

Basics of German: A Brief Introduction to the German A1 Level

Génesis Villar · Tuesday, January 31st, 2023



Are you considering learning German? If so, you are probably looking for resources to introduce you to the language. Whether it's for personal reasons, because you are going to work in Germany or because you have to take the [Goethe German A1 Test](#), it's important to lay a solid foundation to build your knowledge of the German language.

The beginner level (A1) is one of the most important since it introduces us to the language. So it is crucial to establish effective learning habits from the get-go and pay special attention to grasping the fundamentals to avoid gaps in our German journey.

In that sense, today, we will focus on some of the most basic yet essential topics of the German language. However, considering the content of the A1 level is

quite broad, it's not possible to cover all of it in this article. Still, we hope these topics spark your curiosity and make you want to deepen your studies and research even more to reach this level's goals.

Without further ado, los geht's!



Photo by Surendran MP on Unsplash

Alphabet

A major challenge for German learners is the difference in sound and pronunciation of the German alphabet. The guttural pronunciation of certain letters makes it difficult to pronounce some of the words. However, you don't need to worry. Once you are familiar with the sounds of the German alphabet and how the combination of some of its letters works, you will be able to appreciate the distinct nature of this language.

So, let's get to know das Alphabet!

Letter	Name (Pronunciation)	Examples
A	A (ah)	die Ampel (traffic lights)
B	Be (bay)	das Buch (book)
C	Ce (tsay)	das Cybercafé (cyber cafe)
D	De (day)	Donnerstag (thursday)
E	E (ay)	die Eltern (parents)
F	Ef (eff)	die Frau (the woman)
G	Ge (gay)	die Gurke (cucumber)
H	Ha (hah)	das Haar (hair)
I	I (eeh)	Interessant (Interesting)
J	Jott (yot)	der Job (job)
K	Ka (kah)	die Kartoffel (potato)
L	El (ell)	das Land (country)
M	Em (em)	die Mutter (mother)
N	En (en)	der Nachmittag (afternoon)
O	O (oh)	die Orange (orange)
P	Pe (pay)	das Papier (paper)
Q	Qu or Que (koo)	das Quadrat (square)
R	Er (err)	die Reise (trip)
S	Es (es)	der Sohn (son)
T	Te (tay)	der Tag(the day)
U	U (ooh)	die U-Bahn (subway)
V	Vau (fow)	der Vater (father)
W	We (vay)	Das Wochenende (weekend)
X	Ix (iks)	das Xylophon (xylophone)

Y	Ypsilon (uep-si-lohn)	Yoga
Z	Zett (tset)	die Zwiebel
Ä	Ä (eh)	die Äpfel (apples)
Ü	Ü (uuh)	das Gemüse (the vegetables)
Ö	Ö (ouh)	Zwölf (twelve)
?	Eszett (ess-set)	die Straße (street/road)

If you want to polish your pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet, check out the video down below.

Want to top up your learning? Take a look at these [9 Fun Facts About The German Alphabet](#). After studying what we have shared in this section, you will have no problem nailing the German alphabet.

Now that we know the alphabet let's learn some phrases that will allow us to meet people and start a conversation in German.



Photo by Beth Macdonald on Unsplash

Basic Phrases

After learning the alphabet, we can start learning some basic phrases in German. Greeting and knowing how to respond to a greeting is one of the first steps to start communicating with our German friends. As with many languages, German has many greeting expressions. Let's take a look at some of the most common ones.

Guten Morgen ~ Good morning

Guten Tag ~ Hello / Good day

Guten Abend ~ Good evening

Gute Nacht ~ Good night

Danke / Danke schön / Danke sehr ~ Thank you / Thank you very much

Bitte schön ~ You're welcome

Es tut mir leid ~ I'm sorry

Entschuldigen Sie ~ Excuse me

Wie geht es Ihnen? ~ How are you? (formal)

Es freut mich. ~ Nice to meet you.

Wie heißen Sie? ~ What's your name? (formal)

Mein Name ist ~ My name ist....

There are many more phrases, and we encourage you to discover them as you learn more about this level.



Photo by Susan Simpson on Unsplash

Number System

Numbers (**Zahlen**) in German are pretty simple. Despite slight differences, the German number system is very similar to English. Numbers are another fundamental aspect of the language since they allow us to count, tell our age, talk about prices, and many other things.

