Your notes

GCSE German: revision notes

Sounds and spelling

Contents

1. Vowels and umlauts
2. Vowel pairs
3. Consonants
4. Capital letters and stress
5. Key terms
6. Quick questions
7. What to do next

Vowels and umlauts

- Vowels are pure. A vowel is usually long before h or a single consonant (fahren, Sohn, gut) and short before a double consonant (Mutter, Bett, kommen).
- ä sounds like the e in "bed" (Mädchen). ö is like "er" with rounded lips (schön, Österreich). ü is like "ee" with rounded lips (für, über, müde).
- An umlaut can change the meaning: schon (already) and schön (beautiful), Mutter (mother) and Mütter (mothers).

Vowel pairs

- ei sounds like the English word "eye": mein, drei, Bein. ie sounds like "ee": die, vier, spielen. Tip: say the second letter's English name (ei → i → "eye"; ie → e → "ee").
- eu and äu sound like the "oy" in boy: neun, heute, Häuser. au sounds like the "ow" in cow: Haus, Frau, auch.

Consonants

- w sounds like English v: Wasser, wohnen. v usually sounds like English f: Vater, viel, vier (but like v in some borrowed words, such as Klavier).
- z sounds like "ts": zehn, Zug, Zeit. j sounds like English y: ja, jung, Juli.
- s before a vowel sounds like z: sehr, Sonne, sagen. At the start of a word, sp and st sound like "shp" and "sht": Sport, spielen, Straße, Stadt.
- sch sounds like "sh": Schule, schön. ch after a, o, u or au is a throaty sound, as in "loch" (Buch, acht, auch); after other letters it is a soft, whispered sound (ich, nicht, Mädchen). -ig at the end sounds like "ich": billig, zwanzig.
- ß sounds like "ss": Straße, groß, heißen. At the end of a word, b, d and g sound like p, t and k: gelb, Hund, Tag.

- Letters are rarely silent: say the k in Knie, the p in Pferd and the final -e in Schule (shoo-leh).

Capital letters and stress

- All nouns start with a capital letter: der Hund, die Stadt, das Leben. Capitals help you spot nouns when reading.
- Stress usually falls on the first syllable (Mutter, Bruder), but not on the prefixes be-, ver-, ge- and er- (besuchen, vergessen, gegessen).
- Long compound nouns are built from smaller words: Handschuh (hand + shoe = glove), Krankenhaus (sick + house = hospital), Kühlschrank (cool + cupboard = fridge).

Key terms

der Umlaut	the two dots on ä, ö and ü, which change the vowel sound
das Eszett	the letter ß, which sounds like ss
der Diphthong	two vowels said as one sound, such as ei or au
das Nomen	noun (always written with a capital letter)
die Silbe	syllable
die Betonung	stress (emphasis on a syllable)
das Kompositum	compound noun, such as Krankenhaus

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. How is "ei" pronounced in "mein" and "drei"?
2. How is "ie" pronounced in "vier" and "spielen"?
3. How does "w" sound in German, as in "Wasser"?
4. How does "v" usually sound in German, as in "Vater"?
5. How does "z" sound, as in "zehn"?
6. How does "j" sound, as in "ja"?
7. How are "eu" and "äu" pronounced, as in "neun" and "Häuser"?
8. How does "st" sound at the start of a word, as in "Stadt"?

Answers

1. like the English word "eye"
2. like "ee"
3. like English v
4. like English f
5. like "ts"
6. like English y
7. like the "oy" in boy
8. like "sht"

Your notes

What to do next

Practise 14 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

Your notes