

Lesson Objectives

& CEFR Mapping

Teaching German Colloquialisms

A structured approach to *Umgangssprache*. Linking learning outcomes to CEFR standards for controlled production and pragmatic appropriateness.



Target Lexicon & Functions

To effectively teach colloquial German, it's crucial to move beyond literal definitions and connect each expression to its practical use in communication.

💡 This lesson focuses on eight high-frequency colloquialisms mapped to specific communicative functions.

an etw. herumdoktern

Expressing frustration with unskilled or endless tinkering.

Das sagt mir nichts

Politely expressing unfamiliarity with a topic.

Pillepalle

Dismissing something as trivial or very easy.

etw. spitzkriegen

Indicating the discovery of information, often a secret.

zig

Quantifying a large, indefinite number (e.g., 'zig Mal' - countless times).

jemanden zur Schnecke machen

Describing harsh criticism or scolding.

am Start sein

Confirming availability or participation.

es gut sein lassen

Suggesting to stop an activity or discussion.

Where Colloquialisms Fit in Class

Beyond semantic meaning, students must master **register awareness**—knowing when to speak casually and when to maintain professional distance.



Informal Social

HIGH USAGE

THE CONTEXT

Conversations with friends, peers, and close colleagues; social media posts; casual chats.

Classroom Application

Phrases like *'am Start sein'* or *'Pillepalle'* thrive here. Encourage use in role-plays.



Informal Workplace

SELECTIVE USAGE

THE CONTEXT

Internal team chats and casual conversations with peers. Usage depends heavily on company culture.

⚠ Critical Nuance

- ✓ **Safe:** *'Das sagt mir nichts'* (seeking clarification).
- ✗ **Avoid:** Negative phrases like *'zur Schnecke machen'* towards superiors.



Formal Contexts

AVOIDANCE

THE CONTEXT

Official emails, client presentations, academic writing, or conversations with superiors/strangers.

The Rule

Explicitly teach students to avoid colloquialisms here to maintain professionalism.

~~zig-Mal~~ → sehr oft

Error Anticipation & Feedback

Teaching colloquialisms effectively involves more than just presenting definitions; it requires anticipating and addressing the mistakes learners are likely to make.

"Proactive teaching transforms potential frustration into learning moments."

01



Overuse & Register

THE PITFALL

Students learn a new phrase and use it in every possible situation, including inappropriate formal contexts.

THE STRATEGY

Use sorting activities to classify phrases as 'formal' or 'informal'.

Example: Contrast "Bist du auch am Start?" vs. "Kommst du auch mit?"

02



Literal Translation

THE PITFALL

Students attempt to translate components literally, leading to confusion (e.g., 'make someone into a snail').

THE STRATEGY

Treat each expression as a single 'chunk' vocabulary item.

Use visuals to anchor holistic meaning, bypassing literal translation traps.

03



Grammatical Mistakes

THE PITFALL

Incorrect syntax, especially with separable verbs (*spitzkriegen*) or prepositional phrases.

THE STRATEGY

Provide sentence frames and conduct drills on verb position.

"Ich habe _____
spitzgekriegt."

Assessment *Criteria*

To fairly and consistently evaluate students' use of colloquial expressions, a clear assessment framework is needed. This rubric ensures evaluation covers not just correctness but also social appropriateness.

10% ACCURACY

Correctly forms the expression (e.g., word order, separable prefixes).

Uses **correct grammar** (e.g., case with prepositions).

20% APPROPRIACY

Selects an expression that fits the **communicative function** and context.

Uses a **tone appropriate** for the simulated situation (e.g., doesn't use 'Pillepalle' in a way that sounds dismissive or rude).

30% FLUENCY

Integrates the expression into speech **naturally**, without unnatural pauses.

Maintains **conversational flow** during the task.

Meaning & Usage

Mastering these four expressions requires understanding both their literal definitions and their pragmatic context in daily conversation.

an etw. herumdoktern

To try to fix or improve something without the proper knowledge or a clear plan, often with negative or unsuccessful results.

"Du dokterst jetzt schon wochenlang an deinem kaputten Computer herum. Vielleicht solltest du dir einfach einen neuen kaufen."

