

At the checkout in German

— AN DER KASSE

German at the checkout is the set of five questions every supermarket cashier asks in the same order, and the one-word answers to them: Bar oder Karte, Tüte, Kassenbon.

You freeze at the checkout because of the cashier's speed, not because of your German. The questions come in the same order in every shop and every one closes with a single word: **Bar.** · **Karte.** · **Ebenfalls!**

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01 00:10

Right now: you are in the queue, and the questions are already known

SHORTCUT ⚡ There is no long sentence to build at the checkout. The cashier asks **five questions**, the order never changes, and your job is to answer each with **one word**: **Nein, danke.** · **Karte.** · **Ja, bitte.** · **Ebenfalls!**

When you cannot follow the cashier, it feels like your German is bad. Usually it is not that: the cashier asks the same five questions hundreds of times a day, so the words get swallowed and come out **very fast**. At a discount supermarket the whole exchange takes forty seconds. If you know the questions in advance, the speed stops being a problem.

- ✓ **Das macht dreiundzwanzig siebenundvierzig.**

That's €23.47. This is how cashiers say a price: the words Euro and Cent drop out, and two numbers are left.

02 00:50

The whole conversation: five scenes, forty seconds

The conversation below uses the same sentences as the post. The cashier's lines are plain, **yours are marked**. Read it aloud: at the checkout, the sentence that comes out of your mouth is the one your mouth is used to, not the one you read with your eyes.

Scene 1 • Your turn. Your things are on the belt and it is your turn.

Der Nächste, bitte!

Cashier: "Next, please!"

- ✓ **Hallo.**

You: "Hello."

- ✓ **Ich habe noch einen Pfandbon.**

You: "I also have a deposit slip."

Legen Sie ihn einfach hier hin.

Cashier: "Just put it down here."

Scene 2 • Two questions. As scanning starts, two yes-or-no questions arrive. Both close with a single word.

Sammeln Sie Punkte?

Cashier: "Do you collect points?"

- ✓ **Nein, danke.**

You: "No, thanks."

Brauchen Sie eine Tüte?

Cashier: "Do you need a bag?"

- ✓ **Nein, ich habe eine Tasche.**

You: "No, I have a bag."

Scene 3 • Payment. This is the post's main question.

Das macht dreiundzwanzig siebenundvierzig.

Cashier: "That's €23.47." The screen shows 23,47; out loud, Euro and Cent drop out.

Bar oder Karte?

Cashier: "Cash or card?"

- ✓ **Mit Karte, bitte.**

You: "By card, please."

Girocard oder Kreditkarte?

Cashier: "Debit card or credit card?"

- ✓ **Girocard.**

You: "Debit card."

Scene 4 • When it goes wrong. This is the one moment you freeze. Two different mishaps here: the card does not work, then a price turns out wrong.

Die Karte funktioniert leider nicht.

Cashier: "Unfortunately the card isn't working."

- ✓ **Einen Moment — ich habe Bargeld.**

You: "One moment, I have cash."

- ✓ **Ich glaube, der Preis stimmt nicht.**

You: "I think the price is wrong."

Moment, ich hole jemanden.

Cashier: "Hang on, I'll get someone."

- ✓ **Kein Problem, ich warte.**

You: "No problem, I'll wait."

Scene 5 • Leaving. The last line is a single word.

Möchten Sie den Kassenbon?

Cashier: "Would you like the receipt?"

- ✓ **Ja, bitte.**

You: "Yes, please."

Schönen Tag noch!

Cashier: "Have a nice day!"

✓ **Danke, ebenfalls!**

You: "Thanks, you too!"

03 02:10

You already do this in English: nobody answers "cash or card?" with "yes"

When a cashier in London or Chicago asks "Cash or card?", nobody says "Yes". You say "Card" and move on. German works the same way: **Bar oder Karte?** is an **either-or question**, and the answer is the name of what you choose.

