

School

The Rotary Exchange Program is a School Program. With and in their Application the exchange students have agreed to attend school regularly during the exchange year, even if they have finished with school in their home country. [Attending the school](#) with the entailed responsibilities gives the exchange year a structure. It enables to meet people of the same age and helps with the integration. Not all exchange students realize this from the beginning. Knowledge of the [German language](#) and the expressed will to learn it is also of great help.

[School Requirements Peculiarities School System](#)

For the newcomer it might be not easy to understand the school system of another state. This can result from the attempt to compare the school system in the host country with the system at home. Though many similarities can be found, it is easier to not to compare. The best way to learn about our school system is to learn from the beginning.

In the following at first a general description of our school system shall be given which will be followed by the [school requirements for exchange students](#).

Also read the [peculiarities of the German school system, as described by an exchange student](#).

Before starting with this general description it has to be pointed out that in Germany the school curricula, organization, and administration may be different in the 16 Federal States. This is laid down in our constitution which gives the States basically the responsibility for education.

"The School System.

At the age of six, children enter primary school (*Grundschule*). In general it lasts four years, After primary school, pupils attend one of the other general education schools offering the first stage of secondary education. Irrespective of the type of school the pupil attends, the fifth and sixth school years constitute a phase of special encouragement, observation and orientation designed to facilitate choices concerning the pupil's further education and fields of emphasis. In most states this orientation phase takes place within the framework of the various types of schools; in some states, however, it is structured as a separate stage which is independent of the ordinary types of schools.

Table: Basic Structure of the educational system in Germany

Grade	The years through school			
1	Grundschule; Primary School			
2				
3				
4				
5	Gesamt- schule; Comprehensive School	Gymnasium; Grammar School	Realschule; Intermediate School	Hauptschule; Junior Secondary School; 10 th Grade
6				
7				
8				
9	Other Vocational Schools	Vocational School		
10				
11				
12	University and other Institutes of higher Education	Specialized College	Specialized Schools	
13				

(FaG, p. 407 - modified)

"After completing primary school, approximately one third of the children attend the secondary general school (**Hauptschule**). Young people who leave the secondary general school after the ninth or tenth grade usually enter a vocational training program and, as part of their training, attend a part-time vocational school (**Berufsschule**) until at least the age of 18. The secondary general school certificate is generally used to gain acceptance to vocational training programs offered within the framework of the dual system and thus opens the door to many occupations in the craft trades and industry for which formal training is required. The secondary general school imparts a basic general education to its pupils. Its curriculum has been broadened and has become increasingly demanding: Today, for instance, nearly every pupil at a secondary general school receives instruction in one foreign language (usually English) and vocational orientation to ease the transition from school to working life.

The intermediate school (**Realschule**) is positioned between the secondary general school and the grammar school (Gymnasium) and imparts a more comprehensive general education to its pupils. As a rule, it encompasses six years of schooling, grades 5 through 10, and leads to an intermediate school certificate qualifying the recipient to continue his or her education at upper level schools such as a full-time vocational school (**Berufsfachschule**) or a vocationally oriented upper secondary school (**Fachoberschule**). The intermediate school certificate is a pre-requisite for a middle-level career in business and industry or in the public service.

The grammar school (**Gymnasium**), which is generally a nine-year secondary school [in some States however, only through grade 12], imparts a comprehensive general education to its pupils. In the upper stage of the grammar school, which encompasses grades 11 through 13 , a course system has replaced the conventional classes. Although certain subjects or groups of subjects are still compulsory, the wide range of available courses affords pupils in the upper stage of the grammar school ample opportunity to individually structure their coursework to emphasize certain fields. Subjects are divided into three general categories: language, literature and art; the social sciences; and mathematics, science and technology.Upper secondary instruction at the grammar school concludes with the **Abitur** examination which covers four subjects. Upon completing 13 years of schooling and passing the Abitur examination, the pupil is awarded the "certificate of general higher education entrance qualification" (Zeugnis der allgemeinen Hochschulreife). This certificate,, entitles the recipient to study the subject of his or her choice at a university or equivalent institution.

