

## German – A bluffers guide for choral singers

I heartily commend this excellent website compiled by Exeter University – lots of clearly spoken audio examples, well presented.

[www.utils.ex.ac.uk/german/pronounce](http://www.utils.ex.ac.uk/german/pronounce)

Below is a summary of the pronunciation rules which will allow you to score 90%!

<b>Consonants</b>	<b>At the beginning</b>	<b>middle</b>	<b>end of a word</b>
B			Pronounced P
D			Pronounced T
[dt]	-	T (D is silent)	T (D is silent)
G			Pronounced K
[ig]			As in “ich” (see below)
H	Audibly pronounced	Silent, but lengthens the preceding vowel (eg <i>stehen</i> )	
J	Y		
R	Rolled: quite guttural	Rolled: quite guttural	Not pronounced (double rr is rolled)
S	Z	Z (before a vowel)	S
[ss]		S	S
V	F		
W	V		
Z	Ts (like “cats”)	Ts	Ts

<b>Compound consonants</b>	<b>At the beginning</b>	<b>middle</b>	<b>end of a word</b>
ach, och, uch, auch	Guttural, from the back of the throat, like the Scottish “Loch”.		
-ch (following all other vowels), and also -ig	Soft breath of air from the front of the mouth with the mouth shaped as in “ <u>h</u> umane”		
-chs		X	X
ch- “Christ”	K “Krist”		
-ck		K	K
gn	Pronounce both g and n		
Qu	Qv		
sch	Sh	Sh	Sh
Sp, St	Shp, Sht	Shp, Sht	Sp, St
Th	T	T	T

*Occasional confusion arises when a word is a compound. When two or more German words are brought together, the consonant rules apply to the separate portions.*

*In modern German, there are also occasional problems with words borrowed from other languages.*

## Vowels:

Long vowels are good for singing – enjoy them. These are useful guides:

- A vowel is usually long if it is **followed by a single consonant**
- A vowel is usually long **if the vowel is doubled** (ee, oo)
- A vowel is usually long **if it is followed by a silent "h"** (eh, ah, uh)
- **The vowel combination "ie"** is usually long
- An unstressed vowel at the end of a word is usually long, unless the vowel is "-e"

Having a strong basic grasp of this is very important. The distinction between the long vowels and short vowels is more pronounced in German than it is in English, so your long vowels must be very long and committed, and not at all half-hearted.

Your own sound will improve too, of course, if you do this. So will the blend of the choir.

### Short vowels:

- A vowel is usually short if it is followed by two or more consonants
- An e at the end of the word is usually short

<b>Vowels</b>	<b>Sound</b>
Long a (a, aa, ah)	Very warm and rounded. Think of the English “calm”.
Long e (e, ee, eh)	Like the English “day”, with no final diphthong, and longer!
Long o (o, oo, oh)	Very warm and rounded. Like “low”, but no diphthong, and even more rounded.
Long u (u, uh)	Very rounded again. Like an English “oo”, but with rounded lips. Think of a gentle owl hoot: “twooooo”.
Short a, e, o, u	Very like English: “hat”, “get”, “hot”, “push”.

Umlauts cause consternation, because they’re so obviously foreign. But there are only three of them, in long and short versions as before, and one compound.

<b>Umlauts</b>	<b>Sound</b>
Long ä	Like the English “day”, with no final diphthong, and longer.
Short ä	Like the English e in “get”.
Compound äü	Like the English “oy” in joy, but no diphthong slide onto ee.
Long ö	Make the “day” sound, but purse your lips forwards. NB you sing “ay” and move your lips.
Short ö	Similar, but shorter. Not common.
Long ü	Make the English “ee” sound, and purse your lips forwards. NB you sing “ee”, and move your lips.
Short ü	Similar, but shorter. Not common.

<b>Compound vowel:</b>	<b>Sound</b>
ai, ay, ei, ey	As the English “mine”, or the German “Rhein”.
Au	Like “Clown”, only without the big diphthong.
Ei	Pronounce the i sound “Heidi”
Ie	Pronounce the e sound. “Bier” is pronounced “Beer”, helpfully.
Eu	Is the same as äü “joy”.

If a word starts with a vowel it begins with a small glottal stop – words are not elided.