

23 Ways of Saying “No” in German Like A Native

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Saying “no” is an integral part of any language. It allows us to express our feelings, opinions, and set boundaries. While “no” in English is simple and straightforward, the ways of saying “no” in German are rich and diverse, depending on the context and tone.

This essay will explore the various ways to say “no” in German. By the end, you’ll be a master of saying “no in German” in any situation.

From Basic To Playful

Nein – The Basic “No”

The cornerstone of rejecting, declining, or [negating in German](#) is “nein.” It is the one-size-fits-all “no” that can be used in almost any situation.

Imagine a massive oak tree representing the German language, with “nein” being its sturdy trunk, supporting the myriad branches of different ways to say “no.” However, it’s essential to be cautious with its usage, as it can sometimes come across as too direct or harsh. This is where the other ways of saying “no” come into play.

Nö – The Informal “No”

The beauty of language lies in its colloquialisms and informal ways of expression. “Nö” is one such example in German, a casual and friendly way of saying “no.”

It’s like the linguistic equivalent of wearing your favorite pair of jeans – comfortable, easy-going, and perfect for a relaxed setting. You might use it with friends and family: “Nö, ich möchte keinen Kuchen” (No, I don’t want any cake.)

Nee – The Casual “No”

“Nee” is another informal and casual way of saying “no” in German, similar to “nö.” It’s like the friendly pat on the back of rejection, making it perfect for **conversations** among close friends, family members, or peers. It adds a relaxed, easy-going tone to your response and is more suitable for informal settings.

For example, “Willst du noch etwas trinken?” (Do you want something more to drink?) “Nee, ich habe genug” (No, I’ve had enough). Using “nee” in everyday conversations helps you blend in with the locals and showcase your familiarity with colloquial German expressions.

Nä – The Short and Informal “No”

“Nä” is another short and informal way to say “no” in German, similar to “nö” and “nee.” It is used in casual, everyday conversations, often among friends or acquaintances. This expression is like a playful elbow nudge, adding a relaxed and informal tone to your response.

For example, when a friend asks if you want to do something you’re not interested in: “Hast du Lust, heute Abend zu einem Vortrag über Steuergesetze zu gehen?” (Do you feel like going to a lecture on tax laws tonight?) “Nä, das ist nicht so mein Ding” (Nah, that’s not really my thing).

Using “nä” in informal settings helps you connect with others in a more laid-back and friendly manner. Another regional variety of this (South Germany, Austria) is “Na”.

Nix da – The Playful and Informal “No”

“Nix da” (or “nichts da”) is a playful, informal way to say “no” in German, often

used in light-hearted or humorous contexts. It can be translated as “no way” or “not a chance.” This expression is like a cheeky wink, adding a touch of humor and lightheartedness to your denial or disagreement.

For example, when a friend asks if you’re willing to share a delicious treat: “Gibst du mir ein Stück von deinem Schokoladenkuchen?” (Will you give me a piece of your chocolate cake?) “Nix da, das ist alles für mich!” (No way, this is all for me!). “Nix da” adds a spirited touch to your everyday conversations.

Nee, lass mal – The “No” of Casual Decline

“Nee, lass mal” is a casual and friendly way to say “no” in German when you want to decline an offer or invitation. It can be translated as “nah, never mind” or “no, thanks anyway.” This phrase is like a warm and friendly shoulder shrug, adding a gentle touch of refusal while maintaining a sense of camaraderie.

For example, when a friend offers to lend you something you don’t need: “Brauchst du meinen Regenschirm? Es sieht nach Regen aus” (Do you need my umbrella? It looks like rain) “Nee, lass mal, ich habe meinen dabei” (Nah, never mind, I have mine with me).

Using “nee, lass mal” allows you to decline offers with a friendly, easy-going tone.

Polite Withdrawals & Uncertainty

Nein, danke – The Gracious “No”

When you want to decline an offer politely, “nein, danke” (no, thank you) is a perfect choice. It’s like a well-mannered dance of rejection, where you gracefully refuse while showing gratitude for the offer. For instance, “Möchtest du ein Stück Kuchen?” (Would you like a piece of cake?) “Nein, danke” (No, thank you).

Leider – The Polite “No”

Politeness and courtesy are essential aspects of any language, and German is no exception. When you want to say “no” with a gentle touch of diplomacy, “leider” (unfortunately) comes to your rescue. Much like a soft pillow, it cushions the blow of rejection or denial.

For example, “Leider kann ich Ihnen dabei nicht helfen” (Unfortunately, I cannot help you with that) or “Leider habe ich keine Ahnung” (Unfortunately, I have no idea). It’s a great way to express disagreement or refusal without ruffling any feathers.

The Uno-Reversal Card of Negations

Negating Negations With Doch

Imagine a heated conversation in a German **Biergarten**, where the air is filled with the scent of pretzels and the sound of clinking beer glasses. You might overhear someone say “doch,” a versatile word that contradicts a negative statement. It can be translated as “yes” when disagreeing with a negative assertion, like a game of verbal tug-of-war.

