Vorlesungsskript zum Deutschkurs

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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.

Contents

Aussprachekurs

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 [6], and on the pronunciation indicated in Langenscheidt Dictionary [4] and Wiktionary [12] using International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Accent and pronunciation

According to Professor Raville [6], 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 stressed syllable[1] 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 etimology, 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.

The main topics of phonetics and phonology are summarized in Appendix A to make the pronunciation explanation that follows clearer.

How to improve the pronunciation in German

Here are recommended tasks for pronunciation improvement [6]:

- 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.

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[1]Properties of syllables in Appendix A.

- 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]. This letter sounds like a as in **a**lgae.

Examples:

1. **aus**: [aʊs]

2. **auf**: [aʊf]

3. **an**: [an]

4. **aktuell**: [aktuˈɛl]

Ä

Letter name [a] Umlaut, pronounced [ɛː]. This letter may sound long (i.e., stressed), or short (i.e., unstressed) [7].

Examples of long ä:

1. **Hähnchen**: [ˈhɛːnçən]

2. **Käse**: [ˈkɛːzə]

3. **schläfst**: [ˈʃlɛːfst]

4. **Verspätung**: [fɛrˈʃpɛːtʊŋ]

Examples of short ä:

1. **ändern**: [ˈɛndərn]

2. **Gäste**: [ˈɡɛstə]

3. **Männer**: [ˈmɛnər]

4. **März**: [mɛrts]

5. **wäscht**: [vɛʃt]

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

B

Letter name [beː]. This letter sounds like b in open syllables, as in **b**ow. And it sounds like silent p at the end of words or in closed syllables, as in ma**p**.

Examples:

1. **Ab**: [ap]

2. **bald**: [balt]

3. **bekommen**: [beˈkɔmən]

4. **Bier**: [biːr]

5. **Bus**: [bʊs]

6. **gelb**: [ɡɛlp]

7. **gibt**: [ɡɪpt]

8. **habt**: [hapt]

9. **halb**: [halp]

10. **Obst**: [oːpst]

11. **siebzehn**: [ˈziːptseːn]

C

Letter name [tseː]. 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**: [kaˈfeː]

2. **campen**: [ˈkɛmpən]

3. **Celsius**: [ˈtselziʊs]

4. **Chaos**: [ˈkaːos]

5. **Curry**: [ˈkœri]

D

Letter name [deː]. This letter sounds like d in open syllables, as in **d**og. And it sounds like silent t at the end of words or in closed syllables, as in ca**t**.

Examples:

1. **Bild**: [bɪlt]

2. **Dame**: [ˈdaːmə]

3. **dämpfen**: [ˈdɛmpfən]

4. **davor**: [ˈdaːfɔr,daˈfoːr]

5. **Freund**: [frɔʏnt]

6. **Hand**: [hant]

7. **Kind**: [kint]

8. **Land**: [lant]

9. **Stadt**: [ʃtat]

10. **Versand**: [fɛrˈzant]

E

Letter name [eː]. This letter sounds like Spanish **e**, as in abu**e**lo. But it sounds more subtle at the end of words, as in mom**e**nt.

Examples:

1. **eine**: [ˈamə]

2. **esse**: [ˈɛsə]

3. **Frage**: [ˈfraːɡə]

4. **heute**: [ˈhɔʏtə]

5. **lese**: [ˈleːsə]

6. **Sprache**: [ˈʃpraːxə]

7. **Wange**: [ˈvaŋə]

F

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

Examples:

1. **Fach**: [fax]

2. **fegen**: [ˈfeːɡən]

3. **Feier**: [ˈfaɪər]

4. **Flug**: [fluːk]

5. **freundlich**: [ˈfrɔʏntlɪç]

6. **Frucht**: [frʊxt]

7. **Fußball**: [ˈfuːsbal]

G

Letter name [ɡeː]. This letter sounds like g in open syllables, as in **g**ate. And it sounds like silent k at the end of words or closed syllables, as in dar**k**.

Examples:

1. **Flugzeug**: [ˈfluːktsɔʏk]

2. **Gesicht**: [ɡəˈzɪçt]

3. **lügt**: [lyːkt]

4. **mag**: [maːk]

5. **sagt**: [zaːkt]

6. **Sonntag**: [ˈzɔntaːk]

7. **Weg**: [veːk]

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**: [ˈhʊŋər]

2. **lang**: [laŋ]

3. **länger**: [ˈlɛŋər]

4. **Zeitung**: [ˈtsaɪtʊŋ]

5. **vergänglich**: [fɛrˈgɛŋlɪç]

6. **ewig**: [ˈeːvɪç]

7. **fähig**: [ˈfɛːɪç]

8. **fertig**: [ˈfɛrtɪç]

9. **richtig**: [ˈrɪçtɪç]

10. **ständig**: [ˈʃtɛndɪç]

11. **vierzig**: [ˈfiːrtsɪç]

H

Letter name [haː]. It sounds like h as in **h**ave at the beginning of words, it is not pronounced between vowels, and it prolongs the duration of the preceding vowel.

