

Pronunciation - The Alphabet

The Alphabet

The German alphabet consists of 26 letters. Ä, Ö, Ü and ß are in addition to that. Some letters are pronounced differently in German than in other languages. Some distinctive features are explained here.

Take a mirror and start practicing!

Ä, Ö und Ü

- The short Ä [ɛ] such as in *kräftig* is spoken like a German short open E [ɛ] (e.g. as in *Tennis*).
- A long Ä [ɛ:] such as in *Rumänien* is spoken like a German long closed E [ɛ:] (*lesen*) and then you open your mouth wider.
- The Ö (long [ø:], short [œ]) is spoken like a German E but with your lips rounded such as when you make an O sound.
- The Ü (long [y:], short [ʏ]) is spoken like a German I but with your lips rounded as in when you make a U sound.
- When you make the Ö and Ü sounds, your lips should be in a whistling or kissing shape.
- Ö and Ü can also be long/closed and short/open.

AU, EI, ÄU und EU

There are three diphthongs in German: AU, EI and ÄU/EU. They combine two short vowels squeezed together.

- [aɛ]: short A + short E → written as: *ei* (*Leipzig*), *ai* (*Frankfurt am Main*), *ey* (*Meyer*) or *ay* (*Bayern*)
- [aɔ]: short A + short O → written as: *au* (*Australien*)
- [ɔø]: short O + short Ö → written as: *eu* (*Deutsch*) or *äu* (*Verkäufer*)

ß [s]

The ß is solely a lower case letter that occurs after a long vowel. ss is written after a short vowel. ss and ß are spoken like an unvoiced S.

SCH [ʃ]

SCH is only one sound (*schön, Schule*) - not two. Your lips should be pointed forward, your teeth should touch and your breath should be blown out briskly. The SCH sound is also made at the beginning of the syllables *Sp-* (*Sport*) and *St-* (*Stuttgart*), but not with *s + ending -chen* (*Häuschen*) → Häus-chen.

CH

CH is spoken as [x] (at the back of your throat similar to when you snore) after *u, o, a* and *au*: *acht, suchen, Tochter, auch*.

CH is pronounced [ç] (teeth together, lips wide, air blown out) after the other vowels, after *l, n, r* and in the ending *-chen*: *München, ich, Töchter*.

CH, in combination with *-chs* and at the beginning of some foreign words and German names is spoken as a [k]: *Sachsen, sechs, Chor, Chemnitz*.

J

J is often pronounced as just one sound [j] in most words (similar to the English Y): *Japan* pronounced like [ˈja:pan], *Juli* like [ˈju:li] without a glottal stop.

Some foreign words (such as *Jeans*) are exceptions and have an English *j* such as [dʒ] or [ʒ] in *Journalist*.

Z

The Z is spoken as [ts].

V

The V is often spoken as an [f] (*Vorname, Hannover*), and as a /w/ [v] only in a few foreign words (*Visum*).

W

The upper front teeth touch the bottom lip in W. The German W is not bilabial, as in English, but pronounced like the English V.