

Making an appointment

— EINEN TERMIN VEREINBAREN

Making an appointment (einen Termin vereinbaren) means asking a doctor's office or an authority for a time slot: Termin, phone call, absagen.

“Ich möchte einen Termin machen.” — polite, but not the best opener. English softens requests with “I'd like” and “could you”; German softens them too, only with its own small set of words. Here is the phone script, the clock trap, the online form and the cancel-or-postpone kit.

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01 00:10

Right now: you picked up the phone — one sentence is enough

SHORTCUT ⚡ On the phone, build one single sentence — **Guten Tag, mein Name ist ... Ich hätte gern einen Termin.** — and **the person on the other end asks the rest.** Your job is not to build sentences, it is to give short answers to their questions.

The biggest reason people freeze when speaking German is **trying to script the whole conversation in advance.** You don't need to for an appointment call: the person on the line has this exact conversation thirty times a day and they run the order. Just keep an **opening sentence** and **four short answers** ready.

02 01:00

You already do this in English: politeness is done with a “past” form

When you want to be polite in English you push the verb away from the present without noticing: “I want” becomes “*I’d like*”, “can you” becomes “*could you*”, “is it possible” becomes “*would it be possible*”. Nothing is in the past — you are just softening the sentence.

German makes **exactly the same move**. **habe → hätte, kann → könnte, ist → wäre**. They all grow out of the past-tense stem, but they **don’t talk about the past**; they talk about politeness. The name is **Konjunktiv II** — but the name doesn’t matter right now, three words are enough.

PLAIN ENGLISH	POLITE ENGLISH	POLITE GERMAN
I want an appointment .	I’d like an appointment .	Ich hätte gern einen Termin .
Can you give me one?	Could you give me one?	Könnten Sie mir einen Termin geben?
Is it possible?	Would it be possible?	Wäre es möglich?
Does Friday work?	Would Friday work?	Ginge es auch am Freitag?

Memorise these three words and build the rest of the sentence the way you already know how: **hätte · könnte · wäre**. On a German phone call, this is often the only thing standing between you and sounding “rude”.

- ① Don’t forget to add **gern**. **Ich hätte einen Termin** sounds odd; **Ich hätte gern einen Termin** fits perfectly. **Ich möchte gern ...** is also correct and very common.

03 02:10

The real order on the phone

The sequence below almost never changes. The moment you **recognise the left-hand column**, the panic ends — because you know in advance which question is coming.

THE OTHER PERSON SAYS	WHAT IT MEANS	WHAT YOU SAY
Praxis Dr. Weber, guten Tag.	They picked up and gave the practice name	Guten Tag, mein Name ist Yıldız. Ich hätte gern einen Termin.
Waren Sie schon einmal bei uns?	Have you been here before?	Nein, ich bin neu. · Ja, ich war schon einmal da.
Worum geht es denn?	What is it about?	Ich habe seit drei Tagen Halsschmerzen.
Sind Sie gesetzlich versichert?	Are you on public health insurance?	Ja, ich bin gesetzlich versichert.
Wie ist Ihr Geburtsdatum?	Your date of birth?	Ich bin am 4. März 1990 geboren.
Passt Ihnen Dienstag um 9:30 Uhr?	Does Tuesday at 9:30 suit you?	Ja, das passt. · Das passt mir leider nicht.
Bringen Sie bitte Ihre Versichertenkarte mit.	Bring your insurance card	Alles klar, danke. Auf Wiederhören.

The word that ends a phone call is **Auf Wiederhören**, not **Auf Wiedersehen** (you can’t “see” each other on the phone). Small, but it instantly sounds local.

Two more sentences are lifesavers. When the other person talks fast: **Entschuldigung, könnten Sie das bitte langsamer wiederholen?** When they can’t catch your name: **Ich buchstabiere: Y - I - L - D - I - Z.** Germans back up letters with a word (Y wie Ypsilon) — you can do the same.

① Not every character exists in every system. Accents and special letters often get flattened: **José** is saved as **Jose**, **Zoë** as **Zoe**. Find out how your name is spelled on file before you go — so you don’t miss your own name when they call it out at the door.



TRAP 1

No “taking” an appointment in German

English says you *make* or *book* an appointment. German has verbs for that too, but *nehmen* (take) is not one of them: an appointment is **agreed** (*vereinbaren*), **made** (*machen*) or **asked for** (*hätte gern*).

✗ Ich ~~nehme~~ einen Termin.

“I take an appointment” doesn’t translate word for word — it sounds wrong to a German ear.

✓ Ich **hätte gern** einen Termin.

I’d like an appointment. — The safest opener.

✓ Ich **möchte** einen Termin **vereinbaren**.

