

- » Speaking like a native speaker
- » Counting with cardinal and ordinal numbers
- » Stating dates and times
- » Pointing out the parts of speech

Chapter 1

Laying the Foundations of German

Familiarizing yourself with how to use numbers, time, and dates is basic to your German skills. Understanding parts of speech will get you ahead in using spoken and written German.

Sounding Like a German: Pronunciation Basics

The best way to learn to pronounce German is to imitate German speakers as accurately as you possibly can. You'll be pleased to discover that many German sounds are just like those of English. Other sounds may be unfamiliar at first, so you may need to practice those sounds carefully. The following section provides you with a brief overview of the essentials you need to give you confidence in pronouncing German.



TIP

For a complete guide to German pronunciation, refer to the latest edition of *German For Dummies* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), which provides you with a detailed explanation of how to pronounce letters, syllables, and words. The audio files on its website allow you to practice pronunciation as you go along.

Focusing on the German alphabet

The German alphabet has all the letters that English does — 26 of 'em — plus four special letters: **ä**, **ö**, **ü**, and **ß**. The good news is that German words are generally pronounced just as they're spelled. This means there's no confusion, as English has with the likes of bow (tie), (take a) bow, and tree bough. The bad news is that many of the normal-looking letters are pronounced differently from their English counterparts.

Pronouncing vowels

In German, vowels (a, e, i, o, and u) can generally be pronounced in two ways — as short or long vowel sounds. The short vowel sounds are *clipped*, and they're pronounced shorter than their English equivalents. Long vowel sounds are *steady-state* or *pure*, meaning that the sound quality doesn't change even though it's a long sound. Here are the general rules:

- » A vowel is long when it's followed by the letter h, as in **Stahl** (*steel*).
- » A vowel is generally long when it's followed by a single consonant, as in **Tag** (*day*).
- » A vowel is long when it's doubled, as in **Teer** (*tar*) or **Aal** (*eel*).
- » In general, a vowel is short when followed by two or more consonants, as in **Tanne** (*fir tree*).

Pronouncing ä, ö, and ü

German has three extra vowels: **ä**, **ö**, and **ü**. The German word for those curious double dots over the vowels is **Umlaut** (*oom-lout*) (umlaut). **Umlauts** slightly alter the sound of the vowels a, o, and u, as outlined in Table 1-1. These sounds have no equivalent in English, so practice imitating words that contain umlauts.



REMEMBER

To make your German vowels **ä**, **ö**, and **ü** sound a bit more authentic, try progressing through the **ä**, **ö**, and **ü** sounds, pronouncing the vowels as though you're getting ready to kiss someone — in other words, when you make the **ä** sound, your lips are pursed in an oval shape, and when you make the **ö** sound, you round your lips into an O. For the **ü** sound, you pucker up, baby! The **ü** sound is pronounced with very pursed lips.

TABLE 1-1 Pronouncing Vowels with Umlauts

German Letter	Symbol	As in English	German Word
ä (long)	ai	say ("ay" in <i>say</i> with spread lips)	nächste (<i>next</i>)
ä (short)	ê	bet (clipped "e")	fällen (<i>to fell [a tree]</i>)
ö	er	her (without the "r" sound)	schön (<i>pretty</i>) (remember: no "r" sound)
ü	ue	lure ("ooh" with pursed lips)	Tür (<i>door</i>)

Pronouncing diphthongs

Diphthongs are combinations of two vowels in one syllable (as in the English *lie*). One way to think about how diphthongs are pronounced in contrast to single vowel sounds is that diphthong sounds are drawn out; they take a little bit longer to pronounce. German has a few of them, as shown in Table 1-2.



REMEMBER

Both the long German vowel **i** and the German vowel combination **ie** are pronounced like the English letter *e* in *see*, but the German **ei**, **ai**, and **ay** are pronounced like the English letter *y* in *cry*.

