Pronunciation Guide

Even though the purpose of this text is not to teach oral communication in German, it is of great advantage when learning a language to be able to pronounce the words. Words are remembered in part by hearing as well as by seeing. The student must also keep in mind that, on occasion, he may need to communicate with peers the material studied or used in his research, such as titles and quotes.

VOWELS

Like English, German has a number of vowels a, e, i, o, u, but depending upon their position in a given word, the vowel pronunciation may be either long or short.

A vowel is **long** when:

a) it precedes an **h**, e.g. **Sohn** *(son)*

b) it is doubled, e.g. **paar** *(a few, some, a couple of)*

c) it is stressed or followed by a single consonant, e.g. **eben** *(even, exactly ...)*

d) at the end of a word, except for the final unstressed **e**, e.g. **da** *(there)*, but **eine** *(one, a)*

A vowel is **short**:

a) when it is followed by two or more consonants, or a double consonant, e.g. **ist** *(is)*, **kommt** *(comes)*

b) in most prefixes, suffixes or endings, e.g. **be-**, **ver-**, etc. or **-el**, **-en**, etc. as in **ver**steh**en** *(to understand)*, and geh**en** *(to go)*

Vowel		Examples	Comparison
A	long	St**aa**t *(state)*, W**ah**n *(delusion)* **a**ber *(but)*	f**a**ther
	short	B**a**nn *(ban)*, **a**lt *(old)*	m**o**ther
E	long	H**ee**r *(army, host)*, h**eh**r *(sublime)*, W**e**sen *(being, essence)*	r**a**re
	short	H**e**rr *(lord, master)*, Geb**e**r *(giver)*	b**e**tter
I	long	Gl**ie**d *(member)*, **ih**n *(him)*	incogn**i**to
	short	B**i**tte *(request)*, **i**n *(in)*	b**i**tter
O	long	B**oo**t *(boat)*, w**oh**nen *(to live)*	s**o**
	short	G**o**tt *(God)*, d**o**rt *(there)*	**o**ften
U	long	R**uh**m *(fame)*, J**u**den *(Jews)*	f**oo**l
	short	K**u**nde *(news)*, Paul**u**s *(Paul)*, **u**nd *(and)*	f**oo**t

UMLAUTS

The vowels **a, o,** and **u** can be modified by adding **e (ae, oe, ue)** or an umlaut **(ä, ö, ü).** They can be either long or short according to the rules mentioned above. The letters **ä, ö, ü** are, at times, rendered **ae, oe,** or **ue** in the absence of umlaut characters.

Umlaut		Examples	Comparison
Ä	long	V**ä**ter *(fathers)*	st**ay**
	short	M**ä**nner *(men)*	l**e**t
Ö	long	S**öh**ne *(sons)*	(no English equivalent) - French **eu** as in t**eu**
	short	G**ö**tter *(gods)*	w**o**rse
Ü	long	S**üh**ne *(atonement)*, Br**ü**der *(brothers)*	**ie** as in f**ie**ld, but pronounced with rounded and protruded lips
	short	M**ü**tter *(mothers)*	**i** as in b**i**tter, but pronounced with rounded and protruded lips

DIPHTHONGS

There are several diphthongs in the German language, two of which are pronounced the same but are spelled differently, ai/ei, äu/eu, au, and ie. These always have a long pronunciation.

Diphthong	Examples	Comparison
AI	L**ai**b *(loaf)*, L**ai**e *(layman)*	l**i**ght
EI	l**ei**ten *(to lead)*	l**i**ght
ÄU	l**äu**ten *(to ring)*	t**oi**l
EU	z**eu**gen *(to proclaim, give birth)*	*t**oi**l*
AU	Fr**au** *(lady, wife, woman)*	h**ou**se
IE	L**ie**d *(song)*	f**ee**l

CONSONANTS

Many of the German consonants are pronounced very closely to those in English.

Consonant	Examples	Comparison
B	beten *(to pray)*	**b**ut
	Lie**b**[1] *(dear)*	**p**ut
C	**c**ir**c**a[2] *(approximately)*	**c**ir**c**a
	Christ[3] *(christian)*	**Ch**rist
	i**ch** *(I)*, leu**ch**ten[4] *(to shine)*, a**ch**ten *(to respect)*	Scottish: lo**ch**
	se**chs**[5] *(six)*	sa**cks**
	Geschi**ck**, Geschi**cke**[6] *(fate)*	sa**ck**

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[1]At the end of a syllable or word, or before **t**, the consonants **b, d,** and **g** are pronounced **p, t,** and **k.**

[2]receding an **a**, **o**, or **u** the **c** is pronounced like **k**. Preceding an **e** or an **i** it is pronounced like **s**.

[3]The combination **ch** is pronounced at the beginning of a word most often like **k**. At the end of a syllable or word the pronunciation of the **ch** can not be compared to any sound in the English language. It is either an aspirated palatal (after palatal vowels - **e**, **ei**, **eu**, **i** - and consonants), or an aspirated guttural (after velar vowels - **a**, **au**, **o**, **u**).

[4]See footnote three.

[5]The combination **chs** is pronounced like **ks**.

[6]The combination **ck** is always pronounced like a double **k**.

