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## Review of Pausell, Patricia Ryan, Ann-Katrin Gramberg, and Karin U. H. Evans, German for Business and Economics

David A. Wright  
*University of Texas at Austin*

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## REVIEWS

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Five years after its first appearance, *German for Business and Economics* is now available in a second, partially revised and updated edition. Intended for English-speaking students in third-year, fourth-year and graduate-level German programs, the two-volume combined textbook and workbook set, Volume 1: *Die Volks- und Weltwirtschaft* (Economics), and Volume 2: *Die Betriebswirtschaft* (Business), offers a wide assortment of texts that can be adapted to meet a variety of interests and skill-level needs. Although not yet focusing on a wider range of international business skills, *German for Business and Economics* represents an invaluable study guide and resource for advanced students of business German preparing for the *Prüfung Wirtschaftsdeutsch International (PWD)*. On the whole, business German teachers would do themselves a favor by acquiring both volumes and becoming familiar with their content. The authors' presentation of key terminology and basic business and economics concepts clearly reflects their solid understanding of the language skills and knowledge areas that North American students will need to understand to conduct business successfully in Germany.

The text's structure is straightforward. Volumes 1 and 2 both contain three units with four chapters per unit, including three basic content chapters and a review chapter. Each content chapter contains four sections, the first three of which, *Lesetext 1*, *Hörtext*, and *Lesetext 2*, adhere to the commonly used preview-view-review methodology, and are supported by in-class preview and review exercises on transparency masters. Many of the graphs and charts used in the textbook come from *GLOBUS Infographik GmbH* (a German information service which publishes 28 new graphics every two weeks on various German and international topics; see [www.de/globus](http://www.de/globus)). Most of the exercises for each chapter, whether from the textbook, the transparency masters or the CD-ROM, consist of fixed-response items (matching, multiple-choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and short answer).

The core section of every chapter, *Lesetext 1*, consists of a non-authentic text and a series of *Übungen* designed to introduce the basic concepts and vocabulary for the entire chapter. This section typically culminates with a writing/discussion exercise (*Zum Schreiben und zur Diskussion*) that asks students to restate key concepts using target vocabulary. The *Hörtext* continues the theme of *Lesetext 1* and is accessible through the CD-ROM or audio cassette. The listening passage is either a non-authentic text or a modified-authentic text excerpted from an article or interview published in the German periodical *Wirtschaftswoche*, and read by a native German speaker. The readings and exercises in *Lesetext 2* are significantly more challenging than in the first two sections. These texts are selected from German business and economics books or periodicals and introduce socio-cultural topics to broaden the focus of discussions associated with *Lesetext 1* topics.

The final section of each content chapter alternately focuses on business communication (*Geschäftskommunikation*), discourse structures and grammar (*Discourse*), and German/American cultural assumptions and values (*Kulturverständnis*). In Volume 1, *Geschäftskommunikation* focuses on standard formats of resumés, memos, and business letters. In Volume 2, this section shifts its focus to oral business communications (e.g. roundtable discussions with argumentation, job interviews, and telephone conversations). *Discourse* contains explicit exercises relating to six frequently occurring characteristics of German business language (long sentences, initial element variation, passive voice, functional verb combinations, extended modifiers, and the subjunctive I). *Kulturverständnis* contains English language activities designed to enhance cross-cultural awareness.

The review chapter of each unit is composed of exercises designed to prepare students for the *PWD*. Although the *PWD* has been redesigned (the *PWD Neu* will be given in the U.S. for the first time in April 2001), the new test is on the same language skill level as the test that has been administered so far. The Goethe-Institut reports that, except for organization, the section *Specialized Technical Competence* from the *PWD Neu* coincides with *Stoffplan* from the *PWD Alt* (see [www.goethe.de/uk/ney/enswird.htm](http://www.goethe.de/uk/ney/enswird.htm) for a comparison of the *PWD Alt* and the *PWD Neu*). The two new sections of the test, *Method* and *Social Competence*, focus not on business-related linguistic skills and vocabulary, but on communicative and socio-linguistic skills relating to

professional situations. I believe that the sections *Geschäftskommunikation* and *Discourse in German for Business and Economics* remain a good place to begin preparing students for the test's new skill areas.

While this textbook is an excellent aid in preparing students for the *PWD*, its language and culture scope do not cover many of the bases currently considered important in more general foreign language education contexts. Considering that the authors state that their material's primary objective is to increase language *and* cultural proficiency, it is surprising that the authors chose not to adopt a more current language-learning paradigm (e.g. the *National Standards*, 1996) on which to anchor materials development. Instead, the activities in this textbook too-often utilize a narrow, four-skills approach to language and rarely ask students to do more than manipulate language forms, regurgitate information or learn isolated sets of facts and discrete cultural information.

This problem may not be the textbook's alone. The *PWD* has been criticized for focusing too heavily on retrieval skills and for failing to assess higher order thinking skills, such as problem solving. For example, instead of asking students to compare, contrast, or connect the *GLOBUS-Schaubilder* to current events or issues, activities in *German for Business and Economics* generally focus on asking students to simply restate key information using the target vocabulary. These exercises typically lack synthetic activities reflecting target-culture perspectives. In one activity, *Harrys erster Arbeitstag* (Chapter 19), the authors use a short text written for the textbook (and hence not authentic) to portray the first day of a North American business executive, Harry, on a new assignment in a German corporation. Unfortunately, Harry is stereotyped negatively, which does not open up the text's simplistic descriptions of German "cultural norms." Moreover, nowhere are students asked to question the text's misinformation. While introducing stereotypes is a great idea for initiating activities to engender intercultural thinking, this exercise (and others like it in the textbook) ignores the most important learning issue of all, which is how to process information in target-culture sources in a way that does not promote cultural misunderstandings. To be sure, the *Zum Kulturverständnis* section at the end of Chapter 19 presents two additional texts that provide more in-depth portrayals of the issues presented in *Harrys erster Arbeitstag*. But

again, fairly random information about work conditions is presented as factual; nowhere are students asked to consider other target-culture sources that might offer other perspectives on this kind of intercultural clash. Instead, students are asked to discuss the German text as though it represented the opinion of *all* Germans. I would argue that the future viability of foreign-language education will increasingly depend on our ability to portray culture not as fact, but as a strategic and affective process. Even the new sections of the PWD are based on negotiation abilities, not on reified information.

These problems extend to the cross-platform CD-ROM featuring contextualized lessons, which connects audios of native-speaker readings with texts and full-color, full-screen images. The program is easy to navigate and offers students additional computer-graded listening text exercises. Exercise results can be printed or saved on floppy disk for later review by the teacher. In spite of its ease of use, it still focuses on vocabulary and business terminology, not on strategic negotiations and higher order thinking skills.

*German for Business and Economics* has significant strengths in bringing together a wide variety of topics that have multi-level adaptability. Business German teachers will appreciate the broad treatment of major German business topics and terminology, which are illustrated with ample exercises. The linguistic content is remarkably well-selected and accurate, which adds considerably to the value of the textbook as a main resource in upper-division business German courses. Teachers should note that the spelling reform is not yet accommodated in this edition. Setting aside its reticence to break out of four-skills paradigms and treat culture as a strategic and affective process, *German for Business and Economics* is an excellent foundation for students wanting to prepare for the PWD.

David A. Wright  
*The University of Texas at Austin*

Maruyama, Doi, Iguchi, Kuwabara, Onuma, Yasui and Yokosuka.  
*Writing Business Letters in Japanese*. Tokyo: Japan Times, 1999.

Learning Japanese business letters is unquestionably a daunting task for a student of Japanese, for it encompasses all aspects of the Japanese