For example, if someone says, “Du kannst das nicht tun” (You cannot do that), you could counter with “Doch, ich kann das tun” (Yes, I can do that).

Fortified Refusals and Rejections

Auf keinen Fall – The Resolute “No”

There are times when a simple “nein” just doesn’t suffice. In such instances, we need a firm, unwavering way to express our denial or refusal. “Auf keinen Fall” translates to “in no case” or “under no circumstances,” and it’s like a steadfast mountain, immovable and resolute.

For example, “Würdest du jemals Bungee-Jumping machen?” (Would you ever go bungee jumping?) “Auf keinen Fall!” (Absolutely not!) For further emphasis you can add “gar”, i.e. “auf gar keinen Fall” – “absolutely not!”

Bestimmt nicht – The Assertive “No”

“Bestimmt nicht” can be translated as “certainly not” or “definitely not” and is used to assertively express disagreement or denial. It conveys a sense of certainty in your response, like a resolute fortress guarding against unwanted ideas or suggestions. For example, “Glaubst du, dass er recht hat?” (Do you think he’s right?) “Bestimmt nicht!” (Certainly not!)

Das kommt nicht in Frage! – The “No” of Firm Refusal

“Das kommt nicht in Frage!” is a German expression used to convey a strong and firm refusal to a suggestion or proposal. It can be translated as “that’s out of the question” or “no way!” This phrase is like a solid barrier, standing resolute against the possibility of accepting or entertaining the idea being presented.

For example, when someone proposes an action that you find unacceptable: “Sollen wir einfach ohne Erlaubnis gehen?” (Should we just go without permission?) “Das kommt nicht in Frage! Wir müssen warten” (That’s out of the question! We have to wait).

By using “das kommt nicht in Frage!” in your conversations, you can effectively communicate your unwavering stance on a matter, leaving no doubt about your refusal. For further emphasis add “gar”, as in: “Das kommt gar nicht in Frage!” – “That’s absolutely out of the question!”

Stimmt nicht – The Disagreeing “No”

When you disagree with someone’s statement or opinion, you can use “stimmt nicht,” which means “that’s not true” or “that’s incorrect.” It’s like a firm but friendly nudge to the other person to reconsider their claim. For example, “Er hat gesagt, er ist der beste Spieler” (He said he’s the best player) “Stimmt nicht, ich kenne jemanden, der besser ist” (That’s not true, I know someone who’s better).

You can use it both as the short expression “Stimmt nicht!” or as a complete sentence: “Das stimmt nicht!”

Himmel, nein! – The Exclamatory “No”

“Himmel, nein!” is a (slightly archaic but still viable) German expression that adds an exclamatory, emotional touch to your refusal or denial. It can be translated as “heavens, no!” or “goodness, no!” This phrase is like a fiery incantation, lighting up the sky with the intensity of your disagreement or rejection.

For example, when someone asks if you’re willing to do something dangerous or risky: “Würdest du jemals Fallschirmspringen ausprobieren?” (Would you ever try skydiving?) “Himmel, nein! Das ist viel zu gefährlich für mich” (Heavens, no! That’s way too dangerous for me).

Using “Himmel, nein!” in your conversations adds a dramatic flair, showcasing

your emotional investment in the matter at hand.

Keineswegs – The “No” of Strong Denial

“Keineswegs” is a more formal and emphatic way of saying “no” in German, expressing a strong denial or disagreement. It can be translated as “by no means” or “not at all.” Like a fortified wall, this phrase stands firm in the face of an assertion or statement you find incorrect or unacceptable.

For example, if someone claims that you agree with a controversial opinion: “Du stimmst ihm doch zu, oder?” (You agree with him, don’t you?) “Keineswegs, ich bin völlig anderer Meinung” (Not at all, I have a completely different opinion). Using “keineswegs” demonstrates a confident and assertive stance, making it clear that you reject the notion in question without leaving any room for doubt.

Im Leben nicht! – The “No” of Absolute Rejection

“Im Leben nicht!” is a German expression that conveys a strong and emphatic refusal, emphasizing that something will never happen or is absolutely rejected. It can be translated as “not in a million years!” or “never in my life!” This phrase is like a thundering “no,” resounding with conviction and leaving no room for doubt.

For example, when someone asks if you would do something you strongly dislike or disapprove of: “Würdest du jemals deinen Job aufgeben, um ins Ausland zu ziehen, ohne irgendeinen Plan zu haben?” (Would you ever quit your job to move abroad without having any plan?) “Im Leben nicht! Das wäre viel zu riskant für mich” (Never in my life! That would be way too risky for me).

By using “im Leben nicht!” in your conversations, you can express a powerful and unwavering refusal, clearly demonstrating your stance on a matter.

Nicht im Entferntesten – The “No” of Emphatic Disagreement

“Nicht im Entferntesten” is a German phrase used to express a strong and emphatic disagreement with a statement or an idea. It can be translated as “not in the slightest” or “not by a long shot.” Picture this expression as a swift, assertive gust of wind, blowing away any notion of agreement or alignment with the opposing view.

