



5 ways to start a conversation with Germans

- With concrete examples -

So, you want to speak German and strike up a conversation with a German but have no idea what to say or how to do it? Don't Germans don't like smalltalk anyway?

You're right, smalltalk doesn't come natural to them, at least not the way you're used to coming from an English speaking country.

But Germans do engage in chats with strangers. I'm going to tell you a few things that you can do to join in or spark up a conversation with a German.

First of all, here are few things you should know about:

- Germans feel most comfortable if they can answer concrete questions.
- Look them in the eye if possible before approaching (it's like saying hello from afar) or even smile at them.
- Germans don't need a lot of introductory sentences like "I was wondering, ...", they'll appreciate you cutting to the chase (Entschuldigung - excuse me- will be enough most times).
- Addressing someone roughly the same age (and gender) will probably be the most successful.

I've divided the sentences up into situations outside of Germany (#1, which might be the easiest) and situations in Germany (#2- #4). For #1 I'll be using the informal you guys (ihr) as well as the formal you (Sie). The other ones will be using the informal you (du) and the formal you again (Sie).

Outside of Germany

You'll probably bump into Germans before you even make your way to Germany.

Germans proud themselves with being *Reiseweltmeister* (travel world champions) and are most likely to be found in your home country too.

Here are some questions you could ask after establishing they are speaking German:

Ach, ihr seid/Sie sind aus Deutschland! Das ist ja toll. Wie lange seid ihr/sind Sie schon hier?	Ah, you're from Germany! That's awesome. How long have you been here?
Wie lange bleibt ihr/bleiben Sie?	How long are you here for?
Was habt ihr/haben Sie schon gesehen? Was wollt ihr/wollen Sie noch sehen?	What have you already been to? What are your plans?
Woher aus Deutschland kommt ihr/kommen Sie?	Whereabouts in Germany are you from?

You dropped something

The good ol' "I think you just dropped something" can spark up a conversation unobtrusively (make sure you're holding up a receipt or something similar):

Entschuldigung, hast du/haben Sie das hier gerade fallen lassen?	Excuse me, I think you just dropped this?
Ach so, na dann muss es jemand anderem gehören.	Ah well, then it must be someone else's.

From there you can launch into the following sentences.

Ask for directions (even if you know the way)

Everyone loves being helpful, and asking about how to get somewhere is probably the most subtle way to start a conversation:

Entschuldigung, wie komme ich denn zum Bahnhof/zum Kino/zur Kneipe?	Excuse me, how do I get to the train station/movies/pub?
---	--

If you want to say some more, how about you use the upcoming sentences?

At the pub and new to the city

Being new to a city means you'll need some help. Don't be ashamed to ask for it in German:

Entschuldigung, kennst du dich/kennen Sie sich hier aus?	Excuse me, are you from around here?
Ich bin gerade hierher gezogen. Gibt es hier ein gutes Kino/eine gute Bäckerei/eine gute Kneipe/ein gutes Restaurant?	I just moved here. Are there any good movies/bakeries/pubs/restaurants around?

Make a compliment

Who doesn't like getting compliments? I love getting them. Put aside the creepy ones (... fallen from the sky...) and just compliment on a gorgeous haircut, clothes, accessories or bicycles:

Oh, das ist aber eine schöne Jacke/Tasche/Kette.	Oh, that's a very nice jacket/bag/necklace.
--	---

To keep the conversation going you can ask where to get the piece you fancy yourself:

Oh, wo hast du/haben Sie denn das
Fahrrad gekauft? Das sieht ja toll aus.

Wow, where did you buy your bike? It
looks awesome.

Please let me know about your conversation starters, I'd love to hear about them. If you like you can email them to me (anja@thegermanz.com).