

## Experiences of language students

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At university, at work and in your everyday life, if you move to Germany you're going to have to speak German. Language students report on how easy they found it to learn this new language – and how they're making the most of it.

### **What do you like about learning German? What do you especially like about the language?**

**Miguel (Mexico):** I find the German language really interesting and useful, especially for lawyers like me. In South America, we use lots of legal literature from Germany. It is relevant for almost all lawyers in South America.

In the beginning, I was scared of the tests we had to sit each week. However, since then, learning German has become easier, and I actually think it's fun. My wife has started learning German too. My daughter goes to school here, and if I didn't know any German, I wouldn't be able to help her.

**Laima (Lithuania):** German sounds very different, so you have to practise a lot. But there are many beautiful words. I really like the word "Schmetterling", for example. Also, I enjoy learning a new language, speaking it, understanding it, and listening to German music.

**Marcela (Brazil):** You have to practise lots, because German sounds so different from Portuguese. However, here in the Rhine valley, I can often say "sch" instead of "s", because people here speak a bit like Brazilians.

**Hoan (Vietnam):** I find German really fascinating. Its structure is clear and logical, and I enjoy learning a new language so that I can get in touch with others. German is really beautiful. Currently, my favourite word is "Philosophie". During my first week of my course, I met lots of people who are interested in German philosophy.

### **Do you remember what was the first thing you learned in class?**

**Laima:** "Ich heiÙe...", "ich komme aus..." And "Bitteschön", and "Dankeschön".

**Miguel:** And "Ich möchte spazieren gehen". And when I was in Munich, I learned to say "Servus". But people don't use that here. The same is true for "GrüÙ Gott".

### **How long did it take before you were able to manage day-to-day life using German?**

**Miguel:** I think once you have completed the B1 course, you're quite independent. That's three levels, if you start from scratch. (An overview of levels is available [here](#) )

**Marcela:** In my opinion, you start to become independent from the second level, A2. I was able to do some things then, but not much.

**Laima:** After the first level, A1, I was able to do basic things: ask, respond and understand people as long as they used simple language.

**Miguel:** Exactly, in a restaurant, for example, or at the cinema. After B1 you can read the newspaper.

**Laima:** You can do that even after A1. Basically, you start teaching yourself new words.

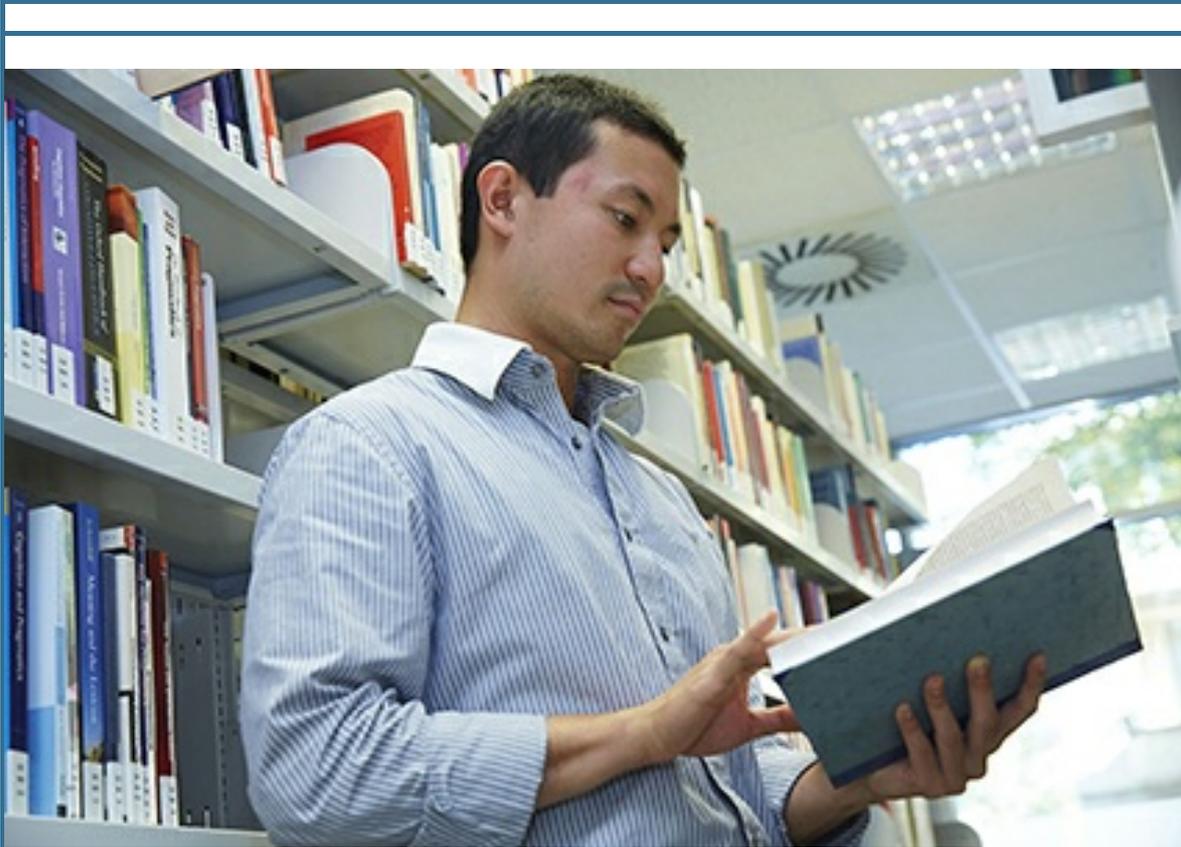
**Miguel:** After three intensive courses, you can understand 90, 95 or 98 per cent. Being able to speak and understand is the most important thing. Writing is something you tend to learn at the end.

