
Vorlesungsskript zum Deutschkurs

Fernando Martins Cardoso

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Fantasie ist wichtiger als Wissen, denn Wissen ist begrenzt.
Albert Einstein

Preface

Gewisse Bücher scheinen geschrieben zu sein, nicht damit man daraus lerne, sondern damit man wisse, daß der Verfasser etwas gewußt hat.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Every journey into a new language is an adventure—at once exhilarating and daunting. German, or **Deutsch**, with its precise grammar, rich vocabulary, and complex case system, presents a unique and formidable challenge. This book is the codified result of one such journey.

It did not begin as a traditional textbook, but as a systematic, version-controlled log—a digital notebook hosted in a GitHub repository. This unconventional origin underscores the book’s core philosophy: that mastering German requires not just immersion, but rigorous organization and clarity. The structure you now hold is designed to serve as a quick reference and summary, a map drawn by a learner, for a learner.

A Systematic Guide to German

This resource is built to cut through the complexity of the language by dividing the study into essential, reviewable components. Inside, you will find:

- **Grammar Rules:** Clear, concise summaries of the most challenging structures, from the intricacies of cases and prepositions to the nuances of verb conjugations and adjective endings.
- **Curated Vocabulary:** Thematic and frequency-based word lists designed for efficient acquisition, ensuring you are building a practical foundation.
- **Phonetics and Pronunciation:** Dedicated notes on tackling challenging German sounds and minimizing common pronunciation pitfalls.
- **Cultural Notes:** Brief but crucial insights into the cultural context that informs the language, aiding comprehension far beyond simple translation.

This book is intended to evolve alongside my own learning trajectory. It is the repository of hard-won knowledge—the distilled essence of countless hours of self-study, courses, and practice.

To the Fellow Learner

Take this material as a learner’s notebook. You may find some mistakes or areas that require more clarification; this is part of the learning process.

The evolution and revision of this book is an open project available on <https://github.com/fernandomartinscardoso/deutsch>.

Feedback, corrections, and contributions are welcome. Together, we can refine this resource into a more effective tool for mastering the German language.

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Aussprachekurs

*Der Alte verliert eines der größten Menschenrechte:
er wird nicht mehr von seines Gleichen beurteilt.*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

This chapter is dedicated to study the German language pronunciation. The content is based on the first chapter of the Berlitz book [1], on the Aussprachekurs from Professor Raville [5], and on the pronunciation indicated in Langenscheidt Dictionary [4] and Wiktionary [10] using International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Accent and pronunciation

According to Professor Raville [5], accent is a particular way of pronouncing certain phonemes, which can change the “melody” and “rhythm” of a particular word or phrase. While pronunciation has a more rigid structure which, even with the variation in accents, must be preserved so as not to compromise the communication process. Therefore, this material focus on German standard pronunciation (*Standardaussprache*) to keep the speech clear during verbal communication.

To check the stressed¹ syllable of German words, the website of the famous German dictionary Duden can be consulted at the following link <https://www.duden.de/>. To check phonetic transcription and etymology, Wiktionary, the free dictionary available in <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/> has an excellent database. Finally, to check pronunciation with audio recordings of native speakers, the website <https://www.forvo.com/> is a great option.

How to improve the pronunciation in German

Here are recommended tasks for pronunciation improvement [5]:

- Always read aloud, and use a voice recorder frequently.
- Check your pronunciation on Google Translate or similar online translators. Do they “understand” you?
- Identify what is most challenging for you to pronounce and practice a lot until you master it.

¹In linguistics, and particularly phonology, stress or accent is the relative emphasis or prominence given to a certain syllable in a word or to a certain word in a phrase or sentence [9]. But this accent must not be confused with the sociolinguistic meaning of accent mentioned on the previous paragraph, which is a way of pronouncing a language that is distinctive to a country, area, social class, or individual [7].

- When speaking German, articulate a lot and exaggerate. This is normal in the beginning.
- Sing in German.

Das Deutsche Alphabet (The German Alphabet)

Before diving into vocabulary and grammar, establishing a solid foundation in pronunciation is crucial. The sounds of a language are its DNA, and mastering them early will significantly accelerate your progress and confidence.

The German alphabet is, thankfully, very similar to the English (Latin) alphabet, sharing the same 26 letters. However, the German language incorporates four additional characters that are essential for accurate reading and speaking: the three mutated vowels (Umlauts) and the sharp S (*Eszett* or *scharfes S*).

This section will provide a comprehensive overview of the following components:

1. The 26 standard letters and how their names and associated sounds differ from their English counterparts.
2. The four special characters (Ä, Ö, Ü, and ß) and their distinct phonetic values.
3. Common diphthongs and letter combinations (like ei, eu, ie, ch, and sch) that follow predictable rules and are key to proper German articulation.

Knowing how to correctly name and sound out each letter will unlock the ability to spell German words clearly and, most importantly, pronounce them correctly.

A

Letter name [a]. In words, this letter sounds like the a in **algae**.

