

Cheat Sheet: Lay & Lie

Lay, *lie*, and the other *lie* seem designed to cause trouble. Two are homonyms, and the present tense of one is the same as the past tense of another.

Mix-ups usually come when we mistake the intransitive *lie*—*she was lying on the floor*—with the transitive *lay*. If she was laying on the floor, she needs an object—*she was laying her yoga mat on the floor*. But most of us usually use the simple past tense. *She laid her yoga mat on the floor, and then she lay down on it. When asked her age, she lied.* Many of us have to look up the past participle every time: *She had laid the mat on the floor. She had lain on it a long time. She had lied about her age for years.*

One good way to ensure you have the right conjugation is to substitute a synonym. *She reclined the mat on the floor* would never get past you.



Sorting out lay & lie

	lay	lie	lie
Verb type	transitive	intransitive	transitive
Definition	to put down	to recline	to tell an untruth
First person present tense	lay	lie	lie
Third person present tense	lays	lies	lies
Simple past tense	laid	lay	lied
gerund-participle	laying	lying	lying
past participle	laid	lain	lied

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Please send me your grammar, usage, and style questions. I'll answer by e-mail and on my blog.