



Basic difference

The word *lay* means to put or place something, but it is also the past tense of the word *lie* when it means to recline. The more common usage of *lie* is used to mean telling a falsehood, but this past tense is *lied*.

This may seem confusing now, but it will all become clearer with the following examples!

Information retrieved from:

Allen, Shundalyn. "Laying vs. Lying – What's the Difference?"
Grammarly Blog, 2017,
<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/lay-lie/>

Writing Desk Hours

Monday-Thursday

12-5pm, 7-10pm

Friday 12pm-5pm

Sunday 1-5pm, 7-10pm

Rolvaag 302 & 354

The answers to these practice examples are located at the Rolvaag Writing Desk!

Have more questions? Still don't understand the difference between *lay* and *lie*? Make an appointment with a writing tutor!

- 1.) Visit the Writing Desk homepage, or
stolaf.edu/asc/writing-help/
- 2.) Click on the Appointments box
- 3.) Sign in with your St. Olaf email, then click an appointment that works with your schedule!

Or just drop on by!

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Lay vs. Lie

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Writing desk

[http://wp.stolaf.edu/
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Lay vs. Lie

Why is learning the difference so difficult? The overall misuse comes from not using *lay* and *lie* as transitive and intransitive verbs. What does that mean?

Lay is a transitive verb, meaning it has an **object** it acts upon.

Example: I lay my textbook on my desk.

In this example, *lay* is acting upon the object, *textbook*.



The trickiest part of *lay* vs. *lie* is that *lay* is the past tense of *lie* **only** when it means "to recline."

Example: I lay on the couch in Rolvaag reading all day yesterday.

In present tense, the action would say *lie*, but because it happened yesterday, use *lay*.

Easiest trick: "lay" has a direct object, and "lie" does

In contrast with *lay*, *lie* is an intransitive verb, which means it is only used when there is **no direct object**.

Example: I love to lie down in the Natural Lands to look at the stars.

Because there is no object that the subject ("I") is acting on, use *lie* in this context instead of *lay*.

Try picking the right usage of *lay* or *lie* to make these sentences correct:

I like to lay/lie in bed and relax before my work shift at the Pause.

My friends will lay/lie their backpacks outside the Caf before they go in to eat.

He was so tired after the Hall Council event last night that he lay/lie on the floor of the lounge.

Now try making your own sentences using these rules!

