

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Recognizing the German you already know
- » Spotting words that aren't what they seem
- » Understanding German pronunciation

Chapter **1**

Warming Up to German Basics

The best way to learn a new language is to jump right in — no tiptoeing around. In this chapter, you get a head start in German by seeing bits of the language you're already familiar with. For those of you who are new to German, you may be pleased to learn that German and English share a number of words in common. You discover some popular German expressions, and you get the hang of why you need to be careful with words known as “false friends” — words that seem to be the same in both languages but actually have different meanings. In the section on pronunciation, you familiarize yourself with the German alphabet and find out how to pronounce words so that you can start to sound just like a native.

Starting with What You Already Know

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

Friendly allies: Kindergarten and more (perfect cognates)

The following words are spelled the same way and have the same meaning in German and in English. The only difference is the pronunciation, as shown in parentheses; in a few instances, the German and English pronunciation for the word is the same, so you see the English word in the pronunciation (followed by the notation “as in English”). The other quirk you may notice is that in German, nouns are always capitalized. In addition, German nouns have one of three genders, as noted in this list by the words **der** (masculine), **die** (feminine), and **das** (neuter) in front of each noun. See Chapter 2 in Book 3 for details on what gender is all about.

- » **der Arm** (dêr ârm)
- » **der Bandit** (dêr bân-deet)
- » **die Bank** (dee bânk)
- » **die Basis** (dee bah-zis)
- » **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)
- » **der Export** (dêr ex-port)
- » **der Finger** (dêr fing-er)
- » **die Hand** (dee hânt)
- » **das Hotel** (dâs hotel [as in English])
- » **die Immigration** (dee im-i-grâ-tsee-ohn)
- » **der Import** (dêr im-port)
- » **die Inflation** (dee in-flâ-tsee-ohn)
- » **die Information** (dee in-for-mâ-tsee-ohn)
- » **die Inspiration** (dee in-spi-râ-tsee-ohn)
- » **das Instrument** (dâs in-stroo-mênt)
- » **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)
- » **der Pilot** (dêr pee-loht)
- » **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 shtrês)
- » **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** (vârm)
- » **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 a few common German spelling conventions:

- » 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.
- » Some English nouns ending in *-ly* have a **-lich** ending in German.

TABLE 1-1

Words Similar in Meaning but 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>

German	English
exakt (êx-âkt)	<i>exact</i>
exzellent (êx-tsel-ênt)	<i>excellent</i>
fantastisch (fân-tâs-tish)	<i>fantastic</i>
der Fisch (dêr fish)	<i>fish</i>
das Glas (dâs glahs)	<i>glass</i>
das Haus (dâs hous)	<i>house</i>
hungrig (hoong-riH)	<i>hungry</i>
indirekt (in-di-rêkt)	<i>indirect</i>
die Industrie (dee in-dooH-stree)	<i>industry</i>
die Infektion (dee in-fêk-tsee-ohn)	<i>infection</i>
das Insekt (dâs in-zêkt)	<i>insect</i>
der Kaffee (dêr kâf-ey)	<i>coffee</i>
das Knie (dâs knee)	<i>knee</i>
die Komödie (dee koh-mer-dee-e)	<i>comedy</i>
die Kondition (dee kon-di-tsee-ohn)	<i>condition</i>
konservativ (kon-sêr-vâ-teef)	<i>conservative</i>
der Kontinent (dêr kon-ti-nênt)	<i>continent</i>
das Konzert (dâs kon-tsêrt)	<i>concert</i>
die Kultur (dee kool-toohr)	<i>culture</i>
logisch (loh-gish)	<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>

(continued)

TABLE 1-1 (continued)

German	English
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 (prâk-tish)	<i>practical</i>
das Programm (dâs proh-grâm)	<i>program</i>
das Salz (dâs zâlts)	<i>salt</i>
der Scheck (dêr shêk)	<i>check</i> (bank)
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

