

Troublesome Translations



For native German speakers, finding the right translation, from German to English or vice versa, can sometimes be a challenge. Here are some examples to help you figure out how to say certain words. And to make sure you keep yourself out of trouble.

Its or it's?

It's very easy to confuse *it's* with *its*. *Its*, without an apostrophe, is the possessive version of a pronoun. 'The spider spun its web.'

It's, with an apostrophe, is a contraction of 'it is' or 'it has'. 'It is a very beautiful web' can be contracted to 'It's a very beautiful web'.

So, if you're bit unsure which to use, try adding 'it is' or 'it has' to the sentence and see if it still makes sense. If not, you need to use *its*.

1. She said _____ only a fifteen-minute drive, so we should be there before 4 p.m. (Sie sagte, es ist nur eine fünfzehnminütige Fahrt, also sollten wir vor 16 Uhr dort sein.)
2. Tennis has lost _____ appeal for Janice because of her arthritis. (Tennis hat wegen ihrer Arthritis seinen Reiz für Janice verloren.)
3. _____ become very difficult to find a parking spot near the library since it moved to _____ new location. (Es ist sehr schwierig geworden, einen Parkplatz in der Nähe der Bibliothek zu finden, seit diese an ihren neuen Standort umgezogen ist.)

Look, see or watch?

Look, *see* and *watch* all have different meanings and are used in different situations.

Look means to direct your eyes in a particular direction.

See means to become aware of someone or something by using your eyes.

Watch means to look at someone or something for an amount of time and pay attention to what is happening.

1. Come and _____ at this photo that Stefan just sent me. I look terrible! (Komm und schau dir dieses Foto an, das Stefan mir gerade geschickt hat. Ich sehe schrecklich aus!)
2. The cat likes to sit on the windowsill to _____ what's happening in the garden. (Die Katze sitzt gerne auf der Fensterbank, um zu beobachten, was im Garten passiert.)
3. Has anyone _____ my glasses? I'm blind without them! (Hat jemand meine Brille gesehen? Ich bin blind ohne sie!)

The solutions are on page 35.