**Guide to German Pronunciation**

**For Singers**

**by Cliff Lamere 3 Mar 2010**

**Note: German nouns are always capitalized.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **American English**  **Description I Use** | **American English Sound** |  | **American English**  **Description I Use** | **American English Sound** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **ah** | **as in Father** | **nğ** | **soft ng as in Singer** |
| **aw** | **as in Saw** | **oh** | **as in Hope** |
| **ai** | **as in Main** | **oo** | **as in Soon** |
| **ee** | **as in Seen** | **ow** | **as in Cow** |
| **e or eh** | **as in Set** | **oy** | **as in Toy** |
| **hh** | **exhaled sound of CH** | **ř** | **almost silent** |
| **i or ih** | **as in Sit** | **r** | **a flipped r** |
| **Ī or ī** | **as in Pipe** | **uh** | **as in But** |
|  |  | **Û or û** | **u as in Put or Push** |

**Some German sounds are not present in English. Click on the speaker icons to hear some unique sounds spoken.**

**G E R M A N V O W E L S**

**Single Vowels**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Single Vowel** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Example**  **(English Word)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **A** | **ah** | **as in Father**  **Short a sounds almost the same.** | **aber - Hand**  **(but - hand)** | **AH-ber ~ hahnt** |
| **E**  **(long)** | **ai** | **1) when e is followed by h**  **2) followed by an r, especially at beginning of a word (er-, ver-, zer- and her-), but not -er at the end of a multi-syllabic word**  **3) when the vowel is doubled (ee). See EE below.** | **sehr - mehr**  **(very - more)**  **wer - heraus**  **(who - out)** | **zair ~ mair**  **vair ~ hair-ows** |
| **E**  **(short)** | **eh** | **as in Sell** | **Bett - wenn**  **(bed - when)** | **beht ~ ven** |
| **E**  **(final letter of a word)** | **eh, uh** | **Should sound like eh sound in Get, but often said like A in Ago.** | **Leute - Hause**  **(people - house)** | **LOY-teh ~ HOW-zeh** |
| **I**  **(long)** | **ee** | **as in Machine** | **Ire - Irak**  **(Irishman - Iraq)** | **EE-reh ~ ee-RAHK** |
| **I**  **(short)** | **ih** | **as in Sit** | **immer - Wille**  **(always - will)** | **IM-mer ~ VILL-eh** |
| **O**  **(long)** | **oh** | **as in Hope** | **Ofen - oder**  **(stove - or)** | **OH-fen ~ OH-der** |
| **O**  **(short)** | **aw** | **like aw sound in Offer** | **offen - Gottes**  **(open - God)** | **AW-fen ~ GAW-tess** |
| **U** | **oo**  **(long)** | **as in Tune** | **Uhr - Stuhl**  **(clock - stool)** | **oor ~ shtool** |
| **U** | **--**  **(short)** | **as in Push** | **Hund - Suppe**  **(dog - soup)** | **hûnt ~ ZûÛ-peh** |

**Vowel Followed by an H Gives it a German Long Vowel Sound**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Combination** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Example**  **(Meaning)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **AH** | **ah** |  | **Gefahr - Sahn**  **(danger - cream)** | **geh-FAHR ~ zahn** |
| **EH** | **ai** |  | **geht - mehr**  **(goes - more)** | **gait ~ mair** |
| **IH** | **ee** |  | **ihn - ihr**  **(him - your)** | **een ~ eer** |
| **OH** | **oh** |  | **ohne - Ohr**  **(without - ear)** | **OH-neh ~ ohr** |

**Combinations of E and I (almost always sounds like the English name of the second letter)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Combination** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Example**  **(Meaning)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **EI** | **Long I**  **(ī)** | **as in Heidi** | **Heilige Geist**  **(Holy Ghost)** | **HĪ-lig-eh gīst** |
| **IE** | **ee** | **as in Piece** | **wieder - lieben**  **(again - to love)** | **VEE-der ~ LEE-ben** |
| **IE** | **ee-eh** | **I and E are sometimes sounded separately if IE is at the end of the word**  **(but not Sie or Glorie)** | **Linie**  **(line)** | **LEEN-ee-eh** |

**Other Double Vowels**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Vowels** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Example**  **(Meaning)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **AA** | **ah** |  | **Staat - Saal**  **(state - hall)** | **shtaht ~ zahl** |
| **AU** | **ow** | **like ow in Cow** | **Baum - glauben**  **(tree - to believe)** | **bowm ~ GLOW-ben** |
| **EE** | **ai** |  | **Beet - Meer**  **(flower bed - sea)** | **bait ~ mair** |
| **EU** | **oy** | **like oy in Toy** | **Leute - Deutschland**  **(people - Germany )** | **LOY-teh ~**  **DOYTSH-lahnt** |

