

Sound/Spelling Shifts Between German and English Cognates

[Adapted from a no longer existing page on the old about.com website]

Consonants

Deutsch	English	Beispiele/Examples
b	f	Dieb - thief; halb - half; Kalb - calf; Leben - life
b	v	haben - have; Grab - grave; sieben - seven; Silber = silver
ch	k	Buch - book; Elch - elk; schwach - weak; sprechen - speak
ch	gh	acht - eight; lachen - laugh; Licht - light; Fracht - freight
d	th	Bad - bath; drei - three; Erde - earth; Leder - leather
f	p	Bischof - bishop; helfen - help; scharf - sharp
ff	p/pp	Affe - ape; Pfeffer - pepper; Schiff - ship
g	y	Tag - day; Weg - way; gestern - yesterday; sagen - say
k	c	Karte - card; Keller - cellar; kühl - cool; Kultur - culture
k	ch	Kirche - church; Kapelle - chapel; Kinn - chin
mm	mb	dumm - dumb; Lamm - lamb; Nummer - number
pf	p/pp	Apfel - apple; Pfund - pound; Pfad - path; Pfanne - pan
sch	s/sh	falsch - false; Fleisch - flesh; Schnee - snow
ss	t/tt	besser - better; dass - that; essen - eat; Wasser - water
t/th	d	Taler/Thaler - dollar; vorwärts - forward; Wort - word
t/tt	d	Bett - bed; gut - good; reiten - ride; Tür - door
tt	th	Mutter - mother; Wetter - weather
v	f	Vater - father; vier - four; voll - full; Volk - folk
z/tz	t	Herz - heart; zehn - ten; zwei - two; Katze - cat
z	c	Eleganz - elegance; zirka - circa; Zirkus - circus

Vowels

Deutsch	English	Beispiele/Examples
a	au	lachen - laugh; schlachten - slaughter
a	ea	Jahr - year; klar - clear; schwach - weak; Waffe - weapon
a	i	Macht - might; Nacht - night
a	o	alt - old; lang - long; Nase - nose; Kamm - comb; falten - fold
ä	e	Ägypten - Egypt; Äquator - equator
au	ou	laut - loud; Haus - house; Maus - mouse; sauer - sour
e	ea	Feder - feather; Herz - heart; heben - heave (lift)
e	i	geben - give; leben - live; rechts - right; Schwester - sister
ei	ea	heilen - heal; Schweiß - sweat; erreichen - reach
ei	i	reich - rich; beißen - bite; Meile - mile; Wein - wine
ei	o	beide - both; Heim - home; Stein - stone; meistens - mostly
ie	ee/ea	Bier - beer; Knie - knee; fliehen - flee; schmieren - smear
ie	o	Liebe - love; vierzig - forty
o	ea	Ost - east; tot - dead; Ohr - ear; Strom - stream; Bohne - bean
u	oo	Buch - book; Blut - blood; Fuß - foot; Schule - school
u	ou	jung - young; Pfund - pound; rund - round; Gruppe - group

False Friends

There are of course examples of words that look and/or sound similar in German and English, but have very different meanings. This is even sometimes the case when the words are historically related. Here are some examples:

<u>German word</u>	<u>English meaning</u>	<u>English cognate</u>
wo	where	who [=wer]
wer	who	where [=wo]
weil	because	while [=während]
also	thus, so	also [=auch]
bekommen	to receive, to get	become [=werden]
aktuell	current, up-to-date	actual [=eigentlich, wirklich]
bald	soon	bald [= hat eine Glatze]
Billion	trillion	(US) billion [= Milliarde]
Dom	cathedral	dome [= Kuppel]
eben	[many meanings, e.g. "just a moment ago"; "smooth" [of a surface]; "that's just it, exactly" [in response to a statement]]	even [=sogar (as in: I even made dinner for your imaginary friend); gerade (as in: an even number)]
eitel	vain	idle [=faul, tut nichts]
eventuell	possibly	eventually [schließlich, nach einer Weile]
Gift	poison	gift, present [= Geschenk]
handeln	to act; to negotiate	handle [=anfassen (as in: touch); machen (as in: to take care of something)]
Hose	pants	hose [=Schlauch]
konsequent	consistent(ly)	consequently [= folglich]
Menü	today's special (at a restaurant)	menu [= Speisekarte]
Präservativ	condom	preservative [= Konservierungsmittel]
schlimm	terrible, awful	slim [=schlank]
seriös	legitimate, reputable, respectable	serious [=ernst]
streng	strict	strong [=stark]
winken	to wave	to wink [= blinzeln, zwinkern]