

Pitfalls for Americans Singing German

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Vowels

1. German vowels are pure, and Americans are not used to saying and sustaining pure vowels.
2. Americans say most vowels with a vanishing glide (diphthong.)
3. Americans are not used to using the tongue and lips (cheeks) energetically.

Closed Vowels

[e]	high, forward tongue no [i] off-glide	Melodien, Sehnsucht
[o]	Enough roundness in lips (cheeks) No [u] off-glide	Musensohn, O Tod
[u]	Enough roundness in lips (cheeks) No [ʌ] off-glide	Mut, Kuh

Umlauts

[y]	Sing [i] with [u] lips	süß
[ʏ]	Sing [ɪ] with [U] lips	NOT [ju] Glück
[ø]	Sing [e] with [o] lips	schöne
[œ]	Sing [ɛ] with [ɔ] lips	NOT [ɛr] möchte

Diphthongs

[ae]	Sustain [a] then glide to [e]	Mein
[ao]	Sustain [a] NOT [ɔ] then glide to [o]	rauscht
[ɔø]	Sustain [ɔ] then glide to [ø] NOT [ɪ]	treu

Schwa

After bright vowels, toward [ɛ]

liebe, schwebe

After rounded vowels, toward rounded [ə]

möchte, rufe

En, el, es, et, er toward darker [ə]

Himmel, Mutter

Consonants

1. German consonants are a major expressive tool for both poets and composers.
2. Most German words begin with a consonant.
3. Voiced German consonants must resonate.
4. Pronounce German consonants *before* the beat.
5. Pronounce each consonant of a consonant cluster separately.
6. Emphasize one consonant in a consonant cluster for expression.
7. Enjoy expressive possibilities for double consonants.

CH

- [ç] Voiceless dorso–palatal fricative mich
- Air passes between the frontal arch of the tongue and the alveolar ridge.
 - Do not substitute [ʃ] for [ç] (feel *no* air flow between the side teeth)
- [X] Voiceless dorso–velar fricative Ach, lachen,
Buch
- Air passes between back of the tongue and the soft palate (velum)
 - Do not substitute [k] for [X]

Trick: Leave the tongue in the position of the vowel or consonant preceding the [ç] or [X] and emit air stream. DO NOT MOVE THE JAW!

Killer words with CH

[ç] preceded by a consonant: manche, Mädchen, durch, horch
(Thinking the word “huge” after the preceding consonant can help)

[ç] followed by a consonant Nächte, sprichst, nächste, höchste

[X] followed by a consonant: Nacht, Macht, taucht
(Do not let the tongue anticipate the t before completing [x])

Dental Consonants

[d], [t], [n], [l]: Dental and more forward than in English (tongue on the teeth rather than the alveolar ridge)

[l] Most difficult for Americans Alle, hell, soll, Leben
No simultaneous [ʌ] with [l]. Lateral not velarized.

[R] is apical (with the tongue)

Initial “r” is rolled Raum, Traum

“r” between two vowels is flipped Ehre

“r” before some consonants or final may be a schwa Der Schönste, hernieder

S

Final “s” is *always* voiceless. This is particularly difficult for Americans when “s” follows a voiced consonant

Uns, als

Genitive “s” is always voiceless

Lebensreise
Frühlingsglaube
Himmelsruh

SH

[ʃ] is made with rounded lips (cheeks)

Schwer, schön

Glottal Stop

Almost all German words begin with a consonant. If there is no written consonant, there is a glottal stop (or space). If there is a prefix before a word beginning with a vowel, there is still a glottal stop before the initial vowel.

‘Etwas in ‘ihm ‘ist ‘anders.

‘Er ‘ists.

Die ‘Er’innerung ‘an der ‘Autoreise in den Ver‘einigten Stadten war ‘einmallig.

There is elision (no glottal) in some adverbs with a prefix ending in “r”

heran

voraus

daran

vorüber