**Vowels with an Umlaut (double dot above the letter)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Vowel(s)** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Example**  **(Meaning)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Ä** | **ai** | **like in Aid** | **Jäger - sägen**  **(hunter - saw)** | **YAI-ger ~ ZAI-gen** |
| **eh** | **like E in Met** | **Männer - Hände**  **(men - hands)** | **MEN-er ~ HEN-deh** |
| **ÄU** | **oy** | **---** | **Fräulein - Häuser**  **(Miss - houses)** | **FROY-līn ~ HOY-zer** |
| **Ö** | **eř** | **with almost no R sound** | **Flöte - schön**  **(flute - beautiful)** | **FLEŘT-eh ~ sheřn**  **[http://www.clifflamere.com/Lang/Graphics/speaker.gif](http://userweb.port.ac.uk/~joyce1/abinitio/pronounce/voweloe.html)** |
| **Ü**  **(long)** | **--** | **shape lips to say the U in Tune, but say EE** | **über - Tür**  **(above - door)** | **[http://www.clifflamere.com/Lang/Graphics/speaker.gif](http://userweb.port.ac.uk/~joyce1/abinitio/pronounce/vowelue.html)listen** |
| **Ü**  **(short)** | **--** | **like U in put or push** | **Brücke - Stück**  **(bridge - piece)** | **[http://www.clifflamere.com/Lang/Graphics/speaker.gif](http://userweb.port.ac.uk/~joyce1/abinitio/pronounce/vowelue.html)listen** |

**G E R M A N C O N S O N A N T S**

**Consonants have basically the same sound as in English, with the exceptions shown below.**

**Consonants Which May Sound Different in German**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Single Consonant** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** |  | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **C** | **TS** | **before i or e at beginning of word** | **circa**  **(circa)** | **TSIHR-kah** |
| **K** | **otherwise** | **Cape**  **(cape)** | **CAH-peh** |
| **G** | **hard as in Go (except as part of NG)** | **never like a 'j'**  **as in Giraffe or Gin** | **Glas - Ginster**  **(glass - broom)** | **glahs ~ GIN-ster** |
| **H** | **H** | **silent following a vowel**  **(see also TH below)** | **gehen - Lehrer**  **(go - teacher)** | **GAI-en ~ LAIR-er** |
| **J** | **Y** |  | **ja - Jude**  **(yes - Jew)** | **yah ~ YOO-deh** |
| **QU** | **KV**  **(never Q alone)** |  | **Qualität - quieken**  **(quality - squeal)** | **kvah-lee-TAIT ~ KVEE-ken** |
| **S** | **Z or S** | **Z before a vowel** | **Suppe - Geist**  **(soup - ghost)** | **ZÛP-eh ~ Gīst** |
| **V** | **F** |  | **Vater - Vorschule**  **(father - nursery school)** | **FAHT-er ~ FOR-shoo-leh** |
| **W** | **V** |  | **Wagen - vorweg**  **(cart - beforehand)** | **VAH-gehn ~ for-VAIK** |
| **Y** | **many sounds** |  |  | **[http://www.clifflamere.com/Lang/Graphics/speaker.gif](http://userweb.port.ac.uk/~joyce1/abinitio/pronounce/consony.html)** |
| **Z** | **TS** |  | **Zimmer - Zucker**  **(room - sugar)** | **TSIM-er ~ TSÛK-er** |

**Consonants That Change Their Sound at the End of a Syllable or Word**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Consonant** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Words** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **B** | **P** |  | **lieben - lieb**  **(to love - kind)** | **LEE-ben ~ leep** |
| **D** | **T** |  | **lieder - lied**  **(songs - song)** | **LEED-er ~ leet** |
| **G** | **K** |  | **Vogel - Sieg**  **(bird - victory)** | **FOH-gel ~ zeek** |
| **HH** | **Like H in Hubert at end of word if it is after an i** | **windig - fertig**  **(windy - finished)** | **VIN-dihh ~ FER-tihh** |

**Double Consonants**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Double Consonant** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Words** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **CH** | **SH or K** | **at beginning of a word** | **Chemie**  **(chemistry)** | **shai-MEE**  **(kai-MEE in South Germany)** |
| **similar to a strong H** | **after a vowel (like H in Hubert)** | **ach - Tochter**  **(oh! - daughter)** | **http://www.clifflamere.com/Lang/Graphics/speaker.gif(to keep it simple, ignore all boxes except first)** |
| **NG** | **as in SINGER** | **not as in the English word finger** | **Finger - Hunger**  **(finger - hunger)** | **FINĞ-er ~ HOONĞ-er**  **(don't use hard g)** |
| **SCH** | **SH** | **---** | **Schule - schief**  **(school - crooked)** | **SHOO-leh ~ sheef** |
| **PF & PS** | **pronounce**  **both letters** | **---** | **Pfeffer - Psychologie**  **(pepper - psychology)** | **PFEF-er ~**  **psee-KOH-loh-gee** |
| **SP** | **SHP** | **at beginning of a word** | **Spiel - Speise**  **(game - food)** | **shpeel - SHPĪ-zeh** |
| **ST** | **SHT or ST** | **Normally ST, but SHT at beginning of a word and also in middle of word if it is a compound word that includes a word that begins with ST** | **stehen - verstehen**  **(stand - understand)** | **SHTAI-en ~ fair-SHTAI-en** |
| **SS or ß** | **S** | **SS is sometimes used in place of ß and vice versa. Name of ß is Eszett**  **[ESS-tsett]** | **Strasse - gross**  **(street - large)** | **SHTRAHS-eh ~ grohs** |
| **TH** | **T** | **the H is always silent in TH** | **These - Apotheke**  **(thesis - pharmacy)** | **TAI-zeh ~**  **ah-poh-TAI-keh** |