

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Recognizing the German you already know
- » Spotting words that aren't what they seem
- » Using basic German expressions

Chapter 1

You Already Know a Little German

The best way to learn a new language is to jump right in — no pussyfooting around. In this chapter, you get a head start in German by seeing some of the language you're already familiar with. You also find out some popular German expressions, and you get the hang of why you need to be careful with what are called “false friends” — words that seem to be the same in both languages but actually have different meanings.

The German You Know

Because both German and English belong to the group of Germanic languages, quite a few words are either identical or similar in both languages. Words that share a common source are called *cognates*. Another group of words common to German and English stem from Latin-based words with which English speakers are familiar. Many of these have direct equivalents in German, for example, nouns that end in “-tion.”

Friendly allies (perfect cognates)

The following words are spelled the same way and have the same meaning in German and in English. The only differences are the pronunciation, as shown in parentheses, as well as the fact that in German, nouns are always capitalized. In addition, German nouns have one of three genders, as seen on this list by the words **der** (masculine), **die** (feminine), and **das** (neuter) in front of each noun. See Chapter 5 for details on what gender is all about and go to Chapter 2 for information on the pronunciation key for each word presented in this book. In a few instances, the German and English pronunciation for the word is the same, so you'll see the English word in the pronunciation (followed by the notation "as in English").

- » **der Arm** (dêr ârm)
- » **der Bandit** (dêr bân-*deet*)
- » **die Bank** (dee bânk)
- » **die Basis** (dee *bah*-zis)
- » **bitter** (*bit*-er)
- » **blind** (blint)
- » **die Butter** (dee *boot*-er)
- » **digital** (di-gi-*tâl*)
- » **elegant** (êl-ê-*gânt*)
- » **die Emotion** (dee ê-moh-tsee-*ohn*)
- » **emotional** (ê-moh-tsee-oh-*nahl*)
- » **fair** (fair [as in English])
- » **der Finger** (dêr *fin*-er)
- » **die Hand** (dee hânt)
- » **das Hotel** (dâs hotel [as in English])
- » **die Information** (dee in-for-mâ-tsee-*ohn*)
- » **die Inspiration** (dee in-spi-râ-tsee-*ohn*)
- » **die Integration** (dee in-tê-grâ-tsee-*ohn*)
- » **international** (in-ter-nâ-tsee-oh-*nahl*)
- » **irrational** (ir-râ-tsee-oh-*nahl*)
- » **legal** (ley-*gahl*)

- » **liberal** (lee-bêr-ahl)
- » **der Mast** (dêr mast)
- » **die Mine** (dee meen-e)
- » **modern** (moh-dêrn)
- » **der Moment** (dêr moh-mênt)
- » **die Motivation** (dee moh-ti-vâ-tsee-ohn)
- » **das Museum** (dâs mooh-zey-oohm)
- » **der Name** (dêr nah-me)
- » **die Nation** (dee nâ-tsee-ohn)
- » **normal** (nor-mahl)
- » **die Olive** (dee oh-lee-ve)
- » **parallel** (pâr-â-leyl)
- » **das Problem** (dâs proh-bleym)
- » **der Professor** (dêr professor [as in English])
- » **das Radio** (dâs rah-dee-oh)
- » **die Religion** (dee rey-li-gee-ohn)
- » **das Restaurant** (dâs rês-tuh-ron)
- » **die Rose** (dee roh-ze)
- » **der Service** (dêr ser-vis)
- » **das Signal** (dâs zig-nahl)
- » **der Sport** (dêr shport)
- » **die Statue** (dee shtah-tooh-e)
- » **der Stress** (dêr shtrêš)
- » **das System** (dâs zers-teym)
- » **das Taxi** (dâs tâx-ee)
- » **der Tiger** (dêr tee-ger)
- » **tolerant** (to-lêr-ânt)
- » **total** (toh-tahl)
- » **die Tradition** (dee trâ-di-tsee-ohn)
- » **der Tunnel** (dêr toohn-el)

- » **warm** (vahrm)
- » **wild** (vilt)
- » **der Wind** (dêr vint)

Kissing cousins (near cognates)

Many words, like the ones shown in Table 1-1, are spelled almost the same in German as in English and have the same meaning. Table 1-1 also shows you something about German spelling conventions, which include the following:

- » The English *c* is a **k** in most German words.
- » The *ou* in English words like *house* or *mouse* is often equivalent to **au** in German words.
- » Many English adjectives ending in *-ic* or *-ical* have an **-isch** ending in German.
- » Some English adjectives ending in **-y** are spelled with **-ig** in German.
- » Some English nouns ending in **-y** have an **-ie** ending in German.

