

Cancelling a contract

— DIE KÜNDIGUNG

Kündigung is the German word for ending a contract, such as a job, phone or rental agreement, and it comes with a set form and deadline: kündigen, Frist, Widerruf.

A contract you forget to cancel **renews itself** — in Germany this is where people lose the most money. In English, “I’d like to cancel” is usually enough; German wants a written form and a deadline. The required parts of the letter, the notice period, and how it differs from **Widerruf**.

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01 00:10

Right now: the four lines you send today

 **SHORTCUT**

A Kündigung letter lives or dies on two things: **which contract** (Vertragsnummer or Kundennummer) and **when** (zum nächstmöglichen Zeitpunkt). The rest is politeness.

If you want out of a contract, write these four lines and send them **today**. Waiting for perfect German costs far more than missing the date. When you cancel a contract, **late and flawless** always loses to **early and simple**.

LINE	WHAT YOU WRITE	WHY IT MATTERS
Subject	Betreff: Kündigung meines Mobilfunkvertrags , Kundennummer 123456	the clerk files it correctly without reading the letter
Greeting	Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren ,	the one right greeting when you don't know who will read it
Main sentence	hiermit kündige ich meinen oben genannten Vertrag fristgerecht zum nächstmöglichen Zeitpunkt .	the one sentence that ends the contract
Request	Bitte bestätigen Sie mir die Kündigung schriftlich und nennen Sie mir das genaue Vertragsende .	without written confirmation you can't prove you cancelled
Closing	Mit freundlichen Grüßen + your full name	on paper , add a handwritten signature underneath

The sentence after the greeting starts with a **lowercase letter** (hiermit kündige ich ...) — because **Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren**, ends in a comma, so the sentence hasn’t finished. It is one of the most visible

marks of formal German writing.

02 01:05

The parts every letter must have

The company doesn't know you; it knows your **number**. A **Kündigung** is rarely rejected for “bad German” — it gets stuck because **nobody can tell which contract it is about**.

- **Sender:** your name and full address — **identical** to the one in the contract.
- **Recipient:** the company's name and address. It is printed on the invoice.
- **Place and date:** Köln, 18.08.2026 — top right.
- **Number:** Kundennummer or Vertragsnummer. If you have both, write both.
- **The cancelling sentence:** hiermit kündige ich ... — not “I want to”, but straight “I cancel”.
- **Confirmation request:** Bitte bestätigen Sie ...
- **Signature:** handwritten on paper; in an email, your full name underneath.

- ① Abbreviations you will see in the letter and in the reply: **KD-Nr.** = **Kundennummer** · **Vertrags-Nr.** = contract number · **z. Hd.** = **zu Händen** (“for the attention of”) · **i. A.** = **im Auftrag** (the signer signs on behalf of the company) · **MfG** = **Mit freundlichen Grüßen**. Don’t use abbreviations yourself, but recognise them when you read them.

03 02:10

You already write this way in English

You have probably written to a phone company or a gym: *“I am writing to give notice that I wish to terminate my membership, number ..., in accordance with the notice period.”* The German letter is **the same skeleton** — even shorter. You can match the formal English words almost one to one.

FORMAL ENGLISH	GERMAN	NOTE
I hereby ...	hiermit	It becomes the first word of the sentence and the verb follows right after it
to terminate · termination	kündigen · die Kündigung	the object is Akkusativ : den Vertrag kündigen
notice period	die Kündigungsfrist	how many months in advance you have to give notice
with due notice	fristgerecht	ordinary cancellation
with immediate effect, for good cause	fristlos	no waiting period, needs a reason
right of withdrawal (14 days)	der Widerruf · widerrufen	NOT cancelling — a separate right, a separate word
the contract renews automatically	der Vertrag verlängert sich automatisch	the real danger is on this line

One English habit is risky in German: **“I would like to cancel” / “I wish to terminate”**. In a German letter, cancelling is done **by declaring it, not by asking**: **ich kündige** — “I cancel”. If you write **Ich möchte kündigen**, that is a statement of **intent**, and the company may refuse to treat it as a valid cancellation.

✗ ~~Ich möchte~~ meinen Vertrag kündigen.

I’d like to cancel my contract. — Fine on the phone, weak in a letter: only an intention.

✓ Hiermit **kündige** ich meinen Vertrag.

I hereby cancel my contract. — This sentence does the cancelling.

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04 03:00

Two tools of formal German: hiermit and Passiv

hiermit takes the **first** slot of the sentence; because of German's iron rule, the **verb goes into slot two** and the subject drops behind it. That is why you will **never** see **hiermit ich kündige** in a letter.

SLOT 1	SLOT 2 = VERB	THE REST
Hiermit	kündige	Ich meinen Vertrag zum 30.09.2026.
Hiermit	widerrufe	Ich den Vertrag vom 12.08.2026.
Leider	kann	Ich den Vertrag nicht mehr nutzen.

