



O'CONNOR ebook ***Avoiding Misunderstandings***



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O'CONNOR ebook

Avoiding Misunderstandings

Dear English Learner,

First of all thank you for downloading this **O'CONNOR ebook** from our website. I assume that if you are reading this, then you are looking for ways to improve your English-language communication at work.

You are not alone. It has become essential for hundreds of thousands of people throughout Germany to work, fluently, confidently and above all successfully in English.

We are pleased to be able to help you with our free Business English Support Service, of which our **O'CONNOR ebooks** are just one part. From our website www.oconnortraining.de, we give you the opportunity

- to test your English level
- to improve your Business English communication with O'CONNOR extra and the O'CONNOR video trainer and
- to polish your English language with our Tip of the Week tips and exercises.

2

If improving your Business or Technical English is a priority, why not consider training? You are welcome to contact us to discuss your learning goals and training preferences. We are happy to advise you on the benefits of different training combinations – face-to-face training, eLearning, telephone training or virtual classroom training - and to agree a programme to best suit your needs.

We're looking forward to hearing from you.

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Actual and Actually

Do you have problems knowing when to use “actual” and “actually” in English? You are not alone! They mean something completely different than the German “aktuell,” so be careful!

Actual (similar to German “tatsächlich”) can be used to refer to something genuine or real. If you show the police a copy of your ID, they will most likely say that they need to see your *actual* ID. Look at these examples:

- I’m sorry, Mr. James, but we need to see the *actual* building permit. This handwritten note won’t do.
- Okay, I can see all of these numbers for the costs of the parts of the machine. Can you give me the *actual* sum, so that I know how much the whole machine costs?

Actually (similar to German “eigentlich”) is a filler word, and is used to express “as a fact.” It is often used to show opposition. Look at these examples:

- “Did you enjoy the film, Mathias?” “*Actually*, I was expecting a lot more.”
- The vendor kept trying to sell me newspapers and magazines, but all I *actually* wanted was a hot dog.
- “Were you impressed by Mr. Schröder’s speech?” “Yeah, I was, *actually*.” (This implies that I was not expecting to be impressed.)

3

Aktuell

How can you express the German idea of “aktuell” in English? Some good choices are: *current*, *currently*, *at the moment*, *up-to-date*, *updated*, *newest* and *latest*. Here are a few examples for you:

- Jefferson, can you please get me the *latest* edition of Business Spotlight? This one is from last year.
- How is your project going *at the moment*, Annika? Are you making progress?
- Is this all *up-to-date* information, Janice? Do you have the *current* prices included?



Exercise: Actual and Actually

Read the following sentences and choose the correct word or phrase to complete them.
You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. You need to show your _____ passport. You can't just show them a copy.
 - a. actual
 - b. actually
 - c. current

2. You need to show your _____ passport. You can't just show them your old one.
 - a. actual
 - b. actually
 - c. current

3. Have you heard the _____ gossip from Hollywood?
 - a. actual
 - b. actually
 - c. latest

4. _____ I am finishing the Berlin project, but next week I will start my new project.
 - a. Actual
 - b. Actually
 - c. At the moment

5. A: Did you enjoy your holiday?
B: _____, the hotel and the weather were awful.
 - a. Actual
 - b. Actually
 - c. Currently

6. Do you have the _____ brochure? The one I have is from last year.
 - a. actual
 - b. actually
 - c. latest

7. It's nice to see you, but I _____ wanted to speak to your boss.
 - a. actual
 - b. actually
 - c. currently



Dates and Appointments

Billy Smith has a **date** with Sarah Brown tomorrow. Which of the following situations best describes what they are likely to be doing?

- a. discussing a business deal
- b. discussing possible treatment options for Billy's back pain
- c. having a romantic dinner in a restaurant
- d. It could be any of the three options. We need more information.

If you guessed option c – **having a romantic dinner in a restaurant** – you are correct. A *date* is always a *romantic meeting*. For example:

- “So, you’ve got a *date* tonight, have you? And, what’s the lucky guy’s name?”

For this reason, native speakers might raise their eyebrows if you tell them you have a date with your dentist!

