

Chapter 1

I Say It How? Speaking German

In This Chapter

- ▶ Recognizing the German you already know
 - ▶ Pronouncing the basics
 - ▶ Using popular expressions
-

The best way to learn a new language is total immersion — so in this chapter, you jump right into the German language. This chapter shows you the German you may already know, explains how to pronounce German, and introduces you to some popular German expressions.

The German You Know

Because both German and English belong to the group of Germanic languages, they have quite a few identical or similar words. These words are called *cognates*.

Friendly allies (perfect cognates)

The following words are spelled the same way and have the same meaning in German and English. The only differences are the pronunciation and the fact that in German, nouns are always capitalized:

- ✓ **der Arm** (*dehr ârm*)
- ✓ **der Bandit** (*dehr bân-deet*)
- ✓ **die Bank** (*dee bânk*)
- ✓ **die Basis** (*dee bah-zîs*)
- ✓ **blind** (*blînt*)
- ✓ **die Butter** (*dee bû-ter*)
- ✓ **elegant** (*êle-gânt*)
- ✓ **die Emotion** (*dee êmoh-tsîohn*)
- ✓ **emotional** (*êmoh-tsîoh-nahl*)
- ✓ **der Finger** (*dehr fîn-ger*)
- ✓ **die Garage** (*dee gâ-rah-je*)
- ✓ **die Hand** (*dee hânt*)
- ✓ **das Hotel** (*dâs hoh-têl*)
- ✓ **die Inspiration** (*dee înspee-râ-tsîohn*)
- ✓ **international** (*în-ter-nâtsîo-nahl*)
- ✓ **irrational** (*îrâ-tsîoh-nahl*)
- ✓ **der Kitsch** (*dehr kîtsch*)
- ✓ **modern** (*moh-dêrn*)
- ✓ **der Moment** (*dehr moh-mênt*)
- ✓ **das Museum** (*dâs mû-zeh-ûm*)
- ✓ **der Name** (*dehr nah-me*)
- ✓ **die Nation** (*dee nâts-îohn*)
- ✓ **die Olive** (*dee oh-lee-ve*)
- ✓ **die Orange** (*dee oh-rong-je*)
- ✓ **parallel** (*pârâ-lehl*)
- ✓ **das Photo** (*dâs foh-toh*)
- ✓ **das Problem** (*dâs prô-blehm*)
- ✓ **die Religion** (*dee rêlî-gîohn*)
- ✓ **das Restaurant** (*dâs rês-toh-rong*)
- ✓ **die Rose** (*dee roh-ze*)
- ✓ **der Service** (*dehr ser-vîs*)

- ✓ **das Signal** (*dās zîg-nahl*)
- ✓ **der Sport** (*dehr shpôrt*)
- ✓ **die Statue** (*dee shtah-tooe*)
- ✓ **das System** (*dās zuus-tehm*)
- ✓ **das Taxi** (*dās tâ-xee*)
- ✓ **der Tiger** (*dehr tee-ger*)
- ✓ **der Tunnel** (*dehr tû-nel*)
- ✓ **wild** (*vîlt*)
- ✓ **der Wind** (*dehr vînt*)

Kissing cousins (near cognates)

Many words, like the ones in Table 1-1, are spelled almost the same in German as in English and have the same meaning.



Notice that the English “c” is a “k” in most German words.

Table 1-1 Words Similar in Meaning, Slightly Different in Spelling

<i>German</i>	<i>English</i>
die Adresse (<i>dee ah-<u>drê</u>-sse</i>)	address
der Aspekt (<i>dehr âs-<u>pêkt</u></i>)	aspect
blond (<i>blônt</i>)	blond/blonde
die Bluse (<i>dee <u>bloo</u>-ze</i>)	blouse
die Demokratie (<i>dee dêmô-krah-<u>tee</u></i>)	democracy
direkt (<i>dî-<u>rêkt</u></i>)	direct
der Doktor (<i>dehr <u>dôk</u>-tohr</i>)	doctor
exzellent (<i>êxtse-<u>lênt</u></i>)	excellent

(continued)

Table 1-1 (continued)