Like many languages, German contains some false friends — words that look very similar to English but have a completely different meaning. As you read the following list, you can see why you have to treat any new German word with kid gloves, especially if it looks like an English word, until 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*, 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 word means *so, therefore, or thus*, not *also*. The German word for *also* is **auch** (ouH).
- » **bald** (bâlt): This word means *soon*. It isn't 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*, 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*, not *brave*. The German word for *brave* is **tapfer** (tâp-fer).
- » **Brief** (breef): This is a noun that 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 (in other words, 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 adjective 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-ah): 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.
- » **Handy** (hân-dee): This is the German word for *cellphone*. The German equivalent of *handy* is **praktisch** (prâk-tish), **geschickt** (ge-shikt), or **handlich** (hânt-liH).
- » **Hut** (hoot): This word means *hat*. The German word for *hut* is **Hütte** (hueH-tê).
- » **Kind** (kint): This is the German word for *child*. It has nothing to do with the English *kind*, which is **nett** (nêt), **lieb** (leep), 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** (trers-ten).
- » **Kost** (kost): This is the German word for *food or fare*. For example, the term **Feinkost** (fayn-kost) refers to gourmet food or a delicatessen where you can buy fine food products. The German word meaning *to cost* is **kosten** (kos-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** (die 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-teeff): You can avoid another embarrassing moment when you remember 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 word means *advice or counsel*. In German, **Ratte** (rah-te) is the word for *rat*.
- » **Rock** (rok): The meaning of this word is *skirt*. The German word for *rock* is **Fels** (fels) or **Stein** (shtayn). Germans do, however, use the word **Rockmusik** (rok moo-zeeek) to refer to *rock music*.
- » **See** (zey): This word means *lake* (**der See**) (deyr zey) or *sea* (**die See, das Meer**) (dee zey, dâs mêr). 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).
- » **Smoking** (smoking [as in English]): In German, this word means *tuxedo* or *dinner jacket*. The verb *to smoke* is **rauchen** (rouH-en).
- » **spenden** (shpen-den): The German meaning is *to donate*, not *to spend*, which in German is **ausgeben** [money] (ous-gey-ben).
- » **sympathisch** (zerm-pah-tish): This word means *likeable* or *congenial*, not *sympathetic*. The German word for *sympathetic* is **mitfühlend** (mit-fuel-ent) or **verständnisvoll** (fêr-shtênd-nis-fo).
- » **Taste** (tahs-te): The meaning of this word is *key*, like the key of a musical instrument or a button on a computer or a machine. The German word for *taste* is **Geschmack** (ge-shmâk). The word for the item you use to lock or unlock a door is **Schlüssel** (shlues-el).

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-krou), **Zeitgeist** (tsayt-gayst), and **Wanderlust** (vân-der-loost).

However, the number of these German words is minimal compared to the number of 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 one 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 1 of Book 3 for more on German verbs and infinitive forms.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| » der Blog | » die City (German meaning: <i>downtown</i>) |
| » der Boss | » der Computer |
| » das Business | » cool |
| » das Catering | » 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 *cell-phone*, **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 English 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-jen*. *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?

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(continued)

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, dâ-n-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]!
No, thanks. Yesterday I went to an outlet and bought a pink T-shirt and a pair of boyfriend 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 may be similar to the way you take a shower: You turn on the water gently, wait for it to warm up, check the temperature, and 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>

German	English
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>
Auf Wiedersehen! (ouf-vee-der-zey-en!)	<i>Goodbye!</i>
Tschüs! (chues!)	<i>Bye!</i>
Ich heiÙe . . . (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!/tôl!) (*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!*)

Finding Meaning through Context

One essential tool for making sense of a foreign language is to consciously look for meaning through the context of the words. You probably do the same thing in your own language. Imagine you're reading a text that's not in your field of expertise. You instinctively look at any headings, scan the text rapidly, and get clues from any illustrations, charts, or tables. When you're looking at a text in German, you can figure out what it means by employing the same techniques you already use in your native language.