TABLE 1-2 Pronouncing German Diphthongs

German Diphthong	Symbol	As in English	German Word
ai/ei/ay	ay	<i>cry</i>	Mais (<i>corn</i>) ein (<i>a</i>) Bayern (<i>Bavaria</i>)
au	ou	<i>loud</i>	laut (<i>noisy</i>)
au (in words of foreign origin)	uh	<i>restaurant</i>	Restaurant (<i>restaurant</i>)
äu/eu	oy	<i>boy</i>	Häuser (<i>houses</i>) Leute (<i>people</i>)
ie	ee	<i>see</i>	Miete (<i>rent</i>)

Pronouncing consonants and combinations of consonants

Ahh, relief! The sounds of German consonants are easier to master than the German vowel sounds. In fact, they're pronounced either almost the same as their English equivalents or like other English consonants.

Pronouncing f, h, k, m, n, p, t, x, and ß

As part of a word, the letters f, h, k, m, n, p, t, and x are pronounced the same in German as they are in English. The letter ß, on the other hand, doesn't exist in English. It's kind of cool looking, though, don't you think? But even if you don't care about looks, you'll be glad to know that you pronounce it just like ss or s.

Pronouncing ch, ck, sch, sp, st, and tsch

The German language has a few consonant sounds that are either different or don't occur in English. Most of them are easy to pronounce, except for the **ch**, which is unfamiliar to the English tongue.

The German letter combination **ch** is the trickiest one for English speakers to pronounce. There's absolutely no equivalent for it in English. You actually have to learn a new sound — a kind of gentle “dry” gargling sound — in order to say it. The sound is a bit like trying to pronounce “hch,” and not a “k” sound. The sound is similar to the guttural “ch” in Scottish, like in Loch Ness.

Table 1-3 shows you how to pronounce these common consonant combinations.

TABLE 1-3 Pronouncing ch, ck, sch, sp, st, and tsch

German Letter	Symbol	As in English	German Word
ch	H	<i>Loch</i> (Ness)	mich (<i>me</i>)
ck	k	<i>check</i>	Dreck (<i>dirt</i>)
sch	sh	<i>shut</i>	Tisch (<i>table</i>)
sp	shp	<i>sh</i> as in <i>shut</i> , <i>p</i> as in <i>people</i>	spät (<i>late</i>)

German Letter	Symbol	As in English	German Word
st (beginning of a word)	sht	<i>sh</i> as in <i>shut</i> , <i>t</i> as in <i>table</i>	Stadt (<i>city</i>)
st (middle/end of a word)	st	<i>stable</i>	fast (<i>almost, nearly</i>)
tsch	ch	<i>switch</i>	Deutsch (<i>German</i>)



REMEMBER

The English “th” sound doesn’t exist in the German language. The **h** is silent, as in the words **Theorie** (*theory*) and **Theologie** (*theology*).

Crunching the Numbers

You encounter the two types of numbers, cardinals and ordinals, in myriad situations. *Cardinal numbers* are vital for counting, prices, phone numbers, or for communicating time and dates. You use *ordinal numbers*, such as first, second, and third, to express a floor number or which street you take when following directions (like when someone tells you to take the third street on your left). The following sections go into detail about using both types of numbers.

1-2-3: Counting off with cardinal numbers

Table 1-4 shows numbers 1 through 29. Notice a couple of points about numbers 21 and up:

- » They’re written as one word: **einundzwanzig** (21), **zweiundzwanzig** (22).
- » They follow the cart-before-the-horse rule — that is, you say the ones digit before the tens digit, linking the words with **und**: for example, **vierundzwanzig** (24; literally: *four and twenty*).

