

Vocabulary: Problem Words

The words in the groups below sound the same, or almost the same, and are often confused. However, they are spelled differently and have different meanings.

1. (a) cereal (noun) – crop plant with edible grain; breakfast food.
(b) serial (noun) – story in parts; regular newspaper or magazine.
 serial (adjective) – in a series; produced in parts.
2. (a) access (noun) – entry or approach.
 access (verb) – to enter.
(b) excess (noun) – surplus, extra, more than enough.
3. (a) present (noun) – gift.
(b) presence (noun) – being present.
4. (a) advice (noun) – recommendation about action; official information.
(b) advise (verb) – offer advice; recommend, inform.
5. (a) strait (noun) – naturally existing channel joining two seas.
(b) straight (adjective) – not curved, level; candid, honestly straightforward;
 heterosexual (slang); immediately.
6. (a) wrap (verb) – cover something up.
(b) rap (verb/noun) – hit something sharply.
(c) rap (noun) – type of music.
7. (a) pier (noun) – seaside structure.
(b) peer (verb) – look closely.
 peer (noun) – person of equal standing with another.

Fill in the blank with the correct word and make changes where necessary.

CEREAL

SERIAL

1. Many people start their day with a glass of juice and a bowl of _____ for breakfast.
2. The last episode of that TV _____ will be shown this week.

ACCESS

EXCESS

3. By the end of our vacation, we realized that we had an _____ amount of clothing.
4. Only the cashier has _____ to the cash register.

PRESENTS

PRESENCE

5. Your _____ is required at the meeting this afternoon.
6. Exchanging _____ at Christmas is a tradition in most families.

ADVICE

ADVISE

7. Her doctor _____ her to lose some weight.
8. She should take his _____ and go on a diet.

STRAIT

STRAIGHT

9. His mother told him to come _____ home after school.
10. The _____ of Dover separates Calais on the north shore of France and Dover on the south shore of England.
11. It's difficult to draw a _____ line without using a ruler.

WRAP

RAP

12. The birthday gift was _____ so artfully she hesitated to open it.
13. Listening to _____ on the radio is her son's favourite pastime.
14. She doesn't like people barging into her office, so please _____ on the door before you enter.

PIER

PEER

15. He tried to _____ through the dirty windows to see what was in the warehouse.
16. Although the boat was tied to the _____, it broke away during the storm and drifted out to sea.
17. Adolescents are more influenced by their _____ than by adults.