Misused Words: Lay vs. Lie

Present Tense	Past Tense	Past Participle (takes the helping verb "has," "have," or "had")
Lay	Laid	Laid
Lie	Lay	Lain

The Present Tense

A. <u>To lay</u> 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* → <u>the keys</u> → on the table.
2. You → *lay* → <u>the laptop</u> → on the desk.

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

B. <u>To lie</u> 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** <u>lie</u> does not take a direct object. We do not transfer the action across to other people or things. Note: In both sample sentences, <u>lie</u> is followed by a prepositional phrase, not a direct object.

The Past Tense and Past Participle

A. The past tense of <u>to lay</u> is *laid,* and the past participle of <u>to lay</u> is *laid.* The past participle of <u>to lay</u> takes the helping verb "has," "have," or "had."

Examples of Lay in the Past and Past Participle Tenses

1. Tomas → *laid* → <u>his newborn baby</u> → in the crib last night. (past tense)
2. Amber → *had laid* → <u>all her money</u> → on the nightstand. (past participle tense)

In the above examples, the **transitive verb** <u>lay</u> takes the direct objects <u>his newborn baby</u> and <u>all her money</u>, respectively. Remember that any tense of the **transitive verb** <u>lay</u> must take a direct object.

B. The past tense of <u>to lie</u> is *lay*, and the past participle is *lain*. <u>To lie</u> 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** <u>lie</u> 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 <u>lay</u>, 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 <u>lay</u>, 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 <u>lay</u>, 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)