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LETTER-WRITING GUIDE

German

INTRODUCTION

This guide is for researchers who do not speak German but must write to Germany, Austria, or parts of Switzerland to request genealogical records. It includes a list of sentences you would use in a letter about genealogical records and a German translation of these sentences.

The best sources of genealogical information in German-speaking countries are records of births, marriages, and deaths kept by churches and civil registration offices. The Family History Library has microfilmed copies of these records for many, but not all, localities. Use the Family History Library Catalog to determine what records are available through the Family History Library and Family History Centers. If records are available from the library, it is usually faster and more productive to search these records first. The library's *Germany Research Outline* (34061) explains how to research records at the library or at Family History Centers.

If the records you want are not available through the Family History Library, you can use this guide to help you write to a church or a civil registration office to obtain information. The *Germany Research Outline* can help you decide whether church or civil registration records will be most helpful to you.

BEFORE YOU WRITE

Before you write a letter in German to obtain family history information, you should do three things:

Determine exactly where your ancestor was born, married, or died. Because most genealogical records were kept locally, you will need to know the specific town where your ancestor's records were kept. See the library's *Tracing Immigrant Origins* for help in finding hometowns.

Determine your ancestor's religion. Because most early records were kept by churches or synagogues rather than civil registration offices, you may need to write to the church your ancestor attended in his or her hometown. If you are not sure what your ancestor's religion was in Europe, determine what religion he or she practiced after immigrating. Usually people did not change religions when they moved from Europe to their new home.

Determine where records from your ancestor's hometown are stored today. Records for smaller localities may be at repositories in nearby larger villages. You can use a gazetteer to determine which parish or civil jurisdiction serves your ancestor's locality. You may also use the *Germany Research Outline* for help locating records.

RESEARCH BY MAIL

Church records are obtained from parishes, and civil records are obtained from civil registration offices. Both kinds of records may be stored in archives. Genealogical Societies may also be able to help you find some of the information you need.

Parishes. Most church records begin in the 1600s, and some begin even earlier. The records may be stored in a local parish or a regional archive. Request information from the local parish first. In your letter, ask where you can write to obtain records that are no longer stored locally.

Civil Registration Offices. Civil registration records begin in 1876 in most of Germany and as early as 1792 in some areas. They begin in 1876 in Switzerland and 1939 in Austria. They are generally deposited at local offices, but older records (especially those over one hundred years old) are sometimes in state or district archives. Write local offices first. Registrars may be able to tell you where to write to obtain records they no longer have.

Archives. If the records you need are deposited in an archive, you may ask the archivist to recommend a private researcher you can hire. Archivists usually do not have time to search records.

Societies. Genealogical societies usually collect genealogies, periodicals, and some original records from their area and recommend researchers you can hire to research local records.

How to Address the Envelope

For a *Catholic Parish*:

An das katholische Pfarramt
(Insert street address, if known.)
(Postal Code) (Name of Locality)
GERMANY
AUSTRIA, or SWITZERLAND

For a **Protestant Parish:**

An das evangelische Pfarramt
(Insert street address, if known.)
(Postal Code) (Name of Locality)
GERMANY
AUSTRIA, or SWITZERLAND

For a **Civil Registration Office:**

An das Standesamt
(Insert street address, if known.)
(Postal Code) (Name of Locality)
GERMANY
or AUSTRIA

An das Zivilstandsamt
(Insert street address, if known.)
(Postal Code) (Name of Locality)
SWITZERLAND

Some archive and society addresses are listed in the *Germany Research Outline*, or you can call the Family History Library at 801-240-3433.

Postal Codes

When addressing your letter, you will need to write the postal (zip) code **in front** of the name of the town to which you are writing. For help finding postal codes, use the postal directory for the country or call the Family History Library at 801-240-3433.

On 1 July 1993 Germany revised its postal codes. Any address published prior to July 1993 must be updated to be correct.

Some towns do not have a post office. When writing to a town without one, put the name of the town at the end of the first line. Write the postal code and the nearest post office on the second line. For example, the German postal directory indicates that the post office for *Blersum* is at nearby *Wittmund*. A letter requesting information from a civil registration office in Blersum should be addressed:

An das Standesamt **Blersum**
26409 **Wittmund**
GERMANY

How to Send Return Postage and Money

When you write someone in Europe, send an international reply coupon (available at most large post offices) to pay for return postage. When writing to Germany, some people have had more success sending an international bank draft.