When you freeze at the checkout, your mouth reflexively says **Ja**, because you have trained yourself to hear every German question as yes or no. But two of the checkout questions are not yes-or-no questions. All you need is to know which is which:

CASHIER'S QUESTION	TYPE OF QUESTION	YOUR ANSWER
Sammeln Sie Punkte?	yes/no	Nein, danke. - Ja, hier ist meine Karte.
Brauchen Sie eine Tüte?	yes/no	Nein, danke. - Ja, bitte.
Bar oder Karte?	either/or	Bar. - Karte. - Mit Karte, bitte.
Girocard oder Kreditkarte?	either/or	Girocard. - Kreditkarte.
Möchten Sie den Kassenbon?	yes/no	Ja, bitte. - Nein, danke.

You do not have to build a sentence to answer an either-or question. A bare **Karte.** is not rude; add **bitte** at the end and it is fully polite.

✓ **Bar, bitte.**

Cash, please. — that is all you need when paying cash.



TRAP 1

Answering "Bar oder Karte?" with "Ja"

When the cashier hears **Ja**, they either repeat the question or look at you and wait. The queue behind you waits too, and you get more tense. One word saves you.

✗ **Bar oder Karte? — ~~Ja.~~**

Which one? The cashier understood nothing; the question will come again.

✓ **Bar oder Karte? — Mit Karte, bitte.**

By card, please. Question closed.

04 03:10

Payment: hearing the price, choosing the card

Two things get lost in the payment scene: the **number** the cashier says and the **type** of your card. Neither comes from the German itself, both come from habit.

When saying a price, the cashier drops the words **Euro** and **Cent** and says the two numbers back to back. On top of that, German numbers run in reverse order: **siebenundvierzig** means “seven-and-forty”, like the old-fashioned English “four-and-twenty”. Your ear waits for “forty-seven”, hears “seven” first, and the number is gone.

ON THE SCREEN	CASHIER SAYS	WHAT YOUR EAR SHOULD CATCH
€23.47	dreißigundzwanzig siebenundvierzig	Two numbers: euros first, then cents
€4.99	vier neunundneunzig	If the first number is short, that is the euros
€9.90	neun neunzig	Round cents come as one word: neunzig
€1.50	eins fünfzig - ein Euro fünfzig	A lone 1 is eins
€0.85	fünfundachtzig Cent	Under one euro, Cent is said
€50.00	fünfzig Euro	With no cents, Euro stays

If you missed it, do not guess: say **Entschuldigung, wie viel?** or look at the terminal's screen, where the amount is written. The full rule for the reversed order is on the [numbers page](#).

✓ Kann ich hier mit Karte zahlen?

Can I pay by card here? — ask this when you walk into a small shop, or before you join the queue.



TRAP 2

A Girocard is not a Kreditkarte

In Germany, the card your bank gives you with your account is usually a **Girocard**; its old name was **EC-Karte**, and people still say that in everyday speech. Visa and Mastercard are **Kreditkarten**. A credit card that works everywhere at home does **not work everywhere** here: small shops, bakeries and kebab stands often take only Girocard or cash.

✓ Kann ich auch mit Kreditkarte zahlen?

Can I pay by credit card too? — if you have a Visa or Mastercard, ask this first.

Learn to spot two signs on the door: if it says **Nur Barzahlung**, no card works. If it says **Kartenzahlung ab 10 €**, have cash ready for anything under 10 euros.

