

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.



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Hear, listen or overhear?

Listen up: there are importance differences between *hear*, *listen* and *overhear*. We use *hear* to refer to sounds that come into our ears. As soon as we wake up and walk around, we *hear* things.

When we *listen*, we try to *hear*. We pay attention and try to understand every sound. For instance, 'I'm *listening* but I can't *hear* anything.'

Meanwhile, *overhear* is when you hear something without the speaker knowing it. For example, 'Did he *overhear* her conversation with Jacob?'

1. She glanced nervously in the direction of the door, as she feared that her mother might _____ the conversation. (Sie warf einen nervösen Blick in Richtung Tür, da sie befürchtete, dass ihre Mutter das Gespräch mithören könnte.)

2. Can you speak louder please? I can't _____ you with all that noise in the background. (Kannst du bitte lauter sprechen? Mit all den Geräuschen im Hintergrund kann ich dich nicht hören.)

3._____ to this song. Can you understand the meaning behind the words? (Hör dir dieses Lied an. Kannst du die Bedeutung hinter den Worten verstehen?)

Remember or remind?

Try to remember the difference between *remember* and *remind*. These two verbs can cause confusion among English learners.

Here's the difference: to *remember* is to bring something to your mind again. For example, '*Remember* to turn off the stove before you leave the house.'

To *remind* is to cause someone to *remember* something. For example, 'The heat *reminds* me of last year's summer holiday in Greece.'

1. He needs someone to _____ him that there is more to life than work. (Er braucht jemanden, der ihn daran erinnert, dass es mehr im Leben gibt, als nur Arbeit.)

2. The short time together had been enough to _____ her just how strong the bond was between them. (Die kurze Zeit zu zweit hatte sie daran erinnert, wie stark die Verbindung zwischen ihnen war.)

3. Did you _____ to lock the door before you left for work? (Hatten Sie daran gedacht, die Tür zu verschließen, bevor Sie zur Arbeit gingen?)

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Big or great?

It can be a big problem, mixing up *big* and *great*. But don't worry – help is at hand.

As adjectives, *big* refers to something large, for example, 'Elephants are *big* animals.'

Meanwhile, *great* describes something very large in either size, extent, importance, or number, such as: 'A *great* decision made by a *great* man.' You can also use great as a positive interjection, expressing happiness. And that's *great*!

1. We all considered the party to be a _____ success. (Wir haben die Party alle als großen Erfolg betrachtet.)

2. She was only two years old, but she was _____ for her age. (Sie war erst zwei Jahre alt, aber sie war groß für ihr Alter.)

3. Anna reassured me that it was no _____ deal. (Anna beruhigte mich, dass es keine große Sache war.)

4. Thanks for helping out today. You're doing a _____ job! (Danke, dass Du heute mithilfst. Du machst einen tollen Job!)

High or tall?

Don't confuse *high* with *tall*.

We use the adjective *high* for objects that are a long way above the ground. For example, 'There are some *high* mountains in the north of the country.'

We don't use *high* when we talk about people. We use *tall* instead. For example, '*Tall* people often get backache.'

1. The light switch is too _____ for a child to use. (Der Lichtschalter ist zu hoch für ein Kind.)

2. Sally is very ____ and slim – she could get a job as a model! (Sally ist sehr groß und schlank – sie könnte einen Job als Model bekommen!)

3. You know that very _____, white building just where the motorway begins – that's where I work. (Sie kennen das sehr hohe, weiße Gebäude genau dort, wo die Autobahn beginnt – dort arbeite ich.)

4. We climbed the _____ mountain in the country in just under six hours. That's quite a feat! (Wir haben in knapp sechs Stunden den höchsten Berg des Landes bestiegen. Das ist eine ziemliche Leistung!)

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Many or much?

There are many examples of people confusing *many* with *much*.

Much precedes uncountable nouns – if you can't make the noun plural, then it's an uncountable noun. *Much* also indicates a large quantity and can normally be replaced by 'some' or 'a lot of'. For example, 'Is there *much* food in the fridge?'

Many precedes countable nouns – if a number can come before the noun, then the noun is countable. It can be replaced by 'a lot of' or 'several'. For example, 'There are *many* snacks in the fridge.'

1. I don't have _____ time, and you don't have _____ money. (Ich habe nicht viel Zeit und du hast nicht viel Geld.)

2. We have _____ friends, in _____ different countries all over the world. (Wir haben viele Freunde in vielen verschiedenen Ländern auf der ganzen Welt.)

3. How _____ did you pay for that car? It looks top of the range. (Wie viel hast du für das Auto bezahlt? Es sieht erstklassig aus.)

4. There are almost as _____ Americans here as there are in California. (Es gibt hier fast so viele Amerikaner wie in Kalifornien.)

Fewer or less?

In the same way, it's easy to mix up *fewer* and *less*.

Fewer is used for countable nouns and *less* is used for uncountable nouns. For example, if there were *fewer* cars in the world then there would be *less* pollution.

1. I wish you would turn off the light, so we could use _____ electricity. (Ich wünschte, Sie würden das Licht ausschalten, damit wir weniger Strom verbrauchen könnten.)

2. This car park is too crowded. I wish there were _____ cars. (Dieser Parkplatz ist zu voll. Ich wünschte, es gäbe weniger Autos.)

3. There are now _____ than five children living in my house, so there is _____ noise than before. (In meinem Wohnhaus leben jetzt weniger als fünf Kinder, sodass weniger Lärm herrscht als früher.)

4. I have _____ pairs of shoes than I used to have but more clothes so there is still _____ room in my wardrobe. (Ich habe weniger Paar Schuhe als früher, aber mehr Kleidung, sodass in meinem Kleiderschrank immer noch weniger Platz ist.)

The solutions are on page 34.