Examples of h at the beginning of words:

1. **haben**: [ˈhaːbən]

2. **Hallo**: [haˈloː]

3. **Haus**: [haʊs]

4. **heißen**: [ˈhaɪsən]

5. **Humor**: [huˈmoːr]

Examples of h between vowels and prolonging vowels:

1. **früher**: [ˈfryːər]

2. **gehen**: [ˈgeːən]

3. **Höhe**: [ˈhøːə]

4. **ihr**: [iːr]

5. **Uhr**: [uːr]

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

I

Letter name [iː]. It sounds like i in **i**llness.

J

Letter name [jɔt]. It sounds like i as in man**i**a.

Examples:

1. **ja**: [jaː]

2. **Jahr**: [jaːr]

3. **jetzt**: [jɛtst]

4. **jedoch**: [jeˈdɔx]

5. **jemand**: [ˈjeːmant]

6. **jetzt**: [jɛtst]

7. **Junge**: [ˈjuŋə]

In words of English origin, the original pronunciation of j is kept as in **j**ob. Examples: **joggen** ([ˈʤɔgən]), and **Pyjama** ([pyˈʤaːma]).

K

Letter name [kaː]. It sounds like k as in **k**id, with a plosive intonation [2].

L

Letter name [ɛl]. In closed syllables, this letter sounds like the Spanish l as in mie**l**.

Examples:

1. **Alkohol**: [ˈalkohoːl]

2. **helfen**: [ˈhɛlfən]

3. **Himmel**: [ˈhɪməl]

4. **Hotel**: [hoˈtɛl]

5. **Milch**: [milç]

6. **schnell**: [ʃnɛl]

M

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

Examples:

1. **Baum**: [baʊm]

2. **einem**: [ˈaməm]

   3. **im**: [ɪm]

   4. **komm**: [kɔm]

   5. **Raum**: [raʊm]

   6. **wem**: [veːm]

N

Letter name [ɛn]. At the end of words, this letter sounds like n as in Heave**n**.

   Examples:

   1. **Bösen**: [ˈbøːzən]

   2. **Mädchen**: [ˈmɛːtçən]

   3. **mein**: [maɪn]

O

Letter name [oː]. This letter sounds like a long o as in Spanish word p**o**llo, or short o as in h**o**t.

   Examples:

   1. **rot**: [roːt]

   2. **Socke**: [ˈzɔkə]

   3. **Soda**: [ˈzoːda]

   4. **Tochter**: [ˈtɔxtər]

Ö

Letter name [o] Umlaut, pronounced [øː]. This letter has no equivalent sound in English. You must pronounce the "e" sound, but with lips in a whistling position.

   Examples:

   1. **Löffel**: [ˈløfəl]

   2. **nervös**: [nɛrˈvøːs]

   3. **öffnen**: [ˈøfnən]

   4. **Öl**: [øːl]

P

Letter name [peː]. This letter sounds like p as in **p**eople, often with plosive intonation.

Examples:

1. **Palast**: [paˈlast]

2. **Pferd**: [pfeːrt]

3. **plus**: [plʊs]

4. **Prinz**: [prɪnts]

Q

Letter name [kuː]. 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**: [kvaːl]

2. **Qualität**: [kvaliˈtɛːt]

3. **Quelle**: [ˈkvɛlə]

4. **Quiz**: [kvɪs]

R

Letter name [ɛr]. This letter sounds like a guttural r, pronounced at the back of the throat (*Reibe-R*). At the end of words or in closed syllables, it sounds like a schwa [ə][2].

Examples:

1. **der**: [dɛr]

2. **Erde**: [ˈɛːrdə]

3. **erledigen**: [ɛrˈleːdɪgən]

4. **Humor**: [huˈmoːr]

5. **Kraut**: [kraʊt]

6. **leer**: [leːr]

7. **lernen**: [ˈlɛːrnən]

8. **rotieren**: [roˈtiːrən]

9. **Rabatt**: [raˈbat]

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[2]The "lazy" or "reduced" sound that appears in unstressed syllables, like a as in w**a**nna.

10. **sehr**: [zeːr]

11. **warm**: [vaʁm]

12. **wer**: [veːr]

13. **wir**: [viːr]

S

Letter name [ɛs]. This letter sounds like English z in open syllables as in **z**ebra. Before p and t, usually at the beginning of words, it sounds like sh as in fi**sh**. For further cases in closed syllables, it sounds like s as in fa**s**t.

Examples:

1. **sagen**: [ˈzaɡən]

2. **sie**: [ziː]

3. **Sache**: [ˈzaxə]

4. **Suppe**: [ˈzʊpə]

5. **Sport**: [ˈʃpoːrt]

6. **Spanisch**: [ˈʃpaːniʃ]

7. **Stunde**: [ˈʃtundə]

8. **Stadt**: [ʃtat]

9. **Lust**: [lʊst]

10. **Ost**: [ɔst]

T

Letter name [teː]. This letter sounds like t as in **t**op, with a plosive intonation.

