

# Sprechen Sie Deutsch?

## Knowing a little German goes a long way when servicing Mercedes-Benz vehicles

You don't have to speak German to work on a Mercedes-Benz vehicle, but it helps. And you don't have to be fluent in German. Just being able to read and understand a few terms will put you a big step ahead of technicians who are clueless when it comes to anything auf Deutsch (in German).

Although Mercedes-Benz does a good job of providing English translations for technical instructions, TSBs, and other material, there are times when knowing a few German words comes in very handy. For example, installing a new head gasket is a lot easier if you know that oben means "up" and vorn means "front." That way you can be sure the gasket goes on correctly, instead of spending time making sure that you've got the gasket positioned so that every passage that is supposed to be open isn't obstructed, while an opening that should be covered is.

For a person whose native language is English, learning German isn't as hard as learning most other languages. In fact, you will recognize some German words because they are close to, if not identical to, English. One reason for the close relationship between German and



*It wouldn't hurt to have this inexpensive "tool" in your box.*

English is that both are "Germanic languages," which means they share the same basic structure for using words and forming sentences.

The other reason is that English, especially as spoken in the United States, has borrowed many words from many different languages, including German. So you are already "speaking" a little German, only it was part of speaking English.

Some of the German automotive terms that are easy to understand include: Wasser (water), Satz (set, as in set of rings), Zylinder (Cylinder), Filter (filter), O-Ringe (O-ring), Glas (glass), unten (under), kalt (cold), warm (warm), Antenne (antenna), Klipse (clip), Kabel (cable or wire), and Kompressor (compressor).

### They combine, we don't

There is a big difference between German and English, especially as spoken in the United States. We like to get things done quickly – it's just part of who we are. That's why we invented "fast food" restaurants, and when that wasn't fast enough, we created the "drive thru" so we didn't even have to get out of our cars to eat.

Our "need for speed" is even reflected in how

we speak. Americans love contractions and using as few words as possible to get their message across. The history of English is a history of dropping a long word for a shorter version whenever possible and coming up with a single word to replace two or three words. We shortened “automobile” to “auto” and “carriage” to “car.” You won’t find this shortening of words in most other languages.

In fact, Germans tend to do the opposite of Americans when it comes to forming words. Instead of replacing two or three words with one shorter word, the practice in Germany is to combine multiple short words into a longer word. For example, the longest word in German is, believe it or not, *Donaudampfschiffahrtselektrizitaetenhauptbetriebswerkbauunterbeamtengesellschaft*. That runs to 80 letters and translates into English as, “the club for subordinate officials of the head office management of the Danube steamboat electrical services.” Americans would probably call it the “junior officers club.” And people who were members would probably call the place the, “O club.”

So don’t be intimidated when you see a word in German that looks like a freight train of letters. It is probably two or more short words combined. If you can identify any group of letters as an individual word, you can often figure out what the entire word means.

For example, *Lichtmaschine*, literally means “Light Machine” in German. In the United States, we would call it a “generator.”

Breaking apart longer words is especially helpful when it comes to the technical terms you will encounter servicing Mercedes-Benz vehicles. These terms are specialized and may not appear in the typical tourist “German-English” dictionary. But if you can break these terms apart into their “root” words, you can often understand, or at least make a good guess, as to what the complete word means.

Speaking of dictionaries, having a basic “German-English” dictionary tucked away in one of the drawers in your tool chest would be a big help. And if you are really serious about learning technical German, there are two good dictionaries to choose from:

- The DeVries-Hermann German-English Technical and Engineering Dictionary (ISBN 3870970421) is a good choice that can be found online for under \$60.

- The best automotive German-English reference is the *Wyhlidal Dictionary of Automotive Engineering, Volume 1* (ISBN 3-923195-03-6). There is a hard copy version, with about 72,000 words, that costs about \$200. A CD version, with about 545,000 words, costs about \$800.