For example, if someone suggests that you enjoy a particularly unpleasant task:

“Du magst es sicher, die ganze Zeit Berichte zu schreiben, oder?” (You surely enjoy writing reports all the time, right?) “Nicht im Entferntesten, es ist ziemlich langweilig” (Not in the slightest, it’s quite boring).

Using “nicht im Entferntesten” adds weight to your disagreement and emphasizes the distance between your perspective and the one being presented.

Sarcasm & Snark

Von wegen! – The “No” of Sarcasm or Disbelief

“Von wegen!” is a German expression that conveys sarcasm, disbelief, or skepticism in response to a statement or claim. It can be translated as “no way!” or “as if!” This phrase is like a raised eyebrow, casting doubt on the validity of what’s being said while adding a sarcastic touch to your response.

For example, when someone makes an exaggerated claim about their abilities: “Ich kann leicht einen Marathon laufen, ohne müde zu werden” (I can easily run a marathon without getting tired) “Von wegen! Du bist schon nach einem Kilometer außer Atem” (No way! You’re out of breath after just one kilometer).

By using “von wegen!” in your conversations, you can express skepticism or disbelief with a hint of humor, showcasing your understanding of the subtleties of the German language.

Klar, und Schweine können fliegen – The “No” of Sarcasm and Irony

“Klar, und Schweine können fliegen” is a sarcastic German expression that can be translated as “sure, and pigs can fly.” It implies that something is impossible or highly unlikely, similar to the English idiom. This phrase is like a wry smile, adding a touch of humor and irony to your disbelief or doubt.

For example, when someone claims they can finish an enormous task in an unrealistically short amount of time: “Ich kann das ganze Projekt bis morgen abschließen” (I can finish the whole project by tomorrow) “Klar, und Schweine können fliegen” (Sure, and pigs can fly).

Negations Of Absence

Ohne mich – The “No” of Non-Participation

When you want to express that you’re not interested in participating in an activity, you can use “ohne mich” (without me). It’s like a polite withdrawal, stepping back from the group activity to let others know you won’t be joining them. For instance, “Wir gehen heute Abend ins Theater, kommst du mit?” (We’re going to the theater tonight, are you coming?) “Ohne mich, ich bin müde” (Without me, I’m tired).

Da muss ich passen – The “No” of Inability or Insufficient Knowledge

“Da muss ich passen” is a colloquial German phrase used when you need to admit that you’re unable to do something or lack the knowledge to answer a question. It can be translated to “I’ll have to pass” or “I can’t help you there.” This expression is like a humble bow, acknowledging your limitations while gracefully stepping aside.

For instance, when someone asks you for advice on a topic you’re not familiar with: “Kannst du mir erklären, wie Quantenphysik funktioniert?” (Can you explain how quantum physics works?) “Da muss ich passen, das ist nicht mein Fachgebiet” (I’ll have to pass, that’s not my area of expertise).

This phrase allows you to admit your limitations or lack of knowledge without embarrassment, and it’s a valuable addition to your German conversational toolkit.

Keine Spur – The “No” of Absence or Non-Existence

“Keine Spur” is a German phrase that conveys the absence or non-existence of something, often used when denying knowledge or the presence of someone or something. It can be translated as “not a trace” or “not at all.”

Picture this expression as a barren desert landscape, devoid of any sign or hint of what is being sought. For example, when asked if you’ve seen a missing item: “Hast du meinen Autoschlüssel gesehen?” (Have you seen my car key?) “Keine Spur, ich habe ihn nirgends gefunden” (Not a trace, I haven’t found it anywhere).

Using “keine Spur” emphasizes the complete absence or lack of what is being discussed, further enhancing the expressive range of your conversational German.


When You Mean No, but Yes, but also No ...!

Jein – The Indecisive “No” (or maybe “Yes”?)

German is a language that even has a word for those times when we are caught in the crossroads of indecision. “Jein” is a playful fusion of “ja” (yes) and “nein” (no), like two rivers merging to form a new, more ambiguous watercourse.

It’s the perfect way to express uncertainty or a combination of agreement and disagreement: “Sollen wir ins Kino gehen?” (Should we go to the movies?) “Jein, ich bin mir nicht sicher” (Yes and no, I’m not sure).

It’s a handy way to navigate those situations where you’re on the fence or require further information before making a decision. There’s even a catchy song about it:



*“ja, nein, ich mein jein
Soll ich’s wirklich machen oder lass ich’s lieber sein?
Jein
(Ja, ja, oder nein?)”*

Summary

The German language offers an array of ways to say “no,” each with its unique nuance, tone, and context. From the direct “nein” to the subtle “nicht,” the informal “nö” to the indecisive “jein,” the resolute “auf keinen Fall” to the polite “leider” and a myriad more, you now have the tools to navigate the diverse landscape of saying “no in German.”

So, next time you find yourself in a conversation with a German speaker, embrace the linguistic richness and confidently express your denial or disagreement in the most fitting manner. In short, the art of saying “no” is an essential skill for communication, and mastering it will open up new horizons in your language journey.

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