Das sagt mir nichts

A common and polite way to say 'I don't know that,' 'That doesn't ring a bell,' or 'I'm not familiar with that.'

"Kennst du den Film 'Der ewige Kreis'?" — "Nee, der Titel sagt mir nichts."

zig

A colloquial term for a large, indefinite number; equivalent to 'countless', 'tons of', or 'umpteen'.

"Ich habe dir schon zig Mal gesagt, dass du dein Zimmer aufräumen sollst!"

jemanden zur Schnecke machen

To criticize someone harshly, to scold or berate them severely.

"Der Chef hat Daniel wegen seines Fehlers richtig zur Schnecke gemacht."

Meaning

& Usage

EXAMPLES • PART 2/2

Deep dive into colloquialisms 5 through 8.
Understanding the nuance between a trivial matter and a harsh critique.

05 Pillepalle

Used to describe something as trivial, unimportant, or very easy to do.

"Diese Matheaufgabe ist total schwierig." — "Ach was, das ist doch pillepalle. Komm, ich zeige dir, wie man die rechnet."

07 etw. spitzkriegen

To find something out, often a secret or information that one wasn't supposed to know.

"Manuel hat irgendwie spitzgekriegt, dass wir eine Überraschungsparty für ihn planen."

06 am Start sein

To be present, available, and ready or motivated for an activity.

"Am Sonntag gehen wir zum Fußball. Bist du auch am Start?"

08 Lass gut sein!

An expression used to suggest stopping an activity, often because it's pointless or enough has been done.

"Ich habe versucht, sie zu überzeugen, aber sie hört nicht zu." — "Lass gut sein! Offenbar ist sie nicht interessiert."

Form Focus & Variations

To use these expressions correctly, students must understand their grammatical forms and levels of formality.

INSTRUCTOR NOTE

Focus on common structural challenges like separable verbs and case patterns, as well as crucial usage notes on capitalization and register.

✂ Separable Verbs

spitzkriegen is a separable verb.

The prefix 'spitz-' goes to the end in the present tense.

*"Ich glaube, er **kriegt** etwas **spitz**."*

Past: "Er hat es **spitzgekreigt**."

A Capitalization

Pillepalle can be used as a noun and is then capitalized.

*"Kümmere dich nicht um diesen **Pillepalle**."*

📦 Prepositional Case

an etwas herumdoktern requires the dative case.

*"Sie doktert an **dem alten Radio** herum."*

(dem alten Radio = Dative)

≡ Levels of Formality

INFORMAL

am Start sein — Common in youth language.

NEUTRAL

Das sagt mir nichts — Wider range of contexts.

Controlled *Fill-in Items*

INSTRUCTIONS

Choose the correct expression from this lesson to complete each sentence.

1. Nach dem Fehler in seinem Bericht hat der Manager ihn _____.
2. Bei der Arbeit musste ich mich heute den ganzen Tag mit unwichtigem _____ beschäftigen.
3. Er hat irgendwie _____, wer der Überraschungsgast auf der Party sein wird.
4. Ich habe noch nicht von dieser Regisseurin gehört. Ihr Name _____.
5. 'Ich habe Carina jetzt schon drei Mal gefragt, ob sie mit mir essen gehen will. Sie hatte immer andere Pläne. Ob ich sie noch mal fragen soll?' — '_____! Sie ist offensichtlich nicht an dir interessiert.'
6. Wir gehen am Freitag ins Theater. Bist du auch _____?
7. Ich versuche schon seit Stunden, dieses Regal aufzubauen, aber es klappt nicht. Ich glaube, ich _____ nur daran _____.
8. Ich habe ihr schon _____ Mal gesagt, dass sie leiser sein soll.

Transformations & Paraphrases

INSTRUCTIONS

Rewrite the following sentences using the appropriate colloquial expression from the video.

 Register Shift: Formal → Colloquial

01 Sie gibt jedes Jahr viele tausend Euro für Kleidung aus.

→

02 'Zig'? Dieses Wort kenne ich nicht.