The German numbering system works in the following way: **from zero to twelve, every number has a specific name.**

	German	English
1	Eins	One
2	Zwei	Two
3	Drei	Three

4	Vier	Four
5	Fünf	Five
6	Sechs	Six
7	Sieben	Seven
8	Acht	Eight
9	Neun	Nine
10	Zehn	Ten
11	Elf	Eleven
12	Zwölf	Twelve

From 13 to 19, the numbers are formed by combining the primary number with Zehn (10).

13	Thirteen	Dreizehn
14	Fourteen	Vierzehn
15	Fifteen	Fünfzehn
16	Sixteen	Sechzehn
17	Seventeen	Siebzehn
18	Eighteen	Achtzehn
19	Nineteen	Neunzehn

Starting with the number **20**, the ending of the numbers change. Instead of combining the primary number with ZEHN (10), it will be combined with **ZIG** instead. For example, the number 20 is **zwanzig**, the number 30 is **dreißig**, 40 is **vierzig**, etc.

For the intermediate numbers, we will use a formula similar to the one we used with the numbers from 13 to 19. However, from 21 onwards, we will add the conjunction ‘und,’ which means ‘and.’

The intermediate numbers from 20 to 100 follow the same pattern: one and twenty (21), six and thirty (36), four and forty (44), five and fifty (55), and so

on.

20	Twenty	Zwanzig
25	Twenty-five	Fünfundzwanzig
30	Thirty	Dreißig
38	Thirty-eight	Achtunddreißig
40	Fourty	Vierzig
50	Fifty	Fünfzig
56	Fifty-six	Sechsfundfünfzig
60	Sixty	Sechzig
70	Seventy	Siebzig
80	Eighty	Achtzig
83	Eighty-three	Dreiundachtzig
90	Ninety	Neunzig
100	One hundred	Einhundert
1000	One thousand	Eintausend

Intro to German Grammar

A few years ago, grammar was considered the least enjoyable part of learning a language. Fortunately, things have changed. Nowadays, new methods have emerged that present grammar with a communicative approach. In this way, as learners, we can see it for what it is, a communication tool.

As we already know, grammar is a set of rules that allow us to structure sentences for the purpose of sharing ideas. These rules can differ in every language. So if the German language rules are very different from your native language, don't be discouraged, and be patient with yourself. Everything will make sense as you learn new vocabulary and become familiar with how the language works.

To get you started, let's take a look at some basics of German grammar, so you can start understanding how it works.

Nouns

These are words that define people, animals, objects, places, etc. In German, nouns have several characteristics.

-All nouns are capitalized. However, pronouns should not be capitalized unless they are at the beginning of a sentence.

Examples:

Der Baum ist grün. ~ The tree is green.

Meine Schuhe sind groß. ~ My shoes are big.

Das Buch ist sehr interessant. ~ The book is very interesting.

-German nouns have genders. If your native language is Spanish or French, the concept of gendered words is not foreign to you. However, for native English speakers, this aspect is a reason for much confusion. In German, nouns have three genders: **masculine, feminine, and neuter.**

–Definite and indefinite articles. In German, nouns are almost always preceded by an article. The article agrees in gender, number, and case with the noun. There are definite articles (**der-masculine, die-feminine, das-neuter**) and indefinite articles (**ein-masculine, eine-feminine**).

Examples:

Definite articles

Masculine-der (definite)

–der Onkel ~ *the uncle*

–der Zahnarzt ~ *the dentist*

–der Polizist ~ *the policeman*

Feminine- die (definite)

–**die Tante** ~ *the aunt*

–**die Zahnärztin** ~ *the dentist*

–**die Polizistin** ~ *the policewoman*

Neuter- das (definite)

-**das Mädchen** ~ *the girl*

-**das Haus** ~ *the house*

-**das Bett** ~ *the bed*

Indefinite articles

Masculine

-**ein Onkel** ~ *an uncle*

-**ein Zahnarzt** ~ *a dentist*

-**ein Polizist** ~ *a policeman*

Feminine

-**eine Tante** ~ *an aunt*

-**eine Zahnärztin** ~ *a dentist*

-**eine Polizistin** ~ *a policewoman*

-**The German plural is formed in several ways.** There are several ways to form the plural, including adding the endings -n/-en, -e, -r/-er, -s. For some nouns, certain vowels need to be changed. Other nouns remain unchanged. There are some rules that can help us form the plural, but like any other language, there are exceptions.

