

Common Pitfalls 1

1. *wenn* means “if” more often than “when.”
2. Don’t confuse article and relative pronoun. In the noun phrase *eine Mittelschicht, zu der Kaufleute und Handwerker gehörten*, *der* is a relative pronoun referring back to *Mittelschicht* (f), whose dative case it expresses (*zu* + dat.): “a middle class, **to which** merchants and craftsmen belonged.”
3. The *-er* suffix characterizes comparative adjectives and adverbs (*interessanter, schneller*), but the same form is also found in simply positive feminine adjectives in the dative and genitive singular, as well as in the genitive plural (dat.sg. *in interessanter Weise*). Make sure to verify whether the context favours a comparative sense before translating it as one. Positive adjectives are more frequent than comparative ones!
4. *nicht. . . sondern* is a set combination expressing contrast (**not** grapefruits **but** oranges).
5. *so. . . so* is a set combination expressing contrast (**as** tall as John is, **so** small is Mary).
6. *logisch gesehen* simply means “logically.” *Gesehen* does not add any meaning. It also combines with other adverbs.
7. *etwa* most commonly means “approximately,” but it can also mean “for instance.”
8. *dürfen* in everyday German refers to permission (*darf ich... → “may I...”*), which in negated form makes “must not”; the dictionaries list these senses first. In academics, however, it often serves as an auxiliary of uncertainty, to be translated as “may” or “probably.”
9. *-end-* (i.e. [infinitive] + *d* + [adjectival ending]) is the present-participle marker. A word with this cluster near the end will usually be an agent noun/adjective (*Spanienreisende*).
10. The preposition *vor* “in front of, before” can also mean “ago”: *vor drei Jahren* “three years ago.”
11. *was X betrifft* means “concerning X, as regards X”
12. *darüber* means “about that/this/those,” referring back or forward to a nearby word, phrase, or clause. It is not a conjunction or adverb.
13. To express duration, a period of time is simply invoked in the nominative: *Michael hat drei Jahre in Toronto gewohnt* “Michael has lived in Toronto for three years”; *zwei Monate später* “two months later.” Not so, of course, when a preposition is used, as in 10 above.
14. “Relationship” for *Angehörigkeit* only makes sense in a genealogical context. In most situations, you’ll want “membership.”