

Greetings and goodbyes

— BEGRÜSSUNG UND VERABSCHIEDUNG

German greetings and goodbyes are the everyday phrases for meeting and parting: Hallo! Ich heiße... Tschüss!

“Guten Tag, ich heiße Ali.” — correct, but it lands cold. In German you greet first, then give your name, and along the way you have to decide between Sie and du.

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Right now: saying hello



SHORTCUT

Even if you read nothing else on this page: the pair **Hallo** and **Tschüss** works in almost every situation. The rest is fine-tuning.

In this section we **only say hello**. Asking how someone is and saying goodbye come further down, in their own sections — don't mix them up.

❶ If you're unsure, say **Hallo**. **Guten Morgen** at the wrong hour raises an eyebrow; **Hallo** never does.

02 01:00

Which greeting at which time

The day is a circle. Four slices, four greetings. The marker sits on **the current time** — and next to it is what you should say right now. Don't memorise the rule, look at the clock.

TIME	GREETING	MEANING
05:00 – 11:00	Guten Morgen	Good morning
11:00 – 18:00	Guten Tag	Good day (afternoon)
18:00 – 22:00	Guten Abend	Good evening
22:00 – 05:00	Gute Nacht	Good night

Spin one full turn and see all four in order.

❷ The borders aren't sharp; nobody checks their watch. **Gute Nacht**, though, is not a greeting like the other three: you say it **when leaving and when going to bed** — just like English "good night".

03 02:10

Right now: du or Sie

English dropped its informal "thou" centuries ago, so this split is new to you. The wrong choice sounds either too familiar or too distant — and both get noticed.

	DU — INFORMAL	SIE — FORMAL
Who to	Friends · family · children · peers	Adults you don't know · officials · doctors · bosses
Your name?	Wie heißt du?	Wie heißen Sie?
How are you?	Wie geht's?	Wie geht es Ihnen?
Spelling	lowercase	always a capital S

The rule fits in one sentence: **when in doubt, Sie**. Being too formal bothers nobody; being too casual does. If the other person wants to switch, they will say «**Wir können uns duzen**» — and then you switch too.

- ✓

— Wir können uns gerne duzen. Ich bin Markus.

— We can use du with each other, if you like. I'm Markus.

- ① These days, tech companies, international offices and gyms increasingly use **du** from day one. In traditional institutions, though, **Sie** is still the standard.

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04 03:20

Right now: saying your name

All three are correct and everyday. The difference is the tone.

- ① heißen is irregular: its stem ends in -ß, so the **du** form gets only a single -t: **ich heiße · du heißt · er heißt · wir heißen**. There is no **du heißst**.

- **Ich komme aus der Türkei.** — I come from Turkey.
- **Ich wohne in Berlin.** — I live in Berlin.
- **Ich spreche Türkisch und ein bisschen Deutsch.** — I speak Turkish and a little German.
- **Ich bin Lehrerin.** — I'm a teacher. (*no article with jobs*)

05 04:30

Right now: asking how someone is

In German this question is not empty politeness the way “how are you?” often is in English — **a real answer is expected**. Say something, even if it's short, and then ask back.

① Don't forget to ask back: **Und dir?** in casual talk, **Und Ihnen?** in formal talk. Not asking back sounds cold.

06 05:30

Right now: the moment you meet

Once both names have been said, you round off the introduction with one of these. Most of the time a single short phrase is enough.

① **Freut mich!** is really a shortened **Es freut mich, Sie kennenzulernen**. In everyday speech you hardly hear the long version; the short one is preferred.

✓ — **Ich heiße Lukas. Und Sie?**

— My name is Lukas. And you?

✓ — **Ich bin Ayşe. Freut mich!**

— I'm Ayşe. Nice to meet you!

07 06:10

Right now: saying goodbye

Same logic as greetings: one works everywhere, the rest depend on the situation.

- ① **Bis** means “until” and is very productive in goodbyes. You can build your own: **Bis Montag** (see you Monday), **Bis nächste Woche** (see you next week).

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08 07:00

Regional greetings

Don't be surprised when you hear these. You don't have to answer in kind — **Hallo** is the right reply in every region.

- ① Some of these greetings have religious roots. **Grüß Gott**, for example, comes from **Grüß dich Gott**, “God greet you, God bless you”, but today it is a completely standard courtesy.

Right now: greeting in writing

The spoken **Hallo** often isn't enough in writing. Salutation and closing **are chosen as a pair**: if you open formally, you close formally.

SITUATION	SALUTATION	CLOSING
You don't know the name	Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren ,	Mit freundlichen Grüßen
You know the name - formal	Sehr geehrte Frau Weber , Sehr geehrter Herr Weber ,	Mit freundlichen Grüßen
Colleague - acquaintance	Hallo Frau Weber ,	Viele Grüße · Beste Grüße
Friend - family	Liebe Elif , · Lieber Mehmet ,	Liebe Grüße · LG

After the salutation comes a **comma**, and the next line starts with a **lowercase letter**: **Sehr geehrte Frau Weber,**

ich schreibe Ihnen wegen... That is the opposite of the English habit ("Dear Ms Weber," then a capital), but it is the standard in German.