Examples:

das Kind – child ~ **die Kinder** – children

die Frau – woman ~ **die Frauen** – women

der Apfel – the apple ~ **die Äpfel** – the apples

-There are four cases in German: nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive, which affect articles, pronouns, nouns, and adjectives. In a sentence, cases establish relationships between the words in that sentence.

The following picture illustrates how the structure of the adjective **neu** (new) varies depending on the case.

	masc.	neut.	fem.	pl.
nominative	<i>neuer</i>	<i>neues</i>	<i>neue</i>	
accusative	<i>neuen</i>			
dative	<i>neuem</i>		<i>neuer</i>	<i>neuen</i>
genitive	<i>neuen</i>		<i>neuer</i>	

Fauban, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons



Photo by Elevate on Unsplash

Personal pronouns + Conjugations of the verbs: “to be” and “to have”

Pronomen (Pronouns)	Sein (to be)	Haben (to have)
ich (I)	bin	habe
du (you)	bist	hast
Sie (formal)	sind	haben
er (he)	ist	hat
sie (she)	ist	hat
es (it)	ist	hat
ihr (plural)	seid	habt
sie (they)	sind	haben

Pronouns are an example of how cases physically alter/change words. Let’s take

a look at the following table to see such variations.

Nominative	Accusative	Dative
ich	mich	mir
du	dich	dir
Sie	Sie	Ihnen
er	ihn	ihm
sie	sie	ihr
es	es	ihm
ihr	euch	euch
sie	sie	ihnen

Basic German Sentence Structure

German has different sentence patterns based on the message you want to convey. The simplest structure is similar to English, with the SVO order: subject + verb + object.

Examples:

-Maria kocht Suppe ~ Maria cooks soup.

-Frank isst Pizza. ~ Frank eats Pizza.

-Wir spielen Fußball. ~ We play soccer.

German Questions

German questions have a similar structure to English questions. They can be structured using an interrogative word: when, why, what, etc. But there are other patterns as well. For example, to turn a statement into a yes/no question, you just need to invert the subject and conjugated verb.

Examples:

Was ist das? ~ What is that?

Bist du Maria? ~ Are you Maria?

Isst Frank auch Pizza? ~Does Frank eat pizza?

When it comes to German sentences, complexity increases as we lengthen our sentences and start writing texts. If we want to communicate more fluently, we must learn to use different types of sentences. If you want to know more about the different German sentence patterns, [this article may be useful for you](#).

The study of grammar is an essential part of learning any language. Thankfully, the internet provides a wide variety of free and paid resources at our fingertips. If German classes are not your cup of tea and you prefer to study on your own, [here are some tips on how to learn German grammar on your own](#).



Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

Self-Introduction

Now, let's see how we can present ourselves to others using some of the points we covered today. If you are here because you need to take the A1 German

exam, this part will be very useful because you will have to introduce yourself in the oral section of the exam.

German

[Guten Tag!

Mein Name ist Sophia, ich bin 23 Jahre alt.

Ich komme aus Kanada, aber ich lebe in Japan.

Ich bin von Beruf Publizistin und arbeite bei A&Q Media.

Ich bin Single und habe keine Kinder.

Ich spreche Englisch, Spanisch und ein bisschen Französisch.

Meine Hobbys sind Lesen und Musik hören.

Freut mich, Sie kennenzulernen.]

English

[My name is Sophia. I am 23 years old.

I'm from Canada, but I live in Japan.

I am a publicist by profession, and I work at A&Q Media.

I am single and have no children.

I speak English, Spanish, and a little French.

My hobbies are reading and listening to music.

I am glad to meet you.]

The A1 level covers many more topics, so you will need to dig deeper into the concepts we have shared and do even more research so that you can get to grips with all the [content of this level](#).

We know that starting to learn a language as complex as German can be a bit intimidating. But this should not stop you. Take it one step at a time, and enjoy every milestone of your learning journey. As you progress, you will realize that if you put in the effort, you will be able to master it in less time than you think.

Vielen Dank fürs Lesen!

Tschüss!