

German B1

— What to Study

Level: **B1 (Threshold)** • Language: **German** • Audience: **Learners**

B1 is the level at which German becomes a tool rather than a subject. You can travel on your own, deal with most everyday problems, follow a conversation between native speakers when they speak clearly, and explain what you think and why. It is also the level many German-speaking employers and universities treat as the first serious threshold.

The Common European Framework describes B1 as being able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school and leisure; to deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling; to produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest; and to describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions, and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Grammar to master

More past tenses.

- The *Präteritum* of regular and irregular verbs, which you will meet in almost every written story, report and newspaper article: *sie ging, er kam, wir fuhren*
- The pluperfect for events before another past event: *Nachdem ich gegessen hatte, bin ich gegangen*
- *als* for a single event in the past, *wenn* for repeated ones, *wann* only in questions

The future and werden.

- The future with *werden* plus the infinitive, used for plans, promises and predictions: *Ich werde dich anrufen*
- *werden* on its own meaning "to become": *Sie wird Ärztin*

The subjunctive II. This is what makes German polite, and what lets you talk about situations that are not real.

- *würde* plus the infinitive for most verbs: *Ich würde gern mitkommen*
- The forms you use constantly on their own: *wäre, hätte, könnte, müsste, sollte*
- Polite requests: *Könnten Sie mir bitte helfen?*
- Unreal conditions and wishes: *Wenn ich mehr Zeit hätte, würde ich reisen; Ich wünschte, ich wäre schon fertig*

The passive. German uses the passive far more than English, especially in instructions, news and anything describing a process.

- Present and past with *werden*: *Das Haus wird gebaut, Das Haus wurde 1990 gebaut*
- *von* for the agent when you need to name it
- The passive with modal verbs: *Das muss heute gemacht werden*

Relative clauses. Relative pronouns mostly look like the definite article and take the case of their role inside the clause: *der Mann, der dort steht; der Mann, den ich kenne; der Mann, dem ich helfe*. The verb goes to the end.

Full adjective endings. At B1 you need the whole system — after the definite article, after *ein* and *kein*, and with no article at all — in all four cases. Learn the patterns as tables once, then build them into speech through repetition rather than calculation.

Linking ideas.

- Subordinating conjunctions: *obwohl, bevor, nachdem, während, seit, damit, sodass*
- *um ... zu, ohne ... zu* and *statt ... zu* with the infinitive
- Indirect questions with *ob* and question words: *Weißt du, wann der Zug kommt?*
- Two-part connectors: *entweder ... oder, nicht nur ... sondern auch, sowohl ... als auch*

Verbs with fixed prepositions. *Warten auf, sich freuen auf* and *über, denken an, sich interessieren für*: learn the preposition and its case with the verb, and the *da-* and *wo-* forms that replace them — *Ich warte darauf, Worauf wartest du?*

The genitive. Recognise and use *des* and *der* plus the *-s* on masculine and neuter nouns, and the common genitive prepositions *wegen, trotz* and *während*. In speech you will often hear the dative instead; in writing the genitive is expected.

Vocabulary areas

Aim for roughly 2,500 active words and a much larger passive vocabulary.

- Work: applications, interviews, the workplace, colleagues and conflicts
- Education and training, including the German school and university system
- Media: news, the internet, social networks
- Health and lifestyle, sport and nutrition
- Relationships, feelings and personal problems
- Travel problems: complaints, lost property, changing plans
- The environment, the city and the countryside
- Opinions, agreement and disagreement

What you should be able to do

- Handle most situations on a trip, including problems and complaints
- Describe experiences, events, hopes and plans in connected speech
- Give your opinion on a familiar topic and support it with reasons and examples
- Follow the main points of a discussion or talk in clear standard German
- Understand the main points of news items and articles on familiar subjects
- Write a personal letter or a simple formal email: a complaint, a request, an application
- Tell the story of a film or book and say what you thought of it
- Take part in a conversation on familiar topics without preparation

Common difficulties

Adjective endings in real time. Most learners can fill in a table correctly long before they can produce the right ending while speaking. Short, frequent speaking practice matters more here than more grammar study.

Als, wenn or wann. English uses "when" for all three. A single past occasion takes *als*, a repeated or future one *wenn*, and a question *wann*.

Long verb clusters at the end. Subordinate clauses with the perfect or the passive stack verbs at the end — ..., *weil das Haus renoviert werden muss*. Read such sentences aloud until the rhythm is familiar.

Regional German. Once you leave the textbook, you will hear Austrian and Swiss German, regional accents and dialect. It is normal not to follow everything; focus first on understanding standard German well, then widen your ear.

How to know you are ready for B2

You are ready when you can explain your opinion on a familiar topic for a few minutes without searching for basic structures, when you use the subjunctive for polite requests without thinking, and when you can read a newspaper article on a familiar topic and understand its main argument. If you still avoid the passive and relative clauses in speech, spend more time at B1.

Next step

Move on to the German B2 guide, which takes you into abstract topics, reported speech and the dense, noun-heavy style of formal and academic German.

Written by GongbuLeng. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 descriptors. For the official German examinations at this level, such as the Goethe-Zertifikat B1, see the Goethe-Institut's examination overview.