Once you pay by card, the conversation moves **to the screen** for a while. On the terminal and from the cashier you will see these four:

WHAT YOU HEAR OR SEE ON SCREEN	WHAT IT MEANS	WHAT YOU DO
Einfach dranhaltten .	Just hold your card against the reader	Pay contactless , do not insert the card
Bitte PIN eingeben	Please enter your PIN	Type the four-digit PIN , press the green key
Zahlung erfolgt	Payment complete	Take your card , wait for the receipt question
Bitte Karte entnehmen	Please remove your card	Do not leave the card in the terminal

05 04:30

Bag, loyalty card, receipt: three small questions

These three are yes-or-no questions and none of them is mandatory; **Nein, danke.** closes all of them. But cashiers do not always ask as neatly as the post does; they often shrink the question to one word. Learn which shortcut is which question:

FULL FORM	SHORT FORM YOU HEAR AT THE CHECKOUT	WHAT IS BEING ASKED
Sammeln Sie Punkte?	Payback? · Haben Sie eine Kundenkarte?	The shop's loyalty card or app
Brauchen Sie eine Tüte?	Tüte? · Möchten Sie eine Tüte?	A carrier bag , for a fee
Möchten Sie den Kassenbon?	Bon? · Brauchen Sie den Bon?	The shopping receipt
Brauchen Sie den Beleg?	Beleg?	The separate slip the terminal prints after a card payment

A one-word question comes with question intonation: **Bon?** Your answer can be one word too: **Nein, danke.**

✓ **Nein, danke, ich habe eine Tasche.**

No, thanks, I have a bag. — the safest answer to the bag question.



TRAP 3

Thinking the Tüte is free

In Germany a bag is **not free**: it costs 20-60 cents and appears as its own line on the receipt. That is why Germans bring their own cloth bag. If you say **Ja**, the bag is added to your total.

✓ **Ja, eine Tüte, bitte.**

Yes, one bag please. — you will see the price as a separate line on the receipt.



TRAP 4

Being afraid of "Sammeln Sie Punkte?"

This question is not a test, just a loyalty-card question. If you have no card, you lose nothing and owe no explanation. The only wrong move is to say **Ja** by reflex.

✗ **Sammeln Sie Punkte? — ~~Ja~~.**

If you have no card and say "Ja", the cashier waits for your card and the queue stops.

✓ **Sammeln Sie Punkte? — **Nein, danke.****

No card: question closed.



TRAP 5

Not understanding "Bon?"

Bon is short for **Kassenbon**: the receipt. Since 2020 shops in Germany have been required to offer you one, which is why the cashier asks every time. If you do not want it, **Nein, danke.** is enough and nobody minds.

✓ **Ja, bitte.**

Yes, please. — always take the receipt if you bought electronics or anything you might return.

06 05:40

When it goes wrong: phrases to get out without freezing

The panic moments at the checkout are always one of a few situations: the card fails, a price is wrong, you change your mind about something, or you miss what the cashier said. Each has a ready-made sentence, and none of them needs an apology.

WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT YOU HEAR	YOUR SENTENCE
The card was declined	Die Karte funktioniert leider nicht.	Einen Moment — ich habe Bargeld. · Kann ich es noch einmal versuchen?
The shelf showed a different price	—	Ich glaube, der Preis stimmt nicht. · Am Regal stand ein anderer Preis.
You changed your mind about an item	—	Das nehme ich doch nicht.
The cashier is calling someone	Moment, ich hole jemanden.	Kein Problem, ich warte.
You missed the price or the question	A fast sentence	Wie bitte? · Entschuldigung, wie viel?

The moment you go silent, the queue locks up. Saying **Einen Moment, bitte.** buys you time and everyone behind you understands what is going on.

✓ **Das nehme ich doch nicht.**

I'm dropping this one. — the cashier removes the item, nobody gets angry.

The worst move when you miss a sentence is a general "I don't understand". The cashier repeats the same sentence at the same speed and you are stuck in a loop. Say what you missed:

✗ ~~Ich verstehe nicht.~~

The cashier does not know what to repeat; the same sentence comes back at the same speed.

✓ **Entschuldigung, wie viel?**

Sorry, how much? — the cashier repeats only the number.

07 06:40

The part nobody tells you: the checkout's unwritten rules

A textbook teaches you what to say at the checkout. But in Germany what draws looks at the checkout is often not what you say but what you **do**. Nobody says it out loud; everybody knows it.