TABLE 1-4 Cardinal Numbers 1–29

Numbers 0–9	Numbers 10–19	Numbers 20–29
0 null	10 zehn	20 zwanzig
1 eins	11 elf	21 einundzwanzig
2 zwei	12 zwölf	22 zweiundzwanzig
3 drei	13 dreizehn	23 dreiundzwanzig
4 vier	14 vierzehn	24 vierundzwanzig
5 fünf	15 fünfzehn	25 fünfundzwanzig
6 sechs	16 sechzehn	26 sechszwanzig
7 sieben	17 siebzehn	27 siebenundzwanzig
8 acht	18 achtzehn	28 achtundzwanzig
9 neun	19 neunzehn	29 neunundzwanzig

**TIP**

In spoken German, people commonly use **zwo** instead of **zwei**, which avoids the confusion — acoustically speaking — with **drei**. To double-check that you heard **zwei** and not **drei** in credit card numbers, prices, room numbers, and so on, either ask or repeat the number(s), using **zwo**.

Table 1-5 shows representative numbers spanning 30 to 999. Double-digit numbers follow the same pattern as 21 to 29 do in Table 1-1: **einunddreißig** (31; literally: *one and thirty*), **zweiunddreißig** (32; literally: *two and thirty*), and the like. Numbers with more digits likewise flip the ones and tens digits: For example, you'd read 384 as **dreihundertvierundachtzig**, which literally means *three hundred four and eighty*.

Note that 30, unlike the other multiples of ten (40, 50, and so on) is spelled slightly differently. **Dreißig** has no **z** in its ending, whereas the other double-digits do (**vierzig**, **fünfzig**, and so on).

**TIP**

In German, people often say telephone numbers in double digits, so you need to be super careful to get the sequence correct as you write the number. For example, the number 76 20 93 88 would be **sechszwanzig**, **zwanzig**, **dreiundneunzig**, **achtundachtzig** (*six and seventy, twenty, three and ninety, eight and eighty*).

TABLE 1-5 Cardinal Numbers 30–999

Numbers 30–100	Numbers 101–114	Numbers 220–999
30 dreißig	101 hunderteins	220 zweihundertzwanzig
40 vierzig	102 hundertzwei	348 dreihundertachtundvierzig
50 fünzig	103 hundertdrei	452 vierhundertzweiundfünzig
60 sechzig	104 hundertvier	573 fünfhundertdreundsiebzig
70 siebzig	111 hundertelf	641 sechshunderteinundvierzig
80 achtzig	112 hundertzwölf	767 siebenhundertsiebenundsechzig
90 neunzig	113 hundertdreizehn	850 achthundertfünzig
100 hundert	114 hundertvierzehn	999 neunhundertneunundneunzig



TIP

Especially in spoken German, you can use **einhundert** (*one hundred*) instead of **hundert** (*hundred*). Doing so makes the number clearer to the listener.

When referring to currency, you can talk about the bills like this: Imagine you’re checking how much cash you have in your wallet. You have two 100€ bills and three 20€ bills. You say to yourself: **Ich habe zwei Hunderter und drei Zwanziger.** (*I have two hundreds [euro bills] and three twenties.*) The numbers **Hunderter** and **Zwanziger** are nouns, and you form them like this: Take the number, for example **hundert**, and add **-er** to the end of the number: **hundert + -er = Hunderter**.

For numbers higher than 999, look at Table 1–6. Notice that the decimal point in German numbers represents the comma in English.

TABLE 1-6 Numbers Greater Than 999

English Numerals	German Numerals	Numbers Written in German
1,000	1.000	tausend or ein tausend
1,000,000	1.000.000	Million or eine Million
1,650,000	1.650.000	eine Million sechshundertfünzigtausend

(continued)

TABLE 1-6 (continued)

English Numerals	German Numerals	Numbers Written in German
2,000,000	2.000.000	zwei Millionen
1,000,000,000	1.000.000.000	eine Milliarde
2,000,000,000	2.000.000.000	zwei Milliarden



WARNING

In English, a comma indicates thousands, and a period shows decimals. German (and many other languages) does the reverse: It uses a period (**Punkt**) for thousands and the comma (**Komma**) as a decimal point. Look at these examples:

English: 1 inch = 2.54 centimeters

Deutsch: 1 Zentimeter (centimeter) = **0,39 Zoll** (inches)
0,39 is read as **null Komma drei neun**.

English: Mount Everest is 29,029 feet high.

