

The cards don't lie - The difference between lie, lay

Written by gallupsun
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Over the past year, I've gotten back into the hobby of collecting baseball cards. As a child of the 1980s, I specialize in collecting the overproduced sets that pushed the hobby hurtling over the cliff of monetary value into a chasm of low values. However, I still find myself drooling over Nolan Ryan cards and Bo Jackson rookies.

In the world of baseball card collecting, where the pursuit of the perfect mint-condition specimen can consume hours, days or even years, there's one grammatical conundrum that can leave even the most seasoned collector scratching their heads: the proper usage of "lay" and "lie."

I know you were wondering how I'd tie baseball card collecting to grammar. After all, lay and lie, seemingly so similar in form, can trip up even the most astute grammar aficionados among us. But fear not, fellow collectors, for I'm here to shed some light on this grammatical enigma and its relation to baseball cards.

When it comes to cards, the word "lay" is primarily used to describe the action of placing or putting something down. For instance, you might say, "I carefully laid my newly acquired Bo Jackson rookie card into the protective sleeve."

On the other hand, the word "lie" is used to describe something that is resting or reclining. So, you would say, "My prized collection of baseball cards lies neatly arranged in their binder."

Now, let's get into the nitty-gritty of these grammatical nuances. The key to differentiating between "lay" and "lie" lies in the action itself, just as it did when Rickey Henderson broke the all-time stolen bases record in 1991. If you're actively placing or putting something down, use "lay." If something is simply resting or reclining, use "lie."

To help you remember, think of it like this: "Lay" requires a direct object, while "lie" doesn't. The baseball card itself isn't actively "laying" down; it's simply "lying" there in its binder. You "lay" down a bunt, while you "lie" down picking dandelions in right field.

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So, the next time you're alphabetizing your baseball card collection, remember these simple rules:

Use "lay" when you're actively placing or putting something down, like laying a card into a sleeve or laying cards into a binder.

Use "lie" when something is simply resting or reclining, like your cards lying neatly arranged in a binder or your cards lying scattered across the floor after spilling out of their sleeves.

Now, go forth and collect confidently, knowing that your grammar is as sharp as the corners of your 1989 Billy Ripken Fleer error card.

—Curtis Honeycutt is an award-winning syndicated humor columnist. Connect with him on Twitter (@curtishoneycutt) or at curtishoneycutt.com.

