

TEXAS STATE GERMAN CONTEST

TIPS FOR WRITTEN TESTING EVENTS

(CULTURE, GRAMMAR, LISTENING COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, SPELLING, TIMED WRITING, VOCABULARY)

People often ask, “How do we know what to study for the written tests at state?” Here are some tips:

Culture

The entire culture tests for levels I and II are in English; the entire tests for levels III and IV are in German. For levels III and IV, therefore, it is useful to know the German words for common geographical terms such as capital, river, forest, mountain range, etc. If you want to prepare yourself, gather and study information about the following topics:

- conversions between **metric** and customary measurements (distance, weight, volume, temperature)
- famous German-speaking **scientists** and their major discoveries, especially Nobel Prize winners
- common German proverbs
- famous German-speaking **authors** and **philosophers** and their major works, especially winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature
- famous German-speaking **composers** (birthplaces, style of music associated with them, major works)
- famous German-speaking **artists** and their major works
- German-speaking **film stars** and **directors**
- common **fairy tales and folk tales** from the German-speaking region
- **monarchs**: kings of the various German nations (Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria), emperors of the (second) German Empire, and emperors/empresses of the Holy Roman Empire/Austria-Hungary
- past and present **leaders** (chancellors and presidents) of Germany and Austria, present leaders of Switzerland and Liechtenstein, leaders of the old DDR
- the names for the various **political sub-units** of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (for example, the U.S. is divided into “states,” “counties,” and “cities” – what are Germany, Austria, and Switzerland divided into?)
- basic **political institutions** of the German-speaking countries and their functions as well as the major **political parties** and their general orientations (for example, the U.S. has a Congress with two houses, a presidency, a Supreme Court, a Cabinet, two major parties (Democrats tend in the liberal direction, Republicans tend in the conservative direction), etc.)
- the **largest 4-5 cities** in each German-speaking country and the largest and smallest *Bundesländer/Kantone* in area and population
- approximate current **population** figures for each German-speaking country
- common **symbols** associated with each German-speaking country: flags, national anthems, the oval stickers that go on cars
- German **automobile manufacturers** and the cities where they are headquartered
- major **corporations** in the German-speaking countries
- **holidays** (religious and secular) in the German-speaking countries
- **religion** in the German-speaking countries
- popular German **card games**
- **rivers**: longest rivers of each German-speaking country, which major cities each major river flows through, which rivers form important borders
- **mountains**: general location of major mountain ranges, highest mountains in each German-speaking country
- **bodies of water**: the two seas that border Germany, the major lakes in each German-speaking country, the various canals that cut across Germany
- famous **landmarks** in the various German-speaking cities (perhaps make a list of the top 20-30 German speaking cities and identify 3-4 of the most famous attractions (castles, monuments, museums, architectural works) in each)
- famous **events** that occur in particular German-speaking cities annually (or sometimes less often)
- the **capitals** of the four German-speaking **countries**
- the **capitals** and approximate **locations** of the *Bundesländer* of Germany and Austria (don’t forget about Austria!!), for instance, Bavaria/*Bayern* is in the southeast of Germany
- the **coats of arms** of the German/Austrian *Bundesländer* and Swiss cantons
- the countries that **border** each of the German-speaking countries

- the basics of how the German **school system** is structured, esp. *Grundschule, Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium*
- basic **German-Texan** and **German-American history** (mostly prominent figures and what they did)
- German **history** (I know that's a huge field, but do your best: the Germanic tribes, Roman colonization, major wars throughout history including WWI and WWII, decisive battles in various wars, the Cold War and the division of Germany, German reunification)
- dates of any **Olympic Games** held in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland
- basic information about the **European Union** (member states, structure, headquarters, European Parliament)
- past and present **currencies** of the German-speaking countries
- traditional **food, drink, and customs associated with meals** in the German-speaking countries

Grammar

Following is a breakdown of the skills tested at each level. Tests at the higher levels can test skills listed for the lower levels, e.g., at Level IV, you could find questions dealing with skills listed for Levels I, II, III, or IV. On the other hand, if a skill doesn't appear until a higher level (for example, secondary adjective endings at Level II), you can assume that skill doesn't appear on the tests for the previous levels. One general tip: for each item, read the entire sentence and consider all four answer choices before making your final decision.