As a matter of principle, the certificate of higher education entrance qualification or the certificate of **Fachhochschule** entrance qualification (**Fachhochschulreife**) is required for admission to a course of study at a higher education institution.

Another type of school offering stage I secondary education is the comprehensive school (**Gesamtschule**) which as a rule provides instruction for pupils in grades 5 through 10. Some comprehensive schools have an upper secondary stage of their own which is structured along the lines of the upper stage of the grammar school.

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Children and young people with disabilities whose needs cannot be adequately met at general education schools receive instruction at special schools (**Sonderschulen**). The compulsory education requirement applies to them as well, and without restriction". (FaG, p. 406f)

Exchange Students at School

When our Inbounds begin with their exchange year in Germany, their school has already been selected. The hosting Rotary Club has selected the school and this school has agreed to provide schooling for the exchange year. The Guarantee Form indicates which school will be attended. Normally the Host Club will enrol the student at grade 11 of a **Gymnasium** (Grammar school). Grade 11 is compulsory even if the exchange student has finished with school at home. It enables the student to a better integration, as the class mostly stays together during the schooldays. Depending on the exchange student's language ability some classes in higher or lower classes may be chosen.

The school normally start around 8h a.m. and ends at about 1:30h p.m.. at some schools there

might be classes in the afternoon.

Table: A typical school-week schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	Geography	Maths	German	French	Art	English
2	Geography	Social Science	German	French	Art	English
3	Social Science	French	Physics	Maths	PhysEd	Maths
4	Physics	English	Biology	Geography	PhysEd	Maths
5	Biology	Religion	English	German	Physics	
6	Homeroom	Religion		Biology		

Explanations:

- Alternatives/Electives: Religion - Ethics; Physics - Chemistry; Art - Music; French - Latin
- Not all schools have classes on Saturday.
- The schedule changes each semester.
- There are also vacations at schools in Germany. German students do not attend school for about 90 days per year which breaks basically in the following holiday periods: two weeks in fall, two - three weeks over Christmas, three weeks over Easter and six - seven weeks in summer.

Extra German language classes

It is strongly recommended for those students who have not had any German at school to start learning immediately after they know that they will spend their exchange year in Germany. If there are no German classes available, taped language course will help.

Being in Germany, students with little or no knowledge of German shall take extra German classes after arrival. The Host Club will help with selecting a school, mostly at the **Volkshochschule** (Community College) or other institutions. As this is not part of the general schooling the students have to bring the necessary fee.

Peculiarities of the German school-system (experiences of an exchange student)

1. Lessons usually begin at 8.00 and finish at 13.00; there are only few lessons in the afternoon.
2. There are no cafeterias, meals or snacks on school-grounds.
3. The comprehensive system does not exist for secondary education in all parts, only in the elementary sector. The Gymnasium should be the school for the most intelligent students, but it has become the school of the majority in some Länder.
4. Extra-curricular activities are the exception in the afternoon or the evenings. School is considered as a place of learning, not of social life.
5. Sport or music competitions between schools are unknown.
6. Most subjects are compulsory, e.g. German, math, a foreign language, sport, history, a science.

7. Religious Education, either Protestant or Catholic, must be offered in all schools. Students have a choice between R.E. and ethics.
8. Lessons: Classroom lectures of teachers are considered as old-fashioned; instead text-work and classroom-discussions should dominate. Marks (grades) include oral and written achievements.
9. Test papers with multiple choice assignments are rare, whereas text work and essay writing are the accepted forms.
10. The relationships between teachers and students are formal, subject-oriented, usually not private.
11. Discipline: It varies. Detainment or corporal punishment were abolished some time ago. Some teachers may allow chewing gum or caps in the lessons, others do not accept this kind of behavior.
12. On the whole, the German school system is more liberal than the system in other countries. So students are allowed to leave school-grounds in free periods.

More questions? [Ask us!](#)

Quotations from: 'Facts about Germany' edited by Dr. Arno Kappler et al; published by Societäts-Verlag, Frankfurt/M 1995.

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