The German Alphabet

Das deutsche Alphabet · A–Z · letter names · IPA · example words

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German uses the **26 letters** A–Z plus **Ä, Ö, Ü** and **ß**. The **name** column is what you say when spelling aloud. The **sound** column is how the letter usually sounds inside words. English sound-alikes are learning aids only, so trust the IPA.

Letter	Name	IPA	Say it	Sound in words	Example	Meaning
A a	A	[aː]	ah	[a] [aː]	**Apfel**	apple
B b	Be	[beː]	bay	[b]; end [p]	**Ball**	ball
C c	Ce	[t͡seː]	tsay	[k] [t͡s]; ch, ck, sch	**Computer**	computer
D d	De	[deː]	day	[d]; end [t]	**danke**	thank you
E e	E	[eː]	ay	[ɛ] [eː] [ə]	**Ente**	duck
F f	Ef	[ɛf]	eff	[f]	**Fisch**	fish
G g	Ge	[geː]	gay	[g]; end [k]	**Garten**	garden
H h	Ha	[haː]	hah	[h]; silent after vowel	**Haus**	house
I i	I	[iː]	ee	[ɪ] [iː]	**Igel**	hedgehog
J j	Jot	[jɔt]	yot	[j]	**ja**	yes
K k	Ka	[kaː]	kah	[k]	**Katze**	cat
L l	El	[ɛl]	ell	[l]	**Lampe**	lamp
M m	Em	[ɛm]	em	[m]	**Mutter**	mother
N n	En	[ɛn]	en	[n]	**Nase**	nose
O o	O	[oː]	oh	[ɔ] [oː]	**Orange**	orange
P p	Pe	[peː]	pay	[p]; pf [p͡f]	**Pferd**	horse
Q q	Qu	[kuː]	koo	qu = [kv]	**Quelle**	spring, source
R r	Er	[ɛʁ]	air (throaty r)	[ʁ]; after vowel [ɐ]	**rot**	red
S s	Es	[ɛs]	ess	[z] [s]; sp/st [ʃ]	**Sonne**	sun
T t	Te	[teː]	tay	[t]	**Tisch**	table
U u	U	[uː]	oo	[ʊ] [uː]	**Uhr**	clock
V v	Vau	[faʊ̯]	fow	[f]; loanwords [v]	**Vogel**	bird
W w	We	[veː]	vay	[v]	**Wasser**	water
X x	Ix	[ɪks]	iks	[ks]	**Xylofon**	xylophone
Y y	Ypsilon	['ʏpsilɔn]	ÜP-see-lon	[y] [ʏ]; loans [j]	**Yoga**	yoga
Z z	Zet	[t͡sɛt]	tset	[t͡s]	**Zeit**	time

Umlauts Ä, Ö, Ü and the Eszett ß

Letter	Name	Sound	How to say it	Example	IPA	Meaning
Ä ä	A-Umlaut	[ɛ] [ɛː]	"e" in "bed"	**Äpfel**	['ɛp͡f̆l̩]	apples
Ö ö	O-Umlaut	[œ] [øː]	say "ay" with round lips	**Öl**	[øːl]	oil
Ü ü	U-Umlaut	[ʏ] [yː]	say "ee" with round lips	**über**	['yːbɐ]	over, above
ß	Eszett	[s]	"s" in "sun"	**Straße**	['ʃtʁaːsə]	street

- ß is **not** one of the 26 standard letters, but it is an essential German character. Use ß after a long vowel or diphthong (**Straße, Fuß**) and ss after a short vowel (**Fluss, Wasser**).
- Switzerland always writes ss. The capital ß is official (since 2017), but **STRASSE** in capitals is also correct.
- No special keys? Write **ae, oe, ue, ss**: Aepfel, Oel, ueber, Strasse.

Vowels: short and long

Long before one consonant, as a double vowel or before a silent h: **Tag, Boot, Sohn**. **Short** before a double consonant or consonant group: **Bett, Mutter, Fisch**.

