

THE END IS NIGH

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Apocalypse Now? Armageddon coming? The Last Trump? The title above is not a warning of imminent doom but a clue to a pair of words that have the same spelling but are pronounced differently – the opposite of homophones, in fact. Such pairs fall into several groups, the largest of which is formed by compound words of Latin origin, where one is a verb and the other a related noun or adjective. Examples include *conduct*, *perfect*, *object*, *content*, *insult*, *project*, *discharge*, and even the word *compound* itself. There is a very strong tendency for the noun (or adjective) to be stressed on the first syllable, while the verb is stressed on the next. This tendency is so strong that it is also carried over into the few compound pairs that are not of Latin origin, such as *download* and *uplift*, and to words that are not really compounds such as *torment* and *ferment*. Even words like *ally* and *allies*, where no sense of any original compound remains, still follow the same trend

Incidentally, I have tried to find a pair in which the word stresses are actually the opposite of the usual ‘rule’ but have only found two examples. The best is *alternate* where the verb carries stress on the first syllable and the adjective on the next. Another candidate is *consummate*, where the verb carries stress on the first syllable and the adjective can be stressed either on the first or on the second. In this instance, even if both are stressed on the first syllable, the pronunciations still differ. For one thing, the verb gives full value to the letter U, while the adjective treats it as a ‘throwaway’ sound, or *shwa*, like so many unaccented vowels in English. More subtly, perhaps, the letter A in the final syllable also varies, and this is common in a number of words ending in *-ate*, such as *advocate*, *aggregate*, *estimate*, *intimate*, *graduate*, *subordinate*, *designate*, *separate*, *syndicate*, in all of which the verb gives full value to the vowel A. Apart from words ending in *-ate* the only other example I can find of this kind is *multiply*, in which the adverb gives only a short sound to the final Y.

There is another group of pairs in which the endings are pronounced differently. Some participles in *-ed* can treat the end as a full syllable, as in *aged*, *ragged*, *learned*, *dogged*, *blessed*, rather as though reviving English speech of a much earlier age. In three of these examples the meanings are close, but in the other two (*dogged* and *ragged*) not so. Differences also occur in pairs with *-use-* in them - for instance *use*, *abuse*, *refuse*, *diffuse*, *house*, where the letter S in the verb form sounds like a Z, but not in the noun or adjective.

Yet another type of difference occurs where two words share the same spelling in the plural. *Bases* can be the plural of both *base* and *basis*, and the final syllable sounds like *-iz* in one case and *-eez* in the other. Similarly, there is *axe* and *axis*, sharing the plural *axes*. In this last example, contrary to all the pairs previously cited, two words of completely unrelated origin

have come to share a common spelling but different pronunciations. Other such cases include *does, wound, viola, tear, row, entrance* and *bow*.

To close, here are a few clues to solve –

1. The end is nigh
2. The little pie is not browned enough
3. Be the first with Heavy Metal
4. Puts seed in for the pigs
5. She won't acknowledge how thick her stocking are
6. Twist in the breeze
7. Sulked over his Vespa
8. Fish that makes a low sound
9. Happy with what's inside
10. Abandon an area where crops won't grow
11. Don't accept rubbish!
12. A little fluid that enables a fish to breathe.

ANSWERS

For the first clue no answer is given. Instead, because there are **four** homographs, not just two, a second clue is offered, using the other pair. For the other nine clues, the answers are a little disguised so that they do not jump out when not wanted. Just ignore the odd-numbered letters: eg if the homograph is TEARS, the answer could be given as ATHESAURUS.

1. Shut off the cul-de-sac
2. OPRAHSATOY
3. ALLEMAND
4. ASTORWAS
5. ADDERNOISEUR
6. AMMONPLEAD
7. AWAITNOD
8. OBLAPSES
9. ACROWNSTREENUT
10. UDDERSBEARIT
11. FREEOFTUSSLE
12. EGHILLEL