



Land und Leute

Die deutsche Sprache heute

German is spoken by more than 200 million people worldwide. It is the first language of 24% of the residents of the European Union—more than any other language. German is the mother tongue of most residents of Germany, Austria, and many regions of



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), großer deutscher Dichter.

Switzerland, as well as Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, and parts of northern Italy, eastern Belgium, and eastern France. Fifteen percent of Americans and 10% of Canadians claim some German heritage. Around 1.3 million residents of the United States speak German at home. About 1,000 German citizens immigrate to Canada each year. Many people associate German with its great poets and thinkers (**Dichter und Denker**) of the past, and it is true that German speakers still play an important role in literature, the arts, and the sciences. However, German is also an important language for the global economy. Germany is often called the powerhouse of Europe, and people who speak German have a very useful skill for the world economy. German is also an important language for international communications. After English, German is the most widely used language on the Internet. Germans love to travel. In many places in the United States, German tourists comprise the largest group of non-English-speaking visitors. Over 420,000 German tourists visit Canada each year. For these reasons and many more, approximately 20 million people around the world are learning German as a second language. Most of them are in central and eastern Europe, but also 68% of Japanese students learn German. You should remember that when you learn German you are not only learning a commercial skill, you are also learning how culture, worldview, and language are intertwined.

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Zwei Studentinnen aus China lernen in der Bibliothek der Universität Aachen.

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Guten Tag

Adults in German-speaking countries often greet each other with a handshake. When one is first introduced or is in a formal situation, a handshake is expected. Greetings vary depending on the region and the speakers.



Tschüss, bis bald!

Expressions for greeting each other:

Guten Morgen / Morgen (*informal*)

Guten Tag / Tag (*informal*)

Hallo (*informal*)

Hi (*popular among young people*)

Grüß Gott (*common in southern Germany, Austria*)

Grüezi (*Switzerland*)

Grüß dich (*informal; common in southern Germany, Austria*)

Salut (*informal; Switzerland*)

Servus (*used only between good acquaintances; southern Germany, Austria*)

Guten Abend / n'Abend (*informal*)

Moin, moin (*northern German greeting gaining popularity throughout Germany*)

Expressions for saying good-bye:

(Auf) Wiedersehen.

(Auf) Wiedersehen.

Tschüss. (*informal*)

Adieu.

Ciao. (*informal*)

Ade. (*informal; southern Germany, Austria*)

Servus. (*used only between good acquaintances; southern Germany, Austria*)

Salut. (*informal; Switzerland*)

Gute Nacht. (*said at bedtime*)

Bis bald.

Bis dann.

Mach's gut.

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Wiedersehen am Bahnhof
in Leipzig.

Du vs. Sie

Historically speaking, **sie sind** (*they are*) and **Sie sind** (*you are*) are more or less the same form. It was considered polite to address someone in the third-person plural and to capitalize the pronoun in writing.

The development of formal pronouns to address a person was a phenomenon common to most European languages. English used to distinguish singular *thou/thee* from plural *ye/you*; *thou/thee* was restricted to informal usage, and *ye/you* was used both as informal plural and formal singular and plural. Today, only *you* survives as our all-purpose pronoun. In German (as well as in other European languages such as French, Spanish, and Italian) there are still distinctions between the formal and informal pronouns for *you*.

The formal pronoun **Sie** is used for everyday communication outside the realm of family and friends. Even neighbors and co-workers may address each other as **Sie** (**siezen**). **Du** (along with its plural form **ihr**) is traditionally a form of address used among relatives or close friends. An older person usually decides on the appropriateness of this form in speaking to someone younger. Most young people address each other with **du** (**duzen**) nowadays. A step somewhere between **du** and **Sie** is to use a first name and **Sie**. It is often used by an older person with a person who is much younger, for example, when parents meet the friends of their children who are in their late teens or early twenties. The parents usually address them with **Sie**, but use their first names (**Michelle, haben Sie Zeit?**). The friends, of course, say **Herr/Frau ...** and use **Sie**.