

V17. Tools for Reading German Handwriting

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Getting Started – The Language

You don't have to be a professional genealogist or expert at understanding German to be able to decipher what is in your ancestor's records. There are many tools that can help you figure it out. Many of these are free downloadable resources. The best resource for free German handwriting help can be found on the FamilySearch Wiki.

The FamilySearch Wiki not only helps you determine where your ancestor came from, but also has many online tools to help you read the record. The sutterlin handwriting tool allows you to type in a name or word and see what it looks like in script. Keep in mind that the actual record will probably vary in how it looks depending on the time period and handwriting variation. Although most letters are fairly similar among people recording the entry, there are distinctive ways letters were written which varied over time. Also handwritten letters are very different than the Fraktur typeface font used for published books.

Helpful German Websites

- Family Search Wiki
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy
- Family Search Wiki - German Handwriting
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Handwriting
- Suetterlin Handwriting
<http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Englisch/Sutterlin.htm>
<http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Lese/Kanzlei1.htm>
- German handwritten and Fraktur script generator
<http://www.deutsche-handschrift.de/adsschreiben.php#schriftfeld>
- Fraktur
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraktur>

Another challenge with reading German handwriting is the vocabulary and knowing what the word is and means. FamilySearch Wiki has free word lists specific for genealogy to help you understand what is in the record. Many times short hand symbols are used to save space in records to indicate births, marriages, burials and other events.

Word Lists

- German https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Genealogical_Word_List
- Latin https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Latin_Genealogical_Word_List
- French https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/French_Genealogical_Word_List
- Danish https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Danish_Genealogical_Word_List
- Portuguese https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Portuguese_Genealogical_Word_List
- Polish https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Polish_Genealogical_Word_List
- German Symbols http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Genealogische_Symbole_und_Zeichen
- Month Names in German https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Month_Names_in_German
- Spelling Variations https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spelling_Variants_in_German_Documents
- Google Translate <http://translate.google.com>

Must Have German Books

- Edna M. Bentz, *If I Can, You Can: Decipher Germanic Records* (San Diego, Calif.: E.M. Bentz, 1982).
- Roger P. Minert, *Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents 2nd Edition* (Provo, Utah: GRT Publications, 2013), 271 pages
- Kenneth L. Smith, *German Church Books: Beyond the Basics* (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1989), 171-97.
- Thode, Ernest. *German-English Genealogical Dictionary*. Baltimore, Maryland, USA: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992. (FHL book 433.21 T352g 1992.)

German Handwriting Webinars

- <https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-part-1>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-part-2>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-german-church-and-civil-records-part-3>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/germany-research-with-the-wiki-part-9-of-14-reading-original-german-records>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-church-and-civil-records>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-introduction>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-the-alphabet>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-paleography-websites>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-key-words>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-key-abbreviations>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-process-of-deciphering-records>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-practice-reading-a-german-church-record>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-practice-reading-a-german-civil-record>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-spelling-variations-names-and-places>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-practice-reading-using-familysearch-community>
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/lessons/deciphering-russian-polish-and-german-names-written-in-russian>

BYU- Independent Study - German Research Course - FREE

<https://isreg.byu.edu/courses/pe/999022071006/public/start.htm>

German Genealogy Relationships & Vital Event Words

| English Word | German word / variant |
|----------------|---|
| Birth | Geburten, Geborene, geboren, Geburts |
| Burial | Beerdigung, begraben, Begrabnisse, vergraben |
| Child | Kind, Kinder |
| Christening | Taufen, Getaufte |
| Confirmation | Konfirmationen, Firmungen |
| Death | Tote, Tod, sterben, starb, verstorben, gestorben |
| Father | Vater |
| Husband | Mann, Ehemann, Gatte |
| Index | Verzeichniss, Register |
| Marriage | Heiraten, verheiratet, Trauungen, Gertraute, Kopulation, Ehe, kopulieren, Verehelichungen, Eheschliessungen |
| Marriage banns | Proklamationen, Aufgebote, Verkundigungen |
| Mother | Mutter |
| Wife | Frau, Ehegattin, Weib, Ehefrau, Hausfrau, Gattin |
| Given Name | Vorname, Name |
| Surname | Zuname, Familienname, Getschlechtsname |
| Parents | Eltern |
| Son | Sohn |
| Daughter | Tochter |
| Brother | Bruder |
| Sister | Schwester |
| Grandfather | Großvater |
| Grandmother | Großmutter |
| Aunt | Tante |
| Uncle | Onkel |
| Niece | Nichte |
| Nephew | Neffe |
| Cousin | Kusine |

