

Bach St John Passion – German Pronunciation Guide

Consonants - German consonants should be pronounced as in English except:

g – always “hard” as in English “garden”: Gottes, gib, Geduld, gross, Gesetz

j – pronounce as English **y**: Jesu, ja

q – as English **cv**: Qual

s – as English **z**: sei, selig, sondern, **except** before p and t, as in English “sh”; Stunde, sterben

v – as English **f**: von, viel, verherrlicht,

w – as English **v**: weinen, weg, wahre

z – as English **ts**: zu, Zeit, zerteilen,

sch – as English “sh”; geschah, Herrscher, schenken

Plus, of course, the consonants with no real English equivalent – **ch** and **r**. They’re both produced in the same parts of the mouth.

-ch – *exhale smoothly between tongue and palate to reflect relevant vowel: --uch, och and ach at the back of the palate, ech and ich at the front with the sides of the tongue touching the top teeth.*

fruchtbarlich; doch; macht, bedacht, nach; echt; mich/dich/ich, nicht.

R & r - *exhale between tongue and palate with a rapid vibration of the uvula at the back of the palate – the “rolled” -r - like a shortened version of gargling. The position of the tongue contact is similar to -och and—ach*

Ruhm, rühre, gross, erreichen, Werk, dürfen, geführt, Erden, worden.

(As with **-ch** vowels at the front of the mouth (**-er, -ir**) can provide a rolled **-r** between tip of tongue and back of the top teeth.

It’s an alternative pronunciation for **Herr** and **Herrscher**.)

So... R and r are generally pronounced in ANY position in a German word, except:

-r is not pronounced after an unaccented ending: Kinder, der, unser (see short **-e** description in vowels below):

Herr (yes); Herrscher (first r yes, final r no); Bist du nicht seiner Jünger einer (no)

*If you can pronounce **durch** and **fruchtbarlich** you’re doing very well!*

Consonants as final letter

d is pronounced “**t**”: Leid, sind, seid, wird.

g is pronounced “**k**”: Weg, Sieg; **except in** -ig, when it is pronounced “-ich”, geduldig.

b is pronounced “**p**”: Leib.

ß – a symbol literally representing “sz”, also spelt as “ss” – pronounced as English “ss”, groß, daß.

Consonants as middle letter

h after a vowel usually lengthens the vowel sound, but is not sounded: gehen, sehen, geschah

German Vowels

Generally all LONG vowels are spoken with **EMPHASIS** and a **MORE OPEN MOUTH THAN THE ENGLISH EQUIVALENT**.

a – generally long in received English “pass” but: Marterstrasse, Tage, Qual

short a as in northern English “hat” in short words or when followed by two consonants: das, alle, Hand, begangen, verlangt

e – generally long, as in English “way”, but **with emphasis, avoiding the diphthong, and with a more open mouth,**

particularly when followed by h or r: leben, lebte, werden, Erde, gehen, ewig, selig, stets

e – short as in English “end” generally in single syllable words: des, denn. Exceptions: long in der, den, wer,

e in the last syllable of a noun or verb is unaccented and sounds like English “-uh”: lebte, Freuden, Plagen.

Similarly, e is unaccented in the first syllable in prefixes like **be**-trubte, **ge**-schlagen, **ver**-lacht

i – generally short (ich, mich, nicht, in, ist) except wir and when followed by h as in ihr, ihm, ihnen.

o – generally short – soll, doch, kommen, Wonne, Gott, but long in Tod, groß, Schoss, Trost, los.

u – generally short as in Standard English “took”, northern English “bug”: und, Geduld, Grunde, muß, durch;

long as in English “zoo”: zu, nun.

au – broadly equivalent to English vowel in “how”: auch

ei - broadly equivalent to English vowel in “ice” – weinen, ergreifen, Zeit, Leid, dein

eu - broadly equivalent to English vowel in “joy” – euch, neu, Freuden

ie - broadly equivalent to English vowel in “sheep” – lieben, diesen, niemand

Umlauts are a variation of the core vowel (a, o, u) produced by raising the tongue towards the palate and pushing both lips forward to make a rounded opening. The sound should be EMPHATIC.

ä – broadly equivalent vowel to German long **e** – “**U**bel**t**äter - but usually short: nächst, Gefängnis, Lässest

ö – broadly equivalent to English vowel in “**u**rn”, and **French eu (eux, bleu, heureux)** – getröstet, fröhlich, König, Bö**s**

ü – broadly equivalent to English vowel in “**Hu**gh”, and **French -u (tu, du, vertu, salut)** (in both cases without diphthong) -

darfür, rühre, gegrüsset, übel