5

Appointments

If you are meeting a doctor, a sales representative, an insurance agent, or a client, you would say you have an *appointment*. *Appointments* are generally formal meetings for things you must do or feel you need to do, not things you necessarily want to do. For example:

- I’ve got an *appointment* at the hairdresser’s at 4:30, but I think I’ll still make it to the restaurant by 6:00.

Meeting friends

If you are meeting someone just for fun, e.g. a friend, your mother, or colleagues for a drink, you wouldn’t use the word “appointment,” as it sounds too formal. You would just say what you’re doing and/or who you’re doing it with. For example:

- I’m meeting up with my friend Alex this evening.
- My mom and I are going shopping at the mall this afternoon.



Exercise: Dates and Appointments

Read the following situations and choose the correct phrase to express what you are planning to do in each case. You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. You are meeting a few colleagues for a drink.
 - a. I have a date with some colleagues this evening.
 - b. I am meeting a few colleagues for a drink this evening.
 - c. I have an appointment with my colleagues this evening.

2. You are going to the doctor for a check-up tomorrow.
 - a. I have a date with my doctor tomorrow.
 - b. I am meeting up with my doctor tomorrow.
 - c. I have a doctor's appointment tomorrow.

3. You are meeting your girlfriend/boyfriend for dinner at a restaurant this evening.
 - a. I have a date with my girlfriend/boyfriend this evening.
 - b. I have a meeting with my girlfriend/boyfriend this evening.
 - c. I have an appointment with my girlfriend/boyfriend this evening.

4. You are going to speak to the bank about getting a loan to buy a house.
 - a. I have a date with the bank.
 - b. I am going to get together with my bankers.
 - c. I have an appointment with the bank to discuss getting a loan.

5. You met a nice, attractive man at the pub last weekend and tonight he is taking you to the movies.
 - a. I have a date tonight.
 - b. I have a meeting at the movie theater.
 - c. I have an appointment to go the movie theater.

6. You are going for a hike with your cousins this weekend.
 - a. I have a date with cousins this weekend.
 - b. I am going for a hike with my cousins this weekend.
 - c. I have a hiking appointment with my cousins this weekend.



Eventually and Eventuell

What does the word “eventually” mean in the following conversation?

Tina: Are you coming to the office Christmas party this evening?

Dave: Eventually.

- a. Maybe Dave will go to the party. Maybe he won't.
- b. Dave will definitely go to the party, but he doesn't know the exact time.
- c. Dave will not be going to the party.

If you chose letter **b**, **Dave will definitely go to the party, but he doesn't know the exact time**, you are correct. In the above example, Dave would probably go on to say something like, “Eventually. First I have to wait until the babysitter comes, and she doesn't know when her meeting will be finished.” The English word “eventually” and the German word “eventuell” are false friends.

Eventually

To say that something will happen *eventually* is to say that it will definitely happen, but the speaker does not know when it will happen, and it may happen a long time from now. Here is another example:

- I'm going to buy a house *eventually*, but for now I'm just renting.
(I am definitely planning on buying a house, but I don't know when, and it probably will not be soon.)

7

Eventuell

If you would like to express the German “eventuell,” it is best to use words like these: *possibly*, *perhaps*, *maybe*. For example:

- If you need the confirmation urgently, *perhaps* we could fax it to you.
- We could *possibly* meet for a drink after the meeting, if there is time.
- *Maybe* I'll finish work early on Friday and then we can go see a movie.



Exercise: Eventually and Eventuell

Match the sentence on the left and its meaning on the right. You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Eventually I am going to buy a car. | a. There is a possibility that these two companies will merge, but it is not certain. |
| 2. Maybe I'll buy a car. | b. There is a possibility that I will buy a car, but it is not certain. |
| 3. Eventually the purchasing department will be in this building. | c. I am definitely planning to buy a car, but I don't know when I will do it. |
| 4. Perhaps the purchasing department will be in this building. | d. These two companies will definitely merge, but we don't know when. |
| 5. Possibly these two companies will merge. | e. There is a possibility that the purchasing department will be in this building, but it is not certain. |
| 6. Eventually these two companies will merge. | f. The purchasing department will definitely be in this building, but we don't know when. |



The First Floor

If you are visiting a subsidiary in an English-speaking country and are supposed to meet a co-worker for lunch in the cafeteria *on the first floor*, where should you go?

