# Lay vs. Lie

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## The Present Tense

### A. To lay is a *transitive verb* that requires a direct object. In other words, something or someone is receiving the action. The action of the verb is being transferred from the actor to the direct object.

*Examples of Lay in the Present Tense*

1. I → *lay* → *the keys* → on the table.
2. You → *lay* → *the laptop* → on the desk.

In the above examples, the *transitive verb* lay is followed by the direct objects the keys and the laptop, respectively.

### B. To lie is an *intransitive verb* and does not take a direct object.

*Examples of Lie in the Present Tense*

1. I *lie* on the couch.
2. We *lie* beside the pool.

In the above examples, the *intransitive verb* lie does not take a direct object. We do not transfer the action across to other people or things. Note: In both sample sentences, lie is followed by a prepositional phrase, not a direct object.

## The Past Tense and Past Participle

### A. The past tense of to lay is *laid*, and the past participle of to lay is *laid*. The past participle of to lay takes the helping verb “has,” “have,” or “had.”

*Examples of Lay in the Past and Past Participle Tenses*

1. Tomas → *laid* → *his newborn baby* → in the crib last night. (past tense)
2. Amber → *had laid* → *all her money* → on the nightstand. (past participle tense)
In the above examples, the **transitive verb** *lay* takes the direct objects *his newborn baby* and *all her money*, respectively. Remember that any tense of the **transitive verb** *lay* must take a direct object.

**B. The past tense of to lie is lay, and the past participle is lain. To lie is an intransitive verb and does not have a direct object.**

*Examples of Lie in the Past and Past Participle Tenses*

1. Ramona *lay* in the sun too long yesterday. (past tense)
2. The cat *has lain* in my bed since nine o’clock last night. (past participle tense)

In the above examples, the **intransitive verb** *lie* does not take any direct objects because the action is not being transferred to anything. Prepositional phrases are not direct objects.

**Activity 1: Practice with the Present Tense**

In the following sentences, choose the correct word. If you choose *lay*, underline the direct object.

1. I *lay/lie* wide awake tonight.
2. My brother *lays/lies* his wet clothes out to dry.
3. You *lay/lie* the book on the chair next to you.
4. We *lay/lie* the placemats on the table.
5. Will you come *lay/lie* next to me in the grass?

**Activity 2: Practice with the Past Tense and the Past Participle**

In the following sentences, choose the correct word. If you choose a tense of *lay*, underline the direct object.

1. Three days ago, Richard *laid/lay* his headphones on the empty seat next to him.
2. I *laid/lay* my head on my pillow last night.
3. The dirty laundry *laid/lay* all over the floor.
4. Cinderella *has laid/has lain* her gown on the soft bed.
5. Yesterday, Evelyn *laid/lay* in a field of wildflowers.

**Activity 3: Practice with the Present Tense, Past Tense, and Past Participle**

In the following sentences, choose the correct word. Pay attention to the indicated time to determine which tense you should use. If you choose a tense of *lay*, underline the direct object.

1. You *lay/laid* the cards on the table yesterday.
2. Now I *lay/lie* me down to sleep.
3. Last month, as we *lay/laid* in our beds, we heard a commotion.
4. She has lain/has laid beneath the trees since early this morning.
5. My mother lies/lays flowers on my grandmother’s grave.

**Answer Key for Activity 1**

1. lie
2. lays (direct object: his wet clothes)
3. lay (direct object: the book)
4. lay (direct object: the placemats)
5. lie

**Answer Key for Activity 2**

1. laid (direct object: his headphones)
2. laid (direct object: my head)
3. lay
4. has laid (direct object: her gown)
5. lay

**Answer Key for Activity 3**

1. laid (direct object: the cards)
2. lay (direct object: me)
3. lay
4. has lain
5. lays (direct object: flowers)