

Ask about English

Wait/await

A question from Sergio Gil Rejas in Peru:

I have a question. I would like to know what is the difference between 'wait' and 'await'. When should I use 'wait' and 'await'? Thanks a lot and congratulations for the site. Kind regards.

Amos Paran answers:

Thanks for this, Sergio. There are two kinds of difference between 'wait' and 'await'.

The first difference is in the grammatical structures that are associated with these two verbs. The verb 'await' must have an object – for example, 'I am awaiting your answer'. And the object of 'await' is normally inanimate, not a person, and often abstract. So you can't say, 'John was awaiting me'.

The verb 'wait' can come in different structures. Firstly, you can just use 'wait' on its own: 'We have been waiting and waiting and waiting and nobody has come to talk to us.' Another structure that is very common is to use 'wait' with another verb – for example, 'I waited in line to go into the theatre.'

Very often, with 'wait', you mention the length of time that you have been waiting – for example, 'I have been waiting here for at least half an hour.'

Finally, speakers often mention what or who they have been waiting for – so, if a friend was really late you could say, 'I have been waiting for you for two hours!'

The other difference between the two verbs, 'wait' and 'await', is the level of formality. 'Await' is more formal than 'wait' – it would be used in formal letters, for example.

If you want a tip about using these two verbs, I would suggest that you should use 'wait for'; use 'await' only in cases where you are absolutely sure that you have heard good users of the language using it, and in cases where things are quite formal.

Audio available online at:

www.bbclearningenglish.com/radio/specials/1535_questionanswer

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