Ruesch International Bank Drafts. An easy and inexpensive way to send money to Europe from North America is to telephone Ruesch International Financial Services at 800-424-2923. Ask for an international bank draft for the equivalent of \$15.00 (or another amount) in either German marks, Austrian schillings, or Swiss

francs. There is a \$3.00 service charge. Have the check made payable to the organization or to the *Pfarramt* (parish). Ruesch will give you a transaction number to write on your payment check. Send the payment to—

Ruesch International Financial Services
700 11th St NW
Washington, DC 20001-4507

When they receive your payment, Ruesch will promptly send you a foreign currency draft (check) you can mail to Europe.

Writing to a Parish. When writing to a parish, it is also a good idea to send a donation of \$15.00 as a courtesy. Do not send a personal check, which is difficult and expensive to exchange in Europe. Cash is most easily converted to European currency, but there are always risks in sending cash.

Writing to Other Offices or Organizations. Some researchers do not send money when writing to a civil registration office, archive, or genealogical society for the first time. These organizations may prefer to bill you for their services. Some may ask you to make the check payable to their account (*Konto*) number. If you want, you may write an institution to determine their fees before making a request. However, this will significantly increase the time it takes to get information.

Checklist for Mailing a Letter to Europe

- Keep a photocopy of your letter.
- Enclose payment for the return postage.
- Convert funds to foreign currency.
- Mark the envelope "Air Mail."

WHAT TO EXPECT

It may take six months or longer for you to receive a reply to your request for information (airmail improves the response time). The results of writing to parishes or civil registration offices can vary greatly. You may get a great deal of information, or you may get no answer at all. Some pastors and civil registrars are willing to do considerable research. Others will not answer until money is sent or offered. Some may be unable to provide information.

Because some information is not easily obtained by writing directly to a pastor or registrar, you may need to hire a local private researcher. We suggest that you inquire about a competent local researcher when you write.

When you receive a reply, send a note of thanks or acknowledgement. You may wish to do this in a follow-up letter requesting further information. Refer to your earlier letters and their return letters by date. If they have assigned you a reference number, include that number as well.

Use German-English dictionaries to help you understand the reply. Sometimes you can hire accredited genealogists to translate for you.

If you do not receive an answer, write again sending a copy of your first letter. Do not send more money unless you verify that your first letter did not arrive.

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER IN GERMAN

Your letter should include:

- the date (at the top)
- the name and address of the addressee
- a greeting
- a brief introduction
- biographical information about your relative
- a short, specific, genealogical request
- referral request(s)
- a comment about payment
- closing remarks
- your signature
- your return address (including your country).

Be brief and simple. Do not ask for too much at one time.

The following English-to-German translations will help you compose your letter. Read the sentences in English and choose those that best express what you want to say. Be sure that your sentences are arranged logically. You may want to write your letter first in English using the following sentences, then replace the sentences with their German translations. However you proceed, make sure you type or neatly print your letter and, when necessary, add any diacritical marks and special characters (such as ä, ö, ü, ß) with a pen.

Do not use this guide as the letter itself! That might insult the recipient and lessen the chance of a reply.

Writing Dates

Write dates in the European style: day-month-year. Write the name of the month out and write the year in full. For example, write *10 Dezember 1889*, not *12-10-89* or even *10-12-1889*.

January	- Januar	July	- Juli
February	- Februar	August	- August
March	- März	September	- September
April	- April	October	- Oktober
May	- Mai	November	- November
June	- Juni	December	- Dezember

English

German

Greetings

1. Dear Sir or Madam:	1. Sehr geehrter Herr oder geehrte Dame,
2. Dear Pastor:	2. Sehr geehrter Herr Pfarrer,

Introductions

3. I am researching my ancestors and need information from your records.	3. Ich erforsche meine Vorfahren und benötige Angaben aus Ihren Registern.
4. My ancestors come from (<i>fill in locality</i>). I would like to know more about them.	4. Meine Vorfahren stammen aus (<i>fill in locality</i>). Ich möchte gerne mehr über dieselben erfahren.
5. The following individual is my ancestor. Below is all the information I have about this person:	5. Die nachstehend aufgeführte Person ist mein Vorfahr. Ich habe alle mir bekannten genealogischen Angaben über diese Person aufgeführt:

Biographical Information

(Give information about your ancestor using the terms from the following list.)