To understand what a whole sentence means, see how the words fit together. Identify the verb or verbs and a noun or pronoun, and you have the meat of your sentence. Then check out how the other words are related to the subject and verb. In short, use all the tools at your disposal to understand German sentences.



REMEMBER

Before you start memorizing new words, you want to make sure you know how to use them. So, after you figure out the meaning of a new word or expression by looking at it in its context, you may want to write it down. Putting words together in a phrase or a sentence — that is, in the context where you first discovered the word(s) — is a great way to improve your brain's ability to remember new words and their meanings.



TIP

Unfortunately, you don't retain vocabulary, grammar, or what-have-you the first time you're exposed to it — or the second or third time. So, use a system of recording important information that works well for you: Try making flashcards (color code the nouns according to gender — blue cards for masculine, pink for feminine, green for neuter), creating an alphabetical word list in Excel, writing new expressions in meaningful sentences, and incorporating new grammar points into a short dialogue.

Handling Basic Pronunciation

Speaking a foreign language correctly is all about mastering the basics of pronunciation. The key to mastering pronunciation is to start small by figuring out how the individual letters sound. Then you can expand to syllables, words, and finally, sentences. The rest is practice, practice, practice.

The following information shows you standard German pronunciation. As you travel throughout German-speaking countries, you may hear variations in German pronunciation that sound slightly different from the pronunciation guidelines in this book. If you use the German pronunciation shown in this book, you will be understood by German speakers.

Understanding stress in German

This type of stress doesn't have anything to do with meeting deadlines or having a BMW tailgate you at 110 miles per hour on the Autobahn. Instead, it's about knowing which syllables to stress in German words. In the pronunciation key that you see in parentheses following each word, the syllables you should stress are in *italics*.

Constructing the alphabet blocks

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, so things aren't as confusing as they are in English with the likes of *bow* (*tie*), (*take a*) *bow*, and (*tree*) *bough*. The bad news is that many of the familiar letters are pronounced differently from their English counterparts.

Table 1-3 shows you the sound of each letter of the alphabet when it's pronounced alone. Knowing how to say each individual letter comes in handy, for example, when you need to spell your name to make a table reservation at a German restaurant, book a room with a hotel receptionist, or compete in a German spelling bee with a grand prize of 500,000 euros.



PLAY THIS

The online audio file for this chapter gives you the sounds of the letters in the German alphabet as shown in Table 1-3. Note that the German pronunciation of a single letter may be different from the way you pronounce it within a German word.

TABLE 1-3

Pronouncing the German Alphabet

Letter	German Pronunciation	German Word
a	ah	Ahnen (<i>ahn-en</i>) (<i>ancestors</i>)
b	bey	Bild (<i>bilt</i>) (<i>image, picture</i>)
c	tsey	Café (<i>kâ-fey</i>) (<i>café</i>)
d	dey	durstig (<i>doohrs-tiH</i>) (<i>thirsty</i>)
e	ey	Ehe (<i>ey-e</i>) (<i>marriage</i>)
f	êf	Feuer (<i>foy-er</i>) (<i>fire</i>)
g	gey	geben (<i>gey-ben</i>) (<i>give</i>)
h	hah	Haus (<i>house</i> [as in English]) (<i>house</i>)
i	ee	ihn (<i>een</i>) (<i>him</i>)
j	yot	Januar (<i>yahn-oo-âr</i>) (<i>January</i>)
k	kah	Kilometer (<i>ki-loh-mey-ter</i>) (<i>kilometer</i>)
l	êl	Liebe (<i>lee-be</i>) (<i>love</i>)
m	êm	Manager (<i>manager</i> [as in English]) (<i>manager</i>)
n	ên	Name (<i>nah-me</i>) (<i>name</i>)
o	oh	ohne (<i>oh-ne</i>) (<i>without</i>)
p	pey	Pause (<i>pou-ze</i>) (<i>break, intermission</i>)
q	kooh	Quatsch (<i>kvâch</i>) (<i>nonsense</i>)
r	êr	rot (<i>roht</i>) (<i>red</i>)
s	ês	S-Bahn (<i>es-bahn</i>) (<i>suburban train</i>)
t	tey	Taxi (<i>tâx-ee</i>) (<i>taxi</i>)
u	ooh	U-Boot (<i>ooh-boht</i>) (<i>submarine</i>)
v	fou	Vogel (<i>foh-gel</i>) (<i>bird</i>)
w	veh	Wald (<i>vâlt</i>) (<i>forest</i>)
x	iks	Fax (<i>fâx</i>) (<i>fax</i>)
y	<i>uep-si-lon</i>	System (<i>zers-teym</i>) (<i>system</i>)
z	tset	Zeit (<i>tsayt</i>) (<i>time</i>)
ä	ah-oom-lout (Umlaut)	Bäcker (<i>bêk-er</i>) (<i>baker</i>)
ö	oh-oom-lout (Umlaut)	hören (<i>her-en</i>) (<i>to hear!</i>)
ü	ooh-oom-lout (Umlaut)	Tür (<i>tuer</i>) (<i>door</i>)
ß	ês-tsêt	Straße (<i>strah-se</i>) (<i>street</i>)

