

German A1

— What to Study

Level: **A1 (Breakthrough)** • Language: **German** • Audience: **Learners**

A1 is the point where German stops being a wall of long words and becomes a language you can survive in. You are not aiming for correct case endings under pressure. You are aiming to handle predictable, concrete situations — introducing yourself, ordering food, asking where something is — with a patient speaker who is willing to slow down.

The Common European Framework describes A1 as being able to understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at satisfying concrete needs; to introduce yourself and others; to ask and answer questions about personal details such as where you live, people you know and things you have; and to interact simply provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Everything below serves that description. If a grammar point does not help you do one of those things, it is not an A1 problem yet.

Grammar to master

Nouns, gender and articles. Every German noun is masculine, feminine or neuter, is written with a capital letter, and forms its plural in one of several ways. None of this is predictable enough to guess, so learn every noun as a set of three: article, word, plural — *der Tisch, die Tische; die Lampe, die Lampen; das Buch, die Bücher*.

- Definite and indefinite articles: *der / die / das, ein / eine / ein*
- The main plural patterns: *-e, -er, -(e)n, -s*, and plurals that add an umlaut
- Capitalising every noun, including nouns made from other words

The present tense. At A1 the present tense does almost all the work, including talking about the future — *Morgen fahre ich nach Berlin*.

- Regular endings: *ich spiele, du spielst, er spielt, wir spielen, ihr spielt, sie spielen*
- *sein* and *haben*, which you will use in nearly every conversation
- Verbs whose stem vowel changes with *du* and *er/sie/es*: *sprechen → spricht, sehen → sieht, fahren → fährt*
- Modal verbs for requests and ability: *möchten, können, müssen, wollen*

Word order. This is the first real structural difference from English, and it is worth getting right early because every sentence depends on it.

- The verb is always the second element in a statement: *Heute gehe ich ins Kino*, not *Heute ich gehe*

- In yes/no questions the verb comes first: *Kommst du mit?*
- With a modal verb, the second verb goes to the very end: *Ich möchte einen Kaffee trinken*
- Separable verbs split, and the prefix goes to the end: *aufstehen* → *Ich stehe um sieben Uhr auf*

Nominative and accusative. German marks the role of a noun in the sentence with its article. At A1 you need the first two cases; the dative arrives properly at A2.

- In the accusative only the masculine changes: *der* → *den*, *ein* → *einen* — *Ich habe einen Bruder*
- Verbs and phrases that take the accusative from day one: *haben, brauchen, möchten, es gibt*
- Personal pronouns in both cases: *ich / mich, du / dich, er / ihn*

Everyday building blocks.

- *du* for friends, family and other students; *Sie* for strangers, staff and anyone older in a formal setting
- Negation with *nicht* for verbs and adjectives, and *kein* in place of *ein* before nouns — *Ich habe keine Zeit*
- Possessives: *mein, dein, sein, ihr, unser, Ihr*
- Question words: *wer, was, wo, woher, wohin, wann, wie, wie viel, warum*
- Time and place prepositions in their most basic uses: *um acht Uhr, am Montag, im Mai, in Berlin, aus Spanien*

Vocabulary areas

Aim for roughly 500 to 800 words you can actually retrieve, not recognise — each noun with its article and plural. Depth in these areas beats breadth across topics you will not use.

- Greetings, farewells and courtesy formulas: *Guten Tag, Tschüss, Entschuldigung, bitte, danke*
- Personal information: name, age, origin, nationality, languages, phone number, email
- Family and relationships
- Professions and workplaces
- Physical description and basic personality adjectives
- The home: rooms, furniture, everyday objects
- Food and drink, meals, ordering in a café or bakery
- Numbers 0 to 100, prices, telling the time, days, months, dates
- Colours and clothing
- The city: shops, public buildings, directions, public transport
- Daily routine and free-time activities
- Weather and seasons

What you should be able to do

Treat this as the real exit test for the level. Grammar you cannot deploy in these situations is not yet learned.

- Introduce yourself and give your personal details, and ask someone else for theirs
- Spell your name aloud using the German alphabet, including *ä, ö, ü* and *ß*, and understand a spelled name
- Describe your family and where you live
- Say what you do for work or study
- Order food and drink and ask what something costs
- Ask for and follow simple directions
- Talk about your daily routine and what you like and dislike, using *gern*: *Ich schwimme gern*
- Fill in a form with your personal data
- Write a short message, postcard or simple personal introduction
- Understand slow, clearly articulated speech on these familiar topics

Common difficulties

Gender is not logical. *Das Mädchen* (the girl) is neuter, *der Löffel* (spoon) masculine, *die Gabel* (fork) feminine. There are helpful patterns — nouns ending in *-ung*, *-heit* and *-keit* are feminine, nouns ending in *-chen* are neuter — but most of the time you simply have to learn the article with the word.

The verb keeps moving. Second position in statements, first in questions, and split in two with modal and separable verbs. Practise short sentences that start with a time word — *Am Samstag...*, *Heute...* — until the inversion stops feeling strange.

Numbers are said backwards. 21 is *einundzwanzig*, literally "one-and-twenty". Phone numbers, prices and ages all use this, so drill it until you can hear a number without translating it.

"Half eight" means 7:30. *Halb acht* is half an hour before eight, not after. Get this wrong once and you will be an hour late.

False friends. *Bekommen* means to receive, not to become. *Das Gift* is poison, not a gift. *Das Handy* is a mobile phone.

How to know you are ready for A2

You are ready when you can hold a slow, simple conversation about yourself and your immediate surroundings without rehearsing it first, when verb-second word order comes out right without thinking

about it, and when you use *den* and *einen* for masculine objects most of the time. Frequent mix-ups between *nicht* and *kein* mean more time at A1, not a harder book.

German usually takes speakers of English and Spanish longer than Spanish or Italian would, mainly because of the case system. Course hour estimates for each level vary widely; treat any figure you see as a rough scale, not a target.

Next step

Move on to the German A2 guide, which brings in the perfect tense — so you can finally talk about what already happened — and the dative case.

Written by GongbuLeng. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A1 descriptors. For the official German examinations at this level, such as the Goethe-Zertifikat A1: Start Deutsch 1, see the Goethe-Institut's examination overview.