German	English
fantastisch (<i>fân-tâs-tish</i>)	fantastic
das Glas (<i>dâs glahs</i>)	glass
der Kaffee (<i>dehr kâ-feh</i>)	coffee
die Komödie (<i>dee kô-muo-dee-e</i>)	comedy
die Kondition (<i>dee kôn-dî-tsîohn</i>)	condition
das Konzert (<i>dâs kôn-tsêrt</i>)	concert
die Kultur (<i>dee kûl-toor</i>)	culture
lang (<i>lâng</i>)	long
die Maschine (<i>dee mâ-shee-ne</i>)	machine
die Maus (<i>dee mows</i>)	mouse
die Methode (<i>dee mê-toh-de</i>)	method
die Musik (<i>dee mû-zeek</i>)	music
die Nationalität (<i>dee nât-sîo-nahl-î-tait</i>)	nationality
die Natur (<i>dee nâ-toor</i>)	nature
der Ozean (<i>dehr oh-tseh-ahn</i>)	ocean
das Papier (<i>dâs pâ-peer</i>)	paper
perfekt (<i>pêr-fêkt</i>)	perfect
potenziell (<i>pô-tên-tsîel</i>)	potential (adjective)
das Programm (<i>dâs proh-grâm</i>)	program
das Salz (<i>dâs zâlts</i>)	salt
der Scheck (<i>dehr shêk</i>)	check
der Supermarkt (<i>dehr zoo-pêr-mârkt</i>)	supermarket
das Telefon (<i>dâs tê-le-fohn</i>)	telephone

German	English
die Theorie (<i>dee teh-oh-ree</i>)	theory
die Tragödie (<i>dee trâ-guo-dee-e</i>)	tragedy
die Walnuss (<i>dee vahl-nûs</i>)	walnut

False friends

As in every language, German contains some false friends — those words that look very similar to English words but often have a completely different meaning:

- ✓ **After** (*âf-ter*): If you want to avoid embarrassment, remember the meaning of this word. It means “anus” and not “after.” The German word for “after” is **nach** (*nahH*) or **nachdem** (*nahH-dehm*).
- ✓ **aktuell** (*âk-too-êl*): This word means “up-to-date” and “current,” not “actually.” The German translation for “actually” is **tatsächlich** (*taht-sêH-lîH*).
- ✓ **also** (*âl-zoh*): This one means “so, therefore” and not “also.” The German word for “also” is **auch** (*owH*).
- ✓ **bekommen** (*be-kô-men*): This verb is an important one to remember. It means “to get” and not “to become.” The German word for “to become” is **werden** (*vehH-den*).
- ✓ **Bowle** (*boh-le*): This noun is a mixed drink of fruits and alcohol and not a “bowl,” which in German, is **Schüssel** (*shuu-sel*) (the one you put food into) or **Kugel** (*koo-gel*) (sports-type ball).
- ✓ **brav** (*brahf*): This word means “well behaved” and not “brave.” The German word for “brave” is **tapfer** (*tâp-fer*).
- ✓ **Brief** (*breef*): This word is a noun and means “letter” and not “brief.” The German translation for the adjective “brief” is **kurz** (*kûrts*), and, for

the noun, **Auftrag** (*owf-trahgk*) or **Unterlagen** (*ûn-ter-lah-gen*).

- ✓ **Chef** (*shêf*): This one is the guy you take orders from, your boss or principal, and not the guy who's in charge of the cooking. The German word for "chef" is **Küchenchef** (*kuu-Hên-shêf*) or **Chefkoch** (*shêf-kôH*).
- ✓ **eventuell** (*eh-vên-too-êl*): This one means "possibly" and not "eventually," which would be **schließlich** (*shlees-lîH*) in German.
- ✓ **genial** (*gê-nee-ahl*): This adjective describes an idea or person "of genius" and has nothing to do with "genial." The German word for "genial" is **heiter** (*hy-ter*).
- ✓ **Kind** (*kînt*): This one is the German word for "child" and has nothing to do with the English "kind," which would be **nett** (*nêt*) or **liebenswürdig** (*lee-bens-vuur-digk*) in German.
- ✓ **Komfort** (*kôm-fôhr*): This word means "amenity" — describing something that is comfortable — and not "comfort." The German word for "comfort" is **Trost** (*trohst*).
- ✓ **Most** (*môst*): This German word means a young wine (or juice). The German word for the English "most" is **das meiste** (*dâs my-ste*). For example, you would say **die meisten Leute** (*die my-sten loy-te*) (most people).
- ✓ **ordinär** (*ôr-dî-nêr*): This word means "vulgar" rather than "ordinary." The German word for "ordinary" is **normal** (*nôr-mahl*) or **gewöhnlich** (*ge-vuohn-lîH*).
- ✓ **pathetisch** (*pâ-teh-tîsh*): This one means "overly emotional" and not "pathetic," which, in German, is **jämmerlich** (*yê-mer-lîH*) or **armselig** (*ârm-zeh-ligk*).
- ✓ **Provision** (*prô-vî-zîohn*): The meaning of this word is "commission" and not "provision." The German word for "provision" is **Vorsorge** (*fôhr-zôr-ge*) or **Versorgung** (*fêr-zôr-gungk*).

