

English Verbs: “to look”, “to see” and “to watch”

“Look”, “see” and “watch” are verbs that we use to talk about using our eyes, but they are used in different contexts. Sometimes they can be interchanged, but not always.

1. to look (at)

When we “**look at**” something, we pay attention to it and we concentrate our eyes on it. We always use the preposition “**at**” if we include the object in the phrase.

- **Look!** It's snowing!
- **Look at** this photo! Isn't it beautiful?
- I'm **looking at** the sky, but I can't see the plane.
- John **looked at** Mary and smiled.

2. to see

When we “**see**” something, it happens accidentally, we don't pay attention to it.

- I can **see** a big grey cloud in the sky. I think it's going to rain.
- When I opened the window, I **saw** a macaw in the tree.
- I can't **see** you. Is your camera on?

3. to watch

When we use the verb “**watch**”, we are actively using our eyes, usually for a long time. “Watch” is similar to “look at”, but it needs more time. We usually watch things that move or change. We can also use the word to mean “take care of” or “look after” something or somebody.

- I don't like **watching** horror movies.
- If you **watch** the egg, you will see it hatch.
- The police **watched** the house all night, but nobody arrived or left.
- I'll have a salad. I'm **watching** my weight! (= “taking care of” my weight)
- I can **watch** the baby tonight if you want to go out. (= “look after” the baby)

Comparisons:

We **see** a shooting star.

We **look at** the moon.

We **watch** the sunset.

We **watch** TV.

We **look at** a computer screen.

Movies/Plays/Shows/TV

We can use “**see**” or “**watch**” for movies, plays, shows, concerts, TV, etc.

- We're going to **see** George Clooney's new movie tonight.
- We **saw** the All Blacks beat Wales in Cardiff last year.
- Did you ever **see** Michael Jackson live on stage?
- Have you **seen** any funny cat videos on YouTube?
- Last night we stayed home and **watched** a really good film on TV.
- When I'm bored I **watch** YouTube videos on my computer.
- I **saw** a play at the theatre last night. It was fantastic!

Exercise 1. <https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/cw-see-look-watch-quiz.htm>

Exercise 2. Complete the following using “look at”, “see” or “watch” (conjugate where necessary). Sometimes there are two possibilities.

1. Please _____ me when I'm talking to you!
2. Did you _____ the game last night?
3. I don't like to _____ suspense movies, they make me nervous!
4. _____ this puppy! It's so cute!
5. Can you please _____ my kids this afternoon, I need to go to the dentist.
6. Excuse me, I'm looking for my phone. Have you _____ it?
7. A: What are you doing?
B: I'm _____ the race. I never miss a Formula 1 event.
8. I've _____ that movie about five times. It's wonderful!
9. I've been _____ my computer screen for hours. My eyes are so tired.
10. A: What can you _____? B: Not much, it's very foggy.

To look in a specific direction

When we “look” in a specific direction, we can use a specific preposition. For example:

- in, out
- down, up
- left, right
- on, under
- ahead, behind
- there, here

Exercise 3. Complete the following using a preposition.

1. If you look _____ the window, you will see a squirrel in the tree.
2. If you don't understand the word, why don't you look _____ the dictionary?
3. *Advice to somebody walking on a tightrope:*
Don't look _____! Just look _____!
4. At a junction, you must look _____ and _____ before you go.
5. Look _____ – it's your mother!
6. Don't look _____, but there's a bear following us.....
7. A: Have you seen my phone?
B: Have you looked _____ your bed?
8. Hi Jane! Jane! Jane! Look _____! It's me!

