

Apartment Hunting: Introduction and Vocabulary

“A man's home is his castle” is a saying in English. And, it's so common that I even hear people say it in Germany! Do you think it's true? Is your home your castle? Just like I think the clothes I wear show who I am, I think that where I live is an extension of my personality. In Germany, it's possible to paint your apartment the way you want, and I like to pick colors that reflect who I am. And, of course, the things I choose to have in the apartment also show who I am.

There are a lot of things that are important to me in an apartment. The size and the **rent**, of course, but also the **neighborhood**. I want to have a park or river **nearby** and—because I don't want to spend a long time going to work every day—I want to live **close to** my work. My wife has her own requirements for an apartment: she wants a **balcony** and likes high **ceilings**, as well as wanting a **two-bedroom apartment**, so there's room for the baby when it comes. When you add the things that I want to the things that my wife wants. . . well, you can see why **apartment hunting** is difficult for us!

But, we have our apartment hunt behind us. That is, it's in the past. We've found our next apartment, and we will be **moving** in May. To celebrate our success we will be talking about apartments and neighborhoods this week.

Today, we're starting with the week's vocabulary.

Vocabulary

Apartment Hunting / Apartment Hunt: When you look or search for an apartment, we say you're apartment hunting in American English. The phrase makes it clear that it's as hard to find a good apartment as it is to find a deer in the forest. . . and the apartment is even harder to catch. The time and energy you spend apartment hunting is what we call your apartment hunt. Because Christine and I have been looking for over half a year, I would say we had a long apartment hunt.

Neighborhood / Neighbor: If you live in an apartment, the other people who live in your building are you neighbors. Neighbors are the people who live close to you. When I was a boy, my family lived in a house, and we spent a lot of time with the people in the houses on either side of us. They were our neighbors, too! And, just like neighbors are people who live near you, your neighborhood is the part of your town that is near your home. Many neighborhoods have names: the Bronx in New York City is a famous neighborhood, and so is Manhattan.

Close to: This is a relative measure, because *your* idea of a lot of time is not the same as *my* idea of a lot of time. But, if I don't need a lot of time to go from my apartment to work, my apartment is close to my work. I want to have a grocery store close to my apartment, too, because I don't

want to have to carry the things that I buy for a long time! The opposite of close to is 'far from.'

Nearby: The word nearby means simply that something is **close to** where you are right now, or where you're standing. I can say “there is a park **close to** my apartment” or, to talk faster, I can say “there's a park nearby.” The two words mean the same thing, but when you say nearby, you don't have to say what something is **close to**. You assume the person listening—or reading—understands: “I want to have **public transportation nearby**” or “I don't want to have my in-laws nearby” both make sense, if you're talking about an apartment!

A **green neighborhood:** Are there a lot of trees in your **neighborhood**? Does your **neighborhood** have a lot of parks? Maybe a river? Then you have a green neighborhood. Green is the color of nature, and a green neighborhood is one where you feel like you live close to nature! Having a green neighborhood is very important to me! After all, I spend a lot of time outside walking with my dog.

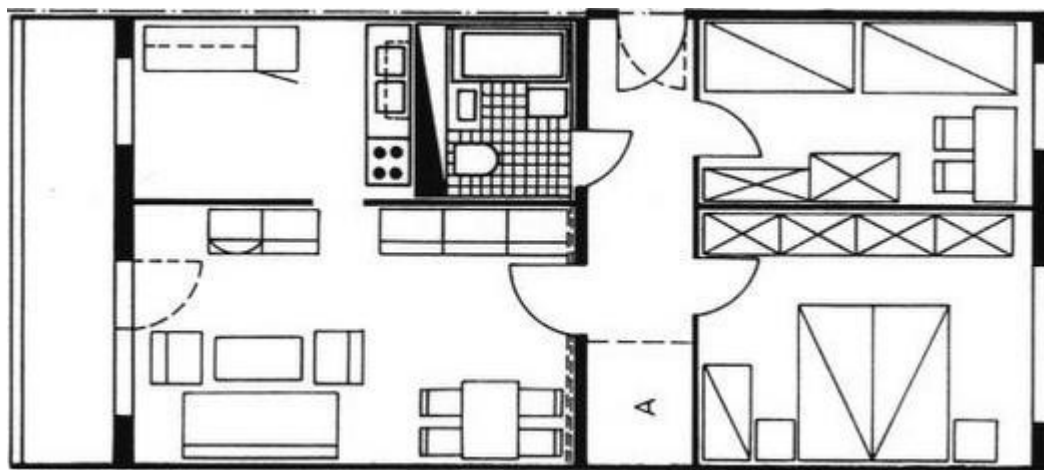
Public transportation: Is it easy to move around your city without a car? Is walking the only possibility? Or are there buses, trams, maybe even subways and trains? All of these possibilities are called public transportation. 'Transportation' is a way to go from one place to another. And 'public' means anyone can use it. In Dresden, there is very good public transportation and I almost never have to drive a car in the city! For me, the greatest thing about public transportation is that I can almost always read a book on the way to work. I think it's a very relaxing way to go to work!

Traffic: Most of us live near streets. If our car is the only one that drives on the street, it isn't a problem, is it? But, if hundreds of cars drive by every hour, it can get pretty loud, especially when we're trying to sleep. Then we say there is too much traffic. Of course, traffic can refer to the cars, the trucks, the trams and even the trains that are near your apartment. Normally, we say that there is too much traffic when it's too loud, or it makes your neighborhood **unsafe**. (For example, for small children.)

Safe: Where we live now, my wife doesn't like to walk alone at night. She takes the dog, or she wants me to come with her. She can't tell you *what* she thinks will happen, she just has a feeling that *something* could happen. She doesn't feel safe. A **neighborhood** is safe when you don't have to worry about something happening to you when you're on the street. Safe can mean there is no crime. But a **neighborhood** with a lot of **traffic** can be unsafe (the opposite of safe) if you have small children!

