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German Pronunciation - Some Guidelines for English Speakers

Vowels (May be Long or Short)		German Words
Short a	as in 'hat', or even the 'u' sound in 'hut'	<i>als, lange</i>
Long a	as in 'ah', 'father' *Note that doubling the letter or following it by 'h' creates the Long vowel	<i>da, Staat, Bahn</i>
Short e	as in 'let', 'bet'	<i>senden, besser, Herr</i>
Long e	as in 'state', or even mid-way between that sound and the 'air' sound in 'hair' *Note that doubling the letter or following it by 'h' creates the Long vowel	<i>lesen, dem, See, geht</i>
Short i	as in 'hit'	<i>Kind, bitte, bist</i>
Long i	as in 'see', 'marine' *Note that 'ie' and 'ih' also produce the Long vowel	<i>wir, sie, ihn, studieren</i>
Short o	as in 'hot'	<i>Sonne, Gott, morgen</i>
Long o	close to English 'or' in 'torn'. Definitely not as 'o' in English 'rose', 'over' and 'go' etc. *Note that doubling the letter or following it by 'h' creates the Long vowel	<i>loben, so, wohl, Boot</i>
Short u	as in 'put'	<i>und, Mutter, zum</i>
Long u	as in 'who', 'pool', with forward, rounded lips: a long pure vowel *Note the lengthening effect of 'h' after the vowel	<i>zut, du, Stuhl, rufen</i>

Diphthongs (German has three diphthongs)		German words
ei or ai	All pronounced as in English 'mile' or 'sigh'	<i>Wein, Kaiser</i>
ey & ay		<i>Bayern, Meyer</i>
au	as in the 'ou' in 'house'	<i>Frau, Baum, Haus</i>
eu & äu	like the 'oi' in 'boil' or the 'oy' in 'boy'	<i>heute, Feuer, Fräulein, euer, Bäume, Mäuser</i>

Modified vowels - the umlaut (¨)	
ä	has the same sound as Short 'e' in some words as <i>hätte, Äpfel, Bäcker</i> but also has the Long 'are' sound in English 'care' or the 'air' sound in 'fair' as <i>wären, später, Schläge</i>
ü & ö	are vowels that have no counterpart in spoken English. To pronounce 'ü' shape the lips for English 'oo' and, holding this position, sing 'ee' instead, e.g. when singing 'Brüder', sing 'breeder' with the lips rounded as though to sing 'brooder'. Schiller actually rhymed "Brüder" with 'wieder' (pronounced <i>veeder</i>); this is poetic licence, but it does indicate the essential 'ee' quality of the German 'ü'. Similarly, to pronounce 'ö', shape the lips for 'oo' and instead, without changing the lip position, sing 'er', e.g. when singing 'schön', sing 'shern' with the 'r' silent as in the English pronunciation but with the lips rounded as though for singing 'shoon'. This is as near as may be to the German 'ö'.