The same rule applies to **leider** · **deshalb** · **aus diesem Grund**. Since most formal letters begin with words like these, **inverted order** is normal there. English does something similar only rarely ("Never have I seen ...").

The second tool is **Passiv**. When a company writes to you, it **doesn't say who does it** — only what happens. Use Passiv when you explain rules in your own letter, too, and the tone turns formal at once.

ACTIVE (EVERYDAY)	PASSIVE (FORMAL)	ENGLISH
Wir verlängern Ihren Vertrag um zwölf Monate.	Ihr Vertrag wird um zwölf Monate verlängert.	Your contract is extended by twelve months.
Wir haben Ihre Kündigung bearbeitet.	Ihre Kündigung wurde bearbeitet.	Your cancellation has been processed.
Sie können den Vertrag monatlich kündigen.	Der Vertrag kann monatlich gekündigt werden.	modal + Passiv: the sentence always ends in ... werden
Sie müssen die Kündigung schriftlich einreichen.	Die Kündigung muss schriftlich eingereicht werden.	Cancellation must be submitted in writing.

Memorise the modal + Passiv pattern: **modal ... + Partizip II + werden**. It is the structure you meet most often in contract texts.

A small distinction that can be expensive: **Der Vertrag wird gekündigt.** = the cancellation **is happening**. **Der Vertrag ist gekündigt.** = it **has happened, that is the state now**. On the phone, ask **"Ist mein Vertrag jetzt gekündigt?"** — that asks about the result, and that is the right question.

05 03:55

fristgerecht · fristlos · Widerruf

Three different rights, three different words. Picking the wrong one usually comes back as **"you had no such right"**. English just says "cancel" for all of them; German doesn't.

WHAT	WHEN	PATTERN
fristgerechte (ordentliche) Kündigung	normal cancellation — respecting the notice period	Hiermit kündige ich fristgerecht zum nächstmöglichen Zeitpunkt.
fristlose (außerordentliche) Kündigung	with a serious reason, without waiting for the period	Hiermit kündige ich den Vertrag fristlos aus wichtigem Grund.
Widerruf	the first 14 days of a contract made online or at the door	Hiermit widerrufe ich den von mir abgeschlossenen Vertrag vom 12. 08. 2026.

When you write **fristlos**, **give the reason too: aus wichtigem Grund** alone may not count as enough; explain what happened in one sentence. If you're unsure, the safe route is: **write fristlos, and add “hilfsweise fristgerecht” below it** — if one is rejected, the other still stands.

- ① A common surprise: a contract you **signed in person at the gym** has **no** 14-day **Widerruf** — the right of withdrawal mainly covers contracts made **at a distance** (internet, phone) or at the door / away from business premises. If you signed at the gym, your only way out is a **Kündigung**.

Three places where people go wrong



TRAP 1

Mixing up kündigen and widerrufen

You signed up online yesterday and changed your mind today. That is **not a cancellation**, it is a **withdrawal**. If you choose the wrong verb, the company writes back “your contract runs 24 months, we’ve noted the cancellation” and **you keep paying**.

✗ Hiermit ~~kündige~~ ich meine Bestellung von gestern.

I hereby cancel yesterday’s order. — Wrong right, wrong verb.

✓ Hiermit **widerrufe** ich den von mir abgeschlossenen Vertrag vom 17.08.2026.

I hereby withdraw from the contract I concluded on 17.08.2026.

The test: **have 14 days passed?** If not, and you made the contract **online or by phone**, it is **Widerruf**. In every other case it is **Kündigung**.



TRAP 2

Saying ab instead of zum

In English you say “cancel *from* September” and you want to write **ab September**. But German contract language names the **day the contract ends**, and that day comes with **zum**. (English “from September” is vague too: it could mean the 1st or the 30th.)

✗ Ich kündige den Vertrag ~~ab~~ September.

Unclear: which day in September? The company has to interpret it.

✓ Ich kündige den Vertrag **zum** 30.09.2026.

I cancel the contract as of 30.09.2026.

✓ Ich kündige den Vertrag **zum nächstmöglichen Zeitpunkt**.

I cancel the contract for the earliest possible date. — The safest form if you don’t know the date.

If you can’t work out the date at all, **don’t write a date**: write **zum nächstmöglichen Zeitpunkt**. It means “end it on the first possible day” and **removes the risk of a wrong date**.



TRAP 3

Thinking sending is the same as arriving

German law has a quiet rule: what counts is not **that you sent it** but **that the letter reached the other side** — **der Zugang**. A letter you post on the last day counts as **late**.

✗ **Ich habe die Kündigung am 30.11. abgeschickt, das reicht.**

I posted the cancellation on 30.11., that's enough. — It isn't.

✓ **Die Kündigung muss dem Anbieter bis zum 30.11. zugehen.**

The cancellation must reach the provider by 30.11.