Level I (Grammar)

- verb conjugation in the present tense, including regular, stem-changing, and irregular verbs such as *sein, haben, werden, and wissen*
- modal verbs in the present tense (*wollen, müssen, etc.*), including the fact that they kick the other verb to the end of the sentence in the infinitive form
- separable-prefix verbs (both how they work and which prefix you need in common situations that would be covered in German I, e.g., is "to open" *aufmachen, anmachen, zumachen, or vormachen?*)
- pronouns in the nominative and accusative cases (for subjects and direct objects)
- articles/possessives (*der, die, das, den, ein, eine, meinen, unsere, etc.*) in the nominative and accusative cases
- question words (*wo, wohin, woher, wann, was, wie, warum, welche-, wie viel, wie viele, wer, wen, wem, wessen*)
- word order (verb in position 2 of statements)
- basic time expressions such as "on Tuesday," "in August," "in the winter," "over the weekend," "five times a week"
- *du* vs. *ihr* vs. *Sie*
- *gern/lieber/am liebsten*
- *wissen* vs. *kennen*
- *zu Hause* vs. *nach Hause*

Level II (Grammar)

- command forms (*du, ihr, Sie*)
- present perfect (conversational past) tense: *haben* vs. *sein* as helping verb, correct past participles
- simple past tense of modal verbs (*musste, konnte, etc.*)
- simple past (preterit) tense of the verbs *haben* and *sein* only
- reflexive verbs
- future tense
- *gefallen*
- articles/possessives (*dem, der, den, meinem, deiner, etc.*) in the dative case
- pronouns (*mir, dir, ihm, ihr, uns, euch, ihnen, Ihnen*) in the dative case
- dative prepositions
- accusative prepositions
- *man*
- *viel* vs. *viele*
- *-n* on nouns in the dative plural
- secondary adjective endings (*ein rotes Auto, der alte Wagen, kaltes Wasser*)
- comparative and superlative adjectives (*schnell, schneller, am schnellsten*)
- basic subordinate clauses (*weil, dass, wenn*)
- *es gibt* + accusative case

Level III (Grammar)

- use of dative with certain verbs (*helfen, gratulieren, danken, glauben, folgen*, etc.)
- more extensive testing of subordinate clauses than at Level II, esp. *als* vs. *wenn* vs. *wann* and *wenn* vs. *ob*
- simple past (preterit) tense of all verbs
- past-perfect tense
- *wo-* and *da-* compounds
- two-way prepositions
- genitive case, including genitive prepositions
- word order with adverbial phrases (time, manner, place)
- present perfect tense of modal verbs (*Ich habe es machen müssen.*)
- *was für ein/eine/einen*
- adjectives used as nouns (*die Deutschen, ein Bekannter*, etc.)
- weak nouns (*der Junge, den Jungen, dem Jungen, des Jungen*, etc.)

Level IV (Grammar)

- verb + preposition combinations, e.g., *sich freuen auf, sich freuen über, teilnehmen an, Angst haben vor, sich interessieren für* etc.
- present and past participles as adjectives and extended adjectival constructions (*bellende Hunde, der vor kurzem angekommene Zug*)
- infinitival phrases (*Ich habe vergessen, den Hund zu füttern.*)
- passive voice (present, simple past, present perfect, and future tenses) and substitutes for passive voice (*man, lassen*)
- relative clauses
- present and past subjunctive II
- subjunctive I
- *gelingen*
- skills from Levels I-III in more complicated constructions

Listening and Reading Comprehension

Working hard and paying attention in German class is the best preparation, along with consuming German-language media on your own. Just remember to listen and read for broad meaning and don't panic if you don't understand every word.

