

Common pitfalls for German learners

"ALL THE" - ALLE

If you are forming a sentence and would like to use the phrase "all the", it might be tempting to go with "alle die". In German, however, *alle* is never followed by a direct article: *Ich habe alle Unterlagen, die ich für meine Bewerbung brauche*. It can be followed by a possessive article, though: *Sie hat alle ihre Freunde zu ihrem Geburtstag eingeladen*.

"I'M A TEACHER" - ICH BIN LEHRER*IN

Talking about one's profession does not include the use of an indirect article: *Mein Vater ist Bauarbeiter*. *Ich arbeite als PR-Beraterin bei einem Modekonzern*. A direct article can come into play if you are talking about a specific position: *Ich bin der neue Chefkoch im Goldenen Anker*.

"THIS IS FUN" - DAS MACHT SPASS

It is advisable to always double-check before making an idiom or an expression part of your language repertoire. In many cases, a direct translation works, but in just as many cases, it does not. One expression that tends to trip up English natives is "to be fun". In German, you say: *Das macht Spaß!* (literally: That makes fun!) "To have fun", on the other hand, is the same: *Wir hatten viel Spaß auf dem Konzert*.

"ALSO" - AUCH

Also is *auch* in German: *Hat auch gesagt, wann er zurückkommt?* *Ich brauche auch Milch für den Kuchen*.

"SO" - ALSO

So means *also* in German: *Also kannst du morgen nicht mit ins Kino kommen? Sie müssen uns also informieren, wenn es ein Problem gibt*. Other words for *so* are *deshalb*, *daher*, and *deswegen*. The last two are slightly more formal in tone, like *therefore* and *thus*, but you will still hear all three of them used in everyday conversations.

"I'M GOOD" - ES GEHT MIR GUT

When asked, *Wie geht es dir?*, or, *Wie geht's?*, English natives are quick to say: *Ich bin gut*. While grammatically correct, *Ich bin gut* does not describe your emotional state, however. Instead, it implies that you are good at something: *Ich bin gut in Mathe*. Or imagine your friend wondering how in the world you were able to whip up a mind-blowing dinner without using a recipe. Then, answering with *Ich bin gut* (and a smug expression) would absolutely work, too. If you want to express how you are feeling, though, say: *Es geht mir (nicht) gut*. Or, shorter and simpler: *Sehr gut*. *Gut*. *Es geht so*. *Nicht gut*.

petra
volkhausen

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"FAVORITE SOMETHING" - LIEBLINGS...

To say that something is your favorite XYZ, you say, for example: *Mein Lieblingsfilm ist Inception*. But unlike *favorite*, *Liebblings...* cannot be its own noun (~~das ist mein Liebblings~~). If you want to avoid *Liebblings...*, you can say: *Das ist mein absoluter Favorit*. Or something like: *Das* (e.g. *mein Lieblingseis*) *schmeckt mir am besten*. Or: *Das ist das beste Eis von allen*.

SEHR VS. VIEL

Telling these two apart can be tricky since both mean *a lot*: *Ich mag dich sehr*. *Sie spricht viel über dich*. However, you also use *sehr* whenever you could use *very* or *really*: *Der Hund ist sehr groß*. *Wir freuen uns sehr auf die Party!* *Sehr* expresses the intensity of an emotional or physical state. *Viel* implies a quantitative nature: *Ich habe viel zu tun* (= many tasks). *Er hilft mir viel im Haushalt* (= on many occasions/with many things).

PERFEKT VS. IMPERFEKT

When talking about events in the past that happened on a specific day or during a specific time period, you use the Simple Past in English. The Imperfekt, the equivalent to the Simple Past, however, is used predominantly in written German. During conversations, use the Perfekt instead to talk about past events: *Ich habe gestern meinen Großeltern im Garten geholfen*. *Er ist um drei Uhr nach Hause gefahren*.

Now, the conversational past in German is a bit more complex than that, since we use *sein*, *haben*, and the modal verbs in the Imperfekt: *Ich war noch nie in New York*. *Wir wollten spontan nach Spanien fliegen, aber wir konnten keinen Flug unter zweihundert Euro finden*. If you want your German to sound more natural, remind yourself to use the Perfekt (with those exceptions in the Imperfekt) during conversations!

TIME WORDS AND PHRASES - ZEITWÖRTER- UND PHRASEN

Unlike in English, time words and phrases in a normal statement are not separated by a comma in German. Instead, they are part of the sentence and most commonly come before or after the verb: *Morgen besuche ich meine Eltern*. (or: *Ich besuche morgen meine Eltern*.) *In zwei Wochen ziehe ich nach Berlin*. (or: *Ich ziehe in zwei Wochen nach Berlin*.) *Er wird nächstes Jahr in Deutschland studieren*. (or: *Nächstes Jahr wird er in Deutschland studieren*.)