



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



Numbers What's the difference? Suggested answers

NB. Americans don't say "and" in large numbers, so that word can usually be taken out in the examples below

- 10.000 and 10,000 – **The first is a decimal point, and 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 always given as individual numbers, so the first is one point one two (not one point twelve). 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 eleven)**
- 1600 (an engine size) and 1600 (the normal way of saying the number) – **Sixteen hundred and one thousand six hundred (although sixteen hundred is fairly common in American English)**
- 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 – **British English speakers say "nought" for zero before a decimal point, so it's nought point five. In American English it is zero point five**
- 0.05 in British and American English – **In the UK we usually say "oh" after a decimal point, so it's nought point oh five/ zero point zero five. The British version is more difficult but makes it less vital to hear the word "point"**
- 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, so different (unlike most fractions)**



- $2/7$ and $2\ 1/7$ – **Two sevenths/ Two and a seventh, so easy to get confused in you miss the “s” in the former or the “and” and “a” in the latter**
- $2/3$ and $233/234$ – **Complicated fractions just use “out of”, so it’s two thirds (or - 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 – **Telephone numbers can include “double”, so it is often four three double two double one oh five. Four three two two one one oh five could be a telephone number or other numbers such as a credit card, bank account, membership number 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 – **The most common way is to say quarter to four in the morning/ quarter to four in the afternoon (or evening). Other possibilities include 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. Therefore only the American one is at the level of the ground. The British person is therefore much more likely to injure or kill themselves!**
- 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**
- 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**