

Translation Guideline

1. Steps in the translation process

- Read the text and try to fully understand it.
- Revise the original and, if necessary, rewrite sentences or break them up into smaller units.
- Analyse the text!
- Translate sentence for sentence!
- Consult your dictionary!
- Read through the rough version!

Now, take a break!

- Check for fidelity: are there any mistranslations or omissions?
- Check for register: is your text an acceptable rendering of the original?
- Check for accuracy: Are there any mistakes in it? Use DATA PASSWORD!
- Make a fair copy! Make sure there aren't any new mistakes in your fair copy!
- Final check!

2. Some terms, mostly scientific or economic terms, have specific, standardized counterparts.

3. Formulaic expressions can have equivalents in German – use them.

Text analysis

What is its function? What type of text is it – a report, a novel, a form, a summary? What field of discourse is it – scientific, medical, political, neutral...? What sort of language is used – formal, neutral, colloquial or even Slang? Has the text a special mood – is it ironic, humorous, poetical...? Does the author choose to break conventions?

Feminism = der Feminismus

Contract management =
Vertragswesen

Betreten des Rasens
verboten = Keep off the
grass!

Dear Sir or Madam =
Sehr geehrte Damen und

- Herren
4. Proverbs exist in many languages. In most cases, you will find a German equivalent. The early bird catches the worm. = Wer zuerst kommt, mahlt zuerst.
5. Quotations can just as well be translated as anything else. However, some quotations have become so outstandingly famous that you will have to find the exact wording. Here, Google will help. For book titles, try Amazon. Viel Lärm um nichts. = Much ado about nothing.
6. Hidden metaphors usually can't be translated literally. Try to rewrite them. He took to his heels. = He ran away.
7. Sometimes, collocations (fixed combinations of words) may give you trouble. Use the simplest synonym to be on the safe side. Ich belege einen Spanischkurs an der VHS. = I take a Spanish class at our local community college.
8. If you can (of course NEVER in a regular class test), try to use an automatic translator. Always take your time to double-check the result.
9. Before using a bilingual dictionary, make sure to know
- How the dictionary is organized;
 - What the abbreviations mean;
 - How far the differences between British English and American English have been considered;
 - the date of compilation;
 - what supplementary information is provided.
10. Use the biggest, newest bilingual dictionary you can get hold of.
11. Always read the WHOLE dictionary entry.
12. If you use a bilingual dictionary, try to cross-check your findings. First, look up your word in

- an English- German dictionary. Then check your translation with a German-English dictionary.
13. Needless to say that <http://dict.leo.org/> is always a good link. You should browse the forum for better results. Oh, talking about improvements – Webster’s audio files are very helpful to check your pronunciation.
 14. Start your own file card system. Rearrange the cards to match your requirements.
 15. Read, read, read English books – but only the ones you like. Read them without a dictionary – if a word doesn’t reoccur it probably wasn’t that important.
 16. Travel abroad, to the UK, NZ, the USA, India – don’t join a German group but mingle with the locals. Additionally, a language exchange program might be an option.
 17. Find a way to talk to native speakers – maybe there’s a British or America drama group you can join? Or a debating society?
 18. Listen to English radio programmes – the BBC has a set of nice channels online.
 19. Watch DVDs in English – subtitles could be a good thing to start with.
 20. False friends are a dangerous thing – both in reality and in language. Learn the words that might give you trouble. You’ll find plenty of them in specialized dictionaries. eventually = schließlich, not eventuell
 21. Fillers are not translated in some cases – sometimes, they will appear in a different place or wording. Do sit down, won’t you? = Setz dich doch bitte!
 22. The German word gender might give you trouble. Be sure to use he and she only with England and her glorious sons!

- pets, people, and ships. (With some countries and cities, it will work as well. But caution!) = England und seine ruhmreichen Söhne!
23. Determiners can be necessary in German where they are omitted in English. People are silly.
= *Die Leute sind (doch) albern.*
24. The concord of subjects and verbs can also cause problems. Plural nouns and collective nouns can be tricky. The scissors are on my desk.
= *Die Schere liegt auf meinem Schreibtisch.*
25. Tenses are a common source of mistakes. Occasionally, the Present Perfect cannot be translated with Perfekt constructions and vice versa. I've lived in London for two years now.
= *Ich lebe seit zwei Jahren in London.*
26. Present and Past Participles should be treated with caution. In most cases, you must find a suitable subordinate clause – temporal, adversative, causative...
Sitting in his armchair, he smoked a cigar.
= *Während er in seinem Sessel saß, rauchte er eine Zigarre.*
27. Equivalents. Some American and British institutions can't be identified with their German equivalents. Lost in the jungle, he had no hope to return alive.
= *Weil er ...*
The Supreme Court is NOT the Bundesverfassungsgericht!
28. Sometimes, it's best to explain what you're talking about when you use American terms! Footnotes can be helpful. Then again, some information is not necessary for the German reader. The Cotton Belt = der Cotton Belt, die Region im Süden der USA, in der vorrangig Baumwolle angebaut wird,
Karlsruhe, a city in Southern Germany, ... = Backnang

29. **Involve the reader's background knowledge!**

- How much information does my reader need?
- How much information can I expect the reader to have already?
- How important is exact understanding of this element for the purpose of the text?
- How far can the reader deduce the meaning of the element or its function from the rest of the text?

How can I best achieve a balance between all these factors and the text itself?

30. **Make sure that you know what the exam is all about:**

1. What are the usual sources for the texts used in the exam?
2. What are the criteria for their selection?
3. How long are the texts?
4. What criteria are used for the assessment of the translation?
5. Does the examiner distinguish between minor and major errors?

Does the examiner always use the whole range of grades?

31. **Lighten the teacher's work load!**

1. Cross out anything which is wrong neatly but completely!
2. Leave ample space between each line and round the edges of your text!
3. Use a black or blue pen, never a red one!
4. Use standard DN A4 paper!
5. Use staples rather than clips!
6. Write legibly!
7. Write your name and address at the top of the first sheet of paper and repeat your name on every new sheet!