

RULES

For Using *Lay* and *Lie*

Understand the problem.

Choosing the correct forms of *lay* and *lie* is a big challenge. Without a doubt, they are the two most difficult irregular verbs. The problem is that when we speak, we frequently misuse them. As a result, our ears are used to hearing incorrect forms. So when we spot a wrong form while we are proofreading, it *sounds* right.

Know the solution.

How do you use *lay* and *lie* correctly? First, you must know the definition of each verb. *Lay* means *to put something [or someone] down*. Because *lay* is a transitive verb, a direct object will come after it. A direct object *receives* the action of the verb. Read this example:

Before returning to the *Godzilla* marathon on late night TV, Quentin *laid* his sleeping son Jeremy on the bed and covered him with a quilt.

Quentin laid *whom* on the bed? Jeremy.

Lie, on the other hand, means *to rest or recline*. *Lie* is an intransitive verb, so no direct object will follow.

The center of Diane's bed always smells like dog because Reliable, her beagle, *lies* there every chance he gets.

What is Reliable doing in the middle of the bed? *Resting*.

Once you know which meaning you need, you must then choose the correct verb form. Look at the table below:

Infinitive	Definition	Simple Present	Simple Past	Past Participle	Present Participle
to lay	to put something down	lay(s)	laid	laid	laying
to lie	to rest or recline	lie(s)	lay	lain	lying

Important note: The simple *past* form of *lie* is the same word as the simple *present* form of *lay*. This shared form accounts for much of the confusion with these two verbs. To choose the correct form, you must understand the uses of the simple present, simple past, and past participle forms.

Use the simple present forms when you mean action which happens consistently or action which is happening right now.

Jack always **lays** the cordless telephone where no one can find it; only the rings of an incoming call will betray its presence. [This action happens *consistently*.]

Although the crowd shouts for him to rise, Charles **lies** in the middle of the boxing ring, felled by a powerful uppercut delivered by Antonio, his opponent. [This action is happening *right now*.]

Use the simple past forms when you mean action completed in the past.

Rachel **laid** her month-late essay in Dr. Cohen's mailbox, hoping that he would still accept the work. [**Laid** = simple past tense of **lay**, to put something down.]

Gently rocked by ocean waves, Robbie **lay** on the raft, unconcerned about the distance to shore or fish nibbling the fingers he dangled in the water. [**Lay** = simple past tense of **lie**, to rest or recline.]

Use the past participle forms whenever you have one or more auxiliary verbs forming the tense.

Rinalda **had** just **laid** the last piece of chicken on the grill when a bolt of lightning and clap of thunder signaled the early end of the family picnic.

Jasper **should** not **have laid** his new black sweater on the bed, for Josie, his beagle, found it the perfect place to nap.

Squeeze, a seven-foot python, **has lain** all day in a corner of his aquarium, his inquisitive tongue the only movement indicating life.

Lorenzo **would have lain** on the sofa all day if the cushions didn't stink of dog.

Check out these additional examples for **lay**:

Every afternoon, Robin **lays** her keys on the counter, and then Buster, her cat, bats them onto the floor. [Robin *puts* her keys on the counter.]

Zaw **laid** his head in his hands and sobbed. He had a 79.4 average in his English class, and the evil Mrs. Varner would not bump his grade to a *B*. [Zaw *put* his head in his hands.]

If Latorrance **had** not **laid** his essay on the cafeteria table, ketchup stains would not decorate four of the pages. [Latorrance *put* his essay on the table.]

Here are more examples for *lie*:

After a hard day of chewing pig ears and scratching fleas, my dog Floyd *lies* on the kitchen floor and takes a well-deserved nap. [Floyd *rests* on the kitchen floor.]

Shimmering with all the colors of the spectrum, a thick, greasy film *lay* on the surface of the squid eyeball stew. [The thick, greasy film *rested* on the surface of the stew.]

The bill for the expensive meal *has lain* on the table so long that Melissa wonders if her boyfriend Kris has forgotten that it is his turn to pay. [The bill *rests* on the table.]



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