

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.

Social or sociable?

Germans learning English tend to confuse *social* and *sociable*. Something *social* is an activity where individuals talk with other people or carry out activities as a team or in a group. *Social* describes someone who is extroverted or outgoing. *Social* can also describe things that have to do with society in general.

Sociable, however, means liking to be with and talk to other people, or enjoying friendly and pleasant *social* relations. For example, 'They are *sociable* people who like going to parties.' One easy way to distinguish between the two is to consider that *social* people like going out and being with people, while *sociable* people are easy for others to get along with.

1. James is a very _____ person; he knows lots of people and often goes to parties. (James ist eine sehr soziale Person; er kennt viele Leute und geht oft auf Partys.)
2. The three-day business trip also included a programme of _____ events. (Die dreitägige Geschäftsreise beinhaltete auch ein Programm mit gesellschaftlichen Veranstaltungen.)
3. _____ people do not enjoy living alone and prefer company. (Gesellige Menschen leben nicht gerne alleine und bevorzugen Gesellschaft.)
4. She missed her friends during the global pandemic and longed for _____ contact. (Sie vermisste ihre Freunde während der weltweiten Pandemie und sehnte sich nach sozialem Kontakt.)
5. The ambitious women wanted to climb the _____ ladder. (Die ehrgeizigen Frauen wollten die soziale Leiter aufsteigen.)

Prescribe or proscribe?

One letter can make a big difference. *Prescribe* and *proscribe* sound similar but have very different meanings. To *prescribe* is to recommend or dictate a rule for others to follow. To *proscribe* is to forbid or demand a stop to something.

Prescribe is often used at the doctor's surgery. When a doctor writes you a *prescription*, she *prescribes* medicine to heal you and make you better.

An easy trick to remember: think of the 'e' in *prescribe* for 'me' and the 'o' in *proscribe* for 'oh no, don't'.

1. The US Constitution _____ government discrimination on the basis of race. (Die US-Verfassung verbietet Diskriminierung durch die Regierung aufgrund von Rassenzugehörigkeit.)
2. If physicians want to help their patients, they need to _____ affordable medical interventions. (Wenn Ärzte ihren Patienten helfen wollen, müssen sie erschwingliche medizinische Eingriffe verschreiben.)
3. Name one country that does not _____ theft. (Nennen Sie ein Land, das Diebstahl nicht verbietet.)
4. The law _____ a minimum of 10 years' imprisonment for your criminal offence. (Das Gesetz schreibt eine Freiheitsstrafe von mindestens 10 Jahren für Ihre Straftat vor.)

The solutions are on page 34.