

Lay vs. Lie

Lay and lie both have a variety of meanings.

Lay could be used as a noun referring to “the general appearance of an area, including the direction of streams, hills, and similar features.”

On the other hand, lie can be used as a noun meaning “a false statement made with deliberate intent to deceive” or as a verb denoting “to speak falsely or utter untruth knowingly, as with intent to deceive.”

However, the definitions that often cause confusion among writers are the use of the verb lay meaning “to put down, especially gently or carefully” and the use of the verb lie denoting “to be in or assume a horizontal or resting position on a supporting surface.” The distinction is actually simple. Lay needs a direct object, something to be laid.

“Trump calls to lay hacking to rest”

[Sky News Australia](#)

“Hundreds brave weather to lay wreaths at Arlington Cemetery”

[Fox News](#)

“Police lay murder charge following death of elderly man in Watson Lake, Yukon”

[CBC.ca](#)

Meanwhile, lie cannot be used with an object.

“Banking standards: treacherous political waters lie ahead”

[The Guardian](#)

“‘They are not going to lie down’: Boxing Day hunt crowds remain strong amid fight to scrap fox hunting ban”

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The Telegraph

“This new office trend lets you lie down at work”

MarketWatch

In this present tense forms of the two words, it is actually easy to remember. You cannot lay on the sofa and the army soldiers cannot lie down their guns. It would make no sense to use these terms in this manner. However, the tricky part would be their past tense and past participle forms. Below is a table showing the different forms of these two verbs.

Present	Past	Past Participle	Present Participle
Lay	Laid	Laid	Laying
Lie	Lay	Lain	Lying

Notice that while the forms of lay are quite easy to remember, the forms of the verb lie may cause a little confusion to some especially the past tense of lie which is lay. The present participle forms may also be tricky as they only differ with the additional letter a. Here are examples on how to properly use the different forms of lay and lie:

Examples

Present Tense

The bird lays its eggs on the nest at the top of the tree.

She lies down on that sofa during break time.

Past Tense

The bird laid its eggs on that nest last week.

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She lay down on a different sofa yesterday because the other one was occupied.

Past Participle

The bird has laid its eggs on that nest for years.

She has lain on that sofa for hours.

Present Participle

The bird has been laying its eggs on that nest since last year.

She has been lying on that sofa since 10 a.m.