Common German Records

| German Word | English |
|---|--|
| Adressbücher | City Directories |
| Auswandererlisten, Auswandererakten | Emigration lists / records |
| Begräbnisse | Burials (church) |
| Bürgerbücher, Bürgerbücherlisten | Burger rolls, citizenship registrations |
| Dorfsippenbücher, Ortssippenbücher | Local Histories |
| Familienbücher | Family registers (church) |
| Geburtsregister | Birth register (church) |
| Gildenbücher, Zunftbücher, Innungsbücher | Apprentice and guild books |
| Grundbücher | Land books |
| Hausbücher | House books |
| Kirchenbücher | Church books |
| Kirchenbücher Zweitschriften | Parish register transcripts |
| Konfirmationsregister | Confirmation registers (church) |
| Kriegslisten, Militärakten | Military records |
| Leichenpredigten | Funeral sermons |
| Passagierlisten | Passenger lists |
| Polizeiregister, Einwohnermeldelisten | Police registers, citizen registration lists |
| Sterberegister | Death register (church) |
| Steuerlisten, Steuerbücher | Tax lists, tax books |
| Taufregister | Christening / baptism registers (church) |
| Testamente, Testamentsakten | Wills |
| Trauregister | Marriage register (church) |
| Volkszählungslisten, Bauernverzeichnisse, Einwohnerlisten | Census records (originally called Tax & Tithing Records) |

Fraktur Alphabet



The Gothic Alphabet
(Variations)

| | |
|-----|--------|
| A | |
| a | |
| B | |
| b | B = |
| C | |
| c | |
| D | |
| d | |
| E | |
| e | |
| F | |
| f | F = FF |
| G | |
| g | |
| H | |
| h | |
| IJ | |
| i | |
| I = | |
| J = | |

| Kleinbuchstaben | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| a | a | a | a | aa | a | a | a | a | a | a | a | a | a | a | a | a |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b | b |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c | c |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d | d |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e | e |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f | f |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g | g |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h | h |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k | k |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l | l |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |
| n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n | n |
| | 1450 | 1466 | 1492 | 1518 | 1538 | 1556 | 1575 | 1582 | 1606 | 1644 | 1674 | 1713 | 1742 | 1777 | 1814 | 1839 |

aus: Hellmut Gutzwiller, Die Entwicklung der Schrift in der Neuzeit, in: Archiv für Diplomatik 38 (1992), S. 38-1 ff.

Großbuchstaben

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| A | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| B | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| C | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| D | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| E | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| F | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| G | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| H | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| I | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| K | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| L | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| M | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| N | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| O | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| P | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Q | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| R | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| S | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| T | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| U | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| V | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Y | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Z | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| o | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| p | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| r _i | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| r _{ii} | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| s _i | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| s _{ii} | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| s _{iii} ß | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| t | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| u _i | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| u _{ii} | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| w | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| x | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| y | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| z | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

a b c d e f g h i j k l m
 n o p q r s t u v
 w x y z
 A B C D E F G H I J
 K L M N O P Q R S
 T U V W X Y Z "ä"

1911/1915

Stilisiertes lateinisches
 Alphabet
 (Entworfen von Sütterlin)

| Druckschrift | Schreibschrift | Druckschrift | Schreibschrift |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| A a | A a | N n | N n |
| B b | B b | O o | O o |
| C c | C c | P p | P p |
| D d | D d | Q q | Q q |
| E e | E e | R r | R r |
| F f | F f | S s | S s |
| G g | G g | T t | T t |
| H h | H h | U u | U u |
| I i | I i | V v | V v |
| J j | J j | W w | W w |
| K k | K k | X x | X x |
| L l | L l | Y y | Y y |
| M m | M m | Z z | Z z |

Frakturalphabet und deutsche
 Schreibschrift des 19. Jahrhunderts

a b c d e f g h i j k l m
 n o p q r s t u v
 w x y z A B C D E F
 G H I J K L M N O P
 Q R S T U V W X Y Z
 "ä" "ö" "ü" "!" "?"

Sütterlins Schulschrift
 (1917)

a b c d e f g h i j k l
 m n o p q r s t u v
 w x y z A B C D E F
 G H I J K L M N O P
 Q R S T U V W X Y Z
 "ä" "ö" "ü"

Deutsche Schreibschrift des 20. Jhs.
 (bis 1941)