A Horse is a Hoarse, Of Course, Of Coarse

A little joke to start:

A Shetland Pony walked into a fast food joint and waited in line to place his order. When it was his turn, he said (in a soft, raspy voice),

"I'll have a Hamburger Happy Meal with a Coke, please."

The woman behind the counter frowned and replied, "Sir, you'll have to speak up. I can't hear you." The pony looked at her and repeated (in the same soft, raspy voice),

"I'll have a Hamburger Happy Meal with a Coke, please."

The woman frowned again and looked rather aggravated. She said sharply, "Sir, I still can't hear you. There are lots of people waiting in line. You'll have to speak up!"

The pony smiled understandingly and replied (in the same soft, raspy voice), "I'm sorry. You've got to excuse me. I'm just a little hoarse."

Why was this little joke funny? If you read carefully, the joke made fun of the word “hoarse” and “horse”. A shetland pony, indeed, is a SMALL horse. The woman could not understand the small horse, because its voice was raspy and HOARSE.

Get it? Ok, let’s move forward to the lesson. (I tried)
Homonyms/Homophones

Homophone and homonym are used synonymously these days, but I always like to distinguish between them.... both have the same prefix from the ancient Greek *hemos*, meaning 'the same' but the root of each has a quite different meaning; Let's look at the roots:

- **phone** comes from the Greek for 'sound, voice', ......while
- **-nym** is from the Greek word *onyma* meaning 'name.'

**What IS the difference?** Homophones are words which have the same sounds - but different meanings and different spelling. There are HUNDREDS of these in the English language.

Examples: *air* (we breathe) and *heir* (person who inherits wealth)
- *marshal* (an officer) and *martial* (warlike)
- *bazaar* (market) and *bizarre* (strange)
- *bear* (the animal) and *bare* (unclothed).

Homonyms are words with the **same sound and the same spelling**, but with **different** meanings.

Example: *bear* (the animal) and *bear* (to carry).

For the sake of simplicity, in this lesson we will only focus on homophones. I just wanted to expose you to the differences between the two.

FYI - To confuse matters further, the word *homograph* is used to refer to words with the same spelling but different pronunciations and different meanings, such as polish (shine) and Polish (the language). But NOT to worry, we are not dealing with those AT ALL!

**To sum up:**

- Homonyms and Homophones are very similar, but not quite.
- It is not vital to distinguish between the two for the purpose of this lesson and assignments.
- It is important to use the correct one in your writing in order to convey your message clearly to your intended audience. (and to be a respected writer)
- Be sure to look the one up that you are not sure of. Relax, have fun! These are not painful.