### German

# Deutsch

**Spoken in:** Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and 38 other countries.

**Region:** Europe

Total speakers: 120 million

Genetic Classification: Indo-European Germanic West Germanic Old High German Middle High

German Modern German

Official language of: European Union, Germany, Liechtenstein, Austria, Luxembourg, and

Switzerland.

Regional or local official language in: Belgium, Denmark, Italy, and Poland.

German is a member of the West branch of the Germanic family of languages, which in turn is part of the Indo-European language family. It is the official language of Germany and Austria and is one of the official languages of Switzerland. German is important as a cultural and commercial second language for millions of people in Central, Northern, and Eastern Europe and in North and South America.

The earliest known examples of written German date from the 8th century AD and consist of fragments of an epic poem, the *Song of Hildebrand*, magical charms and German glosses in Latin manuscripts. A short Latin-German dictionary, the *Abrogans*, was written during the 760s.

German is grammatically similar in many ways to Dutch, but is very different in speech. A speaker of one may require some practice to effectively understand a speaker of the other.

German is written using the Latin alphabet. In addition to the 26 standard letters, German has three vowels with Umlaut, namely ä, ö and ü, as well as a special symbol for "ss", which is only used after long vowels or diphthongs the Eszett (β).

Until the early 20th century, German was mostly printed in blackletter typefaces (mostly in fraktur, but also in Schwabacher) and written in corresponding handwriting (e.g. Kurrent and Sütterlin). These variants of the Latin alphabet are very different from the serif or sans serif antiqua typefaces used today, and are difficult for the untrained to read. The Nazis abolished them in 1941 and this has been retained since for broader and easier usability.

Currently SSWAHS Health Care Interpreter Service employs 4 German sessional interpreters.

## German alphabet:

#### Fraktur alphabet

The Fraktur alphabet was used for printed and written German from the 16th century until 1940. Fraktur was also used for a number of other languages, including Finnish, Czech, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian.



# Sütterlin script

The Sütterlin script or "German handwriting" was created by the Berlin graphic artist L. Sütterlin (1865-1917), who modelled it on the style of writing used in the old German Chancery. It was taught in German schools from 1915 to 1941 and is still used by the older generation.

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