

English Vocabulary: “0” (zero)

There are many ways to refer to the number “0” (zero) in English. Here are the most common:

1) OH

For numbers which are not part of a calculation, we usually say “oh” for the number “0”. Note that the pronunciation is the same as the letter “O” in English. For example:

- My phone number is 555-4082 (“five five five, four **oh** eight two”)
- I live at 205 (“two **oh** five”) Green Street.
- The time is 10:02 (“ten **oh** two”).
- My hotel room is 608 (“six **oh** eight”)
- I love the TV show “Hawaii 5-0” (“Hawaii five **oh**”)
- My name is Bond, James Bond, 007. (“double **oh** seven”)
- I was born in 2005 (“twenty **oh** five”)

If, however, a code or password uses numbers and letters mixed, then we should say “zero” or “oh” to differentiate them. For example:

My password is TGO806DOP001 (“tee gee **oh**, eight **zero** six, dee **oh** pee, **zero zero** one”)

2) NOUGHT / NAUGHT (pronounced “nort”)

These words are a synonym of “nothing”. They are archaic and in modern English we would normally use the word “nothing” instead. You run the risk of sounding too formal if you use them.

- You do a lot of work, and it all goes for **naught**.
- Frank Sinatra - “**My Way**”:
*For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has **naught**.*

More information: <https://writingexplained.org/naught-or-nought-difference>

3) ZERO

“Zero” is the most common word for the number “0” when we talk about calculations, temperature or probability. For example:

- Give me a number from **zero** to ten.
- The result is 0.70526. (**zero** point seven **zero** five two six)
- The temperature is seventeen degrees below **zero**.
- There is **zero** chance that it will rain today. (=“no chance”)

To say decimal numbers less than 1, it is not necessary to say “zero”. For example:

0.78 --> “**nought** point seven eight” (UK)
 “**zero** point seven eight” (USA)
 or: “point seven eight” (universal)

4) NIL

For many sports, especially in the UK, the word “nil” is used. For example, the results of football games are given like this:

- 2 – 0 (“two **nil**”)
- 0 – 0 (“**nil nil**”)
- Manchester United beat Tottenham Hotspur, three **nil**.

The word “nil” is also commonly used in the USA to mean “zero” or “nothing”. For example:

- The value of a calculator in the classroom is practically **nil**.
- The chances of that happening are virtually **nil**.
- The interest from bank bonds is close to **nil**.

The phrase “nil by mouth” is a medical term meaning “nothing can be eaten or drunk”.

- Patient A234 is **nil by mouth** until her operation.

5) LOVE

In tennis, “love” means “zero”. This is actually a corruption of the French word “l’œuf”, which means “egg”. The association is due to the similarity of the shapes of an egg and the number “0”. For example:

- 15-0 --> Fifteen **love**
- 6-3, 6-2, 6-0 --> Six three, six two, six **love**

6) NULL

The word “null” is frequently used to mean “empty”. For example:

- The group of numbers which both end in zero and are odd is a **null set**.
- The results of the study are **null**.
- The effect of paracetamol on a migraine is **null**.
- A **null hypothesis** is one in which nothing happens.

The phrase “null and void” means “to have no power or validity”. For example:

- Due to time passed, his lawyer declared the contract **null and void**.

Only the words “zero”, “nil” and “null” can be used before a noun. For example:

- There is **zero probability** of rain today.
- The temperature is **zero degrees** today.
- There is **nil chance** of snow this week.
- In terms of materials, a one-dollar bill has **nil value**.
- A **null set** is the empty set.
- It is pointless to discuss a **null hypothesis**.

7) Other related words

- nothing
- nada (*from Spanish*)
- nix (*from German*)
- zilch
- jack, jack shit, jack squat (*American English*)
- diddly squat (*British English*)
- zip, zippo (*American English*)

