

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] like in *kräftig* is spoken like a short open E [ɛ] (e.g. like in *Tennis*).
- A long Ä [ɛ:] like in *Rumänien* is spoken like a long closed E [e:] (*lesen*) and then you open your mouth wider.
- The Ö (long [ø:], short [œ]) is spoken like an E but with your lips rounded like when you make an O sound.
- The Ü (long [y:], short [y]) is spoken like an I but with your lips rounded like when you make a U sound.
- When you make the Ö and Ü sounds, your lips are like when you whistle or kiss.
- 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 glidingly combine two short vowels.

- [æ]: short A + short E → written as: ei (*Leipzig*), ai (*Frankfurt am Main*), ey (*Meyer*) or ay (*Bayern*)
- [ao]: 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 (**sch**ön, **Sch**ule) - not two. Your lips are pointed forward, your teeth are touching and the air is blown out briskly. The SCH sound is also made at the beginning of the syllables SP (**S**port) and ST (**S**tuttgart), but not with S + Ending CH (Häus**ch**en) → Häus-chen

CH

CH is spoken as [x] (way in the back of your throat like when you snore) after u, o, a and au: **a**cht, **s**uchen, **T**ochter, **a**uch.

CH is pronounced [ç] (teeth together, lips wide, air blown out) after the other vowels, after l, n, r and in the Ending -chen: MÜN**ch**en, **i**ch, TÖ**ch**ter.

CH, in combination with -CHS and at the beginning of some foreign words and German names is spoken as a [k]: **S**achsen, **s**echs, **C**hor, **C**hemnitz

J

J is often pronounced as just one sound [j] in most words: **J**apan pronounced like ['ja:pan], **J**uli like ['ju:li] without a glottal stop.

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

Z

The Z is spoken as [dʒ].

V

The V is often spoken as an [f] (**V**orname, **H**annover), as a /w/ [v] only in few foreign words (**V**isum)

W

The upper front teeth touch the bottom lip in W. The German W is not bilabial like in English.