



**MY SEMESTER IN**

**FREIBURG,  
GERMANY**



*9/12/22  
Freiburg*



*12/5/22  
Freiburg*



*9/17/22,  
Berlin*

**LEARNING  
ABOUT  
GERMAN  
CULTURE**

**THE  
ADJUSTMENT  
PROCESS**

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Despite many preconceived notions, I did not experience much culture shock upon landing in Freiburg. My main focus was adjusting to life in a new city which included obstacles such as learning the tram system, learning about different food, and expanding my vocabulary. It was only a few weeks later when the amount of my traveling decreased, and I realized that the adjustment process was going to be a little more than I had thought.

The first obstacle that I realized was going to the grocery store in Germany. There is a large difference between shopping in the United States and shopping in Europe. I made several mistakes on my first few shopping trips because of misread labels or the language barrier. I had gotten a frozen pizza with pork on it once and was unable to eat it as I am a vegetarian. There was no possibility of returning any item at grocery stores in Germany so in other words, I was out of money. I realized that shopping meant being very careful, so I spent many trips at Rewe with my phone out because I translated the label and the ingredients. Another aspect of grocery shopping to get used to would be the speed that the cashiers use as they ring up your groceries. Until the end of my trip, I found it unsettling to try to bag my groceries as the cashier moved lightning fast. I did enjoy going to the grocery store because it was one of the most interesting ways to learn about a new culture. This was evident by the size of the bread aisle and the variety of the different potatoes sold. I also always lengthened my trips to the grocery store because I would wander the aisles and look at the variety of different snacks, desserts, and other goods that were offered.

The variety of the different rules for residents living in Germany was something to get used to. I was living in a Wohngemeinschaft or an apartment shared with four to five other students. We had a cleaning schedule and I faced difficulty because I had to remember there were certain times when I could not vacuum. Germany has rules about loud noises which means that people cannot vacuum or listen to loud music at certain hours of the day. However, one of the biggest obstacles that I faced was not the language barrier or a cultural difference but the recycling system in Germany. There are many different

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categories involved in this recycling system such as cardboard, organic materials, glass, and mixed trash. The glass system was divided into further categories which were done by color. I would stand at the trash center by my apartment and try to figure out which glass goes where. The rules involving if something could be recycled or not also made this more complicated. I never fully mastered the recycling system in Germany; however, I have hopes of doing so in a future stay in Germany.

The language barrier was the most significant part of adjusting to life in Germany. The German language was all around me, and I had minimal knowledge of German. I worked hard and expanded my vocabulary. I moved to initiate conversations with my flatmates, classmates, and people at the store. By the end of my time in Freiburg, I was able to navigate life in Germany easier with my improved language use. I was able to ask questions, initiate conversations, and much more. I even gave a tourist couple directions using my improved German skills. However, my knowledge of the language did have its limitations. One day in November, I went to the bakery to get some freshly baked bread and I did not know how to ask them for only a few slices! I ended up going home with a whole roll of bread that day which was delicious. I was able to learn how to ask for a few slices of bread. I went back to the bakery a few weeks later and had a successful exchange with the baker.

My improvement with German taught me that there are two different aspects to adjusting to life in Germany: one that happens over time and one that you have to work on. When I first got to Germany, the language still sounded foreign to me. Everything was very new and there was a different lifestyle. However, I adjusted to the language and the lifestyle over time. In fact, when I went to visit other countries in the European Union, the lack of German was an adjustment. The speed that the cashier used to ring up my groceries stopped being so jarring. However, there were other parts of the adjustment process that involved more work and practice such as the recycling system and using German.

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All of these aspects of the adjustment process were steps I took in order to make Germany my home. My time in Freiburg was an amazing one in which I was able to experience and learn about German culture. I was able to learn what it means to be a German and have a semester full of different challenges and experiences. I can only hope that I return to Freiburg, once a new and strange city that became home.