Deutsch: Mount Everest ist **8.848 Meter hoch**. 8.848 is read as **achttausendachthundertachtundvierzig**.

1st, 2nd, 3rd: Lining up with ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers are the kinds of numbers that show what order things come in. You need ordinal numbers when you're talking about **das Datum** (the date), **die Feiertage** (the holidays), **die Stockwerke in einem Hotel** (the floors in a hotel), and stuff like that.

Ordinal numbers function as adjectives, so they have the adjective endings you normally use in a sentence. (See Chapter 6 for specifics on adjectives.) The general rule for forming ordinal numbers is to add **-te** to the numbers 1 through 19 and then **-ste** to the numbers 20 and above. For example: **Nach der achten Tasse Kaffee, ist er am Schreibtisch stand er auf dem Schreibtisch.** (After the eighth cup of coffee, he found himself standing on top of his desk.)

The three exceptions to this rule are **erste** (first), **dritte** (third), and **siebte** (seventh). For example: **Reinhold Messner war der erste Mensch, der Mount Everest ohne Sauerstoffmaske bestieg.** (Reinhold Messner was the first person to climb Mt. Everest without an oxygen mask.)

Two other adjectives you need to know when putting things in order are **letzte** (*last*) and **nächste** (*next*). You can use them to refer to a sequence of numbers, people, things, or the like:

Könnten Sie bitte die letzte Nummer wiederholen?

(Could you repeat the last number, please?)

Look at the examples of ordinal numbers in Table 1-7. The first column shows the ordinal numbers as digits, the second column shows the same ordinal numbers as words, and the third column shows how to say *on the* (*fifth floor, 12th day of the month, and so on*).

Note: In Table 1-7, you see how to formulate the expression *on the* (*first*). It's **am** + ordinal number + **en**. **Am** is the contraction of **an** (*on*) + **dem** (*the*) and is formed by taking the preposition **an** plus **dem**, the masculine dative of **der**. You need to show dative case agreement with the adjective **erste**, so you add **-n**: **erste** + **n** = **ersten**.

TABLE 1-7 Ordinal Numbers

Ordinals as Numerals	Ordinals as Words	On the . . .
1st	der erste (<i>the first</i>)	am ersten (<i>on the first</i>)
2nd	der zweite (<i>the second</i>)	am zweiten (<i>on the second</i>)
3rd	der dritte (<i>the third</i>)	am dritten (<i>on the third</i>)
4th	der vierte (<i>the fourth</i>)	am vierten (<i>on the fourth</i>)
5th	der fünfte (<i>the fifth</i>)	am fünften (<i>on the fifth</i>)
6th	der sechste (<i>the sixth</i>)	am sechsten (<i>on the sixth</i>)
7th	der siebte (<i>the seventh</i>)	am siebten (<i>on the seventh</i>)
18th	der achtzehnte (<i>the eighteenth</i>)	am achtzehnten (<i>on the eighteenth</i>)
22nd	der zweiundzwanzigste (<i>the twenty-second</i>)	am zweiundzwanzigsten (<i>on the twenty-second</i>)

Expressing Dates

Familiarizing yourself with the German calendar words, as discussed in the following sections, makes scheduling a meeting or planning a trip much simpler.

Looking at the week

On a German calendar, *the week* (**die Woche**) starts on Monday. In addition, the days of the week are all the same gender, masculine (**der**), but generally they're used without an article. For example, if you want to say that today is *Monday*, you say, **Heute ist Montag**.

Here are the days of the week, followed by the abbreviations you often see on schedules:

- » **Montag** (Mo) (*Monday*)
- » **Dienstag** (Di) (*Tuesday*)
- » **Mittwoch** (Mi) (*Wednesday*)
- » **Donnerstag** (Do) (*Thursday*)
- » **Freitag** (Fr) (*Friday*)
- » **Samstag/Sonnabend** (Sa) (*Saturday*)
- » **Sonntag** (So) (*Sunday*)

Note: In northern Germany, *Saturday* is called **Sonnabend**; people living in southern Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland use the term **Samstag**. German-speaking people do understand both terms.

