

Learning English: “to know” (saber vs conhecer)

The verb “to know” in English has two possible translations to Portuguese; “*saber*” or “*conhecer*”. For example:

- Peter is married! Did you know? ☾ *saber*
- Peter is married! Do you know his wife, Susan? ☾ *conhecer*

1. to know something (= *saber*)

When we use the verb “know” to refer to “information”, then it is an “intransitive” verb, in other words, it doesn’t need an “object”, but it can use “about”, “that” or “what/where/when/etc.”.

- A: What’s the time? B: I don’t **know**.
- A: All Dutch people speak English. Did you **know**? B: No, I didn’t **know**.
- Do you **know** about the recent tsunami in Indonesia?
- Did you **know** that there are only 8 planets in our solar system?
- Do you **know** what the time is?
- I don’t **know** when his airplane arrives.
- Only Captain Black **knows** where the treasure is.
- I really don’t **know** why he likes tattoos!
- I want to **know** why he did it.
- I **know** how to play piano. Do you **know** how to play?
- I **knew** how to play chess when I was young.
- Another ten minutes. I will **let you know** when I’ve finished.
(to let somebody know = to inform somebody)

2. to know somebody/place/thing (= *conhecer*)

When we use the verb “know” to refer to “somebody”, “a place” or “a thing”, then it is a “transitive” verb, in other words, it needs an “object”. It can be used in the Present Simple (“know/knows”) or the Present Perfect tense (“has/have known”), but rarely in the Past Simple tense (“knew”).

- Do you **know** a Dutch person?
- Jane **knows** Peter, but he doesn’t **know** her.
- I have **known** Charlie for ten years. Do you **know** him?
- I have visited Paris many times. I **know** it very well.
- Do you **know** Amsterdam?
- A: “Did you **know** John before he died?” B: “No, I didn’t.”
- Do you **know** this book? If not, I recommend it.

Common mistake:

- Incorrect: ~~We went to London and **knew** Big Ben.~~
Correct: We went to London and **saw/visited** Big Ben.

People: A: Do you **know** Peter? B: No, I have never **met** him.
 A: Do you **know** Peter? B: Yes, I **know** Peter. I **met** him yesterday.
 A: Do you **know** Peter? B: Yes, I ~~**knew**~~ him yesterday. (incorrect)
 A: Do you **know** Peter? B: Yes, I **have known** him for a long time.
 When I ~~**knew**~~ Peter, I was living in Paris. (incorrect)
 When I **met** Peter, I was living in Paris.
 When I **got to know** Peter, I was living in Paris.
 (to get to know somebody = to develop knowledge about somebody (can use past simple))

Places: A: Do you **know** London? B: No, I have never **seen** it.
 A: Do you **know** London? B: No, I have never **visited** it.
 A: Do you **know** London? B: No, I have never **been** there.
 A: Do you **know** London? B: Yes, I **saw** it last year.
 A: Do you **know** London? B: Yes, I **visited** it last year.
 A: Do you **know** London? B: Yes, I ~~**knew**~~ it last year. (incorrect)
 A: Do you **know** London? B: Yes, I **went** there last year.
 A: Do you **know** London? B: Yes, I **have been** there many times.
 I **got to know** London when I was at university.
 (to get to know a place = to develop knowledge about a place (can use past simple))

Some useful phrases:

- Do you know _____ ? Você conhece _____ ? (*uma pessoa*)
- Did you know that ? Você sabia que ? (*alguma coisa*)
- I knew (it)! Eu sabia! (*alguma coisa*)
- I didn't know! Eu não sabia! (*alguma coisa*)
- I know how to Eu sei (*habilidade*)
- I met _____ yesterday. Eu conheci _____ ontem. (*uma pessoa*)
- know-how conhecimento
- I will let you know. Eu vou te avisar. / Eu te aviso. / Eu lhe avisarei.

Exercise 1. For each sentence/question below, write 'S' (for 'saber') or 'C' (for 'conhecer'):

1. Jeff **knows** New York very well. _____
2. Do you want to **know** what I can do for your business? _____
3. Do you **know** where my cell phone is? _____
4. I **know** him, but he doesn't **know** me! _____
5. A: "You're getting bald!" B: "Yes, tell me something that I don't **know**!" _____
6. Angie – did you **know** that Maggie has been promoted? _____
7. Do you **know** how to speak German? _____
8. Do you **know** the Spanish series, "La Casa de Papel"? _____
9. An aunt of mine, who I don't **know**, will visit me tomorrow. _____
10. Do you **know** Times Square? Do you **know** where it is? _____

Exercise 2. Correct the following incorrect sentences:

1. I knew Susanna yesterday. She is a nice lady.

2. Have you ever known Paris?

3. A: Do you know Istanbul? B: No, I have never known it.

4. A: Do you know Poland? B: Yes, I knew it last year.
