

German B2

— What to Study

Level: **B2 (Vantage)** • Language: **German** • Audience: **Learners**

B2 is where you stop working around German and start working in it. You can follow a lecture or a meeting, argue a point, read a newspaper editorial and write a structured text that a native speaker would take seriously. It is the level most German universities and many employers ask for, and the one where the formal, written side of the language finally comes into view.

The Common European Framework describes B2 as being able to understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in your field of specialisation; to interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party; and to produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

Grammar to master

The passive in all its forms.

- The state passive with *sein*, which describes a result rather than a process: *Die Tür ist geöffnet*
- The passive in every tense, including the perfect: *Das Problem ist gelöst worden*
- Alternatives to the passive, common in formal German: *sich lassen* (*Das lässt sich ändern*), *sein ... zu* (*Die Aufgabe ist bis Montag zu erledigen*), adjectives in *-bar* (*machbar, lesbar*)

The subjunctive I and reported speech. News reports and formal writing use the *Konjunktiv I* to report what someone said without taking responsibility for it: *Der Minister sagte, er sei nicht informiert gewesen*. At B2 you need to recognise it reliably and use the most common forms in writing — *sei, habe, werde, könne*.

The subjunctive II in the past. *Wenn ich das gewusst hätte, wäre ich früher gekommen*. With modal verbs this produces a double infinitive at the end of the clause: *Ich hätte früher anfangen sollen*.

Nominal style. Formal and academic German packs actions into nouns: *nach der Durchführung der Maßnahme* instead of *nachdem man die Maßnahme durchgeführt hat*. You need to read this style without translating it back step by step, and to produce a moderate amount of it in formal writing.

- Nouns formed from verbs: *-ung, -heit, -keit*, nominalised infinitives (*das Lernen*)
- Genitive chains: *die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung des Instituts*
- Genitive prepositions of formal writing: *aufgrund, infolge, innerhalb, außerhalb, anstatt, bezüglich*

Participles as adjectives. German can put a whole clause in front of a noun: *die im letzten Jahr eröffnete Bibliothek* — the library that was opened last year. These extended participle phrases are standard in newspapers and textbooks, and reading them fluently is a real marker of B2.

Connectors for argument.

- *je ... desto: Je früher, desto besser*
- *zwar ... aber, weder ... noch, einerseits ... andererseits*
- *indem, sofern, falls, es sei denn*
- *außerdem, dennoch, folglich, demnach* at the start of a sentence, followed by the verb

Natural spoken German.

- Modal particles — *doch, ja, mal, eben, halt, wohl* — which carry tone rather than meaning, and which make you sound far less like a textbook
- The future perfect for assumptions about the past: *Er wird den Zug verpasst haben*
- Fixed verb–noun combinations: *eine Entscheidung treffen, in Frage kommen, zur Verfügung stehen, Kritik üben*

Vocabulary areas

Aim for a broad passive vocabulary and at least 4,000 words you can use actively, with a clear sense of register.

- Society and politics, the economy, current affairs
- Science, technology and the environment
- The world of work in formal terms: contracts, responsibilities, negotiations
- Education and research
- Culture: literature, film, the arts, criticism
- The language of argument: stating a position, conceding, contrasting, concluding
- Formal correspondence and phrases for presentations and meetings

What you should be able to do

- Follow a lecture, presentation or meeting on a topic in your field
- Argue for a position in a discussion, respond to objections and summarise the other side fairly
- Understand newspaper articles and reports, including opinion pieces
- Write a structured essay or report with a clear argument, advantages and disadvantages
- Write formal emails and letters in the appropriate register

- Give a short presentation and answer questions on it
- Understand most films and TV series in standard German
- Explain a complex process or problem clearly

Common difficulties

Nominal style is hard to read at speed. The information is all there, but it is compressed into nouns and genitives. Practise by rewriting dense sentences in plain verbal German, then reading the original again.

Konjunktiv I looks like a mistake. *Er sei, sie habe* can look like errors until you know the form. Once you recognise it, news reports become much easier to follow.

Register. B2 speakers need to switch between *du* and *Sie*, and between spoken and written German, correctly. What sounds natural with friends can sound careless in a formal email, and textbook German can sound stiff at a party.

Modal particles. Learners tend either to avoid them entirely or to scatter them at random. Learn them in the fixed phrases where they occur — *Komm doch mit!*, *Das ist ja interessant* — rather than as rules.

How to know you are ready for C1

You are ready when you can take part in a discussion on an unfamiliar abstract topic without falling back on simpler language, when a newspaper editorial no longer needs a dictionary for its structure, and when your formal writing reads as organised German rather than translated thought. C1 moves from arguing clearly to arguing precisely: nuance, implication and style.

Written by GongbuLeng. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2 descriptors. For the official German examinations at this level, such as the Goethe-Zertifikat B2, see the Goethe-Institut's examination overview.