To indicate that something always happens on a particular day of the week, an **s** is added to the word, and it's no longer capitalized. For example, you may get to a museum or a restaurant on a Monday and find it closed, in which case you're likely to see a sign on the door reading **Montags geschlossen** (*closed on Mondays*).

Speaking of days: Pretend it's Tuesday, and you want to confirm your plans to meet someone the next day. You can ask whether you're meeting on Wednesday or whether the meeting is tomorrow. The following word list helps you refer to specific days:

- » **heute** (*today*)
- » **gestern** (*yesterday*)
- » **vorgestern** (*the day before yesterday*)
- » **morgen** (*tomorrow*)
- » **übermorgen** (*the day after tomorrow*)

To speak precisely about a particular time on a specific day, you can combine the preceding words with the times of day discussed in the later section “Talking about parts of the day.” Try on the following examples for size:

heute Morgen (*this morning*)

heute Vormittag (*this morning*)

gestern Abend (*yesterday evening/last night*)

Naming the months

The following list shows you all the names of the months — notice how similar the German names are to the English. All the months’ names are masculine, meaning their article is **der**:

- » **Januar** (*January*)
- » **Februar** (*February*)
- » **März** (*March*)
- » **April** (*April*)
- » **Mai** (*May*)
- » **Juni** (*June*)
- » **Juli** (*July*)
- » **August** (*August*)
- » **September** (*September*)
- » **Oktober** (*October*)
- » **November** (*November*)
- » **Dezember** (*December*)

The following sentences show you how to build the *calendar* (**der Kalender**) in German:

Ein Jahr hat 12 Monate. (*A year has 12 months.*)

Ein Monat hat 30 oder 31 Tage. (*A month has 30 or 31 days.*)

Der Februar hat 28 oder 29 Tage. (*February has 28 or 29 days.*)

Eine Woche hat 7 Tage. (*A week has seven days.*)



TIP

In order to write dates as numerals, write the digit followed by a period: **Der 1. Mai ist ein Feiertag in Deutschland.** (*May 1st is a holiday in Germany.*) If you say the same sentence, it's **Der erste Mai ist ein Feiertag in Deutschland.**

Telling Time

Imagine you're sitting in a park under a tree on a hot sunny day, wondering what time it is. Suddenly, a white rabbit in a checkered jacket runs by, stops, pulls out a pocket watch, and mumbles about being late. Here are two ways you can ask him or anyone else what time it is:

Wie viel Uhr ist es? (*What time is it?*)

Wie spät ist es? (*What time is it?*)

German speakers have two systems for telling time: One uses the numbers 1 through 12 on a standard clock, and the other uses a 24-hour format. They use the 12-hour system in casual conversation and the 24-hour system when they want to avoid any chance of misunderstanding. **Note:** German speakers don't use the a.m./p.m. system.

Using the 12-hour clock

At the top of any hour, telling the time is very easy. You just say **Es ist . . . Uhr.** (*It's . . . o'clock.*)

Of course, you include the number of the appropriate hour before the word **Uhr**: **Es ist acht Uhr.** (*It's eight o'clock.*)

Indicating times such as quarter past three, ten to eight, or half past eleven is a little more complicated, but you need to know only three key expressions. To use the German word for quarter, you include **Viertel** (*quarter*) plus the word **nach** (*past/after*) or **vor** (*to/before*), followed by the appropriate hour, as shown in these examples:

Es ist Viertel nach . . . (*It's quarter past . . .*)

Es ist Viertel vor . . . (*It's quarter to . . .*)

Expressing the half hour isn't quite as straightforward. In German, the word **halb** (*half*) indicates half of the hour to come, rather than the past hour. You use the phrase **Es ist halb . . .** (*It's half an hour before . . .*) followed by the appropriate hour. For example, when it's 4:30, you say this:

Es ist halb fünf. (*It's half an hour before 5:00./It's four thirty./It's half past four.*)

Es ist halb sieben. (*It's half an hour before 7:00./It's six thirty./It's half past six.*)