1. The floor at ground level
2. The floor above ground level

This is a trick question - you can't answer it unless you have more information. Are you in the USA or in Great Britain?

In Great Britain, the floors of a building are counted just as they are in Germany. Therefore, if you are visiting a company in Nottingham, you'll go to **the floor above ground level (option 2)**.

The *second floor* in Great Britain is just as in Germany: two floors above ground level.

In the US, however, the floor **at** ground level is called "the first floor." For Americans, there is no "ground floor" – the first floor is just the first one you walk into when you enter a building. Therefore, if you are visiting a company in Atlanta, you'll go to **the floor at ground level (option 1)**.

The *second floor* in the US would then be the floor above ground level (which is considered the *first floor* in Germany and Great Britain).



Exercise: The First Floor

Choose the correct floor in each of the following cases, depending on the location. You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. In Manchester: the first floor
 - a. The floor at ground level
 - b. The floor above ground level

2. In New York: the first floor
 - a. The floor at ground level
 - b. The floor above ground level

3. In London: the second floor
 - a. Two floors above ground level
 - b. The floor above ground level

4. In Denver: the second floor
 - a. Two floors above ground level
 - b. The floor above ground level

5. In Edinburgh: the first floor
 - a. The floor at ground level
 - b. The floor above ground level

6. In Los Angeles: the first floor
 - a. The floor at ground level
 - b. The floor above ground level



Half-Seven

If you arrange to meet a British colleague for a traditional Swabian meal at the Barfüßer at *half-seven*, what time will your colleague be at the restaurant?

1. 7:30pm
2. 8:30pm
3. 6:30pm

The correct answer is option 1, **7:30pm**. Do you know why?

In Great Britain, 7:30 is **half past seven**.

As this takes too long to say, it is often shortened to the easier *half-seven*.

Important: do not confuse this with the German *halb sieben*, because then you will be waiting for one hour at the restaurant for your colleague! In an hour by yourself, you could drink a lot of *hefeweizen* and then you might not make such a good impression on your visitor from abroad!

Note that English speakers don't use the 24-hour clock when making arrangements. It would sound very strange to your colleague's ears if you suggested meeting at nineteen thirty. The 24-hour clock is only used in the military and sometimes for public transportation schedules (trains, busses, etc.).



Exercise: Half-Seven

Read the following times and choose the correct equivalent in each case. You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. 9:30 is:

- a. half-nine
- b. half-ten
- c. half-eight

2. Half-three is:

- a. 4:30
- b. 2:30
- c. 3:30

3. Half-one is:

- a. 2:30
- b. 1:30
- c. 12:30

4. 11:30 is:

- a. half-twelve
- b. half-eleven
- c. half-ten

5. 5:30 is:

- a. half-five
- b. half-four
- c. half-six

6. Half-eight is:

- a. 9:30
- b. 8:30
- c. 7:30



If and When

You are not sure how long you will have to work this evening. If you get done a little early, you would like to meet your visitor for dinner near his hotel. How would you say this to your visitor in English?

1. If I finish work, I will meet you for dinner.
2. If I finish work early, I will meet you for dinner.
3. When I finish work, I will meet you for dinner.
4. When I finish work early, I will meet you for dinner.

The best option is sentence 2, **“If I finish work early, I will meet you for dinner.”**

Remember:

<i>If</i>	<i>When</i>
expresses <u>uncertainty</u> (i.e. we don't know if it will happen at all.)	expresses <u>certainty</u> (i.e. we know it will happen; we just don't necessarily know the exact point in time.)

Sentence 1 above, “If I finish work, I will meet you for dinner,” means you don't know if you will finish work ... ever!

Sentence 3, “When I finish work, I will meet you for dinner,” means that you will definitely meet your visitor for dinner, as soon as you have finished working. Your visitor will then be quite disappointed if you do not join him for dinner. He is expecting you with certainty.

Sentence 4, “When I finish work early, I will meet you for dinner,” also means that you will definitely meet your visitor for dinner when you have finished working. It is also certain that you will be finishing early. This sentence does not sound very natural, however.



