*Look at*, *see* or *watch*?

***Look at***

When we *look at* something, we direct our eyes in its direction and pay attention to it:

[the speaker is sitting at her computer] - *Come and****look at****this photo Carina sent me.*

***Look at****the rabbit!*

**Warning:**

When *look* has an object, it is followed by *at*:

***Look at****the rain. It’s so heavy.*

Not: ~~Look the rain~~.

***See\****

*See* means noticing something using our eyes. The past simple form is *saw* and the past participle form is *seen*:

*I****saw****Trevor at the shopping centre yesterday.*

*Has anyone****seen****my glasses?*

*\*[see also p. 3]*

***Watch* as a verb**

*Watch* is similar to *look at*, but it usually means that we look at something for a period of time, especially something that is changing or moving:

*We****watch****television every evening.*

*I like to sit at the window to****watch****what’s happening in the garden.*

**Warning:**

We use *see*, not *watch*, when we talk about being at sports matches or public performances, such as films, theatre and dramas. However, we *watch* the television:

*We****saw****a wonderful new film last night. You’ll have to go and****see****it while it’s in the cinema.*

Not: ~~We watched~~… ~~You’ll have to go and watch~~ …

**Compare**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *I****watched****‘Phantom of the Opera’ last night on DVD.* | I was at home. |
| *I****saw****‘Phantom of the Opera’ last night.* | I was at a theatre or cinema. |

When we look at something for a long time, we use *watch*, not *see*.

**Compare**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *We****watched*** *whales jumping out of the water.* | *Watch* focuses on the process of seeing: we spent time looking at the whales. |
| *We****saw****whales jumping out of the water.* | *See* focuses more on the finished event. It doesn’t suggest that we spent much time looking at the whales. |

***Look at, see* or *watch*: typical errors**

* When there is an object, we use *at* after *look*:

*If you go for a walk by the river, you can****look at****the beautiful scenery.*

Not: … ~~you can look the beautiful scenery~~.

* We don’t use *watch* to talk about things that we see without trying:

*If you go to the forest, you might****see****some deer.*

Not: … ~~you might watch some deer~~.

* We don’t use *watch* when referring to a film in the cinema:

**A:** *We’re going to the cinema tonight*.

**B:** *What are you going to* ***see****?* (Not: ~~What are you going to watch?~~)

**A:** *I’m not sure. I really want to* ***see*** *the new Rocky movie but Nancy said she’s not interested in that*.

Not: ~~I really want to watch the new Rocky movie~~ …

* We use *watch*, not *see*, when we refer to something on the television:

*At night, I like to****watch****the television.*

Not: …~~I like to see the television~~.

# *See*

We use the verb *see* to talk about using our eyes to be aware of what is around us:

*He turned on the light so that he could****see****.*

*Did you****see****that falling star?*

We can use *see* followed by an object and a verb in different constructions:

*We****saw****their car drive past the house yesterday.* (*see* + object + base form)

Not: ~~We saw their car to drive past~~ …

*Did you****see****the children playing?* (*see* + object + -*ing* form)

*On television, we****saw****Nelson Mandela presented with a special prize.* (*see* + object + *-ed* form)

**Spoken English:**

When we see something as we are speaking, we usually say *can see* rather than the simple (*I see*) or continuous form (*I’m seeing*):

*I****can see****you in the photo. Look, there you are at the very back.*

We use *see* to mean ‘understand, know or be aware of something’. We don’t usually use this in continuous form:

[one person is explaining how to use a computer software program]

**A:** *… All that appears on the screen is what you put in the value*.

**B: *I see***. *Right*. **🡪** Not: ~~I’m seeing~~.

We can use *you see* when we are explaining something.

*They had no children. They married late*, ***you see***.

We also use *see* to mean ‘meet or come into contact with someone’, or ‘visit a place’:

*We went to****see****my mother at the weekend.*

***Have****you****seen****Jerry lately?*

We can use the continuous form of *see* when it refers to an arrangement to meet someone:

*I****’m******seeing****Harry at ten o’clock tomorrow. What shall I tell him?*

We can also use the continuous form of *see* to mean ‘meeting someone as part of a romantic relationship’:

*I asked her to go out on a date with me but she told me she****was****already****seeing*** *someone.*

*Look as a discourse marker*

We sometimes use *look* as a discourse marker but it needs to be used carefully as it is very strong. We use it when we are explaining something or making a point, especially when we are annoyed or speaking very forcefully:

[in a political debate]

***Look****, too many people have died in this war.*

[a boss talking to an employee]

***Look****, Mark, you have been late for work every day this week. Is there a reason?*

*You see*

We commonly use *you see* in speaking when we want to share knowledge with our listener or listeners. When we use *you see*, we assume that the listener or listeners do not have the knowledge that we want them to have:

*OK, we’ll try to be there but,****you see****, since my accident, I’m a bit nervous about driving on the motorway.*

***You see****, I don’t think she likes folk music so I think she’ll say no.*

*You know*

We use *you know* very commonly in speaking. It is used to check with our listeners that we share the same knowledge. When we use *you know*, we assume that the listener or listeners do have the knowledge that we want them to have:

*Well, what can I say,****you know****, I want my career to go far.*

**A:** *How was the match?*

**B:** *Well, they played OK but the defence was*, ***you know***, *the same as always*.

*You know* is also sometimes used to allow us time to think when we are speaking:

**A:** *Did you like the play?*

**B:** *Well, I’m not sure, it was*, ***you know***, *it was interesting*.

*I mean*

**Spoken English:**

We use *I mean* very commonly in speaking as a discourse marker. We use it when we want to add to what we have just said, to make a point clearer or to correct what we have just said:

*The law is not fair.****I mean****, it’s just not right that he didn’t go to prison.*(adding)

*It cost over £200.****I mean****, that’s more than most of us can afford.* (making something clearer)

*We need to ask Helen,****I mean****Harriet.* (correcting)

We often use *I mean* when hesitating, to make something negative less strong or to soften a disagreement:

**A:** *What do you think of Ben?*

**B:** *Well*, ***I mean***, *he’s not very confident and not always sure what he’s supposed to be doing*.

*I think Peter probably has a strong view about that. It’s interesting …****I mean****I … what I said earlier and****I mean****Peter might disagree with me.*

When we are not sure what to say, we sometimes use *I mean*. We often pause before or after it:

*She’s not coming back, er****I mean****, erm … she and I have broken up.*

**Warning:**

We don’t use *I mean* to introduce opinions. It is not the same as *I think*:

*I****think****we should stay at the Lakeside Inn.*

Not: ~~I mean we should stay at the Lakeside Inn~~.

***You know what I mean***

**Spoken English:**

We often use the phrase *you know what I mean* (or *if you know what I mean* or *do you know what I mean?*) in speaking, to check that our listener understands what we are saying or to show that we assume the listener has the same opinion about something:

**A:** *I just can’t go to Norah’s house*.

**B:** *Why’s that?*

**A:** *I just don’t like all the cats*. ***You know what I mean?*** *They’re everywhere even in the beds*.

**B:** *Yeah, I have to say I’m not a fan of cats either*. (A is checking that B understands that she doesn’t like all the cats in Norah’s house and she assumes that B is going to understand)

*Ken isn’t very helpful,****if you know what I mean****.*

*We’ve got white on the walls in the back room now, but I think he feels as though, pink is not the right colour for the front room,****do you know what I mean?***