TABLE 1-1

Words Similar in Meaning, Slightly Different in Spelling

German	English
die Adresse (dee ah-drê-s-e)	<i>address</i>
der Aspekt (dêr âs-pêkt)	<i>aspect</i>
der Bär (dêr bear [as in English])	<i>bear</i>
blond (blont)	<i>blond(e)</i>
die Bluse (dee blooh-ze)	<i>blouse</i>
braun (brown [as in English])	<i>brown</i>
die Demokratie (dee dê-moh-krâ-tee)	<i>democracy</i>
direkt (di-rêkt)	<i>direct</i>
der Doktor (dêr dok-tohr)	<i>doctor</i>
exzellent (êx-tsel-ênt)	<i>excellent</i>
fantastisch (fân-tâs-tish)	<i>fantastic</i>
das Glas (dâs glahs)	<i>glass</i>

German	English
das Haus (dâs hous)	<i>house</i>
hungrig (<i>hoong-riH</i>)	<i>hungry</i>
die Industrie (dee in-dooH-stree)	<i>industry</i>
der Kaffee (dêr kâf-ey)	<i>coffee</i>
die Komödie (dee koh-mer-dee-e)	<i>comedy</i>
die Kondition (dee kon-di-tsee-ohn)	<i>condition</i>
das Konzert (dâs kon-tsêrt)	<i>concert</i>
die Kultur (dee kool-tooHr)	<i>culture</i>
logisch (<i>loh-gish</i>)	<i>logical</i>
das Mandat (dâs mân-daht)	<i>mandate</i>
der Mann (dêr mân)	<i>man</i>
die Maschine (dee mâ-sheen-e)	<i>machine</i>
die Maus (dee mouse [as in English])	<i>mouse</i>
die Methode (dee mê-toh-de)	<i>method</i>
die Mobilität (dee moh-bi-li-tait)	<i>mobility</i>
die Musik (dee mooh-zeek)	<i>music</i>
die Nationalität (dee nât-see-oh-nahl-i-tait)	<i>nationality</i>
die Natur (dee nâ-tooHr)	<i>nature</i>
offiziell (oh-fits-ee-êl)	<i>official</i> (adjective)
der Ozean (dêr oh-tsê-ân)	<i>ocean</i>
das Papier (dâs pâ-peer)	<i>paper</i>
das Parlament (dâs pâ-r-lâ-mênt)	<i>parliament</i>
perfekt (pêr-fêkt)	<i>perfect</i>
politisch (poh-li-tish)	<i>political</i>
potenziell (po-tên-tsee-êl)	<i>potential</i> (adjective)
praktisch (<i>prâk-tish</i>)	<i>practical</i>
das Programm (dâs proh-grâm)	<i>program</i>
das Salz (dâs zâlts)	<i>salt</i>

(continued)

TABLE 1-1 (continued)

German	English
der Scheck (dêr shêk)	<i>check</i>
sonnig (zon-iH)	<i>sunny</i>
der Supermarkt (dêr zooh-pêr-mârkt)	<i>supermarket</i>
das Telefon (dâs tê-le-fohn)	<i>telephone</i>
die Theorie (dee tey-ohr-ee)	<i>theory</i>
die Tragödie (dee trâ-ger-dee-e)	<i>tragedy</i>
die Walnuss (dee vahl-noohs)	<i>walnut</i>

False friends

As does every language, German contains some false friends — those words that look very similar to English but have a completely different meaning. As you read the following list, you can see why you should treat any new German word with kid gloves, especially if it looks like an English word, until, that is, you find out for sure what it means in English.

- » **After** (ahf-ter): If you want to avoid embarrassment, remember the meaning of this word. Its German meaning is *anus* and not *after*. The German word for *after* is **nach** (nahH) or **nachdem** (nahH-deym).
- » **aktuell** (âk-tooh-êl): This word means *up-to-date* and *current*, not *actual*. The German translation for *actual* is **tatsächlich** (tât-sêH-liH).
- » **also** (âl-zoh): This one means *so*, *therefore*, or *thus*; not *also*. The German word for *also* is **auch** (ouH).
- » **bald** (bâlt): This word means *soon* and is not a description for someone with little or no hair. The German word for *bald* is **kahl** (kahl) or **glatzköpfig** (glâts-kerpf-iH).
- » **bekommen** (be-kom-en): This verb is an important one to remember. It means *to get* and not *to become*. The German word for *to become* is **werden** (vêr-den).
- » **Boot** (boht): This is a *boat* and not a *boot*, which is **Stiefel** (shteef-el) in German. A *sailboat* is called a **Segelboot** (zey-gêl-boht).
- » **brav** (brahf): This word means *well-behaved* and not *brave*. The German word for *brave* is **tapfer** (tâp-fer).

