

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

1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster; 2003:973.
2. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster; 2003:966.
3. Garner BA. *Garner's Modern American Usage*, 3rd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2009:643.

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