Exercise: If and When

Read the following sentences and complete each one with either "if" or "when." You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. _____ it gets dark, the streetlights come on.
2. _____ the film finishes, would you like to go for an ice cream?
3. _____ I don't go to visit my parents this weekend, we could go to the mountains on Sunday.
4. _____ he grows up, George wants to be a plumber.
5. _____ the plane lands, can you please hand me my bag from the overhead compartment?
6. _____ you get another speeding ticket, your driver's license (BE licence) will be taken away.
7. " _____ you're interested in losing weight, call this number today!"
8. _____ her parents pass away, Jill will inherit the farm.
9. _____ you're finished writing that email, don't forget to spell-check it.
10. _____ I become a movie star, I will give you all ten thousand dollars.



Invite and Einladen

Read the following sentence:

“The organization team is going to Joe’s Pizza after the seminar, and we’d like to invite everyone to join us there for dinner.”

What does this sentence imply?

1. The organization team is going to pay for everyone’s pizza.
2. The organization team wants to have dinner with everyone at Joe’s Pizza.

If you guessed option 2, **The organization team wants to have dinner with everyone at Joe’s Pizza**, you are correct. The German verb “einladen” does not mean exactly the same thing as the English verb “to invite.” This can cause embarrassing difficulties if you assume that your companions will pay for your meal just because you’ve been “invited” to dinner. If someone *invites* you to do something, it just means that they ask you to join them. It does **not** refer to payment in any way.

15

If you want to make it clear that **you would like to pay for someone else’s meal**, what can you say? You CANNOT say, “~~You are invited.~~” This phrase does not make sense to native English speakers – they will have no idea what you mean. Try these phrases:

- “It’s my treat.”
- “This one’s on me.”
- “Let me get this.”

When **speaking with non-native speakers**, it is best to be a little more direct.

- “Let me get the bill/check.”

What else can you say if **you would like someone to accompany you, but you do not intend to pay for them**? Try:

- “Care to join me for dinner?”
- “Would you like to go for a drink?”
- “We’re going down the street to a restaurant after the meeting. Would you like to join us?”



Exercise: Invite and Einladen

Read the following pairs of sentences and decide which one is correct in each case. You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. You have been for a meal with a potential new customer from Italy. At the end of the evening, you wish to pay the bill. Which of the following could you say?
 - a. Let me invite you.
 - b. Let me get the bill.
 - c. Care to join me for dinner?

2. You'd like to go for a drink with a colleague. Which of the following could you say?
 - a. Can I invite you for a drink?
 - b. Would you like to go for a drink?
 - c. Let's drink!

3. You would like to invite your colleague and her husband round to your house for dinner. Which of the following could you say?
 - a. Let me get the check at our house tomorrow night.
 - b. Would you like to join us at our place for dinner tomorrow night?
 - c. You can eat dinner at our house tomorrow night.

4. You've been for a drink with an American business partner. You would like to pay for his drink. Which of the following could you say?
 - a. It's my treat.
 - b. You are invited.
 - c. I am paying.



“Mustn’t” and “Don’t have to”

How would you translate the sentence "Das müssen Sie nicht lesen"?

- a) You mustn't read that.
- b) You don't have to read that.

If you would say, "**You don't have to read that,**" you are correct. The expressions "mustn't" and "don't have to" are often confused by German speakers of English.

Remember that, as a general rule,
mustn't = darf nicht and
don't have to = muss nicht.

Must nicht

If you say, "You *mustn't* read that," you are giving your conversation partner a direct order to NOT read something, which can be offensive. You are saying, "You are not allowed to read that." What you want to say is that there is no need for the other person to read the document (because it's boring or irrelevant or whatever). These two meanings are quite different.

17

Darf nicht

Similarly, if you say, "You *don't have to* tell Harry that there will be a surprise party for him on Friday," you are telling your conversation partner that he/she CAN tell Harry about the surprise party, but it is not necessary. He/she may then tell Harry and ruin the surprise. Instead, you should say, "You *mustn't* tell Harry...."