The preferred phrase in formal places (authorities, banks, lawyers).

✗ Ich ~~will~~ einen Termin.

Grammar right, tone wrong. **will** lands like “I want one, now.”

Other accepted forms: **Kann ich einen Termin bekommen?** · **Können wir einen Termin ausmachen?** (everyday)
· **Ich brauche einen Termin.** (neutral, not rude but dry).

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04 03:30

Date and time: the number part of the sentence

On an appointment call the mistakes aren’t in grammar, they’re in the **numbers**. German dates use **ordinal numbers**, and after **am** they take **-en** on the end.

WRITTEN	SAID ALOUD	WHERE
am 5. Mai	am fünften Mai	in speech
am 1. März	am ersten März	1 = erste , 3 = dritte , 7 = siebte
am Montag, dem 12. Mai	am Montag, dem zwölften Mai	formal written form
um 14:00 Uhr	um vierzehn Uhr	formal — 24-hour clock
um 14:30 Uhr	um halb drei	everyday speech
ab 8 Uhr	ab acht Uhr	from 8 o'clock on

With a day name: **am Montag, am Dienstagvormittag**. With a week: **diese Woche, nächste Woche** — don't put **in** in front of these.



TRAP 2

halb zehn is not 10:30

In English “half ten” (British) or “half past ten” means 10:30. German **looks at the coming hour**: **halb zehn** = “half of the tenth hour” = **9:30**. That’s how people turn up an hour early or late — and lose the appointment.

✗ **Termin: halb zehn — ich komme um ~~10:30~~ Uhr.**

You’re an hour late, the slot is gone.

✓ **halb zehn = 9:30 • halb elf = 10:30**

Go half an hour **BACK** from the hour you hear.

TIME	GERMAN	NOTE
9:30	halb zehn	half of the next hour
10:15	Viertel nach zehn	past = nach
10:45	Viertel vor elf	to = vor
10:30	halb elf	don't think “half past” — count towards the next hour

In southern and eastern Germany you’ll also hear **Viertel elf** (10:15) and **dreiviertel elf** (10:45). When you hear it, don’t try to translate — confirm.

The rescue reflex: **confirm every appointment with digits**. Also **am Dienstag, dem 12., um neun Uhr dreißig — richtig?** The other person won’t find it strange; everyone does it.

05 04:40

What the online form says

Appointments at authorities (**Bürgeramt, Ausländerbehörde**) and more and more doctors’ practices are now online. Form language is different from spoken language — **shorter, more formal, colder**. These are the words to recognise:

ON THE FORM	IN ENGLISH	WHAT YOU NEED TO DO
Anliegen	Concern / matter	Pick the right service from the list — pick the wrong one and your appointment can be cancelled at the counter
Dienstleistung auswählen	Select a service	This is the first step , dates come afterwards
Standort / Dienststelle	Location / office	Another branch may have an earlier slot — check them all
Wunschtermin	Your preferred date	The system shows the nearest dates
Zurzeit sind keine Termine frei .	No appointments are free at the moment	Don't give up : cancellations drop back into the system , check several times a day
Pflichtfeld	Required field	Leave it empty and the form won't move on
Termin bestätigen	Confirm the appointment	Without pressing this button you have no appointment
Termin stornieren	Cancel the appointment	Done via the link in the confirmation email

The confirmation email often arrives with the subject **Terminbestätigung** and contains a number. **Don't delete that email** — the cancel and postpone link is in it.

Some systems want you to click the link in the email **within a set time**; if you don't, the appointment lapses. If the email doesn't arrive, look in your **spam** folder first.

06 05:30

Postponing, cancelling, not coming

Mixing up these three verbs causes more trouble in Germany than almost any other topic. Get the difference clear once:

VERB	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE
verschieben	to postpone / move to another day	Kann ich den Termin auf nächste Woche verschieben?
absagen	to cancel (separable verb : sage ... ab)	Ich muss den Termin leider absagen .
wahrnehmen	to keep / attend an appointment — this is the formal one	Ich kann den Termin leider nicht wahrnehmen .
stornieren	to cancel in the system	Sie können den Termin online stornieren .

Practical tactic: if you can, don't say **absagen**, say **verschieben**. When you cancel, your record is deleted and you **join the queue again from scratch** for a new appointment; when you ask to postpone, most places give you a new date on the spot.



TRAP 3

Using **kündigen** for an appointment

kündigen = to terminate a contract (job, rent, phone plan). It is **not used** for appointments. English “cancel” covers both, so people mix them up all the time.

✗ **Ich möchte den Termin ~~kündigen~~.**

That is closer to “I’m terminating my appointment” — nobody says it like this.

✓ **Ich möchte den Termin **absagen**.**

I’d like to cancel my appointment.