- ✓ **psychisch** (*psuu-Hîsh*): This word means “psychological” and not “psychic.” The German translation for “psychic” is **Medium** (*meh-dî-um*) (if you mean the person) or **telepathisch** (*têle-pah-tîsh*).
- ✓ **See** (*zeh*): This word means “lake” or “sea.” In German, the verb “to see” is **sehen** (*seh-hên*).
- ✓ **sensibel** (*zen-zee-bel*): The meaning of this word is “sensitive” and not “sensible,” which translates into **vernünftig** (*fêr-nuunf-tîgk*).
- ✓ **sympathisch** (*zuum-pah-tîsh*): This word means “nice” and not “sympathetic.” The German word for “sympathetic” is **mitfühlend** (*mît-fuu-lent*).

Lenders and borrowers

The English language has adopted a few German words and retained their meaning with a different pronunciation, such as **Kindergarten** (*kîn-der-gâr-ten*) (**Garten** is the German word for garden), **Zeitgeist** (*tsyt-gyst*), **Leitmotiv** (*lyt-mô-teef*), and **Angst** (*ângst*) — a term that lately has become quite fashionable.

However, many more English words have made their way into the German language. Sometimes, the combination of English and German leads to quite remarkable linguistic oddities. For example, you may hear **das ist gerade in/out** (*dâs îst gê-rah-de in/out*) (that’s in/out right now) or **check das mal ab** (*check dâs mahl âp*) (check that out).

The following English words are commonly used in German:

- ✓ **der Boss**
- ✓ **das Business**
- ✓ **die City**
- ✓ **cool**
- ✓ **das Design**

- ✓ **der Dress Code**
- ✓ **das Event**
- ✓ **Fashion** (used without article)
- ✓ **das Feeling**
- ✓ **das Fast Food**
- ✓ **Hi**
- ✓ **hip**
- ✓ **der Hit**
- ✓ **das Jet Set**
- ✓ **der Job**
- ✓ **das Jogging**
- ✓ **der Manager**
- ✓ **das Marketing**
- ✓ **Okay**
- ✓ **das Outing**
- ✓ **overdressed/underdressed**
- ✓ **die Party**
- ✓ **das Ranking** (mostly sports)
- ✓ **das Shopping**
- ✓ **die Show/Talkshow**
- ✓ **das Steak**
- ✓ **der Thriller**
- ✓ **das Understatement**
- ✓ **Wow**

Here are a few phrases using these English words in German:

- ✓ **Hi, wie geht's? Wie ist der neue Job?** (*hi, vee gēhts? vee îst dehr noye job*) (Hi. How are you? How is the new job?)
- ✓ **Super! Ich mache Marketing und mein Boss ist total nett.** (*super! îH m̄-He marketing ûnt myn*)

boss ist t̄t-tahl nēt) (Super! I'm doing marketing and my boss is totally nice.)

✓ **Warst Du in der City?** (*vahrst doo in dehr city*)
(Have you been downtown?)

And finally, German uses a few “fake” English terms. These terms wouldn’t be used in the same context in the English language. For example, the German word for a mobile phone is “**Handy**,” and a “**Party Service**” is a company that caters parties and public events.

