

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.

Assure, ensure or insure?

They sound so similar and are easy to mix up for English learners: *ensure*, *assure* and *insure*. Although they can all be defined as meaning 'to make certain, to guarantee', the three words are used in different situations.

Assure means to tell someone that something will definitely happen. 'The teacher *assured* the students that the test would only cover Chapter One.'

Ensure, meanwhile, is to guarantee that something will happen. 'Correcting homework as a class will *ensure* that your students have understood the day's lesson.'

Finally, *insure* means to buy insurance for something. For example, 'Do you want to *insure* your package against damage or theft?'

1. I can _____ you that your package will arrive on time. (Ich kann Ihnen versichern, dass Ihr Paket pünktlich ankommen wird.)

2. He took steps to _____ that his gift would arrive before December 25th. (Er traf Maßnahmen, um sicherzustellen, dass sein Geschenk vor dem 25. Dezember ankommen würde.)

3. I _____ my car for the maximum amount as it's always better to be safe than sorry. (Ich versichere mein Auto für den Höchstbetrag, da es immer besser ist, auf Nummer sicher zu gehen.)

Personal or personnel?

Let's not get *personal* about the *personnel*! Again, these are two words that look similar but have entirely different meanings.

Personal is an adjective, which means 'related to that person'. The stress in pronunciation falls on the first syllable, namely 'PERsonal'.

Personnel is a noun meaning 'the staff of a company'. The stress here falls on the last syllable, 'personNEL'.

1. This company's biggest asset is its _____. They are all so motivated and productive. (Der größte Gewinn dieses Unternehmens ist sein Personal. Sie sind alle so motiviert und produktiv.)

2. He had to take some leave for _____ reasons. (Er musste sich aus persönlichen Gründen Urlaub nehmen.)

3. I can only tell you what I know from _____ experience.

(Ich kann Ihnen nur sagen, was ich aus persönlicher Erfahrung weiß.)

The solutions are on page 35.