✓ **Ich kann morgen leider nicht kommen. **Könnten wir den Termin verschieben?****

I can’t come tomorrow, I’m afraid. Could we move the appointment? — The most profitable sentence.

The full order on the phone is: **Guten Tag, mein Name ist ... Ich habe morgen um 10 Uhr einen Termin. Ich kann leider nicht kommen und möchte ihn verschieben. Hätten Sie nächste Woche etwas frei?**

If you need a **written cancellation** (authority, lawyer, some medical appointments), the template is ready. Change the date and time, keep the rest:

Betreff: Absage meines Termins am 5. Mai

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

leider kann ich meinen Termin am Dienstag, dem 5. Mai um 10:00 Uhr nicht wahrnehmen.

Ich möchte den Termin daher absagen und würde gern einen neuen Termin vereinbaren.

Vielen Dank im Voraus.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Ayşe Yıldız

- **Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren** — when you don’t know the recipient’s name.
- **Mit freundlichen Grüßen** — the formal sign-off, no comma.
- **Betreff** = subject line; put the **date** in it so they can find your file.

07 06:30

The part nobody tells you: what happens if you go without an appointment

The textbook stops here. But the real question in Germany is: **you couldn’t get an appointment — what happens if you go anyway?** The answer depends on the institution, and knowing the right word opens the door.

WHERE	IF YOU WALK IN WITHOUT ONE	THE RIGHT MOVE
Family doctor (Hausarzt)	In most places you get turned away , but many practices have offene Sprechstunde hours	Haben Sie heute eine offene Sprechstunde?
Specialist (Facharzt)	You'll hear Wir sind bis Oktober ausgebucht .	Setzen Sie mich bitte auf die Warteliste . Ich kann auch kurzfristig kommen .
Bürgeramt / authority	The door says Nur mit Termin , you are not let in	Cancellations drop back into the system — check early in the morning and again in the evening
Bank / Sparkasse	Counter business is fine , advice is not	Ich brauche eine Beratung . Wann hätten Sie einen Termin frei?

kurzfristig = “at short notice, last minute”. This single word is what **moves you up** the waiting list: when someone cancels, they look at you first.

The second unspoken thing: **dringend and Notfall are not the same.**

- **dringend** = urgent. Saying **Es ist dringend.** is legitimate, but if you say it every time nobody takes it seriously.
- **Notfall** = a real emergency. If it isn't one, don't use this word — misuse shuts the door and burns trust.
- **Instead of saying “dringend”, state the symptom: Ich habe seit gestern starke Schmerzen.** A concrete symptom opens an appointment much faster than an adjective.
- The hospital emergency room is **Notaufnahme**; in the evening and at weekends call **116 117** for doctor referral; if life is in danger call **112**.

The third is the **bureaucratic tone**. Official letters and signs don't use everyday words; learn these equivalents and you decode the sentence at once:

OFFICIAL WORD	EVERYDAY EQUIVALENT	WHERE YOU SEE IT
wahrnehmen	kommen / to attend	Sollten Sie den Termin nicht wahrnehmen können ...
erscheinen	kommen / to be present	Bitte erscheinen Sie zehn Minuten vor dem Termin .
Anliegen	matter , concern	Bitte wählen Sie Ihr Anliegen .
rechtzeitig	in time , before it's too late	Bitte sagen Sie rechtzeitig ab .
Terminvergabe	the process of giving appointments	On the phone menu : “press 1 for appointments”
Ausfallhonorar	fee charged for no-shows	Hangs on the wall in some practices

Sollten Sie den Termin nicht wahrnehmen können, sagen Sie bitte rechtzeitig ab. — when you see this sentence in a letter, the translation is: “If you can't come, **let us know.**” Not letting them know leads, in some places, to a fee or to no further appointments.

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What you do this week

This topic doesn't stick through memorising, but through **actually making a call once**. Five steps:

- Before you dial, write three things on paper: **your name** • **the reason** • **Ich hätte gern einen Termin**. Read from the paper while you talk, nobody can see it.
- Say five times out loud: **halb zehn** • **Viertel nach acht** • **Viertel vor sechs** • **um 14 Uhr** • **halb elf** — write the digits next to each one.
- Memorise one confirmation sentence: **Also am Dienstag, dem 12., um neun Uhr dreißig — richtig?**
- Write the cancellation email template with your own name and save it as a draft. On the day you really need it, **you only change the date**.
- On your next call, be sure to say these two sentences: **Setzen Sie mich bitte auf die Warteliste.** • **Ich kann auch kurzfristig kommen.**

- ① Next up is Konjunktiv II: on this page you used three of its words (**hätte** • **könnte** • **wäre**), there you collect the rest.

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 07:40

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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