TRAP 6

Not putting down the Warentrenner

The belt is shared. To keep your things from mixing with those of the person behind you, **you** put the plastic divider bar (the **Warentrenner**) down after your items. It is not written anywhere and nobody says it, but everybody does it; if you are the only one who does not, the person behind you waits and stares. If the bar is out of reach, ask the person in front:

✓ **Können Sie mir bitte den Warentrenner geben?**

Could you pass me the divider bar, please?

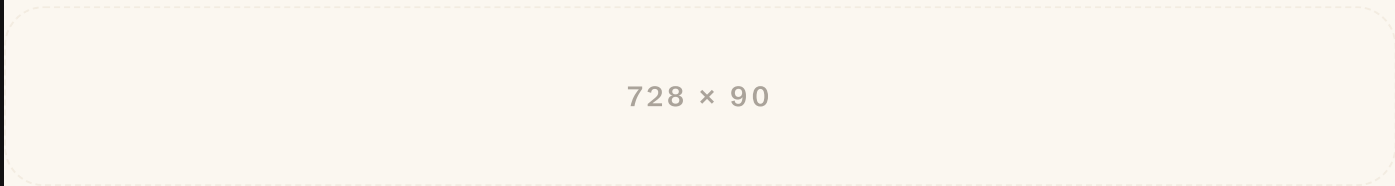
- **Pfandbon** — hand over the deposit slip from the bottle-return machine while the items are still being scanned. Once payment has started, most checkouts can no longer deduct it.
- **Packtisch** — pack your things at the packing table behind the till, not in front of the cashier. The checkout moves fast; while you pack, the next customer's items pile up on yours.
- It is a common courtesy to let **someone with a single item** go ahead of you: **Gehen Sie ruhig vor.**
- **For alcohol and cigarettes**, if you look young you will be asked for ID: **Darf ich Ihren Ausweis sehen?** Carry your ID or residence permit.

✓ **Gehen Sie ruhig vor.**

Go ahead, please. — said to someone with only one item.

① A last word: answering **Schönen Tag noch!** with only **Danke.** is not wrong, but it is half an answer. **Danke, ebenfalls!** or **Danke, gleichfalls!** hands the wish back; **Danke, Ihnen auch!** works too. One word, but it is exactly where a memoriser and a speaker part ways.

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08 07:30

Table: the whole conversation at a glance

Look at this table once before you walk into a supermarket. The moment you recognise the left column, the panic ends, because you already know the next question.

CASHIER ASKS	MEANING	YOUR ANSWER
Der Nächste , bitte!	Next , please!	Hallo . - Ich habe noch einen Pfandbon .
Sammeln Sie Punkte?	Do you collect points?	Nein , danke .
Brauchen Sie eine Tüte?	Do you need a bag?	Nein , ich habe eine Tasche .
Bar oder Karte?	Cash or card?	Mit Karte , bitte .
Girocard oder Kreditkarte?	Debit card or credit card?	Girocard .
Möchten Sie den Kassensbon?	Would you like the receipt?	Ja , bitte . - Nein , danke .
Schönen Tag noch!	Have a nice day!	Danke , ebenfalls!

This topic does not stick by reading; it sticks by **actually saying it at a checkout once**. This week:

- Read the dialogue aloud twice: once the cashier’s lines, once your own.
- Say five prices aloud: 23,47 · 4,99 · 9,90 · 1,50 · 0,85. Then ask someone to say them to you while you write the number down.
- On your next shop, say it before the question comes: **Ich brauche keine Tüte, danke.**
- Say **Mit Karte, bitte.** at the checkout once on purpose. That is how you break the **Ja** reflex.
- Put down the Warentrenner. Then notice that nobody is looking at you.

✓

Ich brauche keine Tüte, danke.
I don’t need a bag, thanks. — say it before the question comes and the conversation gets one step shorter.

09 BUILD

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

09 08:20

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Take the full test

10 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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