6. a. Given name and surname:	6. a. Vor- und Familienname:
b. Date of birth:	b. Geburtsdatum:
c. Place of birth:	c. Geburtsort:
d. Father's given name and surname:	d. Vor- und Familienname des Vaters:

e. Mother's given name and surname:	e. Vor- und Mädchenname der Mutter:
f. Husband's given name and surname:	f. Vor- und Familienname des Ehemannes:
g. Wife's given name and maiden surname:	g. Vor- und Mädchenname der Ehefrau:
h. Date of marriage:	h. Heiratsdatum:
i. Place of marriage:	i. Heiratsort:
j. Date of death:	j. Todestag:
k. Place of death:	k. Sterbeort:
l. Date of emigration:	l. Auswanderungsdatum:
m. Religion: Roman Catholic Protestant (Lutheran) Reformed Jewish	m. Religion: römisch-katholisch evangelisch-lutherisch evangelisch-reformiert jüdisch
Genealogical Requests	
7. Could you please check your birth registers from <i>(fill in year)</i> to <i>(fill in year)</i> for the birth or christening record of this person?	7. Bitte suchen Sie in Ihren Geburtsregistern von <i>(fill in year)</i> bis <i>(fill in year)</i> nach dem Geburtseintrag dieser Person?
8. Please send me a complete extract of the birth or christening record (1) of this person. (2) of these persons.	8. Bitte schicken Sie mir einen vollständigen Auszug aus dem Geburts- oder Taufregister (1) für diese Person. (2) für diese Personen.
9. Please send me a complete extract of the marriage record (1) of this person. (2) of this person's parents.	9. Bitte schicken Sie mir einen vollständigen Auszug des Heiratsregisters (1) für diese Person. (2) für die Eltern dieser Person.
10. I believe that <i>(fill in name)</i> died in your locality about <i>(fill in year)</i> . I would like a complete extract of the death record.	10. Ich glaube, daß <i>(fill in name)</i> ungefähr <i>(fill in year)</i> in Ihrem Ort starb. Ich möchte gerne einen vollständigen Auszug aus dem Todesregister für diese Person haben.
11. I would like to know more about the family of this person. I would be grateful if you would provide the names and birth dates of the brothers and sisters and an extract of the marriage record of the parents.	11. Ich möchte gerne mehr über die Familie dieser Person erfahren und wäre Ihnen sehr dankbar, wenn Sie mir die Namen und Geburtsdaten der Geschwister und einen Auszug aus dem Heiratsregister für die Eltern beschaffen könnten.
12. I would like to locate any relatives who may live in <i>(fill in town)</i> . My ancestor was <i>(fill in name)</i> . If you know any relatives of the family, I would be grateful if you would give this letter to them so that they can contact me.	12. Ich möchte meine Verwandten finden, die in <i>(fill in town)</i> wohnen. Der Name meines Vorfahren ist <i>(fill in name)</i> . Wenn Sie Verwandte dieser Familie kennen, wäre ich Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie ihnen diesen Brief geben könnten, damit sie mit mir Kontakt aufnehmen können.
13. Please send me a copy of the family information on <i>(fill in husband's name)</i> and <i>(fill in wife's name)</i> . They were married (1) <i>(fill in date)</i> . (2) approximately <i>(fill in date)</i> .	13. Senden Sie mir bitte eine Abschrift über die Familie von <i>(fill in husband's name)</i> und <i>(fill in wife's name)</i> . Sie heirateten (1) <i>(fill in date)</i> . (2) ungefähr <i>(fill in date)</i> .