When you need to break down the time in terms of minutes before or after the hour, you use **nach** (*past/after*) and **vor** (*to/before*), like this:

Es ist fünf vor zwölf. (*It's five [minutes] to twelve.*)

Es ist zwanzig nach sechs. (*It's twenty [minutes] past six.*)

Using the 24-hour system

All kinds of businesses — from banks, stores, and airlines to theaters, museums, and restaurants — use the 24-hour system of telling time. Here's how it works: After you reach 12, you keep adding hours (13, 14, 15, and so on) until you get to 24 or **Mitternacht** (*midnight*), which is also referred to as **null Uhr**.

In this system of telling time, you don't use phrases such as *half past* or *a quarter to* (the hour). The time is expressed digitally, like this:

Es ist 15 Uhr. (*It's fifteen hours.*) This corresponds to 3:00 p.m.

Es ist 21 Uhr fünfzehn. (*It's twenty-one hours and fifteen.*)
That's 9:15 p.m.

Es ist 22 Uhr vierundvierzig. (*It's twenty-two hours and forty-four.*) You got it — 10:44 p.m.

Es ist null Uhr siebenundreißig. (*It's zero hours and thirty-seven.*) That's early in the morning — 12:37 a.m.

Talking about parts of the day

When you want to describe a slice of the day, such as morning or afternoon, you have several options in German. However, take the following time periods with a grain of salt; they're meant as guidelines. After all, night owls and early morning joggers have different ideas about when one part of the day starts and another ends.

- » **der Morgen** (*morning*; 4:00 a.m. to noon)
- » **der Vormittag** (*morning*; 9:00 a.m. to noon)
- » **der Mittag** (*noon*; 12 noon to 2:00 p.m.)
- » **der Nachmittag** (*afternoon*; 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.)
- » **der Abend** (*evening*; 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.)
- » **die Nacht** (*tonight*; 12:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m.)

Identifying Parts of Speech

To construct a simple sentence, you need a certain number of building blocks: the parts of speech. The most essential of these are nouns, articles, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions. The following sections give you the lowdown on each part of speech.

Naming with nouns and articles

A rose is a rose is a rose, right? Well, a rose is also a noun, and nouns aren't exactly the same in German and English. Although nouns in both languages name things (people, places, objects, concepts, and so on), the difference is that all German nouns are capitalized and have one of three genders: masculine, feminine, or neuter. Unfortunately, the meaning of a noun isn't usually much help in predicting that noun's grammatical gender.



REMEMBER

In German, grammatical gender is an element of German grammar and isn't related to the meaning of the noun. Instead, it's a kind of marker that identifies how the noun fits into a sentence. Sorry, no easy way out. You simply have to memorize the gender that belongs with each noun. (Flip to Chapter 2 for help getting a grip on word gender.)

Nouns often appear in the company of a sidekick — a definite article or an indefinite article:



TIP

» **Definite articles:** Although the definite article *the* has only one form in English, it has three forms in German: **der** (masculine), **die** (feminine), and **das** (neuter). Which form you use depends on the gender of the German noun. **Der** is the definite article used with masculine nouns, **die** is used with feminine nouns, and **das** is used with neuter nouns.

When meeting a new noun, find out whether its definite article is **der**, **die**, or **das** — in other words, determine the gender of the noun. For example, memorize **der Garten** (*the garden*) rather than just **Garten** (*garden*), **die Tür** (*the door*) rather than **Tür** (*door*), and **das Haus** (*the house*) rather than **Haus** (*house*).

» **Indefinite articles:** In English, you use the indefinite article *a* or *an* when you want to specify one of a particular thing. Because you're dealing with three different genders in German, you also have to use three different indefinite articles. Luckily, the indefinite article for masculine and neuter nouns is the same, **ein**. For example, **ein Name** (*a name*) or **ein Bier** (*a beer*). For feminine nouns, you add an **e** to **ein** to make **eine**. For example, **eine Nacht** (*a night*).

