**

Reread the text or story aloud. Emphasize each homophone and homograph and ask students to underline each word that is a homophone or homograph. After students have listened to the text again and underlined the target words, explain the concepts of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and any other grammatical concepts that are represented by a homophone in the student's text. Invite the students to engage in partner-talk discussions about additional insights they have about the topic and the words. Ask students to draw a symbol identifying the word as a noun, verb, adjective, pronoun, preposition, and any other grammatical structure you designate. Invite them to represent a noun with

a house, an explosive symbol can represent a verb, and a happy face can represent an adjective (or they can label the words as *N*, *V*, or *A*). Finally, explain that some homophones fall into the same category (refer to Figure 4).





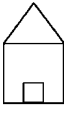


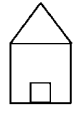
### **Step 4: Categorizing words**

Provide more practice with vocabulary learning by asking students to sort and categorize words. Categories can include nouns (*knight/night*), action verbs (to *run*/a *run* on gasoline; to *see*/the *sea*; *knead/need*), auxiliary verbs (*will*—future tense/a *will*; *be/bee*), adjectives (*round*/a *round* of golf), prepositions (*in/inn*; *to/two/too*), personal or possessive pronouns (*their/they're*), or conjunctions (*or/ore*). Create a word chart with the students (see Figure 5). In addition, as shown in Figure 6, words can be categorized through concepts represented by imagery.






**Figure 4**  
**Sample grammar response sheet**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. To <i>lead</i> 	5. <i>Minute</i> 
2. <i>Two</i> 	6. To <i>tear</i> 
3. The <i>rights</i> 	7. To <i>wind</i> 
4. To <i>break</i> 	8. A <i>manor</i> 

**Figure 5**  
**Grammatical word chart**






Nouns 	Verbs 	Adjectives 
	Action    Linking    Auxiliary	
4. <i>Principles</i>	1. <i>Tear</i>	2. <i>Two</i>
8. <i>Size</i>	3. <i>Break</i>	12. <i>Minute</i>
9. <i>Manor</i>	5. <i>Wind</i>	
10. <i>Export</i>	11. <i>Lead</i>	

**Step 5: Analyzing word meanings within context**

Prepare and read aloud cloze sentences that have a space for the appropriate homophone or homograph. Write each missing word on colored con-

struction paper and post it on the front chalkboard. Ask students to read the words aloud and then fill in each sentence with the appropriate word. Ask students to accept as correct each completed sentence and discuss the meaning before proceeding to the next one.

**Figure 6**  
**Words categorized by imagery**

What I can see	What I can hear	What I can taste	What I can feel	Can you smell...?
				
A manor	Something <i>breaking</i>	<i>Whey</i>	The <i>wind</i>	<i>Flower</i>

**Figure 7**  
**Response guide**

Student's homophone/homograph response guide

1. *Wind* (air)
2. *Break*
3. *Rights*
4. *Way*
5. *Their*

- Wind* (twist)
- Brake*
- Writes*
- Weigh*
- There*

Examples:

The *wind* *blew* through southern fields.

Trade and commerce were able to *wind* through the northern states.

### **Step 6: Owning the words**

Prepare a list of homophones or homographs that you would like your students to review. Assign students in pairs to prepare a short skit or pantomime or to pictorially represent one of each pair of words. After each dyad presents a description of the word, ask students to decide which word was described. Review the meanings and pronunciation of each word before inviting the next pair of students to present their word description. Finally, students can write sentences contrasting the meanings of each word (see Figure 7).

### **Step 7: Extending and evaluating new meanings**

As an additional review activity, which provides insights about the students' understanding of the selected topic and the targeted language, you can prepare 10 to 20 cards with words written on each side that you would like students to review. You can develop group sets by making seven to eight copies of the word cards including pairs of homophones, homographs, and one extra word if you would like to make the activity challenging for advanced learners. Next, develop a set of cloze sen-

**Figure 8**  
**Student's homophone activity and game cards**

<i>Right</i> <i>Write</i> <i>Rate</i>	<i>Seen</i> <i>Scene</i> <i>Screen</i>	<i>Principles</i> <i>Principals</i> <i>Primary</i>	<i>Their</i> <i>There</i> <i>They're</i>	<i>Manors</i> <i>Manners</i> <i>Mankind</i>
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**The road to freedom**

1. The topic of the U.S. Civil War, including the causes and the effects, continues to be a subject about which many authors \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Northern states enforced laws that protected the \_\_\_\_\_ of every person's freedom and liberty.
3. Southern plantation owners had \_\_\_\_\_ the movement toward abolishing slavery as a threat to their way of life.
4. Many artists have portrayed a \_\_\_\_\_ depicting the battles between the North and the South.

Answer key

1. *Write*      2. *Right*      3. *Seen*      4. *Scene*

tences (see Figure 8) leaving spaces that require students to fill them in with a correct word. Invite students to work in groups of two to four, each selecting a card from the pile of word cards you have prepared. As each student reads the words, he or she selects the word that best fits the context of the sentence and then writes it in the sentence. Other students fill in the word according to the student's suggestion. If another student disagrees with the student's answer, he or she can fill in a different sentence. After students have gone through all of the cards, discussing and evaluating the correctness of the suggested meanings, you can provide them with a copy of the answer key.

## How can student's language knowledge be formatively and summatively assessed?

During your teaching of this seven-step plan, you will be using formative assessment information

gained from your insights about student performance to make your next instructional decisions. After teaching the plan, you may want to assess your students' knowledge of the target words with a simple summative assessment like the one shown in Figure 9.