→

03 Der Lehrer hat den Schüler vor der ganzen Klasse stark kritisiert, weil er seine Hausaufgaben nicht gemacht hatte.

→

04 Die deutsche Grammatik ist nicht schwierig.

→

05 Ich habe ihr schon sehr oft gesagt, dass sie ihr Zimmer aufräumen soll.

→

06 Wir gehen am Freitag ins Theater. Kommst du auch mit?

→

07 Ich versuche schon seit 3 Monaten, mein Fahrrad zu reparieren.

→

Role-Play Cards

Structured scenarios designed to encourage the active, authentic use of target colloquial expressions in context.

TASK GUIDE

Use these scenarios for pair or small group role-playing. Each group should try to use at least **three** of the target expressions in their short dialogue.

Scenario 1: The Frustrating Project (WORKPLACE)



PERSON A

You are frustrated because you've been trying to fix a bug in the software for days without success. You feel you are just **herumdoktern**.

PERSON B

You think the bug is **Pillepalle** and offer to help. You also ask if Person A is **am Start** for a coffee break.

Scenario 2: The Surprise Party (FRIENDS)



PERSON A

You are planning a surprise party. You are worried that the guest of honor might have **spitzgekrigt** the plan.

PERSON B

You reassure Person A that **zig** people are coming. You ask about a band, but the name **sagt dir nichts**.

Scenario 3: Giving Up (UNIVERSITY)



PERSON A

You are complaining that a professor **zur Schnecke gemacht** a classmate in the last lecture.

PERSON B

You agree it was unfair. You suggest Person A should **Lass gut sein** and stop worrying about it before the exam.

Mini-Dialogues *for* Performance

Instructions for Students: In pairs, create a short dialogue (4-6 lines) based on one of the following situations. Your dialogue must include at least two colloquial expressions from this lesson.

01 Situation 1

Two friends are discussing a difficult task one of them has to do.

02 Situation 2

A colleague tells another colleague about a large number of emails they received.

03 Situation 3

One person invites another to an event this weekend.



Peer Feedback

CHECKLIST FOR TEACHERS

- ✓ Did the dialogue include at least two target expressions?
- ✓ Were the expressions used correctly in the sentence?
- ✓ Did the expressions fit the context of the dialogue?
- ✓ Was the dialogue easy to understand and follow?

Quick Quiz

PART 1: MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. What does it mean to make 'jemanden zur Schnecke'?
 - a) to praise someone kindly
 - b) to criticize someone harshly
 - c) to convince someone not to stress
2. If a topic 'sagt dir nichts', it means:
 - a) you know about it, but aren't interested
 - b) you are not familiar with the topic
 - c) you heard about it, but don't remember well

PART 2: FILL IN THE BLANK

3. This task is not a big deal, it's absolute _____.
4. I've told you _____ times to be quiet!
5. He somehow _____, that we're planning a party for him.

 Recall the expressions from the Lexicon.

All Answers & Rationale

Consolidated solutions for review. Instructors may use this to clarify rationale and address final questions.

1 Controlled Fill-in

Recalling Slide 9

- 01. ...zur Schnecke gemacht.
- 02. ...Pillepalle...
- 03. ...spitzgekrigelt...
- 04. ...sagt mir nichts.
- 05. 'Lass gut sein!'
- 06. ...am Start?
- 07. ...doktere...herum.
- 08. ...zig...

2 Transformations

Recalling Slide 10

- 01. Sie gibt jedes Jahr **zigtausend** Euro für Kleidung aus.
- 02. 'Zig'? Dieses Wort **sagt mir nichts**.
- 03. Der Lehrer hat den Schüler...**zur Schnecke gemacht**...
- 04. Die deutsche Grammatik ist **pillepalle**.
- 05. Ich habe ihr schon **zig mal** gesagt, dass sie ihr Zimmer aufräumen soll.
- 06. Wir gehen am Freitag ins Theater. Bist du auch **am Start**?
- 07. Ich **doktere** schon seit 3 Monaten an meinem Fahrrad **herum**.

3 Quick Quiz

Recalling Slide 13

- 01. **MULTIPLE CHOICE**
b) to criticize someone harshly
- 02. **MULTIPLE CHOICE**
b) you are not familiar with the topic
- 03. Keyword **Pillepalle**
- 04. Keyword **zig**
- 05. Keyword **spitzgekrigelt**