

<b>Name (in Romaji):</b>	→
<b>Student Number:</b>	→
<b>Class Day + Period:</b>	→

## PUNS AND WORDPLAY

### Introduction

A pun is a form of wordplay that exploits the multiple meanings of a term or similar-sounding words for humorous or rhetorical effect. Often relying on homophones (i.e., words that sound alike but have different meanings), puns can be as simple as a playful twist in conversation or as complex as literary devices in classic literature.

Puns are generally considered jokes (by the way, they are sometimes called “dad jokes”), but not always. They are typically used when the timing for them is right. For instance, if someone asks what you had for breakfast you might say, “I had eggs. They were eggstraordinary.” If you wait too long to say the pun, its comedic effect is lost. It is also worth noting that puns sometimes come out by accident. You might, for instance, see someone write “no pun intended” in parentheses in an email if the person inadvertently chose words that could be construed as a pun (and, of course, if the person actually notices it).

Many newspaper headlines use puns. For instance, a headline like “Otter Devastation” might be used in an article about declining otter populations, playing on the similarity between “otter” and “utter.” Beyond journalism, puns are prevalent in everyday conversations, social media, television, and other mediums where wit and humor are appreciated.

Puns are often used to elicit laughter, though they can sometimes provoke groans due to their perceived simplicity or overuse. Despite this, they remain a staple in various forms of communication, from casual conversations to literature.

### Puns in Literature: The Case of Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is renowned for his prolific use of puns, with estimates suggesting he employed over 3,000 puns across his works. His plays often feature wordplay that adds layers



of meaning and humor, sometimes even in serious or tragic contexts. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the character Mercutio, after being mortally wounded, says, “Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man,” playing on the word “grave” to mean both serious and dead. Shakespeare’s use of puns demonstrates their potential for sophistication and depth, challenging the notion that puns are merely simplistic jokes.

### Other Forms of English Wordplay

While puns are a prominent form of wordplay, the English language boasts a variety of other techniques that play with words to achieve humor, emphasis, or stylistic flair. Some common examples include:

- **spoonerisms:** The accidental or deliberate swapping of initial sounds in words, such as saying “a bail soat” instead of “a sail boat.”
- **malapropisms:** The mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, often with unintentionally amusing effect, like saying “dance a flamingo” instead of “dance a flamenco.”
- **double entendres:** Phrases that can be understood in two ways, one of which is often risqué or humorous.
- **portmanteau words:** Blending two words to create a new one, such as “brunch” (breakfast + lunch) or “smog” (smoke + fog).
- **Tom Swifties:** A fun use of words that follows a quote, using a punny adverb. “I have frostbite,” Jim said coldly.
- **palindromes:** A word, phrase, or sentence that is read the same forward as backward, such as “madam,” “dog god” and “Was it a cat I saw?”

These forms of wordplay enrich the language, offering speakers and writers tools to entertain, persuade, and engage their audiences creatively.

Consider a few other wordplay instances:

- I was wondering why the baseball was getting bigger. Then it hit me.
- Why did the fly fly? Because the spider spied her.

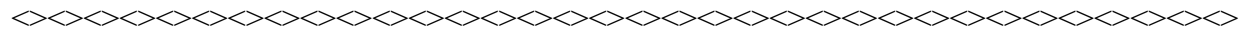


- Someone threw a can of Coke at my head. It didn't hurt because it's a soft drink.
- What do you call a fly without wings? A walk.
- The art competition ended in a draw.
- Libraries are often very tall because they have so many stories.
- If you are afraid of elevators or escalators, then you should take steps to avoid them.
- When he asked me what the fake plastic flowers should smell like, I told him to use common scents.
- The golfer brought two pairs of pants to the golf course just in case he got a hole in one.
- Most people are tired on April 1 because they just finished a 31-day March.

From casual jokes to literary masterpieces, these linguistic tools serve not only to amuse but also to add depth and nuance to communication. Understanding and appreciating such wordplay can enhance one's command of the language and provide insight into its cultural contexts.

## Reference

Oxford Royale (2025). *A guide to English puns and wordplay*. Retrieved May 19, 2025, from <https://www.oxford-royale.com/articles/english-puns-wordplay>



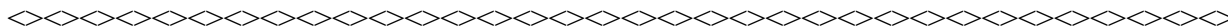
## English-Japanese Jokes/Puns

Many people have had fun saying puns and using wordplay by mixing English and Japanese. Here are a few examples:

- Why do Hawaiian people rarely go to the dentist? 歯はいいから !
- What do you call a rooster that lays eggs? ヘンですね。
- 蜘蛛の味はどんな味ですか？ すっぱいだ。
- Why are you never lost if you have a slice of pizza? It comes with 地図.
- I can never understand fan makers on weekends. That is the only time they don't make 扇子.



- I was lost in the fashion store. I couldn't find 出口.
- “Dad, can we rob the convenience store?” “No, it's against the Lawson.”
- When did people start eating eggs? A long たまご.
- My daughter just had a baby. Since I'm a university professor who teaches English, I will celebrate becoming a grandfather by making the focus of my next class 時事英語.



\*\*\*\*\* HOMEWORK TASKS \*\*\*\*\*

Here are three tasks. The tasks should be printed out, ready for submission.

**Part 1**

Find three English puns that have not been used in class. Translate them into Japanese. Do your best to make the translations work in such a way that they keep some element of humor (this may not always be possible). Explain why the translations either work or do not work. You may search the internet for English puns, but you may not use GenAI like ChatGPT or use any kind of translation software.

**Part 2**

Find five examples of puns in the real world. This includes shop names, product names, advertising, etc. (example: a sushi restaurant called “Soy Happy”). The pun usage can be all English or a mix of English-Japanese. You may search the internet. For whatever you find:

1. Print a picture (if available).
2. Explain where it is/why it is being used (e.g., in the U.S., for a soft drink ad).
3. Explain the pun. Use as many sentence as you need (**use your own words**).

**Part 3**

Create a 5-question quiz. You will test your classmates on puns. The quiz is: “Is this a pun or not?” In the quiz you must include a mix of English-Japanese puns, English puns, and non-puns. You should include at least one of each type. You may search the internet for puns that have not been used in class.