## ***One or two more ideas (Or is it won, or to, or too?)***

An additional engaging and instructional activity that supports the seven-step plan can be found in Lederer's *Get Thee to a Punnery* (1988). His activity asks students to insert a word in the center of two words or phrases that are defined by the inserted word (see Figure 10). The teacher develops a list of homophones or homograph pairs and inserts between them the correct number of underlined, blank spaces for the target word. Students survey the definitions and the number of blanks, which indicate the number of letters in the miss-

**Figure 9**  
**A simple summative assessment**

**Part 1: Homophone assessment—Identify**

The teacher reads aloud the following sentences and choices. Students circle the correct word.

Thinking about our development as a nation

- |  | <u>A</u>     | or | <u>B</u>       |
|--|--------------|----|----------------|
| 1. An important _____ in our country is the freedom to speak freely.                   | <u>write</u> |    | <u>right</u>   |
| 2. The North had ensured personal liberty _____ laws the individual states had passed. | <u>threw</u> |    | <u>through</u> |
| 3. African Americans often helped one another to find the _____ to freedom.            | <u>weigh</u> |    | <u>way</u>     |

**Part 2: Homograph assessment—Transfer and develop**

Add a meaning

These words share the same sound. Provide a definition or a sentence describing a second use of the word.

For example, A - *tail* (dog's back appendage)

B - *tale* Student response: (a story)

- | <u>A</u>                                  | <u>B</u> (Sample student response)                                |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>break</i> (to smash, crash)         | <i>brake</i> (a pedal or hand gear used to slow a car or bicycle) |
| 2. <i>through</i> (to pass in the middle) | <i>threw</i> (the past tense of to <i>throw</i> , means to toss)  |
| 3. <i>their</i> (possessive pronoun)      | <i>they're</i> (used to mean they are)                            |

Make a rhyme

These words are pronounced differently. Write a word that rhymes with each word. Then write a sentence with each word.

- | <u>A</u>   | <u>B</u>  |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>tear</i> (sounds like <i>bear</i> )<br>The south wanted to tear away from the union.       | <i>tear</i> (sounds like <i>fear</i> )<br>The tear came from a soldier's wife.                      |
| 2. <i>wind</i> (sounds like <i>pinned</i> )<br>The wind blew during the stormy nights of battle. | <i>wind</i> (sounds like <i>find</i> )<br>The plantations in the South wind around the countryside. |

ing word. In addition, the teacher provides a word bank from which students can select the word that best fits the double meaning of the homophones or homograph pairs. Students then fill in the blank spaces with a word that reflects the definitions on both sides.

Students can also keep a special vocabulary journal of the homophones and homographs

they study. The more opportunities they have to encounter, interact with, and practice new words, the more secure they will be in successfully managing the intricacies of the semantics of the English language. Eventually, students will begin to internalize these words and use them to communicate their daily ideas and the academic concepts they wish to express.

**Figure 10**  
**Make a match**

- |                |                |                       |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Metal       | <u>l e a d</u> | To direct             |
| 2. Air current | <u>w i n d</u> | To twist, wrap around |

## Selecting resources

The following books, designed to address the specific area of homonyms, homophones, and homographs have been written for native speakers of the language. When using these texts, teachers should accommodate the needs of second-language learners through activities that reflect the methods of differentiation presented in this article, which include accessing prior knowledge, visualizing, attending to familiarity of concepts, categorizing words, presenting opportunities to compare and contrast meanings and sounds, modeling, using guided instruction, and using assessment that directly reflects words and concepts that have been studied. We have found that students appreciate and enjoy the approaches described in this seven-step plan because it provides for an organized process of learning as well as an outlet for creative expression.

### Teacher resources

Gordon, J.A. (1999). *Vocabulary building: With antonyms, synonyms, homophones and homographs*. Greenville, CA: Super Duper Publications.

Explanations and examples of words with semantic similarities and differences are included in this workbook-style text, which also suggests ready-to-use resources for the classroom.

Jacobson, J., Lapp, D., & Mendez, M. (2003). *Accommodating differences among English language learners: 75 literacy lessons*. Colorado Springs, CO: PEAK Parent Center.

Lesson examples in this book provide teachers with the instructional and grouping ideas and materials needed to differentiate learning for beginning, intermediate, and advanced English-language learners.

Jacobson, J., Moore, K., & Lapp, D. (2007). *Accommodating differences among English language learners: 75 literacy lessons* (2nd ed.). Colorado Springs, CO: PEAK Parent Center.

Lessons in this book extend those in the first edition through additional instructional and grouping ideas and materials to expand oral-language development through peer conversation and technology engagement.

### Student resources

Bourke, L.A. (1991). *Eye spy: A mysterious alphabet*. New York: Scholastic.

A series of pictures depicting two different homophones or homographs are presented in this engaging book. For example, the reader opens to the letter A and sees a picture of an insect (the ant) and on the following page a lady (an aunt). The reader predicts the connection. The book also includes a clue in the picture to unlock the meaning of the next set of words.

Steere, F.H. (1977). *Sound-alike words: Fun activities with homonyms, homographs, and homophones*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Activities that encourage students to compare and contrast words with identical sounds as well as those with varying spelling patterns are well presented in this text.

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The International Reading Association joins the literacy community in mourning the passing of Dr. James E. Flood on July 15, 2007. Jim was an active and valued participant in IRA publications and Association leadership. We are honored to feature one of Jim's final works in this issue.