

R U L E S

For Using *Lay* and *Lie*

Understand the problem.

Using the verbs *lay* and *lie* correctly 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 the verbs incorrectly. So when we see a wrong form while we are proofreading, it **sounds** perfectly right to us.

Know the solution.

How do you use *lay* and *lie* correctly? First, you must know the definition of each verb.

Lay means **to put or place 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. Here is an example:

During a commercial break, Quentin **laid** his sleeping son Jeremy on the bed and covered him with a quilt before returning to the **Godzilla** marathon on late night TV. [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:

Verb	Definition	Simple Present	Simple Past	Past Participle
Lay	<i>to put or place something down</i>	lay(s)	laid	laid
Lie	<i>to rest or recline</i>	lie(s)	lay	lain

Important note: The simple **past** of *lie* is the same word as the simple **present** of *lay*. This shared form accounts for much of the confusion between 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 presently.

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 presently.]

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 or to place something or someone down.]

Gently rocked by Atlantic waves, Robbie **lay** on the pool raft, unconcerned about the distance to shore or sharks 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 an auxiliary verb 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's picnic.

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

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 up 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 **placed his essay** there.]

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 **reclines** 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** there.]



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