Examples:

1. **aus**: [aʊs]
2. **auf**: [aʊf]
3. **an**: [an]
4. **aktuell**: [aktu'ɛl]

Ä

Letter name [a] Umlaut, pronounced [ɛ:]. In words, this letter can sound long (i.e., stressed), or short (i.e., unstressed) [ɐ].

Examples of long ä:

1. **Hähnchen**: ['hɛɪnçən]
2. **Käse**: ['kɛ:zə]

3. **schläfst**: ['ʃlɛfst]

4. **Verspätung**: [fɛr'ʃpɛ:tʊŋ]

Examples of short ä:

1. **ändern**: ['ɛndərn]

2. **Gäste**: ['gɛstə]

3. **Männer**: ['mɛnər]

4. **März**: [mɛrts]

5. **wäscht**: [vɛft]

Depending on the area of Germany, ä can sound as short in words where it is usually long, e.g., **schläfst** being pronounced as ['ʃlɛfst], and **später** being pronounced ['ʃpɛtər].

B

Letter name [be:]. In words, this letter sounds like b before vowels, as in **bow**. And it sounds like silent p at the end of words and before consonants, as in **map**.

Examples:

1. **Ab**: [ap]

2. **bald**: [balt]

3. **bekommen**: [be'kɔmən]

4. **Bier**: [bi:r]

5. **Bus**: [bʊs]

6. **gelb**: [gɛlp]

7. **gibt**: [ɡɪpt]

8. **habt**: [hapt]

9. **halb**: [halp]

10. **Obst**: [o:pst]

11. **siebzehn**: ['zi:ptse:n]

C

Letter name [tse:]. In words, this letter sounds like ts before e and i, and sounds like k before a, o and u. It is not a common letter in German language, mostly used in foreign words incorporated into German.

Examples:

1. **Café:** [ka'fe:]
2. **campen:** ['kəmpən]
3. **Celsius:** ['tselziʊs]
4. **Chaos:** ['ka:os]
5. **Curry:** ['kœri]

D

Letter name [de:]. In words, this letter sounds like d before vowels, as in **dog**. And it sounds like silent t at the end of words and before consonants, as in **cat**.

Examples:

1. **Bild:** [bɪlt]
2. **Dame:** ['da:mə]
3. **dämpfen:** ['dɛmpfən]
4. **davor:** ['da:fɔr, da'fo:r]
5. **Freund:** [frɔʏnt]
6. **Hand:** [hant]
7. **Kind:** [kint]
8. **Land:** [lant]
9. **Stadt:** [ʃtat]
10. **Versand:** [fɛr'zant]

E

Letter name [e:]. In words, this letter sounds like Spanish or Portuguese **e**, as in **abuelo**. But it sounds more subtle at the end of words, as in **moment**.

Examples:

1. **eine:** ['aɪnə]
2. **esse:** ['ɛsə]

3. **Frage:** ['fra:gə]
4. **heute:** ['hɔʏtə]
5. **lese:** ['le:sə]
6. **Sprache:** ['ʃpra:xə]
7. **Wange:** ['vʌŋə]

F

Letter name [ɛf]. In words, this letter sounds like f as in **f**ate or **f**riend.

Examples:

1. **Fach:** [fax]
2. **fegen:** ['fe:gən]
3. **Feier:** ['faɪər]
4. **Flug:** [flu:k]
5. **freundlich:** ['frɔʏntlɪç]
6. **Frucht:** [frʊxt]
7. **Fußball:** ['fu:sbal]

G

Letter name [ge:]. In words, this letter sounds like g before vowels, as in **g**ate. And it sounds like silent k at the end of words and before consonants, as in **d**ark.

Examples:

1. **Flugzeug:** ['flu:ktʁɔʏk]
2. **Gesicht:** [gə'zɪçt]
3. **lügt:** [ly:kt]
4. **mag:** [ma:k]
5. **sagt:** [za:kt]
6. **Sonntag:** ['zɔnta:k]
7. **Weg:** [ve:k]

As per article in [3], there are two exceptions for the general rule of g pronunciation: the g is not pronounced after n, and it is pronounced as ch in the German word **ich** when it comes after i.

Examples:

1. **Hunger:** ['hʊŋər]
2. **lang:** [laŋ]
3. **länger:** ['lɛŋər]
4. **Zeitung:** ['tsaɪtʊŋ]
5. **vergänglich:** [fɛr'gɛŋlɪç]
6. **ewig:** ['e:vɪç]
7. **fähig:** ['fɛɪç]
8. **fertig:** ['fɛrtɪç]
9. **richtig:** ['rɪçtɪç]
10. **ständig:** ['ʃtɛndɪç]
11. **vierzig:** ['fɪrtsɪç]

H

Letter name [ha:]. It sounds like h in **have** at the beginning of words, it is not pronounced between vowels, and it prolongs the duration of the vowel that comes before it.

Examples of h at the beginning of words:

1. **haben:** ['ha:bən]
2. **Hallo:** [ha'lo:]
3. **Haus:** [haʊs]
4. **heißen:** ['haɪsən]
5. **Humor:** [hu'mo:r]

Examples of h between vowels and prolonging vowels:

1. **früher:** ['fry:ər]
2. **gehen:** ['ge:ən]
3. **Höhe:** ['hø:ə]
4. **ihr:** [i:r]
5. **Uhr:** [u:r]

Exceptions: compound words, e.g., **woher**, and foreign words adapted to German, e.g., **Alkohol**.

