

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.

'Denglish' – misusing borrowed words

Confusingly, there are a number of existing English words that are wrongly used by Germans in conversation.

One of the most common ones is *handy*. The English word *handy* means *convenient*, *practical* or *nearby*; it has nothing to do with mobile phones! Likewise, an *old-timer* means someone who has been living in the same place or doing the same job for a long time; it has no connection to classic cars. And beware: Germans may refer to the public screenings of live or recorded events as *public viewings*, but in many English-speaking countries this refers to the time when family and friends come to see a deceased person after they have been prepared by a funeral home.

1. I'll give you a call when you're on the road. What's your _____ number, please?

(Ich rufe Sie an, wenn Sie unterwegs sind. Wie lautet Ihre Handynummer?)

2. My brother has an impressive _____ car collection.

(Mein Bruder hat eine beeindruckende Oldtimersammlung.)

3. Do you want to watch the public _____ of the football final?

(Möchtest Du die öffentliche Vorführung des Fußballfinales sehen?)

Further examples of 'Denglish' to avoid

There are many other English words that Germans often unknowingly misuse. Here are a few common ones:

- *Pullunder* may be the opposite of *pullover* but this item of knitwear is actually known in English as a *tank top* or *sleeveless pullover*.
- *Beamer* doesn't mean *video projector* in English; it's a slang word for a BMW.
- Don't talk about dressing up in a *smoking*; the correct English word is a *tuxedo*.
- And don't ask someone to turn up the *box* if you want the music louder; turn up the *loud speakers* instead.
- Don't speak about *mobbing* if someone is harassing you in the workplace; it's known as *bullying* in English.
- Every hotel in Germany seems to have a *wellness area*. In English, you would talk about a *spa* if you want to go for a massage or to the sauna.
- Talk about *hitchhiking*, not *tramping* – a *tramp* in English is another word for a homeless person.

So the next time you use an English word in a German sentence, think twice and make sure you're not really speaking 'Denglish'!

The solutions are on page 35.