

Make or Do?

The verbs “make” and “do” can be confused especially as in some other languages one verb is used for both. They are also both commonly used *active* verbs. Here are some guidelines to see how they are used differently as well some examples of common expressions with the two verbs.

General Difference in Meaning

With the common everyday uses of “make” and “do” it is possible to differentiate between them with these general concepts:

- 🔊 **Do** is generally used for **work: tasks** or **chores**, in particular for **housework, maintenance** or **physical activities** that aren't a game. Notice it is often used with the -ing structure

For example:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Do the shopping | Do your homework |
| Do the washing up | Do some gardening |
| Do the accounts | Do exercise |

- 🔊 **Make** is generally used for activities where you **create, construct** or **instigate something new**

For example:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Make lunch (<i>create</i>) | Make cars (<i>construct</i>) |
| Make a film (<i>create</i>) | Make an appointment (<i>instigate</i>) |
| Make a shelf (<i>construct</i>) | Make friends (<i>instigate</i>) |

- Using the ideas above, decide which of these words/phrases go with “make” or “do” and put them in the appropriate column:

sport dinner some work the cleaning progress yoga your job
a deal a mess a cake a mistake press ups the paperwork a phone call a profit
an exam a joke a change business a decision the ironing a promise

MAKE	DO

There are, of course, plenty of exceptions to these “rules”. For example, “make the bed” is a *chore* we associate with *housework* and “do good” might fit better in the *instigate* category. However, this summary aims to give general guidelines, rather than strict rules, to help understand the different uses of the verbs.

- More common expressions with “**make**” (these also come under the categories of *create*, *construct* & *instigate*):

Make a journey, a suggestion, money, an effort, an excuse, a noise, an offer, a plan, peace, love, an exception, a fortune, an announcement, a living, a nuisance, a request

- Indefinite expressions using “**do**”:

Do something/nothing/anything, better/worse, what shall we do? What can be done?

- More common expressions with “**do**”:

Do someone a favour, one’s best, good, harm, damage, one’s hair, one’s teeth

There are also many idiomatic expressions with “make” and “do”. The more you read and listen to English the more you will become familiar with these, but here are some of the most common examples you might come across:

Make up your mind	Do away with something
Make the most of something	Do one’s part
Make do with something	Do or die
Make your mouth water	Do something in vain
Make a meal of something	Do someone proud
Make a mountain out of a molehill	Do something on the fly
Make a fool out of someone	Do the trick

- Match the above expressions with the definitions below:

Exaggerate a problem	_____
Act without achieving the desired result	_____
Achieve the desired result, function as a solution	_____
Decide something	_____
Get rid of or throw out	_____
Act quickly without thinking	_____
Over complicate a task	_____
Enjoy or profit from a situation	_____
Use something that may not be ideal for the job	_____
Complete a task or utterly fail	_____
Play your role	_____
When something smells/looks very appetising	_____
Cause someone to seem stupid	_____
Cause someone to be very pleased with you	_____