



Numbers What's the difference?

All the pairs of numbers below are pronounced in different ways and/ or have different meanings. Can you identify and explain the difference each time?

- 10.000 and 10,000
- 1,000,000 and 1,000,000,000
- 1.12 as a number and 1.12 as dollars
- 911 (the emergency telephone number) and 9/11 (the World Trade Center attacks)
- 1600 (an engine size) and 1600 (the normal way of saying the number)
- 15-0 (a tennis score) and 15-0 (a very unlikely soccer score)
- the short forms of 125 kilograms and 125 kilometres
- 5' and 5"
- 5/4/2010 written by a British person and 5/4/2010 written by an American person
- 0.5 in British English and 0.5 in American English
- 0.05 in British English and 0.05 in American English
- 1/4 and 1:4
- 90 minutes expressed as hours and 30 minutes expressed as hours
- 3rd and 1/3
- 5th and 1/5
- 4th and 1/4
- 2/7 and 2 1/7
- 2/3 and 233/234
- 080 543 543 said by someone from the UK and the US
- 02 134 5892 and 021 345 892
- 4322 1105 as a telephone number and a credit card number
- 090 22555 and 090 22255
- 4:45 and 5:15
- 4:55 and 5:05
- 04:45 and 16:45
- 16:10 and 16:11
- The meaning of "Jump out of the first-floor window" when a British person is speaking and when an American is speaking
- the years 2006 and 1966
- the years 1940 and 1904

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Suggested answers

- 10.000 and 10,000 – The former has a decimal point, so it is ten or ten point oh oh oh/ ten point zero zero zero
- 1,000,000 and 1,000,000,000 – A million/ a billion (or a thousand million)
- 1.12 as a number and 1.12 as dollars – Decimals are given as individual numbers, so the former is one point one two. The second is one dollar twelve (cents).
- 911 (the emergency telephone number) and 9/11 (the World Trade Center attacks) – Nine one one/ Nine eleven (or September eleventh)
- 1600 (an engine size) and 1600 (the normal way of saying the number) – Sixteen hundred and one thousand six hundred (although sixteen hundred is also possible)
- 15-0 (a tennis score) and 15-0 (a very unlikely soccer score) – Fifteen love/ fifteen nil



(or fifteen zero in American English)

- the short forms of 125 kilograms and 125 kilometres – One hundred and twenty five kilos (or kg)/ one hundred and twenty five k (or km). “Kilo” is common, but “k” is idiomatic and the others are rare.
- 5’ and 5” – Five feet/ Five inches
- 5/4/2010 written by a British person and 5/4/2010 written by an American person – British people write and say it day/ month/ year, so it’s the fifth of April 2010. Americans write and say it month/ day/ year, so it’s May (the) four(th) 2010.
- 0.5 in British English and 0.5 in American English – UK speakers say “nought” for zero before a decimal point, so it’s nought point five. In America it’s zero point five
- 0.05 in British and American English – In the UK people usually say “oh” after a decimal point, so it’s nought point oh five/ zero point zero five.
- 1/4 and 1:4 – A quarter (or a fourth)/ one in four
- 90 minutes expressed as hours and 30 minutes expressed as hours – An hour and a half/ Half an hour
- 3rd and 1/3 – Third/ a third, so very similar
- 5th and 1/5 – Fifth/ a fifth, so very similar
- 4th and 1/4 – Fourth/ A quarter (usually, though a fourth is possible)
- 2/7 and 2 1/7 – Two sevenths/ Two and a seventh, so easily confused
- 2/3 and 233/234 – Complicated fractions just use “out of”, so it’s two thirds (or, more rarely, two out of three)/ two hundred and thirty three out of two hundred and thirty four
- 080 543 543 said by someone from the UK and the US – The British tend to say “oh” in telephone numbers, so it’s oh eight oh five four three five four three/ zero eight zero five four three five four three
- 02 134 5892 and 021 345 892 – The gap means a pause, so the pauses come in different positions depending on what part of the telephone number the area code is.
- 4322 1105 as a telephone number and a credit card number – Phone numbers can include “double”, so it can be four three double two double one oh five. Four three two two one one oh five could be a phone number or others such as a credit or ID card
- 090 22555 and 090 22255 – You can also use the word “treble” in telephone numbers, although it is quite rare, so it could be oh nine oh double two treble five/ oh nine oh treble two double five
- 4:45 and 5:15 – (A) quarter to five and (a) quarter past five
- 4:55 and 5:05 – Five to (or before) five and five past (or after) five
- 04:45 and 16:45 – Most commonly quarter to four in the morning/ quarter to four in the afternoon. Also could be four forty five a.m./ four forty five p.m.
- 16:10 and 16:11 – With times that aren’t divisible by five, you must add the word “minutes” when telling the time the long way, so it’s ten past four in the afternoon/ eleven minutes past four in the afternoon.
- The meaning of “Jump out of the first-floor window” when a British person is speaking and when an American is speaking – British buildings start on the ground floor and then go first, second, third etc, so only the American one is at ground level and so likely to be safe!
- 2006 and 1966 – Years with two zeros in the middle tend to be pronounced like numbers, so it’s two thousand and six/ nineteen sixty six. Twenty oh six is also OK.
- 1940 and 1904 – Saying “oh” with a year ending in a single digit makes it easier to hear the difference, so it is nineteen forty/ nineteen oh four