- » **Brief** (breef): This is a noun and means *letter*, not *brief*. The German translation for the English adjective *brief* is **kurz** (koorts), and, for the English noun, **Auftrag** (ouf-trahk) or **Unterlagen** (oon-ter-lah-gen).
- » **Chef** (shêf): This is the German word for a person you take orders from, your boss or *supervisor*, not someone who's in charge of the cooking. The German word for *chef* is **Küchenchef** (kueH-ên-shêf) or **Chefkoch** (shêf-koH). Otherwise, a plain cook is called a **Koch** (koH) in German.
- » **eventuell** (ey-vên-tooh-êl): This one means *possible* or *possibly*, not *eventual* or *eventually*, both of which would be **schließlich** (shlees-liH) in German.
- » **fast** (fâst): This is an adjective that means *almost* — not the speeds at which Formula One drivers race. The German word for *fast* is **schnell** (shnêl) or **rasch** (râsh).
- » **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** (hay-ter).
- » **Gift** (gift [as in English]): The German meaning is *poison*, so when you're giving your German-speaking host a *present*, you should say you have a **Geschenk** (gê-shênk), that is, unless you really are giving something like weed killer or a green mamba.
- » **Kind** (kint): This is the German word for *child*. It has nothing to do with the English *kind*, which is **nett** (nêt) or **liebenswert** (lee-bens-vuerd-iH) in German.
- » **Komfort** (kom-fohr): This word means *amenity*, for example, the amenities you expect in a five-star hotel, not *comfort*. The German verb meaning *to comfort* [someone] is **trösten** (ters-ten).
- » **kurios** (koohr-ee-ohs): This word means *strange*, not *curious*. The German word for *curious* is **neugierig** (noy-geer-iH).
- » **Mist** (mist [as in English]): Be careful not to misuse this word that actually means *manure* in German! It doesn't describe heavy moisture resembling a fine rain, which is called **Nebel** (ney-bel) or **Dunst** (doonst).
- » **Most** (most): This is the German word for unfermented fruit juice, and in southern German-speaking regions, a young fruit wine. The German word for the English *most* is **das meiste** (dâs mays-te); for example, **die meisten Leute** (dee mays-ten loy-te) (*most people*).
- » **Menü** (mên-ue): This word means *the daily special* that you find in some restaurants. The German word for menu is **Speisekarte** (shpayz-e-kârt-e).
- » **ordinär** (or-di-nair): This word means *vulgar* rather than *ordinary*. The German word for *ordinary* is **normal** (nor-mahl) or **gewöhnlich** (ge-vern-liH).

- » **pathetisch** (pâ-tey-tish): This one means *overly emotional*, not *pathetic*, which, in German, is **jämmerlich** (yêm-er-liH) or **armselig** (ârm-zey-liH).
- » **plump** (ploomp): The German meaning is *clumsy* or *tactless*, not *roundish*, which in German is **rundlich** (roont-liH).
- » **Präservativ** (prê-zêr-vah-teeF): Another embarrassing moment can be avoided when you know that this word means *condom* in German. The German equivalent of *preservative* is **Konservierungsmittel** (kon-sêr-yeer-oongs-mit-el).
- » **Provision** (proh-vi-zee-ohn): The meaning of this word is *commission*, not *provision*. The German word for *provision* is **Vorsorge** (fohr-zor-ge) or **Versorgung** (fêr-zohrg-oong).
- » **Rat** (rât): This one means *advice*, not the rodent you never want to see in your house. The German word for *rat* is **Ratte** (rât-e).
- » **See** (zey): This word means *lake* or *sea*. In German, the verb *to see* is **sehen** (zey-en).
- » **sensibel** (zen-zee-bel): The meaning of this word is *sensitive* rather than *sensible*, which translates as **vernünftig** (fêr-nuenf-tiH).
- » **sympathisch** (zerm-pah-tish): This word means *likeable* or *congenial*, not *sympathetic*. The German word for *sympathetic* is **mitfühlend** (mit-fuel-ent).

Lenders and borrowers

A few German words have been adopted by the English language and have retained their meaning, such as **Kindergarten** (kin-der-gâr-ten), **Angst** (ânkst), **kaputt** (kâ-poot), **Ersatz** (êr-zats), **Sauerkraut** (zou-er-kroust), **Zeitgeist** (tsayt-gayst), and **Wanderlust** (vân-der-loost).

