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Understanding Behördendeutsch — The 50 Most Important Words

Decipher official German: The essential terms from letters, forms, and decisions explained simply. Status: March 2026.

Deutsche Begriffe: Amtsdeutsch | Behördensprache | Formular | Bescheid | Antrag

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Understanding Behördendeutsch — The 50 Most Important Words

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Why Behördendeutsch is So Difficult

German authorities use their own language — **Amtsdeutsch**. Even Germans often don't understand it right away. Here are the most important terms you need to know.

General Terms

Amtsdeutsch	Meaning
Antrag	Form/application that you complete to receive something
Bescheid	Official decision from the authority (letter)
Bewilligungsbescheid	Yes, your application has been approved
Ablehnungsbescheid	No, your application has been rejected

Amtsdeutsch	Meaning
Widerspruch	You disagree and want a review
Frist	Time limit — must be observed!
Zuständig	Who is responsible for your matter
Rechtsbehelfsbelehrung	Information at the end of a decision — how to file an objection
Anhörung	The authority gives you a chance to speak
Formlos	Without a form — a simple letter is enough

Money and Finance

Amtsdeutsch	Meaning
Einkommensnachweise	Salary statements from the last 3 months
Steuerbescheid	Letter from the tax office with your tax declaration result
Zuzahlung	Your own share of the costs
Eigenanteil	Same as Zuzahlung
Nachzahlung	You still need to pay something back
Erstattung	You get money refunded
Freibetrag	Amount that is not taxed

Residence and Authorities

Amtsdeutsch	Meaning
Aufenthaltserlaubnis	Permission to live in Germany
Niederlassungserlaubnis	Unlimited residence rights
Duldung	Deportation temporarily suspended
Meldebescheinigung	Proof of where you live
Abmeldung	You register off (because you're moving)
Beglaubigte Kopie/Übersetzung	Officially certified copy/translation
Apostille	International certification of a document

Housing

Amtsdeutsch	Meaning
Wohnungsgeberbestätigung	Confirmation from landlord for registration
Betriebskostenabrechnung	= Operating costs statement
Kaltmiete / Warmmiete	Rent without / with additional costs
Mietschuldenfreiheitsbescheinigung	Confirmation that you have no rent arrears

Reading Letters from Authorities

Important Signal Words:

• **"Sie werden aufgefordert..."** = You must do something!

• **"Innerhalb von 14 Tagen..."** = Deadline! Act immediately!

• **"Bei Nichtbeachtung..."** = Consequences threaten

• **"Es wird darauf hingewiesen..."** = Important information

• **"Ihr Antrag wurde bewilligt"** = Good news — approved!

• **"Ihrem Antrag kann nicht stattgegeben werden"** = Rejected — consider filing an objection

Tips

• **ALWAYS meet deadlines** — Delay can mean loss of rights

• **Don't ignore** — even if you don't understand the letter, respond!

• Use the **hamboorg.city assistant** to translate official mail

• **Advisory centers** (AWO, Caritas, Diakonie) help for free with understanding decisions