

German pronunciation guide

Consonants

B: This letter is pronounced as it is in English, except a final B is pronounced more like a P. The word halb ('half') is pronounced as if it were spelled halp.

C: The initial CH in words like Chor, Christ and Chromatik is pronounced like a K.

CH: For German ch, use a hard, throaty sound (like a Scottish 'loch') after back vowels (a, o, u) and a soft, hissing sound (like an angry cat!) after front vowels (ä, ö, ü, e, i) or consonants.

CHS is a separated KS sound as in the English word 'vixen'. Examples include sechs, wachsen, Fuchs, Ochse.

D: This letter is pronounced as it is in English, except a final D is pronounced more like a T. The word Rad ('wheel') is pronounced as if it were spelled Rat.

G: This letter is pronounced like it usually is in English ('good' or 'green').

IG: The suffix IG (used to convert a noun into an adjective) can be pronounced in various ways. The Westphalians pronounce it as if it were spelled ICH (see CH above). The Rhinelanders pronounce it as if it were spelled ISCH. Others pronounce it like the IG in 'pig.' You choose – but let's make sure everyone is doing the same. 😊

J: This letter is pronounced like the English initial Y in 'yes'.

NG: The German N is pronounced as in English, but English speakers have a tendency to insert an extra G following an NG sound if another syllable follows. The Germans pronounce the word länger as läng-er, not läng-ger.

PF: This letter combination is pronounced like the PF in 'stepfather'. The P becomes a little explosive puff before the F. Examples include Pferd, Pfarre, Pfeffer, Pfüte.

Q: As in English, Q is always followed by U in German words. The combination QU is pronounced KV. Examples are quälen, quer, Quelle, Quatsch!.

S: A single S at the beginning of or in the middle of a word is pronounced like the English Z. At the end of a word an S is pronounced as it is in English. A double S (ss) is pronounced like the English S although it may be broken into separate syllables (was-ser).

ß: 'ss'.

SCH: represents the sound SH as in 'ship', 'shoe', 'shred' or 'shadow'.

SP and ST: when at the beginning of a word or following verb prefixes they are pronounced SCHP or SCHT. In the body or at the end of a word they are pronounced as they would be in English.

V: This letter is pronounced like F.

W: This letter is pronounced like V in English.

Z: This letter is pronounced like TS in 'sits' or 'tsunami'. Examples are Herz, plötzlich, Zimmer, zerbrechen.

Vowels

A

Long: 'ah' sound in words like '**bah**' or '**rah**'

Short: '**a**' sound in '**ha**'

AU

As in 'ow'

Ä

Long: 'e' sound in 'fez' or 'bed,' only held slightly longer

Short: short 'e' sound in words like 'red,' 'led,' 'ever' and 'else'

E

Long: 'ay' sound in words like 'may,' 'way' and 'stay' (but without the diphthong)

Short: short 'e' sound in words like 'red,' 'led,' 'ever' and 'else'

EI

Similar to 'eye'

EU

As in 'oy'

I

Long: long 'e' sound in words like 'seen' or 'green'

Short: short 'ih' sound at the beginning of words like 'inside' or 'impact'

IE

As in 'ee'

O

Long: long 'o' sound in 'photo,' or 'cone'

Short: tighter version of the 'o' sound in 'ought'

Ö

Long: kind of the 'ir' sound in the word 'bird'. Easier if you're Welsh. 😊

Short: 'ur' sound in the standard British pronunciation of words like 'dirt' and 'hurt'

U

Long: tight 'oo' sound in 'glue' or 'true'

Short: 'oo' sound in 'cook,' 'book,' or 'forsook'

Ü

Long: lengthen the short Ü!

Short: say the sound 'ee' and purse your lips almost completely shut.