Long	IPA	Short	IPA
Staat state	[ʃtaːt]	**Stadt** town	[ʃtat]
Miete rent	['miːtə]	**Mitte** middle	['mɪtə]
Ofen oven	['oːfn̩]	**offen** open	['ɔfn̩]

Letter combinations

Spelling	Sound	Like...	Examples
ch after a, o, u, au	[x]	Scottish "loch"	**Bach, Buch, auch**
ch after e, i, ä, ö, ü, consonants	[ç]	"h" in "huge"	**ich, Milch, Bücher**
sch; **sp-, st-** at the start	[ʃ]	"sh"	**Schule, Sport, Stein**
ei	[aɪ̯]	"eye"	**Ei, drei, Wein**
ie	[iː]	"ee"	**Liebe, Bier, vier**
eu, äu	[ɔʏ̯]	"oy" in "boy"	**heute, neu, Häuser**

Key consonants

- **R** [ʁ] is made at the back of the throat (**rot**). After a vowel at the end it sounds like "uh" [ɐ] (**Uhr, Vater**). A rolled [r] is used in parts of the south.
- **W** = English v (**Wasser**). **V** = English f in German words (**Vogel, Vater**), v in loanwords (**Vase**).
- **J** = English y (**ja, Junge**). **Z** and **tz** = ts (**Zeit, Zug, Katze**).
- **Final devoicing:** b, d, g at the end of a syllable sound like p, t, k: **Hund** [hʊnt], **Tag** [taːk], **gelb** [gɛlp].
- **S** before a vowel is [z] in standard German: **Sonne** ['zɔnə]. Many southern speakers say [s].

Beginner pronunciation notes

- Letter **names** (Be, Ce, De…) are for spelling aloud. Inside words, letters can sound different.
- Keep vowels pure: **O** [oː] doesn't glide into "oh-oo" as in English "go".
- Always pronounce a final **-e** as a soft "uh": **danke** = DAHN-kuh.
- The **h** after a vowel is silent. It only lengthens the vowel (**Sohn, Uhr**).
- Umlauts change meaning: **schon** (already) ≠ **schön** (beautiful).
- Swapping **ei** and **ie** is a classic mistake: **Wein** (wine) vs. **Wien** (Vienna).

> Letter names follow the standard German given in Duden. In Austria, J is often **Je** [jeː] and Q **Kwe** [kveː].

Practice 1 – Trace and write

Ä				ä			
Ö				ö			
Ü				ü			
ß				ß			

Practice 2 – Spell it aloud

Spell your name with German letter names. Example: **Max** = Em – A – Ix.

My name: _____ = _____

Practice 3 – Ich or ach?

Write [ç] or [x]: **Nacht ___ Licht ___ Kuchen ___ Bücher ___ Loch ___ Mädchen ___**

Practice 4 – ß or ss?

Stra_e Flu_ Fu_ Wa_er hei_en Ku_

Practice 5 – Long or short vowel?

Circle the long vowels: **Boot · Bett · Sohn · Sonne · Liebe · Fisch · Tag · Mutter**

Practice 6 – Match the word and meaning

Zeit	○	○	water
Vogel	○	○	street
Wasser	○	○	time
Straße	○	○	bird
Igel	○	○	hedgehog

Practice 7 – Read aloud

Zeit · Wein · vier · heute · Straße · über · Wasser · Junge · Uhr · danke

Answers: Practice 3 – [x] Nacht, Kuchen, Loch; [ç] Licht, Bücher, Mädchen. Practice 4 – Straße, Fluss, Fuß, Wasser, heißen, Kuss. Practice 5 – long: Boot, Sohn, Liebe, Tag. Practice 6 – Zeit = time, Vogel = bird, Wasser = water, Straße = street, Igel = hedgehog. Practice 7 – tsite, vine, feer, HOY-tuh, SHTRAH-suh, ÜE-ber, VAH-ser, YOONG-uh, oo-uh, DAHN-kuh.
More practice, audio and games: **alphabetslearn.com/blog/german-alphabet-pronunciation.html**