Timed Writing

Spend a couple minutes planning before you start writing. Make sure you address all aspects of the prompt. Write as neatly as possible. Try to avoid thinking of what you want to say in English and then translating that word-for-word into German; rather, stick to vocabulary and structures that you know in German. Elaborate and describe as much as possible. Quoting from the critique sheet: "The contestant uses correct grammar with a variety of complex structures and writes in the tense(s) appropriate for the task." So ... if you know how, use complex sentences (*weil...*, *obwohl...*, *dass...*, relative clauses, etc.), and pay close attention to whether present or past tense is called for and then use the correct tense.

Spelling

We're not going to publish a list of words to study here. Your teacher might have a list or you can develop your own list by looking at the glossaries of German textbooks. The test consists of 50 words plus 10 tie-breakers. The test is recorded. The person on the recording will read the word, give you the part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.), read a sentence using the word, and repeat the word. Chances are, no matter how much you study, there will be some words on the test you're not familiar with. In those instances, don't panic. Remember that German spelling follows very predictable rules and that you can probably guess how to spell the word if you apply the rules. First of all, make sure you capitalize all your nouns. Since the test tells you which words are nouns, you have no excuse not to do this correctly. Don't capitalize any other parts of speech (verbs, adjectives, etc.). If you don't capitalize a word that should be capitalized or do capitalize it when it shouldn't be, it will be marked wrong.

Consonants

- Recall that a "v" sound as in "vest" is usually expressed with a "w" in German.
- If you hear something that sounds like the "y" sound in English (as in yellow), it's probably "j" in German.
- If a syllable begins with a "k" sound, it's probably spelled with "k" in German, almost never with "c".
- If you hear something that sounds like "kv," it's probably "qu" in German.
- Remember that "f" is not the only way to spell the "f" sound in German; there's also "v." Especially if the word begins with a syllable that sounds like "fair" or "fore" that's probably "ver" or "vor" in German.
- Remember that the "r" sound in German is not like the English "r". The German "r" is usually guttural (throaty), but some people also roll it with the tongue. We have attempted to use a combination of guttural and rolled r's on the State recordings, but sometimes a guttural "r" sounds a bit tricky on a recording. Just be aware of that.
- You probably know that "st" and "sp" at the beginning of words are pronounced like "sht" and "shp" in German, but don't be tempted to spell them that way.
- Remember that the buzzing sound as in "zip" is expressed by "s" in German; don't spell a word with "z" in German unless you hear the "ts" sound.

Vowels

- If you hear a vowel sound as in the English word "ouch," that's spelled "au" in German.
- If you hear a sound as in the English word "boy," that can be either "eu" or "äu" in German.
- If you hear a sound as in the English word "eye," that is almost always "ei" in German, in very rare instances "ai". It's definitely never "ie," although many people make that mistake.
- In German, "ie" says "ee" as in "see," although that sound is sometimes also spelled "i" or "ih" in German.
- Finally, you might want to work with your teacher on recognizing the difference between umlauted and non-umlauted vowels. This is important, because if you leave off a necessary umlaut or put one when it's not necessary, the word will be counted wrong.

Vocabulary

The only advice I can give you for vocabulary is to study words that you've been exposed to in class, both in the textbook and in any other materials your teacher has given you. The vocabulary tests consist of the following types of items:

- Given a word in German and four choices for what it could mean in English, you select the right **translation**.
- Given a list of words in German, you select **the one that does not belong** (has the least to do with the rest of the words).
- Given a sentence in German with one word missing, you select from four choices of German words the one that best **fills in the blank**.
- Given two lists of words in German, you match up the **antonyms** (words with opposite meanings).
- Given two lists of words in German, you match up the **synonyms** (words with similar meanings).
- Given a question or statement, you select the correct **rejoinder** (response). These may feature common idioms.
- At Level IV only: Given a German **idiom** (figure of speech), you select its correct German definition.
- Tie-Breakers: Given a word in English, you provide a German equivalent.