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,” meaning 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 basic rules:

- » A vowel is long when it’s followed by the letter *h*, as in **Stahl** (shtahl) (*steel*) or **ihn** (een) (*him*).
- » A vowel is generally long when it’s followed by a single consonant, as in **Tag** (tahk) (*day*).
- » A vowel is long when it’s doubled, as in **Teer** (teyr) (*tar*) or **Aal** (ahl) (*eel*).
- » The vowels **a**, **e**, and **i** sound long before a single consonant, as in **beten** (bey-ten) (*to pray*).
- » In general, a vowel is short when followed by two or more consonants, as in **Tanne** (tân-e) (*fir tree*).



PLAY THIS

Table 1-4 shows you how to pronounce German vowels by providing some examples and the letter combinations that serve as the English equivalent of the German letter’s pronunciation (called the *phonetic script*). In this book’s phonetic script, two short vowel sounds have a little “hat” over the letter, so they look like this: â and ê. (Note that the phonetic spelling of ê in Table 1-4 is the same as that of the German short umlaut sound ä in Table 1-5.) Listen to the audio file online for this chapter to hear how to pronounce these German vowels.

TABLE 1-4 Pronouncing German Vowels

German Letter	Phonetic Symbol	As in English	German Example
a (long)	ah	father	Bahnhof (bahn-hohf) (<i>station</i>)
a (short)	â	adore (clipped “a”)	Banner (bân-er) (<i>banner</i>)
e (long)	ey	vein	Leben (ley-ben) (<i>life</i>)
e (short/stressed)	ê	bet (clipped “e”)	Bett (bêt) (<i>bed</i>)
e (short/unstressed)	e	pocket	Lachen (lâH-en) (<i>laughter</i>)
i (long)	ee	see	ihn (een) (<i>him</i>)
i (short)	i	winter	Mitte (mit-e) (<i>middle</i>)

(continued)

TABLE 1-4 (continued)

German Letter	Phonetic Symbol	As in English	German Example
o (long)	oh	mope	Lob (loh-p) (<i>praise</i>)
o (short)	o	gonna	Sonne (zon-e) (<i>sun</i>)
u (long)	ooh	moon	Tube (tooh-be) (<i>tube</i>)
u (short)	oo	push (clipped “u”)	muss (moos) (<i>have to/must</i>)

Pronouncing ä, ö, and ü



PLAY THIS

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 1-5. These sounds have no equivalent in English, so listen to the audio file online devoted to them to find out how to pronounce them.

TABLE 1-5 Pronouncing Vowels with Umlauts

German Letter	Phonetic Symbol	As in English	German Example
ä (long)	ai	say (“ay” in “say” with spread lips)	nächste (naiH-ste) (<i>next</i>)
ä (short)	ê	bet (clipped “e”)	fällen (fêl-en) (<i>to fell [a tree]</i>)
ö	er	her (without the “r” sound)	schön (shern) (<i>pretty</i>) (remember: no “r” sound)
ü	ue	lure (“ooh” with pursed lips)	Türe (tuer-e) (<i>door</i>)



TIP

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, round your lips and pucker up, baby! The **ü** sound is pronounced with very pursed lips.