Consonants

b	as in English when initial in a word or syllable, or doubled, <i>but</i> when <i>final</i> in a word or syllable, or when followed by another consonant or consonants, sounds like 'p' in English 'tap', e.g. <i>ab</i> , <i>Weib</i> , <i>liebte</i> , <i>abgeben</i> , <i>gibst</i> - all have the 'p' sound
ch	has two sounds, both quite difficult for most English speakers. (i) the first occurs after: <i>a, o, u, au</i> , and, like the <i>ch</i> in Scottish 'loch'; is in the back of the throat! e.g. <i>Bach</i> , <i>Buch</i> , <i>rauchen</i> , <i>suchen</i> , <i>noch</i> (ii) this sound of <i>ch</i> occurs after <i>ä, e, i, ö, ü, ei, äu, eu, y, l, r, n</i> , and in the diminutive suffix '-chen'. It is produced towards the front of the mouth like the <i>h</i> in 'huge', but with the pronounced exhalation of the breath and with the tip of the tongue firmly attached to the bottom of the lower teeth. Hold the back of your hand near your lips and feel the air pressure needed to make this sound. Try to avoid the easy way out by simply making the sound ' <i>sh</i> '. Try this: first say ' <i>ish</i> ', then place the tip of the tongue firmly against the lower teeth and, <i>without detaching the tongue tip</i> , try to say a 'breathy' ' <i>ish</i> '. Do the same with these: ' <i>nisht</i> ', ' <i>milsh</i> ', ' <i>lisht</i> ', ' <i>made-shun</i> '. If you are doing it correctly you will be pronouncing the words: ' <i>ich</i> ', ' <i>nicht</i> ', ' <i>Milch</i> ', ' <i>Licht</i> ' and ' <i>Mädchen</i> '.
d	as in English when initial in a word or syllable or doubled, <i>but</i> when final, or when followed by another consonant or other consonants, it sounds like 't' in 'cat', e.g. ' <i>Hand</i> ', ' <i>und</i> ', ' <i>Rad</i> ' (pronounced 'hant', 'oont', and 'rart')
f	as in English
g	(i) as in English, <i>but</i> at the end of a word it sounds like ' <i>k</i> ', e.g. ' <i>Tag</i> ' (tark), ' <i>Berg</i> ' (bairk) (ii) also, when final in a syllable or followed by another consonant or other consonants, it sounds as 'k', e.g. ' <i>sorglos</i> ', ' <i>möglich</i> ' (iii) in the suffix ' <i>ig</i> ' it sounds like the second ' <i>ch</i> ' sound, see above - ' <i>ich</i> ', ' <i>mich</i> ' etc. e.g. ' <i>Grundig</i> ', ' <i>Konig</i> ', ' <i>selig</i> ', ' <i>Heiligtum</i> ' (pronounced 'groondich', 'kernich', 'zairlich')
h	as in English, <i>but</i> it is silent before the vowel of a word end and when it simply indicates the lengthening of a vowel, e.g. pronounced quite strongly in the following words: ' <i>haben</i> ', ' <i>gehabt</i> ', ' <i>Holz</i> ', and is silent in the following: ' <i>gehen</i> ', ' <i>Kuh</i> ', ' <i>weh</i> ', ' <i>geschen</i> '
j	like the 'y' in 'yes', e.g. ' <i>ja</i> ', ' <i>jeder</i> ', ' <i>Jahr</i> '
l	as in English, but with more positive and <i>forward</i> sound
m & n	as in English
-ng	like the ' <i>ng</i> ' in English ' <i>sing</i> ', ' <i>long</i> '. <i>Never</i> with a detached 'g' as in the English word 'finger' - pronounced 'fin-ger'. Thus the German identical word for the English word 'finger' is pronounced to rhyme with the English word 'singer'!
p	as in English, <i>but</i> note that in words beginning with 'p' and another consonant the 'p' is always sounded, e.g. ' <i>Pferd</i> ', ' <i>Pflanz</i> ', ' <i>Psalm</i> ', ' <i>psychologie</i> '
qu	as in English the 'q' is always followed by the 'u' but the German pronunciation is always like 'k' + 'v', thus ' <i>Quelle</i> ', ' <i>bequem</i> ', ' <i>qualität</i> ' is pronounced ' <i>kveler</i> ', ' <i>bekvem</i> ', ' <i>kvaleetet</i> '
r	has no English counterpart. It must be trilled; either in the throat (the 'uvular' r) or with the tip of the tongue against the upper gums (the 'lingual' r). Either sound is acceptable and, perhaps, the 'lingual' r is more easily produced by English speakers

Consonants (continued)

s (i)	as an initial letter of a word or a syllable before a vowel it sounds like 'z': 'sehen', 'sich', 'rasend', 'Ilse', 'Rose'
(ii)	when final in a word or syllable, and before more consonants it is like 's' in 'sea': 'Gras', 'weshab', 'als', 'Post'
(iii)	when initial before 'p' or 't' it sounds like ' sh ' in ' ship ': 'stehen', 'spielen', 'gestanden'
sch	also pronounced as 'sh' - see s (iii) above. Thus: ' sch iff', ' Sch ule', ' sch reiben', 'raus chen '. <i>But note</i> that when 's' ends one word <i>element</i> and 'ch' begins another, each must be pronounced separately, e.g. 'Häus chen ' is not pronounced 'hoys shen ' but with a clear articulation of the two elements 'hoys/ chen '.
t	as in English, <i>but note</i> that in 'loan' words before 'i' it becomes ' ts ', e.g. 'Nati on ' is pronounced like 'nartsee orn '
th	also sounds like 't' in English. Thus ' The ater' (tayarter)
v	like 'f' in English 'fear'. 'von', ' V ater', 'vier'
w	like 'v' in English 'vine'. 'war', 'Sch w ester', 'wo'
x	as in English 'tax' i.e. = 'k'+ 's'
y	
z	always has the ' ts ' sound, e.g. 'zu', 'Herz', ' Z eit', 'zehn'