Note: The endings of the articles change depending on the case of the noun they're attached to. For the scoop on case, Chapter 2 can also help you.

Replacing with pronouns

Pronouns are the handy group of words that can punt for nouns so you don't sound redundant. In German, pronouns change form depending on their role in a sentence. For example, **ich** (*I*) can change into **mich** (*me*) or **mir** (*me*). In the following list, you find

the types of pronouns you encounter in this book (see Chapter 2 for more details on each pronoun type):

- » **Personal pronouns:** These pronouns translate to *I, you, he, she, it, we, and they*. You use them frequently in everyday German language.

Spielst du gern Karten? (*Do you like to play cards?*)

Ja, ich spiele gern Poker. (*Yes, I like to play poker.*)

- » **Relative pronouns:** You use relative pronouns when you want to tack on some more information about a noun or a pronoun that has already been mentioned. This group includes the German equivalents of *who, whom, whose, that, and which*.

Ich kenne den Supermarkt, den du meinst. (*I know the supermarket [that] you mean/are talking about.*)

Wie gefällt dir das Hemd, das ich anhabe? (*How do you like the shirt [that] I'm wearing?*)

- » **Demonstrative pronouns:** You make use of the demonstrative pronouns *this, that, these, or those* when you need to add emphasis to something or someone you're pointing out. Frequently, the demonstrative pronouns are translated as *he, him, she, her, it, they, or them*.

Ist diese Straße relativ ruhig? Ja, die ist absolut ruhig.
(*Is this street relatively quiet? Yes, it's absolutely quiet.*)

Wie findest du diesen Wein? Den finde ich ausgezeichnet.
(*How do you like this wine? It's outstanding.*)

What you think of in English as possessive pronouns, for example, **mein** (*my*), **dein** (*your*: singular, informal), **sein** (*his*), or **euer** (*your*: plural, informal), are considered adjectives in German because the endings they form resemble those of descriptive adjectives. Head to Chapter 6 for more on this topic.

Describing with adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns. In German, adjectives have different endings depending on the gender, case, and number (singular or plural) of the noun they accompany. Adjective endings also depend on whether the adjective is accompanied by a definite

article, an indefinite article, or no article at all. I help you figure out how to form adjectives properly in Chapter 6.

Conveying action with verbs

Verbs express actions or states of being. The person doing the action is the verb's subject, and the verb always adjusts its ending to the subject. For example, you say *I open the door*, and *the cat opens the door*. In the present tense in English, most verbs have two different forms, or spellings: for example, *open* and *opens*. Most German verbs, on the other hand, have four different forms in the present tense. (For further information on tenses, check out Chapters 3, 8, and 9.)

The verb form in its basic, static state is called the *infinitive*. It's what you see in any dictionary. In English, the infinitive verb form looks like *to ride*, and you can put it into a sentence like this: *I know how to ride a camel*. German infinitives, however, usually have the ending **-en**, as in **lachen** (*to laugh*), stuck onto what's called the *stem*. For example, the stem of **lachen** is **lach-**. A small number of verbs have the infinitive ending **-n**.

The stems of most verbs don't change, and the endings of such verbs are always the same. But some exceptions to the rule do exist. When the stem of the verb ends in **-m**, **-n**, **-d**, or **-t**, you need to insert an **-e** before the ending in the **du**, **er/sie/es**, and **ihr** constructions, as in **er arbeit-e-t** (*he works*).

Modifying with adverbs

Adverbs accompany verbs or adjectives, and their purpose is to describe them. In English, most adverbs end with **-ly** (as in: *I ran down the stairs quickly*.) In German, adverbs are generally spelled the same as their adjective counterparts in their barebones form, without special endings.

