Word for Word

Pour over or pore over?

The idioms *pore over* and *pour over* often confuse writers.

To *pour* is to cause a substance, usually a liquid, to flow in a stream.¹ *Pore* is most often used as a noun meaning "a minute opening, especially one by which matter passes through a membrane."² *Pore* commonly refers to the small openings in the skin.

Example:
By the time Zina finished the marathon, sweat was pouring from her pores.

However, *pore* can also be a verb meaning "to gaze intently" or "to read or study attentively."² When used in this sense, *pore* is usually followed by the preposition *over* and an object that names the thing being gazed at or studied. Because this meaning of pore is unrelated to the word's other, more common meaning, writers often use the more familiar *pour over* when *pore over* is correct.²,³

Examples:
Incorrect: The researchers poured over their data to find the error.
Correct: The researchers pored over their data to find the error.

*Pour over* is just what it seems: to pour a liquid over some other object. It often describes a method of preparing coffee.

Example:
He usually prefers a pour-over brew to espresso.
References


--Amy Ninetto

Image Credit: [© Can Stock Photo](http://canstockphoto.com)