CALLING ON THE HOMOPHONE

RICHARD LEDERER
San Diego, California

Too-fore-sics-ate! Homophones we appreciate!

Homophones are pairs (pears, pares), triads, or more capacious clusters of words that sound the same but are spelled differently and communicate different meanings. Here (hear) are some (sum) beastly examples:


Have you ever seen a dear deer, a grisly grizzly, a new gnu, a foul fowl, a towed toad, an ant aunt, and a gorilla guerrilla?

Have you ever seen a boar bore, a bee be, a whale wail, a flea flee, ewes use, and does doze?

Or take this homophonic tour de farce: Have you heard about the successful perfume manufacturer? *Her business made a lot of scents (cents, sense).* That’s a triple play—three homophones nestled in a single syllable!

I have been able to snare well more than a hundred triple homophones (*there, their, they’re*) and quadruple homophones (*right, rite, write, wright*), reaching as high as sextuple homophones (*air, heir, err, ere, Eyre, Ayer*). 

Hear here. Let’s start with 20 words that become their own homophones when their first letter is beheaded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aisle/isle</th>
<th>knew/new</th>
<th>llama/lama</th>
<th>wrest/rest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hour/our</td>
<td>knickers/nickers</td>
<td>psalter/salter</td>
<td>wretch/retch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knap/nap</td>
<td>knight/night</td>
<td>scent/cent</td>
<td>wright/right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knave/nave</td>
<td>knit/nit</td>
<td>whole/whole</td>
<td>write/rite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kneed/need</td>
<td>knot/not</td>
<td>wrap/rap</td>
<td>wrote/rote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now take a look at another list of 20 words that become their own homophones when their last letter is curtailed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>add/ad</th>
<th>butt/but</th>
<th>flue/flu</th>
<th>ore/or</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bee/be</td>
<td>bye/by</td>
<td>fore/for</td>
<td>please/pleas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belle/bell</td>
<td>canvass/canvas</td>
<td>inn/inn</td>
<td>prose/pros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>block/bloc</td>
<td>caste/cast</td>
<td>lamb/lam</td>
<td>sow/so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>borne/born</td>
<td>damn/dam</td>
<td>lapse/laps</td>
<td>tease/teas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next up, 20 pairs of words that are homophonic when we delete an internal letter:

aunt/ant  choral/coral  maize/maze  overrate/overate
boarder/border  fourth/forth  mined/mind  read/red
boulder/bolder  guild/gild  mooed/mood  reign/rein
callous/callus  hoarse/horse  mourning/morning  two (too)/to
finned/find  lead/led  oar/or  waive/wave

Now for the most pyrotechnic of all homophone acts—20 high-stepping homophonic pairs that turn out to be anagrams of each other:

bear/bare  hide/hied  pride/pried  steak/stake
break/brace  hose/hoes  reed/rede  tale/tael
discrete/discreet  meet/mete  rude/rued  tear/tare
gale/gael  ore/o’er  ruse/rues  tide/tied
great/grate  pear/pare  seer/sere  wear/ware

And, finally, two patterns that I observed in the passage you’ll soon read—20 past-tense -ed verbs and 20 s-marked plural nouns that turn out to be homophonic:

allowed/aloud  guessed/guest  passed/past  weighed/wade
bowled/bold  holed/hold  sighed/side  wheeled/wield
chased/chaste  mooed/mood  soared/sword  whiled/wild
cored/chord  mussed/must  stayed/staid  whirled/world
graphed/graft  owed/ode  trussed/trust  whored/hoard

boos/booze  gays/gaze  pros/prose  sighs/size
cents/sense  guys/guise  rays/raise  tees/tease
chants/chance  hours/ours  seas/seize  tents/tense
days/daze  paws/pause  sects/sex  verses/versus
dents/dense  pennants/penance  senses/census  whys/wise

In the 12 paragraphs you are about to read, each word is homophonically misspelled. That means no ifs, ands, and only one but, as almost all of the little prepositions and conjunctions that glue our sentences together become unavailable, along with most pronouns. While I do repeat homophones of articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns, I strive not to recycle the same spelling of any homophonic main word: nouns, verbs, and modifiers.

To the eye, the text looks like the work of a demented typesetter with an orthographic disability. But when you read it aloud, it sounds a lot like English. To avoid getting a headache, please consult the ensuing translation whenever necessary:
Hears sum rye, humerus pros eye rote won idol mourning our discreetly four nun butt deer auld ewe. Bye chants, wood yew—sunny buoy, chased made—chews riches sighed inn uh capitol caws, Dane two lone you’re assistants two Dix kneed? Watt hee once mussed bee dun. Mite eww gneiss guise, suite Mrs. aurally reed mai hole peace allowed? Yew wood? Tea he! Yea! Hay! Aye guest rite!

Gays, stair, canvas, saver mai epoch owed too write-whey righting. Yule here ore sea Howe ate-carrot, forte-knocks-sighs, goaled-plaited versus martial hour census; rays hour aw; seam owe sew bowled, tern boulder — hear oar oversees, sealing two seller, there scull, lox, I browse, knows rite too they’re heals, souls, feat, tows inn shoos.

Thee awl-why sol praise, seize, here’s, nose weave finely one uh whirled-premier, grayed-eh, tighten pries baste awn reel fax inn bettor, meteor, Whittier, finally-maid plotz witch plum purist soles. Grate read-wight-blew pried ads flare, caries wait, urns ascent, complements, hie preys, lo boughs four mai hail, cereal tail. Its acute butte! Adherence clamor fore mooor!