For example, take **vorsichtig** (*careful/carefully*), which has the same spelling for both its adjective and its adverb meaning. When you use **vorsichtig** in a sentence as an adverb, it keeps the same spelling: **Fahren Sie vorsichtig!** (*Drive carefully!*) However, when you use **vorsichtig** in a sentence as an adjective, it changes its form (spelling) the way all German adjectives do: **Sie ist eine vorsichtige Fahrerin.** (*She's a careful driver.*)

Connecting with prepositions

A *preposition* is a small word that shows the relationship between its object (a noun) and another word or words in the sentence. It's part of a *prepositional phrase*, which starts with a preposition and has an article, a noun, and other words.

You find out how crucially important these little guys are in expressing such things as the following:

- » Place/where something is located, as with **in** (*in*): **Es gibt eine Fliege in meiner Suppe.** (*There's a fly in my soup.*)
- » Movement/the direction where something is going, as with **unter** (*under*): **Eine Maus läuft unter meinen Stuhl.** (*A mouse is running under my chair.*)
- » Information showing relationships, as with **trotz** (*in spite of*): **Trotz dieser Überraschungen, schmeckt mir das Essen.** (*In spite of these surprises, the food tastes good.*)

Prepositions, such as *around*, *before*, and *with*, combine with other words to form prepositional phrases that provide information on where (*around the corner*), when (*before noon*), who (*with you*), and much more. Prepositions perform incredible tasks when they combine with other words, notably nouns and verbs, to create a diverse range of expressions. But all those possibilities come at a price. Prepositions are finicky little critters, much more so in German than in English. They abide by grammar rules. To get more comfortable with German prepositions, look at Chapter 7.

Building Sentences

Nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs aren't just thrown together helter-skelter; instead, to create a logical sentence, you arrange words in a specific order. The correct order is determined by certain rules, which the next sections explain.

Getting words in the right order

Standard word order in German is much like English word order. The subject comes first, then the verb, followed by the rest of the sentence. Look at the following example sentence.

Subject	Verb	Direct Object
Meine Freundin	hat	einen Hund.
<i>My girlfriend</i>	<i>has</i>	<i>a dog.</i>

Putting the verb in second place

One of the most important things to remember is the place of the verb in a German sentence. In freestanding clauses (known as *independent clauses*), like the one in the preceding section, a one-word verb is always in second place, no matter what. The term *second place*, however, doesn't necessarily mean the second word in the sentence. Rather, it refers to the second "placeholder," which may be comprised of more than one word. For example, **meine Freundin**, the subject of the earlier sentence, consists of two words but it's the first placeholder. In the following example, the verb is **fahren** (*to drive*), and it follows the second-place rule.

Meine Freundin fährt nach Dänemark. (*My girlfriend is going to Denmark.*)

How about adding some more information?

Meine Freundin fährt morgen mit dem Zug nach Dänemark. (*My girlfriend is going to Denmark by train tomorrow.*)



REMEMBER

Standard practice in German sentences is to place the reference to time first followed by the reference to manner, and after that, the reference to place, as you can see in the previous example where **morgen** (*tomorrow*) appears first, then **mit dem Zug** (*by train*), followed by **nach Dänemark** (*to Denmark*).

What happens if you start the sentence with **morgen**?

Morgen fährt meine Freundin mit dem Zug nach Dänemark. (*Tomorrow my girlfriend is going to Denmark by train.*)

Morgen is in first place, and because the verb has to be in second place, the subject follows the verb. Technically, this arrangement is called *inversion of the verb*. All it means is that the verb and the subject switch places. Inversion of the verb occurs whenever anything other than the subject occupies first place in a sentence.

Placing the verb at the end



REMEMBER

Dependent clauses typically start with *subordinating conjunctions* (words that link sentences) such as **dass** (*that*), **weil** (*because*), **damit** (*so that*), **obwohl** (*although*), **bevor** (*before*), and **wenn** (*when*). These subordinating conjunctions affect word order: They always push the verb to the end.

Check out the following sentence, which combines several thoughts to form a more complex structure:

Wir gehen nicht ins Konzert, weil wir kein Geld haben.

(We're not going to the concert because we have no money.)

The verb **gehen** (*go*) is in second place as you would expect, but the verb **haben** (*have*) in the dependent clause beginning with **weil** gets kicked to the end.