

Section 1 / Lecture 2 – Get the Ball Rolling

Let's get moving

In this lecture you're going to learn how to read German words.

German spelling is straightforward. Unlike in English, if you learn a couple of rules, you will always know how to read a word, unless it's an exception or a foreign borrowing.

As both English and German belong to the same family of Germanic languages, they have a lot of words that either look or sound similar.

Some first rules

Let's have a look at the following words:

HAUS, MAUS, LAUS

They all sound like their English counterparts: *house*, *mouse* and *louse*.

So, you now know rule number 1: how to pronounce the diphthong **AU** in German. Just like **OU** in the above mentioned English words.

How about words like:

EIS, PREIS, REIS

They are pronounced like English *ice*, *price* and *rice* and also mean the same.

So, rule number 2: if you see **EI**, pronounce it like **I** in *ice*.

That was easy. How about words that do not look or sound like their English counterparts? Are we still able to read them correctly, even if we have never come across them before and have no idea what they mean?

EXERCISE

Using the two rules, how would we pronounce these words:

KLEIN, BAUM, BEIN, GLEIS

Yeah, that's easy, too. So, as you can see, you don't even have to know a word and you are still able to pronounce it. That's a very nice feature of German: You just have to memorize some rules once and then you always know how to pronounce a word.

One more rule

How about one more rule? Look at these examples:

WEIN, WORT, WUNDER

They are pronounced *vine*, *vort* and *voonder* and mean wine, word and wonder respectively. So, how do you pronounce **W** in German? Just like **V** in English.

EXERCISE

So, how about these? How would you pronounce them?

WANN, WAS, WAND?

Exactly, these are pronounced *vaan*, *vaas* and *vaant* and mean *when*, *what* and *wall*.

So, let's have a look at the three rules we've talked about:

AU – pronounced like OU in HOUSE

EI – pronounced like I in ICE

W – pronounced like V in VET

EXERCISE

Now, you can try yourself. Just remember the rules and read the following words aloud :

NEIN, BAU, WENN

Did you read *nine*, *bou* (like in ***ab**out*) and *ven*? You were right.

EXERCISE

Now try this:

WEIT, WEST, AUS

Did you say *vite*, *vest* and *ouse* (like in ***hou**se*)? Very good.

Well, these are just some of the rules but you did really great. You will shortly learn more rules, which will enable you to read every word in German.