
**Sevin, Dieter and Ingrid Sevin. *Wie geht's?*
An Introductory German Course. 8th edition.**

Boston: Thomson and Heinle, 2007. ISBN 1-4130-1978-1. Includes a Text and Audio CD, Workbook and Lab Manual, and a Video/DVD.

Like most introductory German textbooks published in the U.S., *Wie geht's?* is ambitious and expansive in scope. In an introduction (*Schritte: Beginnen wir!*) and fifteen chapters, the authors cover the basics of German grammar, while simultaneously presenting a variety of cultural, historical, linguistic, and geographical information about German-speaking countries in Europe. The book is clearly organized, each chapter having the same overall structure. The section entitled *Vorschau* introduces the topic in a page-long preview in English, alongside related images. In the following section, *Zum Thema*, dialogues in written and oral form (available on the accompanying audio CD)-familiarize students with the chapter topic and offer them a variety of activities for practicing pertinent vocabulary. The third section, *Struktur*, introduces grammar followed by exercises. The fourth section, *Einblicke*, features additional vocabulary intended for an in-depth discussion of the chapter topic. This part also contains a reading passage, which includes pre- and post-reading activities, writing assignments, and one final listening comprehension exercise. From Chapter Eight onwards, the segment *Literatur* becomes a regular fifth component, introducing students to authentic poems, short stories, and fairy tales. Biographical information about each author is provided in English. Throughout each chapter, several light purple textboxes entitled *Fokus* present cultural, linguistic, and historical information, also in English. Where appropriate, the student is provided with suggestions and strategies for reading and writing, and each chapter also features at least one pronunciation activity. The topics run the usual gamut from "Family," "Food and Shopping," "Holidays and Celebrations," and "Schools and Professions" to "Leisure Activities and Health," "Entertainment," and Berlin in its historical context. Rather than devoting one chapter each to Switzerland and Austria, the authors have chosen to highlight these countries within the context of a given chapter. Thus, Austria is spotlighted in the chapter on city life, while the chapter on traveling focuses on Switzerland.

The ancillaries for *Wie geht's?* include audio CDs to be used in lab, a video program on VHS or DVD, and a student Workbook/Lab Manual (*Arbeitsbuch*), as well as the publisher's companion Website (<http://wiegehts.heinle.com>). An audio CD including recordings of all listening comprehension sections and literary texts comes conveniently packaged with the textbook. The video program features a staged, slowly spoken *Minidrama* at the beginning of each chapter, which contextualizes the topic. Occasional *Blickpunkt*-segments filmed in Berlin are intended to provide cultural background. They are introduced in English, narrated in German, and invite the viewers to make comparisons between their own culture and German-speaking cultures. The Workbook contains pre- and post-viewing activities for the Video and CD listening and writing exercises, all well suited for homework assignments. Like the Video, the audio recordings are slowly paced and clearly enunciated. Occasionally, crossword puzzles offer opportunities for additional vocabulary practice, though all but one give English clues. After every few chapters a segment entitled *Rückblick* allows students to review material previously covered, and an answer key at the end of the workbook enables them make corrections as they prepare for a test or exam. The publisher's Website also is designed to help students review the material. It offers interactive crossword puzzles, concentration games, vocabulary review, and a tutorial quiz. As in the textbook, Workbook, and audio-visual program, the structure is consistently the

same, and users will know what to expect after the introductory chapter. The Website also offers English podcasts with German examples and Internet activities for each chapter.

Now in its eighth edition, *Wie geht's?* features an attractive mix of color photographs, line drawings, and realia, and its layout is clear and user-friendly. Icons identifying partner-work activities, listening exercises, oral activities, and group assignments offer learners and instructors a choice of ways in which to interact with the material. However, although some of the content-based activities are communicative, the majority of the grammar exercises lack thematic contextualization. Despite employing different language skills, students will find themselves manipulating a series of random, unrelated phrases and sentences. The book requires a fair amount of English-German translation, not only in each chapter's designated translation assignments, but also in communicative activities. Exercises entitled *Kurzgespräche*, for example, describe a given communicative situation at some length in English, rather than providing the students with a choice of conversational cues in German. Realia-based exercises, on the other hand, all consist of partner-activities with a list of pre-formulated questions, unnecessarily restricting more adventurous and creative learners. Post-reading activities in the *Einblicke*-section consist mainly of matching, cloze and multiple-choice exercises, whereas mostly personalized questions follow the authentic texts. Categorizing, sorting, even drawing as alternative or additional post-reading activities would allow spatial-visual and kinesthetic learners to engage with the material, too. Since structural practice is also mainly text-based, one wonders why many of the visuals were not integrated in a more meaningful way into the text. The grammar presentation, on the other hand, follows a logical sequence, conducive to developing communication strategies. Introducing the conversational past in the fourth chapter, after students have acquired the vocabulary to discuss shopping, eating out, and holidays certainly provides opportunities for authentic conversations. The only counter-intuitive structural move seems to be the relatively early introduction of the dative case (Chapter Three), while deferring the presentation of personal pronouns in the accusative and dative until the fifth chapter, but I assume the authors have successfully tested this strategy in their classrooms.

Wie geht's? offers a wealth of clearly organized information about German-speaking countries for the introductory German course. Instructors writing their syllabi will find the hints for using the book in the quarter or semester system helpful and will appreciate the concise summary of the German spelling reform. Most of the literary selections are interesting and have the potential to stimulate class discussion, although they do not necessarily fit in with a given chapter's overriding thematic and vocabulary focus. Students will undoubtedly find the periodic reviews in the Workbook useful and will benefit from most of the reading and writing tips in the main text. However, if instructors are trying to reach more types of learners in a student-centered classroom, they will need to develop additional, more varied activities. Furthermore, even though students receive a lot of visual information about life in German-speaking countries, the video program does not provide them with opportunities to hear naturally paced German. Novice language learners can cope with authentic language as long as the tasks designed around the video or audio segment are manageable. Therefore, instructors whose goal is to

develop cultural competency will find themselves searching for authentic audio-visual material and relegating the textbook's video program to out-of-class viewing as homework. Since all Website quizzes are cloze and multiple-choice exercises, and the concentration games and crossword puzzles are simply translation activities, they are also more suited for self-study than integration into a proficiency-oriented and communicative computer lab setting. German definitions for the puzzles and concentration games, as well as image- or audio-based clues, would not only make the activities less predictable and more challenging, but would also appeal to more than just language learners. All in all, though, despite the lack of variation in its structural and communicative activities, *Wie geht's?* offers a solid basis for an introductory German course, especially if the program is designed around teacher-centered rather than student-centered, instruction.

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