

16 Modal particles

Modal particles are words which express the speaker's attitude to what he or she is saying. They may, for example, convey agreement or disagreement, express surprise, or emphasize or tone down a statement. They are used extensively in German.

There are no standard translations for these particles. English tends to use intonation, stress, tag-questions (e.g. *isn't it?*) and phrases such as *you know* and *you see* as equivalents. The most common modal particles are listed below, with examples.

16.1 aber

■ **16.1.1** In exclamations **aber** indicates that something unexpected has happened:

Das ist **aber** schade! *Oh, what a shame!*
Bist du **aber** gewachsen! *Haven't you grown!*

■ **16.1.2** In statements and commands **aber** has the same meaning as the conjunction **aber** (*but*), expressing a contradiction or a reminder, but it is placed within the clause:

Du musst **aber** zur Polizei gehen. *You must go to the police, though.*
Pass **aber** auf dein Geld auf! *But do watch your money!*

16.2 auch

■ **16.2.1** In statements **auch** may confirm, correct or contradict a preceding phrase or sentence:

Er hat **auch** sehr viel geraucht. *He did smoke an awful lot.*
Das hat sie **auch** nicht gemeint. *But that's not what she meant.*

■ **16.2.2** In 'yes/no' questions **auch** seeks confirmation that something is/is not the case:

Haben Sie **auch** den Schlüssel abgegeben? *You did hand in the key, didn't you?*
Hast du dich **auch** nicht geirrt? *Are you sure you haven't made a mistake?*

■ **16.2.3** In questions with an interrogative word **auch** expresses a negative attitude:

Warum musste sie **auch** Lehrerin werden? *Why on earth did she have to become a teacher?*
Was kannst du **auch** von so jemandem erwarten? *Well, what do you expect from someone like that?*

16.3 bloß and nur

Bloß and **nur** are in most cases interchangeable.

■ **16.3.1** In imperatives **bloß** and **nur** often express warning and disapproval, but can also convey reassurance:

Versuch das **bloß/nur** noch mal! *Just you try that again!*
Mach dir **bloß/nur** keine Sorgen! *Just don't worry! (It'll be all right.)*

Only **nur** can be used in polite requests. It is friendly and reassuring:

Nehmen Sie **nur** Platz! *Please take a seat.*

■ **16.3.2** In rhetorical questions (those where one doesn't expect an answer) and in real questions, **bloß/nur** intensifies the importance of what is being said:

Wie kann man **bloß/nur** so rumlaufen? *How can anybody walk around dressed like that?*
Wie kann ich Ihnen **bloß/nur** dafür danken? *I really don't know how to thank you.*