U

Letter name [uː]. This letter sounds similar to English oo as in tr**oo**per.

Examples:

1. **Kultur**: [kʊlˈtuːr]

2. **Mund**: [mʊnt]

3. **unter**: [ˈʊntər]

Ü

Letter name [u] Umlaut, pronounced [yː]. This letter has no equivalent sound in English. You must pronounce the "i" sound, but with lips in a whistling position.

Examples:

1. **Brücke**: [ˈbrykə]

2. **Früh**: [fryː]

3. **über**: [ˈyːbər]

V

Letter name [faʊ]. This letter sounds like f as in **f**ade.

Examples:

1. **Vater**: [ˈfaːtər]

2. **vier**: [ˈfiːər]

3. **Volk**: [fɔlk]

W

Letter name [veː]. This letter sounds like v as in **v**ase.

Examples:

1. **Wasser**: [ˈvasər]

2. **wegen**: [ˈveːgən]

3. **weiß**: [vaɪs]

X

Letter name [ɪks]. This letter sounds like x as in bo**x**.

Examples:

1. **extrem**: [ɛksˈtreːm]

2. **Praxis**: [ˈpraksɪs]

3. **Text**: [tɛkst]

Y

Letter name [ˈypsɪlɔn]. This letter sounds like ü as in **ü**brig.

Examples:

1. **analysieren**: [analyˈziːrən]

2. **sympathisch**: [zymˈpatɪʃ]

3. **System**: [zysˈteːm]

Z

Letter name [tsɛt]. This letter sounds like z as in Pi**zz**a (always ts sound for German words).

Examples:

1. **jetzt**: [jɛtst]

2. **spazieren**: [ʃpaˈtsiːrən]

3. **Zimmer**: [ˈtsɪmər]

ß

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

According to [9], 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**: [ˈaʊsən]

2. **dreißig**: [ˈdraɪsɪç]

3. **Fuß**: [fuːs]

4. **groß**: [ɡroːs]

5. **Gruß**: [ɡruːs]

6. **heißen**: [ˈhaɪsən]

7. **schließen**: [ˈʃliːsən]

8. **Spaß**: [ʃpaːs]

9. **Straße**: [ˈʃtraːsə]

10. **weiß**: [vaɪs]

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

1. **essen**: [ˈɛsən]

2. **Fluss**: [flʊs]

3. **gerissen**: [ɡəˈrɪsən]

4. **krass**: [kras]

5. **muss**: [mʊs]

Appendix A

Basics of Phonetics and Phonology

Syllables

A syllable is a unit of pronunciation voiced without interruption, close to a single sound. All words are made from at least one syllable [11].

According to Ramoo [5], while phonemes are the smallest units of sound, we don't actually speak in phonemes. If you say the word "cat" [kæt] and record it, you won't be able to break it into three units of [k], [æ] and [t].

Therefore, the smallest unit of articulation is not the phoneme but rather the *syllable*. Most native speakers of a language will know how many syllables are in a word in their language. You can try this in English by saying a word slowly. For example, the word "elephant" has three syllables: [ˈel.ɪ.fənt]. As seen in Figure A.1, all syllables must have a mandatory *nucleus* or peak. This is usually a vowel. Some languages can also have a syllabic consonant as a nucleus of a syllable as in the English word "button" [bʌt.n̩] where there are two syllables [bʌt] and [n̩]. You can see that the second syllable has no vowels but a syllabic [n̩] as the nucleus.
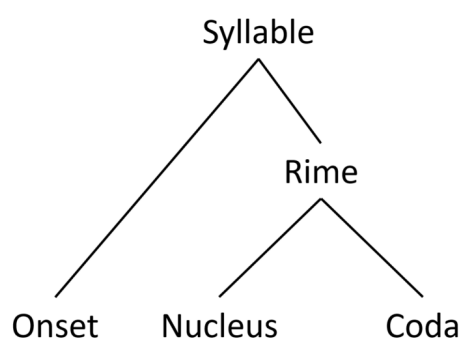
Syllable

Rime

Onset Nucleus Coda

Figure A.1: Syllable structure [5].

Consonants that come before the nucleus of a syllable are know as *onsets* and those that come after it are called *codas*. The nucleus and coda of a syllable form a group called a *rime*. These onsets and codas can be complicated or simple depending on what is allowed in a language. English allows up to three consonants in the onset and at least as much in the coda. Consider the word "twelfths" [twɛlfθs]. It has two consonants in the onset and four consonants in the coda. Generally, the onset is more restricted in what consonants are allowed [5].

Properties of Syllables

If a syllable ends with a consonant, it is called a *closed syllable*. If a syllable ends with a vowel, it is called an *open syllable* [11]. In summary, closed syllables have coda consonants.

The *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 [10]. But this accent must not be confused with the sociolinguistic meaning of accent, which is a way of pronouncing a language that is distinctive to a country, area, social class, or individual [8].

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