Pronouncing diphthongs



PLAY THIS

Diphthongs are combinations of two vowels in one syllable (as in the English “lie”). Table 1-6 lists the German diphthongs and shows you how to pronounce them. (Practice using the online audio file for this chapter devoted to diphthongs.)

TABLE 1-6 Pronouncing German Diphthongs

German Diphthong	Phonetic Symbol	As in English	German Example
ai/ei/ay	ay	cry	Mais (mays) (<i>corn</i>)/ ein (ayn) (<i>a</i>)/ Bayern (<i>bay-ern</i>) (<i>Bavaria</i>)
au	ou	loud	Restaurant (res-tau-rahnt) (<i>restaurant</i>)
äu/eu	oy	boy	Häuser (<i>hoy-zer</i>) (<i>houses</i>)/ Leute (<i>loy-te</i>) (<i>people</i>)
ie	ee	see	Miete (<i>meet-e</i>) (<i>rent</i>)



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*.

Pronouncing 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. Of course, you'll find a couple of oddities and exceptions, but don't worry. The following sections explain what you need to know.

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*.

As far as the written language goes, whether a given German word is spelled with **ss** or **ß** depends on a couple of rules. Here's the scoop:

- » After a long vowel or a diphthong, the *s* sound is spelled **ß** — for example, **Fuß** (*foohs*) (*foot*).
- » After a short vowel, the *s* sound is spelled **ss** — for example, **Fass** (*fâs*) (*barrel*).

Note: In Switzerland, the **ß** isn't used at all. Instead, the Swiss always spell words with the double **ss**.



PLAY THIS

Table 1-7 tells you how to pronounce the rest of the German consonants by providing you with examples and a phonetic script. To hear them all, listen to the online audio file for this chapter devoted to consonants.

TABLE 1-7 Pronouncing Selected German Consonants

German Letter	Phonetic Symbol	As in English	German Example
b* (end of a word or syllable or before voiceless consonants)	p	<i>up</i>	Abfahrt (âp-fahrt) (<i>departure</i>)
b	b	<i>bright</i>	Bild (bilt) (<i>image, picture</i>)
c (beginning of a word)	k	<i>cat</i>	Café (kâ-fey) (<i>café</i>)
c (mostly words of foreign origin)	ts	<i>ts</i> as in <i>tsar</i>	Celsius (tsêl-zee-oos) (<i>Celsius</i>)
c (mostly words of foreign origin)	ch	<i>cello</i>	Cello (chêl-oh) (<i>cello</i>)
d* (end of a word or syllable or before voiceless consonants)	t	<i>moot</i>	blind (blint) (<i>blind</i>)
d	d	<i>do</i>	Dunst (doonst) (<i>mist, haze</i>)
g	g	<i>go</i>	geben (gey-ben) (<i>give</i>)
g* (end of a word or syllable or before voiceless consonants)	k	<i>lag</i>	Tag (tahk) (<i>day</i>)
j	y	<i>yes</i>	ja (yah) (<i>yes</i>)
qu	kv	<i>kv</i> (pronounced together)	Quatsch (kvâch) (<i>nonsense</i>)
s (beginning of a word)	z	<i>zoo</i>	sieben (zee-ben) (<i>seven</i>)
s (middle/end of a word)	s	<i>sit</i>	Haus (house [as in English]) (<i>house</i>)
v	f	<i>f</i> as in <i>fire</i>	Vogel (foh-gel) (<i>bird</i>)
v (words of foreign origin)	v	<i>velvet</i>	Vase (vah-ze) (<i>vase</i>)
w	v	<i>vice</i>	Wald (vâlt) (<i>forest</i>)
y (mostly words of foreign origin)	y	<i>yes</i>	Yoga (yoh-gâ) (<i>yoga</i>)
y (mostly middle a of word)	er	<i>her</i> (without the "r" sound)	System (zers-teym) (<i>system</i>)
z	ts	<i>ts</i> as in <i>tsar</i>	Zahl (tsahl) (<i>number</i>)
ß	s	<i>guess</i>	Straße (shtrah-se) (<i>street</i>)