Mouthing Off: Basic Pronunciation

The key to pronouncing a foreign language is forgetting your fear of sounding awkward and never getting it right. To master the language, you need to know the basic rules of pronunciation and concentrate on small units, which can gradually be expanded — from sounds to words and sentences. The rest is practice, practice, practice.

The German alphabet has the same number of letters as the English one, 26. However, many of the letters are pronounced differently than their English counterparts. The good news is that German words are pronounced exactly as they are. Here’s the German alphabet:

a (<i>ah</i>)	i (<i>ih</i>)
b (<i>beh</i>)	j (<i>yot</i>)
c (<i>tseh</i>)	k (<i>kah</i>)
d (<i>deh</i>)	l (<i>ell</i>)
e (<i>eh</i>)	m (<i>em</i>)
f (<i>eff</i>)	n (<i>en</i>)
g (<i>geh</i>)	o (<i>oh</i>)
h (<i>hah</i>)	p (<i>peh</i>)

q (<i>koo</i>)	v (<i>fow</i>)
r (<i>err</i>)	w (<i>veh</i>)
s (<i>ess</i>)	x (<i>eks</i>)
t (<i>teh</i>)	y (<i>üppsilon</i>)
u (<i>ooh</i>)	z (<i>tset</i>)

Pronouncing vowels

In German, vowels (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*) can have long, drawn-out vowel sounds or shorter vowel sounds. Luckily, a few general rules do apply:

- ✓ A vowel is long when it's followed by an "h," as in **Stahl** (*shtahl*) (steel).
- ✓ A vowel is long when a single consonant follows it, as in **Tag** (*tahgk*) (day).
- ✓ A vowel is long when it's doubled, as in **Teer** (*tehr*) (tar) or **Aal** (*ahl*) (eel).
- ✓ In general, a vowel is short when two or more consonants follow it, as in **Tanne** (*tā-ne*) (fir tree).

Table 1-2 gives you an idea of how to pronounce German vowels by providing you with examples and a phonetic script — the letter combinations that serve as the English equivalent of the German letter's pronunciation.

In this book's phonetic script, *diacritics* (the little "hats" on letters) (for example, *ê*) indicate that a vowel sound is short.

Table 1-2 Pronouncing German Vowels

<i>German Letter</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>As in English</i>	<i>German Word</i>
a (long)	ah	father	Laden (<i>lah-den</i>) (store)
a (short)	â	dark	Platz (<i>plâts</i>) (place)

<i>German Letter</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>As in English</i>	<i>German Word</i>
e (long)	eh	beige	Leben (<i>leh-ben</i>) (life)
e (short/stressed)	ê	let	Bett (<i>bêt</i>) (bed)
e (short/unstressed)	e (second e)	elevator	Lachen (<i>lâ-Hen</i>) (laughter)
i (long)	ee	deer	Ritus (<i>ree-tûs</i>) (rite)
i (short)	î	winter	Milch (<i>mîlH</i>) (milk)
o (long)	oh	foe	Lob (<i>loh-p</i>) (praise)
o (short)	ô	lottery	Motte (<i>mô-te</i>) (moth)
u (long)	oo	lunar	Tube (<i>too-be</i>)
u (short)	û	look	Rum (<i>rûm</i>) (rum)



Pronounce the German vowel “i” (long and short) like the English sound “ee”!

Pronouncing umlauts

You may have seen those pesky little dots that sometimes appear over vowels in German words. They’re called **Umlaute** (*ûm-low-te*) (umlauts). They slightly alter the sound of a vowel, as outlined in Table 1-3.



Nouns sometimes acquire an umlaut in their plural form.

Table 1-3 Pronouncing Vowels with Umlauts

<i>German Letter</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>As in English</i>	<i>German Word</i>
ä (long)	ai	hair	nächste (<i>naiH-ste</i>) (next)
ä (short)	ê	let	Bäcker (<i>bê-ker</i>) (baker)
ö	uo	learn	hören (<i>huo-ren</i>) (hear)
ü	uu	lure	Tür (<i>tuur</i>) (door)

Pronouncing diphthongs

Diphthongs are combinations of two vowels in one syllable (as in the English “lie”), and the German language has quite a few of them, as shown in Table 1-4.