## Some tips on using any German-English dictionary:

- Don’t be confused about all the words that start with a capital letter. In German, all nouns start with a capital letter.
- Start by looking up the first few letters of any word to find a match. If you find a match, that is the “first word” or “first part” of the longer word.
- You will often see an “umlaut” (two little dots) over a vowel. Don’t worry about it, the umlaut is only a guide to how the word is pronounced. In the dictionary, you can ignore the umlaut when looking up a word. An *Ä* is treated like a plain *A*.
- The prefix “ge” changes the word to past tense. Try looking for the root word with the “ge” prefix.
- As you find a match for the first part of the word—assuming it’s not found in its entirety—write down the literal translation for that part and then try to match the next group of letters. After you’ve matched as many parts of the word as you can, read all the words together, in order, and see if you can figure out what the larger word means based on the combination of shorter words. In many cases, you’ll understand exactly what the larger word means based on its parts.

For example, *Fahrzeug*. If you look up *fahr*, you’ll find *fahren* which means “drive.” Look up *zeug* and you’ll find it means “thing.” So *Fahrzeug* is a “driving thing,” or an automobile. Split *Worterbuch*, and you get *Worter* (words) and *Buch* (book) which forms words book, so a “words book” is a Dictionary.

When you see an unfamiliar word on a part, or in a repair instruction, take the time to check into it. Not only could it be a warning, which might save you from some nasty surprises, it could be a helpful instruction or hint to ensure the diagnosis or repair goes well.

To help you get started in learning German, we've included a number of terms that you will often see when working on Mercedes-Benz vehicles.

German Word	English Translation
Anzeige	Display
Anzeiger	Indicator, Pointer
Auf	Off, or upon
Aus	Out
Aussen	Outer
Beifahrer	Co-driver, Passenger
Blau	Blue
Braun	Brown
Bremsen	Brakes
Drück, Drücken	Pressure, Pressurize, Print
Dunkel	Dark
Fahrer	Driver
Farbe	Color
Feder	Spring, Feather, Pen
Fond	Rear
Geber	Sensor, Sender
Gefahr,	Gefährlich Danger, Dangerous
Gelb	Yellow
Getriebe	Gearbox, Transmission
Grau	Gray
Grün	Green
Gurt, Gurtstraffe	Belt, Seatbelt
H, h	See Hinten
Heiss	Hot
Hell	Light (-color)
Hinten	Rear
HL	Rear Left
Hoch	High, Tall
HR	Rear Right
Kalt	Cold
Klar	Clear (color, meaning)
Klebeband	Adhesive tape
Koffer	Trunk, (suit)case
Kuhler	Radiator
L, l	see Links
Lautsprecher	Loudspeaker
Leer	Empty
Leitung	Pipe, Wire,
Leitungssatz	Wiring harness
Lenkung	Steering
Links	Left
LL	Left-hand drive
Löt	Solder
Messen	to Measure

German Word	English Translation
Natur	Natural (-color)
Not	Emergency
Oben	Up
Öl	Oil
Orange	Orange
R, r	see Rechts
Rechts	Right
Richtung	Direction
Riemen	Belt (as in v-belt)
Rippe	Rib
RL	Right-hand drive
Rot	Red
Schalter	Switch
Schwarz	Black
Seil	Cable, Rope
Selbst	Self
SG, Steuergeraet	Control Module
Sicherheit	Safety
Sicherung	Fuse
Sitz	Seat
Sonder	Special
Spannung	Voltage
Stecker or,	
Steckverbindung	Connector (usually electrical)
Stoff used alone,	"Fabric," combined, "stuff"
Tacho,	TachometerSpeedometer
Transparent	Transparent (color)
Überdrück (or Ü)	Pressure
Unten	Under
Unterdrück (or U)	Vacuum
V, v	see Vorn
Verstarker	Amplifier
Violett	Violet
VL	Front Left
Voll	Full
Vorn	Front
Vorsicht	Caution
Vorwärts	Forwards
VR	Front Right
Wasse	Water
Weiss	White
Werkzeug	Tool
X (richtung)	(direction) front to rear
Y (richtung)	(direction) side to side
Z (richtung)	(direction) up to down
Ziehen	to Pull
Zu	Close
Zylinder	Cylinder