- ① The most common letter mistake: the male salutation has an **-r** (**Sehr geehrter Herr**), the female one doesn't (**Sehr geehrte Frau**).

Four real dialogues

① 1 • Morning, at work — formal

- ✓ — **Guten Morgen, Frau Weber!**
— Good morning, Ms Weber!
- ✓ — **Guten Morgen! Wie geht es Ihnen?**
— Good morning! How are you?
- ✓ — **Danke, gut. Und Ihnen?**
— Fine, thank you. And you?

① 2 • With a friend on the street — informal

- ✓ — **Hey! Wie geht's?**
— Hey! How are you?
- ✓ — **Ganz gut. Und dir?**
— Pretty good. And you?

✓ — Müde, ehrlich gesagt. Bis später!

— Tired, to be honest. See you later!

① **3 • At the checkout** — in Germany the cashier greets first

✓ — Hallo!

— Hello! (*answer back, don't stay silent*)

✓ — Zusammen oder getrennt?

— Together or separate?

✓ — Danke, schönen Tag noch!

— Thanks, have a nice day!

① **4 • On the phone** — in Germany the person who picks up says their SURNAME

✓ — Weber.

— Weber. (*not "hello"*)

✓ — Guten Tag, hier ist Elif Kaya.

— Good day, this is Elif Kaya.

✓ — Auf Wiederhören!

— Goodbye!

11 09:00

Traps



TRAP 01

Writing Sie with a small s

The formal “you” **Sie** is always written with a capital S — even in the middle of a sentence. A small **sie** means “she” or “they”.

✓ Wie heißen **Sie**?

What's your name?

Wie heißen **sie**?

What are their names? — a different sentence



TRAP 02

Adding “a” when you name your job

✗ Ich bin **ein** Student.

extra article — English says “I am a student”, German drops it

✓ Ich bin Student.

I’m a student.



TRAP 03

Greeting with Gute Nacht

Gute Nacht works like English “good night”: it is a **goodbye for bedtime**, not a hello. When someone arrives in the evening you say **Guten Abend**.



TRAP 04

Dropping the article in a country name

✗ Ich komme aus **Türkei**.

article missing

✓ Ich komme aus **der Türkei**.

I come from Turkey.

English never puts “the” before “Turkey”, but German does. Most countries have no article (**aus Deutschland**); a handful do: **die Türkei** · **die Schweiz** · **die USA** · **der Iran**.

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Frequently asked questions

In Germany a greeting is expected in more places than you may be used to: you say it when walking into a small shop, a doctor's waiting room, even an elevator. Not greeting stands out.

- **Is saying Hallo rude?** No. It is used in the supermarket and in the office alike. What is rude is not greeting at all.
- **Do I have to greet at the checkout?** Not required, but expected. Starting without a greeting comes across as cold.
- **Can I say Tschüss in formal places?** Largely yes today. In a very formal institution **Auf Wiedersehen** is safer.
- **If the other person says du, can I say du too?** Yes, it is mutual. The offer usually comes from the older or higher-ranking person.
- **What do I do when I hear Servus?** Say **Hallo**. Nobody expects you to imitate a regional greeting.

- ① Shaking hands with a greeting is common in business and formal settings; among friends it isn't expected. If a hand is offered, shake it — you don't have to be the one to start.

13 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

TIPS

Know this before the test

The core of the topic in three lines, then the mistakes people make most often.

01

The greeting follows
the clock

Guten Morgen (morning) ·
Guten Tag (daytime) · Guten
Abend (evening). Gute

02

The goodbye follows
the channel

Face to face Auf
Wiedersehen, on the phone

03

Meeting in three steps

Wie heißen Sie? — Ich
heiße ... — Freut mich!

Where you're from: Woher

Nacht is not a greeting, it is the goodbye before bed.

Guten Morgen!

Auf Wiederhören, informal
Tschüss, soon Bis bald.

Bis morgen!

kommen Sie? — Ich komme aus der Türkei.

Freut mich!

04

The reply changes with du/Sie too

Wie geht es Ihnen? (formal)
↔ Wie geht's? — Und dir? (informal). Pick the register to match the other person.

Gut, danke. Und dir?

✗ ~~Gute Nacht! as a morning greeting~~

✓ Guten Morgen!

Gute Nacht is only for going to bed.

✗ ~~To an official: Wie heißt du?~~

✓ Wie heißen Sie?

Sie for people you don't know — basic politeness.

✗ ~~On the phone: Auf Wiedersehen!~~

✓ Auf Wiederhören!

You can't see them, you hear them.

✗ ~~du heißt~~

✓ du heißt

When the stem ends in an s-sound, the s of the ending drops.

13 09:30

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Finish the topic: take the full test

13 questions · timed · exam style · 60% finishes the topic



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