

Language and culture guide

German

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about German language and culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About German

German is an official language of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Belgium, Luxembourg and South Tyrol (in Italy). It is also used as an official regional or auxiliary language in a number of other countries in Europe, and in Namibia in Africa. German is one of the official languages of the European Union. German, or one of its dialects, is spoken by communities in many countries around the world, including Australia.

Language

German and English both come from the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family so they have some similarities. German is a largely phonetic language with many of the same sounds as English, and the same Roman alphabet. Like English, it has 26 letters, but there are four extra ones: three vowels with dots called 'umlauts' above them (ä, ö, ü) and the letter ß, called 'Eszett' or 'scharfes S', which makes the 's' sound.

In German, all nouns are capitalised.

German is a gendered language. Nouns have a gender – masculine, feminine or neuter, for example, 'die Banane' (feminine), 'der Apfel' (masculine) or 'das Gras' (neuter).

In German, many words change their form or add different endings depending on whether the word is the subject or an object of the sentence. This is known as the case system and each noun, pronoun, and article has four cases.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.



Culture

Germany has a rich culture with a strong tradition in the arts, architecture, design, literature, philosophy and music.

A significant percentage of Germans are Christians, with about half of those being Roman Catholic and the other half Protestant.

A number of other religions are practised too. In Austria, the majority of the population identify as Roman Catholic.

Politeness and customs

In German-speaking countries, depending on the time of day, you may say hello/good day ('Guten Tag'), good morning ('Guten Morgen'), good evening ('Guten Abend'), and shake hands when you meet or leave someone. Close friends and family may give a kiss on the cheek or embrace.

Young people may say 'Hallo!' to their peers for 'Hi!', and 'Tschüss!' for 'Bye!' However, with their elders they mostly use greetings such as 'Guten Tag' and the more formal goodbye 'Auf Wiedersehen'.

When you first meet someone, it's polite to use the formal form of 'you' ('Sie') until asked to use the familiar form ('du'), unless they are a child, friends or family.

Similarly, Germans tend to address those they don't know well by their last name unless they are invited to do otherwise. This practice is evolving, however, as social-media-savvy young people align more with the informal greetings and forms of address of young people globally.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing German cultural references, such as a dachshund, a ladybird, red currants or a tuba. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

Interesting topics

Animals

Some animals of Germany include:

- mammals such as chamois, ibex, deer, wildcats, lynxes, foxes, wild boars, hedgehogs, weasels, polecats, martens, beavers, badgers and otters
- birds such as owls, eagles, pelicans, storks and herons, and many species of migratory birds
- sea animals such as porpoises, seals and turtles.

Some of these animals are also found in other German-speaking countries in Europe.

Arts

Germany is rich in the arts, including visual arts, theatre, music, architecture, design and literature.

- Famous German visual artists include the Renaissance printmaker Albrecht Dürer and painter Hans Holbein the Younger; the Romantic landscape painter Casper David Friedrich; members of the Expressionist art groups Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter; and other artists such as Paul Klee, Max Ernst and Käthe Kollwitz.
- The Bauhaus was a school of arts that existed from 1919–1933 and had a huge influence on design, architecture and applied arts.
- Famous classical composers from Germany and Austria include Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Johannes Brahms, Franz Schubert and Richard Wagner.
- *Grimm's Fairy Tales* were collected and first published by the Brothers Grimm (Jacob and Wilhelm) in 1812. Many of the stories, such as 'Snow White', 'Rapunzel', 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Cinderella', have been turned into animated children's classics, but the original stories are not so family-friendly.
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is considered the greatest German literary figure of the modern era and is often referred to as 'Germany's Shakespeare'. His contemporary Friedrich Schiller was also a prominent German dramatist, poet and literary theorist, despite his relatively short life.

Sports

- Soccer is the most popular sport in Germany and the national men's team has won the World Cup four times. Other sports that many people like are golf, ice hockey, basketball, handball and motor sports.
- Skiing and snowboarding are very popular activities in the Alps in winter.
- With around 200,000 kilometres of trails in Germany, hiking is a popular summer activity.



Interesting topics

Food

German people traditionally eat their main meal in the middle of the day as a family, with a smaller dinner consisting primarily of bread, cheese and cold meats. With changing work patterns, this has shifted more to having the main meal in the evening. There are many different regional variations in German cuisine and some dishes are shared with neighbouring German-speaking countries.

- Families and friends often gather together in the afternoon for coffee and cake ('Kaffee und Kuchen').
- Bread is a very important part of German cuisine and there are hundreds of different types. Dark rye-flour breads are popular.
- Germany is one of the top meat producers in the European Union, particularly of pork, which is the most frequently consumed meat product in Germany. Germany is the world's leading producer of Wurst (cold cuts and sausages).
- Well-known German dishes include bratwurst, sauerkraut and schnitzel.
- There are many delicious German and Austrian pastries, cakes and desserts, such as Schnecken, Berliner Pfannkuchen, Zwetschkuchen, SchwarzwälderKirschtorte (Black Forest gateau), Bienenstich, Stollen and Apfelstrudel.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.