Exercise: "Mustn't" and "Don't have to"

Fill in the blanks with the correct form of either "mustn't" or "don't have to." Remember to conjugate the verbs! You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. If you have time, you can start washing the dishes, but you _____.
2. You _____ touch anything in this porcelain shop, little Alex. It's all very fragile.
3. I _____ study this evening since the exam isn't for 3 weeks, but it might be a good idea anyway.
4. Rachel _____ come to my party if she isn't feeling well. I won't be offended!
5. We _____ say anything to Rob about his birthday present. It should be a surprise.
6. You really _____ help me clean up. I'll manage just fine.
7. We _____ say anything wrong in this meeting. If everything goes well, we could gain a new customer.
8. You _____ tell Angela this, but Mike is going to ask her to marry him!



Tonight

Which of the following sentences is correct?

1. I had a nightmare tonight.
2. I had a nightmare last night.

If you think choice **2**, "I had a nightmare last night," is right, you are correct.

Unlike in German, the term "tonight" refers only to the upcoming night – the present or the future. "Last night" refers to the night that has just finished. Therefore, you generally shouldn't use the past tense with *tonight*.

Here are some examples of the correct usage of both.

- Do you have any plans for *tonight*? Would you like to join us for a few drinks?
- Thanks for the invitation, but I think I'll go to bed early *tonight*. I didn't sleep well *last night*, and now I'm quite tired.
- I slept horribly *last night* – I just can't sleep on airplanes.

19

As you can see in the first example, English speakers often use *night* in place of *evening*.

Because each night is attached to only one day in English, we NEVER use expressions like "the night from Saturday to Sunday". In English, that is simply *Saturday night*. Similarly, you would NOT reserve a hotel room for "the night from Friday to Saturday" either. You would simply reserve it for *Friday night*.



Exercise: Tonight

Complete the following sentences with either "tonight" or "last night." You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. I slept well _____.
2. What are your plans for _____?
3. Were you able to sleep on the train _____?
4. Let's go out for a few drinks _____.
5. There was quite a storm here _____! It woke me up!



Writing Dates

If you have a meeting with a colleague from abroad on this date: 04.11.2015, when should you arrive for the meeting?

- a. On 4 November, 2015
- b. On April 11, 2015

This is a trick question.

If your colleague is using **British English**, your meeting will be on **4 November** (a).

If your colleague is using **American English**, your meeting will be on **April 11** (b).

British people write the date just like Germans do: day.month.year. Therefore, 04.11.2015 is 4 November, 2015 in British English.

Americans, on the other hand, write the date like this: month/day/year. Therefore 04/11/2015 is April 11, 2015 in American English.

21

How can you avoid this misunderstanding? It's best to always write out the name of the month. If your confirmation e-mail looks like this: "I am happy to confirm that I will attend the sales meeting on 4 November, 2015," there is no room for confusion. It is worth the few extra strokes on the keyboard if it will save you from coming to a meeting seven months late!



Exercise: Writing Dates

Choose the correct date from the two options in each case, depending on location. You can check your answers in the answer key on pp. 23-24.

1. British English: 02.10.2011
 - a. 2 October, 2011
 - b. February 10, 2011

2. American English: 02.10.2011
 - a. 2 October, 2011
 - b. February 10, 2011

3. British English: 10.07.2012
 - a. October 7, 2012
 - b. 10 July, 2012

4. American English: 10.07.2012
 - a. October 7, 2012
 - b. 10 July, 2012

5. British English: 11.12.1996
 - a. 11 December, 1996
 - b. November 12, 1996

6. American English: 11.12.1996
 - a. 11 December, 1996
 - b. November 12, 1996



Answer Key

Actual and Actually

1. a
2. c
3. c
4. c
5. b
6. c
7. b

Dates and Appointments

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. c
5. a
6. b

Eventually and Eventuell

1. c
2. b
3. f
4. e
5. a
6. d

The First Floor

1. b
2. a
3. a
4. b
5. b
6. a

Half-Seven

1. a
2. c
3. b
4. b
5. a
6. b

If and When

1. When
2. When
3. If
4. When
5. When
6. If
7. If
8. When
9. When
10. If

Invite and Einladen

1. b
2. b
3. b
4. a



“Mustn’t” and “Don’t have to”

1. don't have to
2. mustn't
3. don't have to
4. doesn't have to
5. mustn't
6. don't have to
7. mustn't
8. mustn't

Tonight

1. last night
2. tonight
3. last night
4. tonight
5. last night

Writing Dates

1. a
2. b
3. b
4. a
5. a
6. b