However, the number of these German words is minimal compared to the English words that have made their way into the German language. At times, the combination of English and German makes for somewhat curious linguistic oddities. For example, you may hear **das ist total in/out** (dâs ist toh-tahl in/out [as in English]) (*that's totally in/out*) or **Sie können den File downloaden** (zee kern-en deyn file [as in English] doun-lohd-en) (*You can download the file*).

The following is a list of German words that have been borrowed from the English language. Note that they all retain their English pronunciations, with a slight exception: The borrowed verbs are “Germanified,” which simply means they combine the English verb, such as *kill* or *jog*, with **-en**, the German suffix that creates the infinitive form (*to kill* and *to jog*). Go to Chapter 5 for more on German infinitives:

- » der Blog
- » der Boss
- » das Business
- » das Catering
- » die City (German meaning: *downtown*)
- » der Computer
- » cool
- » das Design
- » das Event
- » Fashion (used without article)
- » das Fast Food
- » das Feeling
- » die Fitness
- » flirten (*to flirt*)
- » der Headhunter
- » Hi
- » hip
- » der Hit
- » das Hotel
- » der Influencer
- » das Internet
- » das Interview
- » der Jetlag
- » der Job
- » jobben (*to do temp jobs*)
- » joggen (*to jog*)
- » killen (*to kill*)
- » der Lifestyle
- » managen (*to manage*)
- » der Manager

- » das Marketing
- » das Meeting
- » Okay
- » online
- » outsourcen (*to outsource*)
- » die Party
- » pink
- » das Shopping
- » die Shorts
- » die Show/Talkshow
- » skateboarden (*to skateboard*)
- » das Steak
- » surfen (*to surf waves or the Internet*)
- » das Team
- » der Thriller
- » das Ticket
- » der Tourist
- » trendy
- » das T-Shirt
- » das Weekend
- » der Workshop
- » Wow

Finally, a few English terms have different meanings in the German language. For example, the word **Evergreen** refers to a *golden oldie*, **Handy** means a *cellphone*, **Mobbing** means *bullying* or *harassing*, **Oldtimer** refers to a *vintage car*, and **Wellness-Center** means *spa*.

Talkin' the Talk

Read the following conversation with a grain of salt — and a smile. It gives you an idea of how many words have slid into German. However, you're not likely to overhear this many examples of mixed language in a single conversation. In this scenario, two friends, Claudia and Jana, meet on the street. Notice how some terms have a slightly different meaning in German.

Claudia: **Hi Jana, wie geht's? Wie ist der neue Job?**

Hi [as in English] *yâ-nâ*, vee geyts? vee ist dêr *noy-e* job
[as in English]?

Hi Jana, how are you? How's the new job?

Jana: **Super! Heute war meine erste Presentation vor meinem big Boss, und er war total cool.**

super [as in English]! *hoy-te* vahr *mayn-e êrs-te* pre-zen-tât-see-*ohn* fohr *mayn-êm* big boss [as in English], oont êr vahr toh-*tahl* cool [as in English].

Super! Today was my first presentation in front of my big boss, and he was totally cool.

Claudia: **Wow! In meinem Office gibt es nur Stress. Mein Boss kann nichts managen. Mein Kollege checkt nichts, und denkt, er ist ein Sonnyboy, und alle anderen spinnen.**

wow [as in English]! in *mayn-êm* office [as in English] gipt ês noohr shtrês. mayn boss kân niHts *mân-â-gen* [g as in English]. mayn kol-ey-ge checkt niHts oont dênkt êr ist ayn sonny boy [as in English], oont âl-e ân-der-en *spin-en*.

Wow! In my office there's nothing but stress. My boss can't manage anything. My colleague isn't "with it," and thinks he's a hot shot, and all the others are crazy.

Jana: **Ich gehe shoppen. Kommst du mit?**

iH *gey-e* shop-en. Komst dooh mit?

I'm going shopping. Do you want to come along?

Claudia: **Nein, danke. Gestern war ich in einem Outlet und habe ein T-Shirt in pink und eine Jeans im Boyfriend-Look gekauft. Ich gehe jetzt joggen. Bye-bye!**

nayn, *dân-ke*. *gês-têrn* vahr iH in *ayn-em* outlet [as in English] oont *hah-be* ayn T-shirt [as in English] in pink [as in English] oont *ayn-e* jeans [as in English] im boyfriend-look [as in English] ge-*kouft*. iH *gey-e* yêtst *jog-en* [*jog* as in English]. bye-bye [as in English]!