14. For my family research I need information from the Jewish records of births, marriages, and deaths from your community. Do you know where such records were kept and where they are presently located?	14. Für meine Ahnenforschung brauche ich Angaben aus den jüdischen Geburts-, Heirats-, und Todesregistern Ihres Ortes. Wissen Sie, wo diese Unterlagen aufbewahrt wurden und wo sie sich gegenwärtig befinden?
15. Would you please inform me if it is possible to obtain photocopies from your records and tell me the cost of such copies?	15. Würden Sie mir bitte mitteilen, ob es möglich wäre, Fotokopien von Ihren Urkunden zu erhalten und was sie kosten?
Referral Requests	
16. If you do not have the necessary records, could you provide the address of the place where the records can be found?	16. Wenn Sie die notwendigen Unterlagen nicht besitzen, könnten Sie mir die Anschrift der Dienststelle mitteilen, wo sich die betreffenden Unterlagen befinden?
17. If you are unable to do this research for me, could you please recommend a local researcher that I could hire for this purpose—someone who speaks some English if possible?	17. Sollten Sie nicht in der Lage sein, mir bei dieser Forschung zu helfen, so bitte ich um den Namen eines Ahnenforschers, den ich beauftragen könnte—wenn möglich jemanden, der Englisch kann?
Payment	
18. To cover your expenses, I am enclosing a donation to your parish as well as payment for the return postage.	18. Zur Deckung Ihrer Gebühren lege ich eine Spende zu Ihrem Pfarramt bei.
19. Please let me know the cost of your help and how I can pay.	19. Bitte teilen Sie mir mit, was ich für Ihre Dienstleistung zu bezahlen habe und wie ich den Betrag überweisen kann.
Closing Remarks and Return Address	
20. I thank you in advance for your help.	20. Ich danke Ihnen im Voraus für Ihre Hilfe.
21. Sincerely,	21. Mit freundlichen Grüßen
22. My address:	22. Meine Anschrift:
Follow-up (Use these sentences in follow-up letters as needed.)	
23. Thank you for the information you sent on (<i>fill in date</i>). It has helped me very much.	23. Vielen Dank für die Angaben, die Sie mir am (<i>fill in date</i>) geschickt haben. Die sind für mir eine große Hilfe!
24. I need further information about one of the individuals you mentioned in your letter: (<i>fill in name</i>).	24. Ich brauche zusätzliche Angaben über eine Person, die Sie in Ihrem Brief erwähnt haben. Es handelt sich um (<i>fill in name</i>).
25. I have already received from you the following information about this person:	25. Ich habe von Ihnen über diese Person schon die folgenden Angaben erhalten:
26. I am enclosing a copy of a letter I sent you on (<i>fill in date</i>). Please write and tell me if you can do this research.	26. Ich lege eine Kopie von einem Brief bei, den ich Ihnen am (<i>fill in date</i>) geschickt habe. Bitte, schreiben Sie mir, ob Sie diesen Auftrag annehmen können!

EXAMPLE LETTER

Date 20 Juli 1993

Addressee An das evangelische Pfarramt Seele
99799 Nirgendwo
GERMANY

Greeting Sehr geehrter Herr Pfarrer,

Introduction Die nachstehend aufgeführte Person ist mein Vorfahr. Ich habe alle mir bekannten genealogischen Angaben über diese Person aufgeführt:

Biographical Information Vor- und Familienname: Andreas NIEMAND
Geburtsdatum: 28 Mai 1820
Geburtsort: Seele, Sachsen, Preußen
Vor- und Mädchenname der Ehefrau: Beatta CRILE
Heiratsdatum: 13 April 1857
Heiratsort: Jefferson County, Iowa, USA
Religion: evangelisch-lutherisch

Genealogical Request Bitte schicken Sie mir einen vollständigen Auszug aus dem Geburts- oder Taufregister für diese Person?

Referral Requests Wenn Sie die notwendigen Unterlagen nicht besitzen, könnten Sie mir die Anschrift der Dienststelle mitteilen, wo sich die betreffenden Unterlagen befinden?

Sollten Sie nicht in der Lage sein, mir bei dieser Forschung zu helfen, so bitte ich um den Namen eines Ahnenforschers, den ich beauftragen könnte—wenn möglich jemanden, der Englisch kann?

Payment Zur Deckung Ihrer Gebühren lege ich eine Spende zu Ihrem Pfarramt bei.

Closing Ich danke Ihnen im Voraus für Ihre Hilfe.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Signature

Return Address Meine Anschrift:
Jane Doe
674 "Q" Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84103 USA

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Family History Library welcomes additions and corrections that will improve future editions of this guide. Please send your suggestions to—

Publications Coordination
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File: Language Helps.

34066

ENGLISH