D	**d**u *(you, thou)*	**d**ear
	Lie**d**[7] *(song)*	fee**t**
F	**F**reiheit *(freedom)*	**f**ather
G	**g**eben *(to give)*	**g**o
	Ta**g** *(day)*	ta**k**e
	Sä**ng**er[8] *(singer)*	si**ng**er
	wichti**g**[9] *(important)*	
H	**H**eiland[10] *(savior)*	**h**ow
	se**h**en[11] *(to see)*, Lu**th**er[12]	
J	**J**och *(yoke)*	**y**oke
K	**K**önig *(king)*,	**K**ing
	Knecht[13] *(servant)*	
L	**L**eben *(life)*	**l**ife
M	**M**eister *(master)*	**m**aster
N	**N**acht *(night)*	**n**ight
P	**Pf**ingsten[14] *(Pentecost)*	often as in: **f**inger
	Philoso**ph**[15] *(philosopher)*	**f**ool
	Priester *(priest)*	**p**riest
QU	**Qu**elle *(source, spring)*	**kv**
R	**R**echt *(right)*, B**r**ot *(bread)*	fai**r**

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[7]See footnote one.

[8]The combination **ng** is usually pronounced like **ng** in singer, but not like **ng** in finger.

[9]In the uninflicted suffix **-ig** the **g** is often pronounced like **ch** as in **ich** (I) or more like a **k**.

[10]The German **h** is never silent as in the English word honor; however, in its function to lengthen a preceding vowel, it may also be mute. The **h** is also silent in the combination of **th**.

[11]See footnote ten.

[12]See footnote ten.

[13]The **k** in the combination of **kn** must be pronounced.

[14]The combination **pf** is often pronounced like **f**.

[15]The combination **ph** is also pronounced like **f**.

	T**o**ren *(fools)*, hö**r**t *(listens)*	**r**ight[16]
S, ß	**S**egen *(blessing)*	ha**s**
	Bu**ß**e[17] *(repentance, atonement)*	**s**o
	wi**ss**en *(to know)*	
	Schiff[18] *(ship)*	**sh**ip
	Spruch[19] *(saying)*	**sh**ip
	streben *(to strive)*	
T	**T**estament, **Th**eologie[20]	**t**estament
	Hi**tz**e[21] *(heat)*, Na**ti**on[22]	hi**ts**
V	**V**ater *(father)*	**f**ather
	E**v**angelium[23] *(gospel)*	uni**v**erse
W	**W**elt *(world)*	**v**ery
X	Te**x**t *(text)*	te**x**t
Y	S**y**mbol[24]	
Z	**Z**eichen *(sign)*, Kreu**z** *(cross)*	ca**ts**

[16]Depending upon the position of the **r** in a given word, there are varying degrees of distinct pronunciations, in general: a) in initial position or before vowels with more of a roll or trill; b) in a final position or before consonants very faint.

[17]The combination **ss** or **ß** is pronounced like **s** in **s**o. In American publications the **ß** is often rendered as **ss**.

[18]The combination **sch** is identical to the **sh** in English as in ship.

[19]The **s** in the combinations **sp** and **st** at the beginning of a syllable is pronounced like **sh** as in shepherd.

[20]The combination **th** is pronounced like **t**.

[21]The combination **tz** is pronounced like **ts**.

[22]The **t** in the suffix **-tion** is pronounced like **ts**.

[23]Often (primarily in words of Latin origin) **v** is pronounced like the **v** in the English very.

[24]The **y** is pronounced like the German **ü**.

STRESS

As in English, German words with more than one syllable are pronounced with a stress on one of the syllables. It is usually the first one which receives the accent, e.g.:

heute	*(today)*
geben	*(to give)*
freundlich	*(friendly)*
hören	*(to hear)*

When separable prefixes are added to a word, the stress moves to the prefix, e.g.:

weggeben	*(to give away)*
unfreundlich	*(unfriendly)*
aufhören	*(to stop)*

However, the nonseparable prefixes such as **be-, ent-, er-, ge-, ver-, zer-** are not stressed. Thus the accent of the word remains on the first syllable of the main or stem word, e.g.:

be**hal**ten	*(to keep)*
er**fül**len	*(to fulfill)*
ge**ge**ben	*(given)*

Note: ge- may also be used as part of the stem, e.g.:

geben	*(give)*
gehen	*(to go)*
gegen	*(against)*

In compounds the stress is on the first word, applying the above rules, e.g.:

Endziel	*(final goal)*
Ge**fühls**handlung	*(sentimental act)*
Ent**wick**lungshilfe	*(foreign aid)*
Glaubenswerke	*(works of faith)*

Words of Greek and Latin origin usually carry the stress on the last syllable, e.g.:

abso**lut**	*(absolute)*
Ob**jekt**	*(object)*

Theo**rie**   *(theory)*
Defini**tion**   *(definition)*
religi**ös**   *(religious)*
ana**log**   *(analogous)*

Note: Many of the Greek and Latin root words may also appear with various grammatical endings which do not influence the stress pattern, e.g.:

Tradi**tio**nen   traditions
ak**ti**ve Gruppe   active group
defi**nie**ren   to define
defi**nier**bar   definable
Defi**nier**barkeit   definability