

Pronunciation of the *s* sounds in German: *s*, *ss*, *ß* and *z*

Guten Tag! Well, you've been learning German for a while now and are starting to get the hang of it. Still, you think you don't sound much like a German? Not to worry, it's much easier than you think. Today we'll talk about the *S* sounds in German. They're just slightly different from the *S* sounds in English, but quite easy to master, if you remember a few hints.

1. the *S* sounds made with *s*, *ss* and *ß*.

a. When the letter *s* appears alone at the beginning of a word followed by a vowel, or when it appears within a word surrounded by two vowels, it is usually pronounced as a voiced *s* in German. That means it sounds much like the sound we give to our letter *Z* in English, in the word *zoo*. Listen to these words and repeat them:

Saal, Salat, Sonntag, blasen, Käse, böse, Nase

b. When *s* appears at the end of a word or when it appears as double *ss*, or if it appears within a word in combination with *t* or *p*, it sounds just like the *s*-sound that we normally have in English. That is a sort of hissing sound as in *bless*. Listen to these words and repeat them:

Haus, las, Fluss, wachsen, Glas, Reis, besten, Vespe, müssen, Wasser

c. When *s* appears written in the form *ß*, then it also pronounced as the double *ss* in *bless*. Remember that *ß* will not appear at the beginning of a word, only in the middle or at the end. Listen to these words and repeat them:

heißen, fließen, fleißig, außer, Fuß, weiß, groß

d. When *s* appears at the beginning of a word in combination with the consonants *t*, *p*, or *ch*, it sounds like the English letter combination *sh* as in *shoe*. Listen to these words and repeat them:

Stock, Stress, stecken, Speck, spielen, Sprache, schicken, Schatz

2. the *S* sounds made with *Z*.

The letter *z* in German is pronounced just like the sound of the letter combination *ts* in English. Think of the scolding *tsk, tsk, tsk* or the plural forms *bats, rats, cats*. *Z* is pronounced this way no matter where it shows up in a word, and no matter what other letters surround it. Listen to these words and repeat:

Zug, zwischen, bezahlen, Hochzeit, zelten, Zucker, jetzt, Schatz

O.k., these are the different sounds in German for *s* and *z*.

Let's sum it up.

- ⇒ *S* can sound like the English *z* for zoo in *Nase* and *Vase*.
- ⇒ *S* can sound like the English *s* for snake in *Haus*, *Maus* and *Straße*.
- ⇒ *S* can sound like the English *sh* for short in *Stock*, *Schock* and *Speck*.
- ⇒ *Z* sounds like the English letter combination *ts* for bats and hats anywhere it appears for example, *Zug*, *zog*, and *Zahn*.

Repeat the words you've heard here trying as hard as you can to imitate the pronunciation and you'll have your *S*-sounds down in no time. Das war's für heute, bis bald und viel Spaß beim Deutschlernen!