

To the Student

Vorsprung, Fourth Edition, offers students a communicative introduction to the German language and German-speaking cultures that fosters active use of the German language. The **Vorsprung** materials are designed to provide ample opportunity for you to practice realistic German in authentic contexts. While the program emphasizes all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—it places a special emphasis on the development of good listening skills as a foundation for the other skills.

Did You Know ...?

- that when children learn their own language, they develop their listening skills first?
- that you spend about 40% of your time each day listening in your own language?
- that listening skills do not erode as quickly as speaking skills?
- that good listening skills can prove valuable in the development of speaking and writing skills?

What Does This Mean for Learning German?

- While doing listening activities, concentrate initially on comprehension without being too anxious about speaking. You will be asked to speak and write more German gradually, as your listening skills develop.
- Listen carefully to your instructor. He or she—along with the audio and video recordings—will be your primary models for good German.
- Listen carefully to other students in the class. You can learn a lot from them. Pay close attention to the words they use, their pronunciation, and their partner's comprehension and reaction to what they say.
- Listen carefully to what you are saying. This may seem difficult at first, but as time progresses it will become easier.

What Else Is Important When Learning German?

- **Learn to focus** on what you do understand and rely on your own intuition to guess at the meanings of words. Don't become discouraged by what you don't understand.
- **Have realistic expectations.** Real fluency in another language can take years of study and may seem slow at first; during the first few weeks you may only be able to produce a word or two. However, by the end of [Chapter 6](#), you can fully expect to be speaking in sentences about your family, your possessions, and your likes and dislikes. After two years of study you will find yourself quite comfortable conversing in German. The German language includes sounds not present in English which will be foreign to your ear. Nobody expects you to have perfect pronunciation right now, but more accurate pronunciation will ultimately facilitate your communication. With time, effort and practice, your pronunciation will improve. Remember, communication is the goal of **Vorsprung**.
- **Be realistic** in your expectations of your pronunciation of German. Nobody expects you to have perfect pronunciation right away. With practice and time, your pronunciation will improve. Remember, communication is the goal of **Vorsprung**. Set aside enough time each day to listen to the recordings, pause them and then repeat what you've heard, or read the texts several times until you are comfortable with them.
- **Challenge yourself.** Try to express yourself in novel ways and go beyond using language that you have rehearsed extensively.

- **Develop good study skills.** Language learning is a *skill* that requires lots of short-dose practice. Have in mind that frequency of practice is more important than duration! Set aside enough time each day to listen to the recordings, pause them and then repeat what you've heard, or read the texts several times until you are comfortable with them. Let the accompanying activities guide you through different levels of comprehension. Take advantage of the study tools available in MindTap, such as the grammar tutorials and flashcards. Ask your instructor for help when things are unclear.
- **Assume responsibility** for your own learning. Prepare before you come to class. For example, you are expected to read the grammar explanations on your own. Class time should be used for learning experiences you cannot get on your own, especially for communication and interaction with other students, as well as listening to authentic spoken German. Make an effort to use German whenever you can and to learn to say everyday phrases in German. Try to acquire vocabulary that is relevant to your own communicative needs. If you find yourself confused by any of the material, be proactive about your learning, make an appointment to see your instructor, or get support from the tutoring services available on many campuses.
- **Study the models in *Vorsprung*** and be sure that you understand the structures and vocabulary used in them.
- **Know your learning style.** Develop an approach to working with the information provided in *Vorsprung* that suits your particular learning style or needs. Try to assess how you learn best; for example, through visualizing concepts or associating them with each other, through listening to recordings or hearing yourself formulate statements aloud, or perhaps through writing things down and underlining them. Do whatever you find helpful for learning German.
- **Develop a vocabulary strategy.** When learning new vocabulary, practice writing new words on note cards or identifying objects in your environment with stick-on tags. You may also find it helpful to record new vocabulary and play it back to yourself. Try to organize words into small, manageable groups categorized thematically, by gender, by ranking, or by some other system. Continually test your knowledge of these new words. **Avoid memorizing lists of words.** Learn to associate new words with the visual or linguistic context provided in *Vorsprung*.
- **Learn to use a dictionary**, but don't let your dictionary become a substitute for effective reading strategies. This can undermine your own ability to associate meaning with new words and may inhibit your acquisition of German.
- **Keep an open mind** to new information. Much of what you learn about the German language and German-speaking cultures may seem different and strange at first. Maintaining an openness to new things is an important tool in learning about another language and culture.
- **Expect to make lots of errors** as you learn German. However, you will also be expected to learn from your mistakes and to make fewer and fewer errors as you progress. When you do make mistakes in class, listen carefully to what your instructor says. It should be your model for fashioning your own speech. The authors and your instructor want to congratulate you for deciding to learn German. You have made a very exciting and valuable educational choice.

Ignore this advice to "avoid memorizing lists of words." Research has shown that studying lists IS effective, as long as it is combined with other strategies, such as noticing new vocabulary in context, forming simple sentences, etc.

Viel Spaß!

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