I

Letter name [i:]. It sounds like i in **illness**.

J

Letter name [jɔt]. It sounds like i in **mania**.

Examples:

1. **ja**: [ja:]
2. **Jahr**: [jaɪ]
3. **jetzt**: [jɛtst]
4. **jedoch**: [je:'dɔx]
5. **jemand**: ['je:mant]
6. **jetzt**: [jɛtst]
7. **Junge**: ['juŋə]

In words of English origin, the original pronunciation of j is kept as in **job**. Examples: **joggen** ([ˈdʒɔɡən]), and **Pyjama** ([py'ɔ̯a:ma]).

K

Letter name [ka:]. It sounds like k in **kid**, with a plosive intonation [2].

L

Letter name [ɛl]. With no vowel, it sounds like spanish l in **miel**.

Examples:

1. **Alkohol**: ['alkoho:l]
2. **helfen**: ['hɛlfən]
3. **Himmel**: ['hɪməl]
4. **Hotel**: [ho'tɛl]
5. **Milch**: [milç]
6. **schnell**: [ʃnɛl]

M

Letter name [ɛm]. At the end of words, it sounds like the m in **room**.

Examples:

1. **Baum**: [baʊm]
2. **einem**: ['aɪnəm]

3. **im:** [ɪm]
4. **komm:** [kɔm]
5. **Raum:** [raʊm]
6. **wem:** [ve:m]

N

Letter name [ɛn]. At the end of words, it sounds like the n in **Heaven**.

Examples:

1. **Bösen:** ['bø:zən]
2. **Mädchen:** ['mɛ:tçən]
3. **mein:** [maɪn]

O

Letter name [o:]. It sounds like long o in Spanish word **pollo**, or short o like in **hot**.

Examples:

1. **rot:** [rɔ:t]
2. **Socke:** ['zɔkə]
3. **Soda:** ['zo:da]
4. **Tochter:** ['tɔxtər]

P

Letter name [pe:]. In words, this letter sounds like p as in **pen**.

Examples:

1. **Palast:** [pa'last]
2. **Pferd:** [pfe:rt]
3. **plus:** [plʊs]
4. **Prinz:** [prints]

Q

Letter name [ku:]. In words, this letter sounds like k as in **k**ite, and it is always followed by the letter u, forming the sound [kv].

Examples:

1. **Qual:** [kva:l]
2. **Qualität:** [kvali'tɛ:t]
3. **Quelle:** ['kvɛlə]
4. **Quiz:** [kvɪs]

R

Letter name [ɛr]. In words, this letter sounds like a guttural r, pronounced at the back of the throat. At the end of words, it sounds like a schwa [ə]².

Examples:

1. **der:** [dɛr]
2. **Erde:** ['ɛ:rdə]
3. **erledigen:** [ɛr'le:ɪgən]
4. **Humor:** [hu'mo:r]
5. **Kraut:** [kraʊt]
6. **leer:** [le:r]
7. **lernen:** ['lɛ:rən]
8. **rotieren:** [ro'ti:rən]
9. **Rabatt:** [ra'bat]
10. **sehr:** [ze:r]
11. **warm:** [varm]
12. **wer:** [ve:r]
13. **wir:** [vi:r]

S

Examples:

1. : □
2. : □
3. : □

²The "lazy" or "reduced" sound that appears in unstressed syllables, like a as in **wanna**.

T

Examples:

1. : □

2. : □

3. : □

U

Examples:

1. : □

2. : □

3. : □

V

Examples:

1. : □

2. : □

3. : □

W

Examples:

1. : □

2. : □

3. : □

X

Examples:

1. : □

2. : □

3. : □

Y

Examples:

1. : []
2. : []
3. : []

Z

Examples:

1. : []
2. : []
3. : []

ß

Letter name *eszett* or *scharfes S*. In words, this letter sounds like the ss in passing and comes after a long vowel or diphthong (blend of two vowel sounds in a single syllable).

According to [8], as the ß derives from a ligature of lower-case letters, it is itself exclusively lower-case. The proper transcription when it cannot be used, or when writing a word in all capital letters, is **ss** or **SS**. The ß is not used in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, where it was replaced by **ss**.

Examples:

1. **außen**: ['aʊsən]
2. **dreißig**: ['draɪsɪç]
3. **Fuß**: [fu:s]
4. **groß**: [gro:s]
5. **Gruß**: [gru:s]
6. **heißen**: ['haɪsən]
7. **schließen**: ['ʃli:sən]
8. **Spaß**: [ʃpa:s]
9. **Straße**: ['ʃtra:sə]
10. **weiß**: [vaɪs]

When the vowel is short, the word is written with **ss**. Examples:

1. **essen**: ['ɛsən]

2. **Fluss:** [flʊs]
3. **gerissen:** [gə'ɾɪsən]
4. **krass:** [kras]
5. **muss:** [mʊs]

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