**How patient are the Germans when you speak with them and make mistakes, maybe?**

**Marcela:** They help or correct us. They understand that our German isn't great yet.

**Hoan:** Germans are really patient with foreigners. When we speak German, they see that we respect Germany and its culture. It does happen that Germans want to speak English, though.

**Marcela:** ... yes! Then they start speaking English, and I tell them "no, I want to speak German!".





### **Hoan**

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Hoan is Vietnamese and started learning German while studying at university in Vietnam. He has been in Germany since the spring of 2014 because he wants to study medicine here. Depending on his university, he has to provide evidence of certain German skills.

### **Laima**

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Laima is Lithuanian and started learning German while still at home in Lithuania, as she had many friends whom she visited on a regular basis. After her husband's death, she moved to Germany in 2013. Laima is a nurse and wants to work in her job in Germany: "I don't like sitting around at home." As a nurse, she is required to pass the B2 exam in German.

## Marcela

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Marcela is a Brazilian journalist. She graduated in Brazil five years ago and is in Germany on a foundation scholarship, doing an internship with Deutsche Welle. She started learning German seven years ago but took longer breaks in between. Since the summer of 2014, she has been doing German courses at the Goethe-Institut in Bonn.

## Miguel

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Miguel is Mexican and a lawyer by trade. He came to Germany on a scholarship. Miguel is currently researching aspects of criminal law, especially with regard to organised crime. Back in 2000/2001, he spent three months at a university in Munich and started learning German then. Since the summer of 2014, he has participated in three German courses.

### Where is German most important? Where do you need it most?

**Laima:** For everyday activities: shopping, going to the hairdresser's, at the pharmacy, at the doctor's. You need it everywhere.

**Miguel:** As a father, you really need to know German. I take my daughter to school, and everyone only speaks German there. So I speak German in order to help my daughter.

**Marcela:** You need it to overcome everyday challenges. The other day, I wanted to open a bank account. The staff didn't speak English very well, so I tried to understand everything in German. I also need it when I'm unsure of how something works, for example when I'm trying to buy a ticket at the train station.

### Can you remember the first time you experienced a sense of achievement using your new language skills?

**Miguel:** For me, registering my new phone and Internet connection was really challenging. I needed an Internet, phone and TV connection. Obtaining it took about two months, but in the end, I succeeded.

**Laima:** I was always really scared of the phone ringing. I was worried someone would say something to me, and I wouldn't understand. But now I manage. The main thing is that I understand what the other person wants from me, and that I can speak. The other day, an old lady started talking to me on the bus. I understood what she wanted and was able to reply.

**Hoan:** I really enjoyed the moment when I was able to use my language skills with a German person in an everyday life situation for the first time.

### What do you do outside class to improve your German?

**Miguel:** TV and radio are really helpful for learning the language. The same is true for music. I also read children's books in German. They are a good introduction to the language. I usually have lunch at the university restaurant, normally on my own first, so that I can listen to people. Unfortunately there are a lot of colleagues from Spain, but I do try to listen to as many Germans as possible and understand what they say, even if they speak a bit too quickly.

**Marcela:** Exactly, I try and listen to people in the train station and really like it when I understand a word of what they are saying. As I am a journalist, reading the news is really important to me. I may not understand everything, but it's great for reading and learning new words. Even when I meet people who would be able to speak Spanish, we try in German too.

**Miguel:** I live in a small village, and only Germans live there. That's why I need to be able to speak German. It doesn't work any other way, otherwise you never get to know the German culture.

**Laima:** I started off watching TV, listening to the radio and reading simple texts. That works quite well. I can understand a lot more now, and I can tell it's getting better by the day.

**Hoan:** I listen to the radio, which is really informative and interesting. And I talk to people at the baker's or at the gymnastics club. I don't understand them all that well, because they use a special type of language. Especially older people don't always use standard German. But you can learn to understand them.