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No, thanks. Yesterday I went to an outlet and bought a pink T-shirt and a pair of boyfriend-style jeans. I'm going jogging now. Bye!

Jana: **Schade. Bye-bye!**
 shah-de. bye-bye!
 Too bad. Bye!



Using Basic Expressions

Your first steps speaking German might be similar to the way you take a shower: you turn on the water gently, wait for it to warm up, check the temperature, then slowly step under the showerhead. This section warms you up so that you feel comfortable as you start out speaking German.

As you delve into the following chapters of this book, you find these basic expressions in context. They appear in conversations and situations that you may find yourself in when you go to a German speaking country.

Table 1-2 shows you the basic words and expressions to start you out on your German-speaking journey:

TABLE 1-2 **Basic Expressions**

German	English
ja (jâh)	<i>yes</i>
nein (nayn)	<i>no</i>
danke (dân-ke)	<i>thank you</i>
bitte (bi-te)	<i>please / you're welcome (as a response to danke)</i>
danke schön (dân-ke shern)	<i>Thank you very much</i>
vielen Dank (fee-len dânk)	<i>Thank you very much</i>
Entschuldigung! (ênt-shool-dee-goong!)	<i>Excuse me / pardon</i>
Entschuldigen Sie, bitte! (ênt-shool-dee-gen zee bi-te!)	<i>I beg your pardon</i>
Guten Tag! (gooh-ten tahk!)	<i>Hello! (standard greeting)</i>
Hallo! (hâ-loh!)	<i>Hello! (informal greeting)</i>

German	English
Auf Wiedersehen! (ouf-vee-der-zey-en!)	<i>goodbye!</i>
Tschüs! (chues!)	<i>Bye!</i>
Ich heiße . . . (iH hay-se. . .)	<i>My name is , , ,</i>
Mein Name ist. . . (mayn nah-me ist. . .)	<i>My name is. . .</i>
Sprechen Sie Englisch? (sprêH-en zee êng-lish?)	<i>Do you speak English?</i>
Können Sie mir helfen? (kern-en zee mir hêlf-en?)	<i>Can you help me?</i>
Ich suche . . . (iH zooH-e. . .)	<i>I'm looking for . . .</i>
Wo ist der nächste Geldautomat? (voh ist dêr naiH-ste gêlt-ou-toh-maht?)	<i>Where is the nearest ATM?</i>
Gibt es WLAN hier? (gipt es vey-lân heer?)	<i>Is there Wi-Fi here?</i>
Wo sind die Toiletten? (voh zint dee toy-lêt-en?)	<i>Where are the restrooms?</i>
Die Speisekarte, bitte. (dee sphayz-e kêr-te bi-te.)	<i>The menu, please.</i>
Ich möchte gern . . . (iH merH-te gêrn. . .)	<i>I'd like . . . (when ordering in a restaurant)</i>
Ich hätte gern . . . (iH hêt-e gêrn. . .)	<i>I'd like . . . (when ordering in a restaurant)</i>
Die Rechnung, bitte. (dee rêH-noong bi-te.)	<i>The check, please.</i>

Apart from such basic expressions, many handy and frequently used German expressions are easy to learn. You hear them often in casual conversation. Here are some of them:

Prima!/Klasse!/Toll! (pree-mah!/klâs-e!/tôll!) (*Great!*)

Fertig. (fêrt-iH.) (*Ready./Finished.*) This can be either a question or a statement.

Quatsch! (qvâch!) (*Nonsense!/How silly of me!*)

Einverstanden. (ayn-fêr-shtând-en.) (*Agreed./Okay.*)

Vielleicht. (fee-layHt.) (*Maybe./Perhaps.*)

Mach's gut. (vîrt ge-mâHt.) (*Take it easy.*) This is a casual way of saying *good-bye*.

Wie, bitte? (vee bi-te?) (*[I beg your] pardon?/What did you say?*)

Macht nichts. (mâHt niHts.) (*Never mind./That's okay.*)

Nicht der Rede wert. (niHt dêr rey-de vêrt.) (*Don't mention it.*)

Schade! (shah-de!) (*Too bad!/What a pity!*)

So ein Pech! (zoh ayn pêH!) (*Bad luck!*)

Viel Glück! (feel gluek!) (*Good luck!*)

Oder? (oh-der?) (*Isn't that true?/Don't you think so?*)

Bis dann! (bis dân!) (*See you then!*)

Bis bald! (bis bâlt!) (*See you soon!*)