Floor plan: When you look for an apartment online, it's difficult to imagine how big all the rooms are just by looking at photos. That's why—if you're lucky—you'll be able to find a 'map' of the apartment. This 'map' or floor plan looks like someone photographed the apartment from above,

without **ceiling**, of course! The floor plan will show how big the kitchen is relative to the living room, and how big the bathroom is. I think it's important to see floor plans when I'm **apartment hunting**. It's the only way to imagine if I can live in an apartment or not. Sometimes, the floor plan is also called the 'layout.'



The floor plan of our apartment now

Balcony: If you live in a house, you probably have a 'yard,' a grassy area where you can go for fresh air when the weather is good. But if you live in an apartment, you probably don't have a yard where you can go for fresh air. So, where can you go for fresh air? In some apartments, there's nowhere to go. But a lot of apartments have a 'room' with one or more wall missing, for fresh air. This balcony is normally not very big: it's just big enough to sit and enjoy the sun on a summer's day. Or, if you have a guest who smokes in a non-smoking apartment, you might send him to the balcony to smoke. I like to grow tomatoes on my balcony.

Floor / Ground floor / Second floor: A building without any stairs only has one floor: the ground floor. But, if you walk into a building and go up a **flight of stairs**, you're on the second floor in English. A 'floor' refers to the "levels" in a building. Unfortunately, floors are counted differently in Britain and in the U.S. In the U.S., the ground floor is also the first floor. The next floor up is the second floor. In Britain, there is the ground floor and the next floor up is the first floor. 'Storey' is another word for a 'floor.'

Flight of stairs: A 'stair' is the same thing as a step. It's somewhere between five and twenty-five centimeters high. So, obviously, you need more than one stair to go between **floors** in a building! How many? One flight. A flight of stairs is all the stairs connecting one **floor** to the next. You will often hear native English speakers say "upstairs" and "downstairs," but when I want to make it clear just how many stairs I'm talking about, I say "I have to carry my groceries up six flights of stairs." And "falling down a few stairs" is not as bad as "falling down a flight of stairs."

Elevator: Imagine if you lived on the hundredth **floor** of a building. Would you want to walk a hundred **flights of stairs** every day? I wouldn't! That's why there's the elevator, it's a little room that carries you between **floors**. You simply walk into the elevator, push a button for the hundredth **floor**, and it carries you all the way up! In England, they call the elevator the 'lift.'

Ceiling: Imagine you are sitting in your house or apartment—maybe you really are—now look up. What do you see? Can you see the sky? Of course not. You see the ceiling. The ceiling is the 'cover' to an apartment: it's the first thing between you and the sky. . . or the next **floor**. Ceilings can be important in an apartment: I like high ceilings—ceilings that are three or more meters above the **floor**—but they make an apartment expensive to **heat** in the winter!

Floor: Imagine now that you're standing in your apartment. Are you standing on grass? Probably not. You're standing on the floor. This is the more common meaning of the word 'floor:' the 'bottom' of an apartment. Wood floors look really nice in an apartment, but they require a lot of work. Carpeted floors are nice to walk on if you're not wearing shoes, but I always spill coffee on them!

Heat: In the summer it is hot. In Dresden, it can get to thirty degrees Celsius and higher! And in the winter it is cold. Here, we've had negative thirty degrees Celsius! Of course, that's only outside. In our apartment, it's around twenty degrees Celsius. That's because we have a heater: a machine that makes our apartment warmer. Or, we heat our apartment. As energy gets more expensive, how you heat your apartment will be more and more important. Electric heat, for example, is very expensive. And so is gas heat. Oil heat is common in Germany, but we all know how the oil prices change! My favorite heat comes from a fireplace, a place where you can make a wood fire in your home.

Bedroom / Two bedroom apartment: If you look at our apartment now in the **floorplan**, you'll see that we have a living room, and two bedrooms, as well as a kitchen and bathroom. In the U.S., when we count rooms, we don't count the kitchen and bathroom. And we don't count the living room. We'd say that we have a two-bedroom apartment. And that's even though we don't use the second room as a bedroom. We use it more as a study: a place to keep books and read. It's almost our private library. Still, there are one-bedroom apartments and, of course, three-bedroom apartments.

Rent: My apartment isn't my property. It belongs to a company in Dresden that makes me pay money every month to use the apartment. The money I pay is the rent for my apartment. Our rent isn't very high: but it certainly seems as though rent is always too much, doesn't it? You can pay rent for an apartment, but also for a house or a car! When we go **apartment hunting**, the rent is one of my very first concerns!

Move: Imagine you find an apartment just as nice as the one you have now, but with half the **rent**. You decide to live in the new apartment. Can you bring all the things you have in your apartment now in your car? I can't. Getting our things from one apartment to the next is a lot of work: we have a lot of things! The whole process is called moving. Christine and I will move into a new apartment in May. That means we'll pack all of our stuff into boxes, pack the boxes and our furniture into a truck, and carry everything into the next apartment. Moving is a lot of work. Sometimes I think about hiring a company to help. It would be, of course, a moving company.

Quiet: When my favorite song comes in the radio, I turn the volume up as high as it will go. I like to hear that song very *loud*. Some music—piano music, for example—I like to hear, but not loud. I like to play it quietly. 'Quiet' is the opposite of 'loud.' It doesn't mean that you can't hear *anything*—the word for that is 'silent'—it only means that you can't hear very much. A quiet apartment won't have a lot of noise from **traffic**, and you won't be able to hear your neighbor's radio. A **neighborhood** can be quiet, too, if there's not a lot of **traffic** and the people don't make a lot of noise.