Table 1-4 Pronouncing German Diphthongs

<i>German Diphthongs</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>As in English</i>	<i>German Word</i>
ai	y	cry	Mais (<i>mys</i>) (corn)
au	ow	now	laut (<i>lowt</i>) (noisy)
au	oh	restaurant	Restaurant (<i>rês-toh-rong</i>) (restaurant)
äu / eu	oy	boy	Häuser (<i>hoy-zer</i>) (houses) / Leute (<i>loy-te</i>) (people)
ei	ay / y	cry	ein (<i>ayn</i>) (a) / mein (<i>myn</i>) (my)
ie	ee	deer	Liebe (<i>lee-be</i>) (love)

Pronouncing consonants

You may be relieved to discover that the sounds of German consonants aren't as unfamiliar as those of the vowels. In fact, German consonants are either pronounced like their English equivalents or like other English consonants. Well, there are a couple of oddities and exceptions, which we show you later.

Pronounce the letters **f, h, k, l, m, n, p, t,** and **x** the same as in English.



Although the German “r” is represented as “r” in the phonetic script of this book, it’s pronounced differently. In German, you don’t roll the “r.” To make the sound, position your tongue as if you want to make the “r” sound, but instead of rolling the tip of your tongue off your palate, leave the tongue straight and try to produce the sound in the back of your throat!

Table 1-5 tells you how to pronounce the rest of the German consonants.

Table 1-5 Pronouncing German Consonants

<i>German Letter</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>As in English</i>	<i>German Word</i>
b	p	up / Peter	Abfahrt (<i>âp-fahrt</i>) (departure)
b	b	bright	Bild (<i>bîlt</i>) (image, picture)
c	k	cat	Café (<i>kâ-feh</i>) (café)
c	ts	tsar	Celsius (<i>tsêl-zî-ûs</i>) (Celsius)
c	tsh	cello	Cello (<i>tshê-loh</i>)
d	t	“t” as in moot	blind (<i>blînt</i>) (blind)

(continued)

Table 1-5 (continued)

<i>German Letter</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>As in English</i>	<i>German Word</i>
d	d	do	durstig (<i>dûr-stigk</i>) (thirsty)
g	gg	go	geben (<i>geh-ben</i>) (give)
g	gk	lag	Tag (<i>tahgk</i>) (day)
j	y	es	ja (<i>yah</i>) (yes)
qu	kv	quick	Quatsch (<i>kvâtsh</i>) (nonsense)
s (beginning of a word)	z	zoo	sieben (<i>zee-ben</i>) (seven)
s (middle/end of a word)	s	sit	Haus (<i>hows</i>) (house)
v	f	"f" as in fire	Vogel (<i>foh-gel</i>) (bird)
v	v	velvet	Vase (<i>vah-ze</i>) (vase)
w	v	vice	Wald (<i>vâlt</i>) (forest)
y	y	yes	Yoga (<i>yoh-gâ</i>) (yoga)
y	uu	syllable	System (<i>zuus-tehm</i>) (system)
z	ts	"ts" as in tsar	Zahl (<i>tsahl</i>) (number)

Identifying a new letter: ß

In written German, you come across a letter, **ß** (*ês-tsêt*), which is a combination of the letters **s** (*ês*) and **z**

(*tsê*) and is pronounced as a sharp “s.” It’s considered a single consonant but isn’t an additional letter of the alphabet.

The German language used to have quite a few words that were spelled either with “ss” or “ß” (the sound is identical) and it was tricky to get the spelling right. German has recently undergone a spelling reform that solved this problem. Here’s the scoop:

- ✓ After a long vowel, the sharp “s” is spelled “ß” — for example in **Fuß** (*foos*) (foot).
- ✓ After a short vowel, the sharp “s” is spelled “ss” — for example in **Fass** (*fâs*) (barrel).



Switzerland doesn’t use the ß at all. Instead, the Swiss always spell words with the double “ss.”

Pronouncing combinations of consonants

The German language has a few combinations of consonants that don’t occur in the English language. Most of them are easy to pronounce, with the exception of “ch,” which is unfamiliar to the English tongue.

The letter combination **ch** has absolutely no equivalent in English. It’s kind of a gargling hiss and is represented by a capital “H” in the phonetic script in this book.