Currant stile guyed lessens billed trussed; holed wait; we’ve whit; Wynne meddles; illicit acclimation—bayou fare-hewed flours; popery sashays; whine sands pier; pallet-peeking deserts; minx firs; sheik close, Whigs, warn genes; rapt presence pact inn uh bo-tide Bach’s.

Aye—you’re bazaar barred; meet mews; franc auricle; pore, plane profit; trustee tooter—whish Yul knot Bea hostel ore pea owed o’er doughs, knapping allot, two dammed board buy bass, cheep, feint, heirless, miner, stayed, stationery, wurst Babel witch Mrs. Marx.

Dew knot caul mi uh rued, ruff faux; uh foe, lacks lyre; uh sari, week-need cowered; oar uh doer, callus, mien nave hoo lax principals ore manors, hoo wood except graphed o’er hied oar berry boos, licker, logger bier, palil ail, junkie jinn, oar heroine; ore uh sic, grocer, teste puts (two quoin uh frays) hoo wood insight uh coo two sees uh hansom princess thrown; steel uh faro’s lute—joules, purls, cache,
Czechs—uh shakes whored; o’er rayed uh precedence wore rheum.  
“Holed yore hoarse! Clothes you’re pi whole! Doo pennants! Your 
cane, knot able—uh phat-but hangar-awn, uh cursor.hoo boarders awn 
shear roomer! Aye overate yew!” isle repost, mach, tees, sensor.

Yoo hoo red mai holy Abel, Ernest whirred maize wright threw 
Cannes coolie fined patients bye wrestling you’re world, phased, 
waisted mined fora we bitt. Quires carrel coral cords, Cokes daze 
berth. Wholly serifs clime starlet, Ariel piques, witch Basque inn 
sonny whether. Reign-beaus ark. Uh summary see Bries throes knew 
cedes, maze colonels. Lightning lodes, rapped harts ryes, sore—born 
hi, razed hire, Leica gnu berth.

Whiled bores, mousse, yacks, lamas, news grays inn uh heard. 
Hairs, dear, doze, fauns gamble inn Haydn Sikh. Aunts, Beatles, flees, 
knits, leaches, Nat’s, tics borough. Lam, use lo, bah. Bronx knicker, 
Crowe. Fouls cheap. Signets lei. Wales, mores, raise, guild Marlon 
pea. Links a tax, bytes. Guerrillas inn troupes eight pares, aplomb. 
Quayle, Robyn, be, burred flu. Illegals wield, sword. Mewls, burrows 
braid. Towed staid.

Wont Moore, rood guessed? Aisle knot paws butt—Pee Dee 
Cue, toot sweet—altar hour mooed. He’d fay cymbals ore sines witch 
cents bruit pane; worn ore bowed dyer straights; baron whoa, crewel 
fete: Wringing belles peeled, told grizzly knight, chili rein, roomy 
missed, Erie Paul. Inn uh Grimm would, Cyprus routes frees. Beach 
bows sheikh. Timbre! Vial gilt wreaks. Few! Uh fowl cent Styx too 
dents, teaming heir.

Limns brews, creek. Soars oohs. Wastes synch. Naval hertz. Hare 
reseeds. Elicit, band hoars ewes sects. Haight Concord. Murderess 
gorillas mustard fuhrer; chute pistils, canons; wheeled axis; serge; 
sleigh heeling piece; pray awn holey fryers; reck Seine scents. Wii 
pour retches, spade UNIX, cant bare undo torcher oar sloe dyeing, 
sow whee brewed, “Thyme, tied whacks, wain—weight fore Noh 
Mann.”

Silents rains.

Trust me, verbivorous readers. Every one of the 721 words in the passage you’ve just read is a homophone. Illuminating the more elusive ones, auld is the first word in auld lang syne, a gneiss is a rock, mai is the first part of mai tai, fora is a plural of forum, Yul refers to actor Yul Brynner, caul is an intestinal covering, mi is a note on the musical scale, a wight is a creature, an awn is a slender bristle, and a wain is a farm vehicle. You get the idea.

Sow pleas bare inn mined:

No humor;
No happiness.
Know humor;
Know happiness.

Translation

Here’s some wry, humorous prose I wrote one idle morning hour discreetly for none but dear old you. By chance, would you—sonny boy, chaste maid—choose Rich’s side in a capital cause, deign to loan your assistance to Dick’s need? What he wants must be done. Might you nice guys, sweet misses orally read my whole piece aloud? You would? Tee hee! Yay! Hey! I guessed right!

Gaze, stare, canvass, savor my epic ode to right-way writing. You’ll hear or see how eight-carat, Fort-Knox-size, gold-plated verses marshal our senses; raise our awe; seem oh so bold, turn bolder—here or overseas, ceiling to cellar, their skull, locks, eyebrows, nose right to their shoes, heels, soles, feet, toes.

The all-wise soul prays, sees, hears, knows we’ve finally won a world-premiere, grade-A, titan prize based on real facts in better, meatier, wittier, finely-made plots which plumb purest souls. Great red-white-blue pride adds flair, carries weight, earns assent, compliments, high praise, low bows for my hale, serial tale. It’s a cute beaut! Adherents clamber for more!

Current style guide lessons build trust, hold weight, weave wit, win medals; elicit acclamation—buy you fair-hued flowers; potpourri sachets; wine sans peer; palate-