

See, Look & Watch

See, look and watch are verbs which are used in relation to our sense of *sight*, but they are used differently and don't always correspond to similar verbs in other languages so they can be easily confused. This summary will set out the different meanings and uses of the three verbs

🔊 See

See is often used to talk about our *ability to see* and our *sense of vision* and so commonly used with the modal verb **can**. For example:

Can you see the top of the mountain?
Have you seen my glasses anywhere, I don't know where I put them?

to meet or visit someone.

I'm going to see my doctor tomorrow; I just made an appointment.
When can we come to see you? It's been ages!
See you later!

to understand something or someone:

I see what you mean, it's quite a complicated situation.
He can't see why you left, he's very confused.
I don't see what this has to do with you!

to consider whether something might happen *in the future*:

I hope it works. We'll see.
Let's see if she remembers to call.
I'm going to win this match – you'll see!
I'll see what I can do

🔊 Look

to look at something means you *are focussed on* it or *actively paying attention* to what you see. We use **see** in a more passive sense, an ability which doesn't require our full attention, whereas **look at** is a deliberate action.

I looked at your report this morning and it's very well written.
Look at that boy over there, isn't he Sammy's son?
We looked at a lovely apartment in central Paris but it was way too expensive.

look + adjective is used when talking about how someone or something appears.

He looks tired, he can hardly keep his eyes open.
It looks very old. Do you think it's Roman?

look like can be used to mean someone/thing resembles someone/thing else

She looks just like her mother when she was the same age
That looks like my jumper. Where did you find it?

it looks like is used for predicting or speculating on what is going to happen from what you can see now.

It looks like it's going to be sunny this afternoon. I'm going to the beach
She's playing really well; it looks like she'll win.

🔊 Watch

We use the verb **watch** in a similar way to how we use **look at**, but watch suggests there is an *ongoing activity* taking place where *things are changing, moving or developing*:

*Are you **watching** the football? It's a really exciting match.*

*You **need to watch** Bobby all the time, he's always getting into trouble*

*We've **been watching** the company closely; it's becoming one of our main competitors.*

🔊 Common Phrasal Verbs with "look"

Some phrasal verbs have literal meanings in that the preposition indicates the direction the person is looking. For example: **look through, look over, look up, look down, look away, look back, look out of, look into**

But with many phrasal verbs the preposition is used to give the verb an alternative meaning, often with a more idiomatic or metaphorical sense. For example:

look after	to care for someone or something <i>I can look after your cat while you're away if you like?</i> <i>My sister's looking after the children tonight.</i> <i>Nobody's been looking after these plants, they're dying!</i>
look around	to look at what is in a place such as a building, shop, town etc, especially when you are walking <i>We looked around the old town, it was really beautiful.</i> <i>The house is for sale so feel free to look around</i>
look for	to search for something <i>I'm looking for my umbrella, I think I left it here.</i> <i>I think she's looking for a new job</i>
look forward to	to be excited or happy about something that is going to happen in the future <i>I'm really looking forward to our trip to Scotland next month.</i> <i>We look forward to seeing you soon!</i>
look into	to investigate, research or find out more about something <i>I'm not sure what the situation is, but I'll look into it and let you know.</i> <i>This needs looking into immediately, we must find out what went wrong.</i>
look up	to search for information especially in a book or online <i>I don't know what that means, I'll look it up in a dictionary</i> <i>They must have looked up my number in the phone book</i>
have/take a look	to check something <i>There's a problem with the water heater, the plumber is having a look.</i> <i>I'm sure the room is empty, but you can take a look if you want.</i>

Look out! & **Watch out!** can both be used to warn someone of something bad that's about to happen or alert someone to something dangerous approaching.

***Look out** there's a car coming!*

***Watch out!** Mr. Richardson is in a bad mood this morning...*

look out for and **watch out for** are used when the situation is less urgent and to make someone aware of a potential problem.

*You need to **look out for** pickpockets when the market is crowded like this.*

***Watch out for** the trick questions, the examiners usually include one or two.*