*Note: When the letters **b**, **d**, and **g** are at the end of a word or syllable or before voiceless consonants like **s** or **t**, they change sounds. The **b** changes to a *p* sound; **d** changes to *t*; and **g** changes to *k*.

Pronouncing the German r and l

You pronounce the letters **r** and **l** differently in German than you do in English:

- » To replicate the “gargled” pronunciation of the German **r**, try making a gargling sound before saying *aahh*, so you’re saying *ra*. Also, don’t roll the tip of your tongue or use it to pronounce the German **r**.
- » To correctly pronounce the German letter **l**, you have to position your tongue differently than you do when you pronounce the English letter *l*. In English, you pronounce the *l* with your tongue in a spoon shape, hollowed out in the middle. To make the German **l**, you press the tip of your tongue against your gum ridge (just as you do in English), but you keep it flat instead of spoon-shaped. The German **l** sound is clipped, not drawled.



PLAY THIS

Listen to the **r** and **l** audio file online to hear how to pronounce these letters. Here are some sample words:

- » **l** as in **Bild** (bilt) (*picture*)
- » **r** as in **richtig** (riH-tiH) (*correct*)

Pronouncing consonant combinations

The German language has a few consonant sounds that are either different or don’t occur in English. Fortunately, most of them are easy to pronounce.

The German letter combination **ch** is the trickiest one for English speakers to pronounce. There’s absolutely no equivalent for it in English (that’s why it’s represented by a capital *H* in this book’s phonetic script), and 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*.

The good news is that in a few words, the **ch + s** combo is simply pronounced as an *x* sound, for example in **Wachs** (vâks) (*wax*) or **Fuchs** (fooks) (*fox*). In a few other words (generally French foreign words), the **ch** is pronounced like the sound *sh* in English, for example in **Champignon** (shâm-peen-yon) (*mushroom*) or **Champagner** (shâm-pân-yer) (*champagne*).



PLAY THIS

Table 1-8 shows you how to pronounce the common consonant combinations of **ch**, **ck**, **sch**, **sp**, **st**, and **tsch**. The online audio file devoted to these consonant clusters can also help.

TABLE 1-8

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

German Letter	Phonetic Symbol	As in English	German Example
ch	H	<i>Loch (Ness)</i>	mich (miH) (<i>me</i>)
ck	k	<i>check</i>	Dreck (drêk) (<i>dirt</i>)
sch	sh	<i>shut</i>	Tisch (tish) (<i>table</i>)
sp (beginning of a word or a syllable)	shp	<i>sh</i> as in <i>shut</i> , <i>p</i> as in <i>people</i>	spät (shpait) (<i>late</i>)
st (beginning of a word or a syllable)	sht	<i>sh</i> as in <i>shut</i> , <i>t</i> as in <i>table</i>	Stadt (shtât) (<i>city</i>)
st (middle/end of a word)	st	<i>stable</i>	fast (fâst) (<i>almost, nearly</i>)
tsch	ch	<i>switch</i>	Deutsch (doych) (<i>German</i>)



REMEMBER

The English *th* sound doesn't exist in the German language. The **th** combination is pronounced one of two ways in German:

- » The **h** is silent, as in the words **Theorie** (tey-oh-ree) (*theory*) and **Theologie** (tey-oh-loh-gee) (*theology*).
- » The **t** and **h** are pronounced separately because they actually belong to different components of a compound noun, as in the words **Gasthaus** (gâst-hous) (*inn*), which is a combination of the German words for *guest* and *house*, or **Basthut** (bâst-hooht) (*straw hat*), a combo of the German words for *raffia* and *hat*.