

# Word for Word

## Peruse or Pursue?

*Peruse* and *pursue* may look and sound similar, but the words have vastly different meanings.

*Peruse* means to examine something—usually something written—carefully or thoroughly.<sup>1</sup>

### Examples:

The researcher perused several dozen detailed articles on the subject before deciding which to feature in her paper for *Nature Reviews Cancer*.



The detective perused the crime scene with an eagle eye; any grisly detail might uncover the identity of the bicycle seat thief.

*Peruse* can also mean to look at something in a leisurely or cursory manner.<sup>1</sup>

### Examples:

He perused the headlines in the morning paper. Finding nothing of interest there, he turned to watch the birds in his backyard for entertainment.

She briefly perused the menu before settling on her usual selection: boiled liver and onions with a pint of strong lager.

*Pursue*, in contrast, means to seek to accomplish something.<sup>2</sup>

**Examples:**

To test their hypothesis, the researchers pursued three specific aims.

He ran away from the circus to pursue a career in biomedical research.

*Pursue* can also mean to follow something (or somebody) with the intent to capture or kill.<sup>2</sup>

**Examples:**

Hungry for its first meal in weeks, the cheetah pursued the gazelle across the grassy plain.

The detective pursued the bicycle seat thief through the crowded streets of Rome; she would not get away this time.

A good rule of thumb is to use *peruse* if you're writing about *reading* something but use *pursue* if you're writing about *chasing* something.

**References**

1. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/peruse>. Accessed October 30, 2019.
2. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pursue>. Accessed October 30, 2019.

—Joe Munch

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