- If you sent an email, **keep the sent folder**; if possible, ask for a **Bestätigung** the same day.
- If you send paper, use **Einwurf-Einschreiben** or **Einschreiben mit Rückschein** — they give you a delivery record.
- If the site has a **Verträge hier kündigen** button, use it: at the end you get a **confirmation** you can download. **Download the PDF and keep it.**
- If you only cancelled by phone, you have **no proof at all**; always send it in writing after the call.

The test for proof: **could you show a stranger, three months from now, that you cancelled?** If you can't, then as far as anyone is concerned you didn't.

07 06:20

The part nobody tells you: contracts renew themselves

A textbook teaches you the verb **kündigen**; it doesn't teach you that the contract **quietly extends**. This is exactly where money disappears in Germany: if you do nothing, the contract **simply continues**. Nobody has to send you a reminder that "your term is running out".

WHAT IT SAYS	WHAT IT MEANS	WHAT YOU DO
Mindestlaufzeit: 24 Monate	no way out for the first 24 months	set a calendar alarm three months before the end
Der Vertrag verlängert sich automatisch.	it renews by itself	write before the notice period — or a new term starts
Kündigungsfrist: drei Monate zum Laufzeitende	must arrive three months before the end	set the alarm four months ahead , leave one month of slack
danach jederzeit mit einer Frist von einem Monat kündbar	monthly exit after the first term	now standard in newer contracts

The rule changed on 1 March 2022: consumer contracts made after that date **no longer lock you in automatically for another year** once the first term ends; they continue indefinitely and can be ended at any time with **one month's** notice. But if you have an **older** contract, the old rule applies — and there it really can renew for **another twelve months**.

If you miss the date, it isn't the end of the world, but **write immediately**. Companies usually don't bin a late cancellation; they note it for a later date. The sentence you will see in the reply is: **Wir haben Ihre Kündigung zum**

nächstmöglichen Termin vorgemerkt. — “We have noted your cancellation for the earliest possible date.” **Read that date and put it in your calendar;** you keep paying until then.

The second unspoken thing: the moment you cancel, **your phone rings**. The person on the other end has the job of keeping you, and the conversation almost always goes the same way:

✗ **Wir haben Ihre Kündigung erhalten. Dürfen wir Ihnen ein besseres Angebot machen?**

We have received your cancellation. May we make you a better offer?

✓ **Nein danke, ich bleibe bei meiner Kündigung. Bitte bestätigen Sie mir das Vertragsende schriftlich.**

No thank you, I’m sticking with my cancellation. Please confirm the contract end in writing.

Never say “**Ja, schicken Sie mir mal ein Angebot**” in this call. Accepting an offer often means **a new contract**, and the term starts **from zero**. Even if you’re interested, leave your cancellation in force first and ask for the offer **in writing**.

Three more things nobody mentions up front: **(1)** A rental contract is a different world — **email doesn’t count** there; the law requires **Schriftform**: paper, handwritten signature, delivered to the landlord. The tenant’s notice period is normally **three months**, and it starts counting for that month if given within the first three working days of the month. **(2)** Most other contracts only need **Textform** — so **email is valid**; even if the contract says “by letter only”, that condition is void in most consumer contracts. **(3)** Moving house alone doesn’t get you out of a gym contract — German courts **don’t treat moving as a special reason to cancel**; but health problems or a gym that can’t provide its service are different.

① Car insurance has a hard calendar: the normal cancellation date for an annual policy is **30 November** (one month before a term ending 31 December). If the premium goes up, you get a **Sonderkündigungsrecht** — use that word **exactly** in your letter.

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08 07:30

What to do this week

This topic doesn’t stick by memorising, it sticks by **opening your files in one evening**. You do it once and it earns you money for years:

- List **all** the subscriptions you pay for (phone, internet, gym, insurance, streaming). Open the last three months of your bank account and mark the direct debits.
- For each one, find a single thing: when does the **Mindestlaufzeit** end, and how many months is the **Kündigungsfrist**? Search the contract PDF for those two words.
- Set a phone alarm: **end date minus four months**. Call the alarm “**Kündigung schreiben**”.
- Write one template letter and save it — the only things that change are the company name, number and date. The main sentence stays fixed: **Hiermit kündige ich meinen Vertrag mit der Kundennummer ..., fristgerecht zum nächstmöglichen Zeitpunkt.**

- Say these three sentences out loud three times — you will need them on the phone: **Bis wann muss die Kündigung bei Ihnen eingehen? · Wann endet meine Mindestlaufzeit? · Ich bleibe bei meiner Kündigung.**

- ① Sending the letter isn't the end: **if no confirmation arrives, treat it as not cancelled.** If no **Bestätigung** comes within ten days, write one line: **Ich habe am 18.08.2026 gekündigt und bitte um eine schriftliche Bestätigung mit dem genauen Vertragsende.**

If you want to go deeper into the grammar of formal sentences, Passiv and Konjunktiv II come next — the patterns that soften a request in a letter come from there.

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.

+7

Take the full test

13 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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