Try to approximate this sound by starting with the way you pronounce the letter “h” in the beginning of the word human and then drawing out and emphasizing the “h.” The “ch” sound is produced at the same place in the back of your throat as the “k” sound. But instead of rolling your tongue in the back of your mouth — as you do when you pronounce a “k” — you have to lower it and bring it forward to your front teeth. If you practice it a little, you shouldn’t have problems pronouncing the words **ich** (*îH*) (I) and **vielleicht** (*fee-lyHt*) (perhaps). (Yes, it does sound a bit like your cat when she has a hairball.)

The good news is that there are a couple of words where “ch” is simply pronounced as a “k,” for example in **Wachs** (*vâks*) (wax) or **Lachs** (*lâks*) (salmon).

If the “ch” is preceded by a bright vowel (e, i, ü, ö, a) and not followed by an “s,” pronounce the “ch” as in **ich** (*îH*), which is more open and happens closer to the teeth. If the “ch” is preceded by a dark vowel (a, o, u), the “ch” is pronounced like the “hairball” example earlier in this section.

Table 1-6 shows you how to pronounce some other common consonant combinations.

Table 1-6 Pronouncing ck, sch, sp, and st

<i>German Letter</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>As in English</i>	<i>German Word</i>
ck	k	check	Dreck (<i>drêk</i>) (dirt)
sch	sh	shut	Tisch (<i>tîsh</i>) (table)
sp	shp	“sh” as in shut and “p” as in people	spät (<i>shpait</i>) (late)
st (beginning of a word)	sht	“sh” as in shut and “t” as in table	Stadt (<i>shtât</i>) (city)
st (middle/end of a word)	st	stable	Last (<i>lâst</i>) (burden)
tsch	tsh	switch	Deutsch (<i>doytsh</i>) (German)



The German language doesn’t have a sound for the English “th” sound. The “h” is either silent, as in the words **Theorie** (*teh-oh-ree*) (theory) or **Theologie** (*teh-oh-lô-gee*) (theology). Or, the letters “t” and “h” are

pronounced separately, as in the words **Rasthaus** (*râst-hows*) (inn) or **Basthut** (*bâst-hoot*) (straw hat).

Using Popular Expressions

German has many *idioms*, expressions typical of a language and culture that don't really make sense if translated word for word. Here are a few:

- ✓ **Ein Fisch auf dem Trockenen** (*ayn fîsh owf dehm trôk-nen*) (a fish on the dry, meaning: "a fish out of water.")
- ✓ **Es regnet Bindfäden** (*ês rehɡk-nêt bînt-fê-den*) (It's raining twine, meaning: "It's raining cats and dogs.")
- ✓ **Das macht den Braten (den Kohl) nicht fett.** (*dâs mâHt dehn brah-ten [dehn kohl] nîHt fêt*) (That doesn't make the roast [the cabbage] fat, meaning: "That won't make much difference" or "That won't help.")
- ✓ **den Braten riechen** (*dehn brah-ten ree-Hen*) (to smell the roast, meaning: "to get wind of something")

Apart from these idioms, you can easily master some of the following frequently used German expressions:

- ✓ **Prima!** (*pree-mah*) (Great!)
- ✓ **Klasse!** (*klâ-se*) (Great!)
- ✓ **Toll!** (*tôl*) (Great!)
- ✓ **Einverstanden.** (*ayn-fêr-shtân-den*) (Agreed./Okay.)
- ✓ **Geht in Ordnung.** (*geht in ôrt-nûngk*) (I'll do it.)
- ✓ **Wird gemacht.** (*vîrt ge-mâHt*) (Okay./Will be done.)
- ✓ **Keine Frage.** (*ky-ne frah-ge*) (No question.)
- ✓ **Macht nichts.** (*mâHt nîHts*) (Never mind. /That's okay.)

- ✓ **Nicht der Rede wert.** (*nîHt dehr reh-de vehrt*)
(Don't mention it.)
- ✓ **Schade!** (*shah-de*) (Too bad!)
- ✓ **So ein Pech!** (*zoh ayn pêH*) (Bad luck!)
- ✓ **Viel Glück!** (*feel gluuk*) (Good luck!)
- ✓ **Prost!** (*prohst*) (Cheers!)