

Why learn German?

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So you already have some perfectly good reasons for learning German ... Maybe you want to be able to communicate with relatives, or to travel to Germany during your summer break, or prepare yourself for study in a German-speaking country. Maybe a German exchange student sparked your interest, or you have a friend who recommended it, or you just like the way the language sounds. Just in case you need some reassurance in your decision or the final push toward taking the plunge, here are 12 more solid reasons why learning German may be a good choice for you.

1. German is the most widely spoken language in Europe.

More people speak German as their native language than any other language in Europe. It's no wonder, since Germany's 83 million inhabitants make it the most populous European nation. But not only the residents of Germany speak German. It is also an official language of Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Liechtenstein. And it is the native language of a significant portion of the population in northern Italy, eastern Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, eastern France, parts of Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, and Romania, as well as in other parts of Europe.

While learning German can connect you to 120 million native speakers around the globe, remember that many people also learn German as a second language. It is the 3rd most popular foreign language taught worldwide and the second most popular in Europe and Japan, after English.

2. Germany has the 3rd strongest economy and is the #1 export nation in the world.

Germany has the third largest economy in the world and is the economic powerhouse of the European Union. In 2007 -- for the 5th year in a row and despite the strength of the euro currency -- the Germans were world champions in exports. The country exported 940 billion US dollars worth of goods, just ahead of the US exports. From cars to machinery and industrial equipment, from pharmaceuticals to household goods, German businesses earn 1 in 3 euros through export, and 1 in 4 jobs depends on exports. The competitiveness and desirability of German products on the market are indicated by the country's substantial trade surplus, which reached 162 billion euros (209 billion dollars) in 2006 and continues to grow every year.

And don't forget that Switzerland, another German-speaking country, has one of the highest standards of living in the world.

3. Knowing German creates business opportunities.

Germany's economic strength equals business opportunities. Multinational business opportunities exist throughout the European Union and in the Eastern European countries, where German is the second most spoken language after Russian. Companies like BMW, Daimler, Siemens, Lufthansa, SAP, Bosch, Infineon, BASF, and many others need international partners. The Japanese, who have the 2nd most powerful economy in the world, understand the business advantages that a knowledge of German will bring them: 68% of Japanese students study German.

If you're looking for employment in the United States, knowing German can give you great advantages. German companies account for 700,000 jobs in the United States, and US companies have created approximately the same number of jobs in Germany. All other things being equal, the job candidate with German skills will trump the one without such skills every time. Most surveyed companies in the United States would choose someone with German literacy over an equally qualified candidate.

4. Germans are innovators.

From Gutenberg's printing press to Hertz' discovery of electromagnetic waves, from Ehrlich's development of chemotherapy to Einstein's theory of relativity, to Brandenburg's creation of the MP3 digital music format, throughout history Germans have proven themselves time and again to be great innovators. That trend continues today. 4 of the world's 10 most innovative companies are located in Germany and at 12.7% of the world's patent applications, the country ranks 3rd in the world. Consequently, 200,000 businesses introduce new products on the market each year.

As a nation committed to research and development, Germans are on the frontline of new technologies. Germany exports more high-tech products than any other country except the U.S. and more than 600 firms are active in the cutting-edge field of biotechnology. 115 of these are located in Munich alone. The east German city of Dresden has become Europe's microchip center with its more than 765 semiconductor firms.

Given the Germans' commitment to innovation, it is perhaps not surprising that two-thirds of the world's leading international trade fairs take place in Germany. These include CeBIT, the world's largest trade fair for information and communications technology, and the IFA consumer electronics trade fair.

5. Germans are the biggest spenders of tourist dollars in the world.

Culture Fact

Over half a million Germans
visit Florida each year.

6. The German presence on the Internet supercedes most others.

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While German workers are highly productive, it is clear that they know how to play just as hard as they work. With ample disposable income and an average of 6 weeks of vacation a year, Germans have the time and the means to travel, ... and they do! If you are a world traveler, you are certain to encounter Germans wherever you go since nearly 3 out of every 4 vacations by Germans are spent in other countries. In 2007, they spent a record 91 billion euros on international travel. Year after year, the residents of Germany spend more on foreign travel than those of any other nation.

Germans especially favor travel to warm Mediterranean climates, such as can be found in Spain, Italy, Turkey, and Greece, and travel to Eastern European countries is increasing in popularity. Germans also readily travel to Africa, the Far East, and the Americas. 1.2 million German tourists visited the U.S. in 2003, making Germans the third largest nationality of tourists to the United States (after the British and Japanese). The most popular U.S. destinations are California, Florida, and New York. Travel agencies, tour companies, hotels, airlines, and car rental agencies that can communicate with Germans in their own language will win their business. Floridians know this: In that state there are at least two travel magazines published in German: *Florida Journal* and *Florida Sun Magazin*.

6. The German presence on the Internet supercedes most others.

Considering what great innovators the Germans are, it's not at all surprising that they maintain a dominant Internet presence. With 8 million Internet domains, Germany's top-level country domain .de is second only to the extension .com. That makes German domain names even more popular than those with .net, .org, .info, and .biz extensions. Even the second-place country extension .uk trails far behind at 3.7 million domain names.

7. Germans form the largest single heritage group in the U.S.

German ancestry in the United States



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The light blue areas on the map represent the states in which German ancestry ranks ahead of all other ethnic groups.

See the [county-by-county breakdown](#) for a more accurate distribution.

If you're American or are interested in American culture, learning German can expand your appreciation and knowledge of U.S. history and culture. In the year 2000 census, 42.8 million or 15.2% of Americans reported having German ancestry, making German Americans the largest single heritage group in the U.S.

In waves of immigration that span nearly 4 centuries, Germans brought with them many customs and traditions that have become so ingrained in American ways that their origin is often forgotten. Family names and names of thousands of towns and cities indicate the German heritage of their ancestors or founders. Such cultural mainstays as kindergarten, the Christmas tree, and hot dogs and hamburgers were introduced by German immigrants to America. They founded multiple breweries, created Levi's jeans, invented ketchup, and created Hershey's chocolate. Germans had such a fundamental presence at the time of the founding of the United States that a German language version of the Declaration of Independence was printed only a few days after it was adopted.

8. 1 in 10 books in the world is published in German



Customers browsing in a German bookstore. 80,000+ new titles appear in German each year.

German is not only a language of the past. As prolific researchers and scholars, German speakers produce nearly 80,000 new book titles each year. The only language markets that produce more books annually are the Chinese and English publishing industries. In number of books published, Munich is second in the world only to New York. Since only a small percentage of German books are translated into other languages (for instance, approximately 10% into Korean and Chinese, just

over 5% into English), only a knowledge of German will give you access to a vast majority of these titles.