
10 Dutch phrases you won't learn from a textbook, but will hear everywhere

Language Empowers · Find your voice in Dutch



Welkom!

Hallo,

Welcome and congratulations on taking this first step toward speaking Dutch with confidence.

I'm Gabi, founder of Language Empowers. I've spent over 20 years helping people find their voice in a new language, and if there's one thing I've learned, it's this: real fluency comes from the small, everyday interactions.

Using and understanding phrases people actually use with a neighbour, a colleague, or the person behind the counter will help you take your first steps. Because learning a language is all about doing!

This guide gives you ten phrases you won't find in a course book, but will hear everywhere once you start listening for them.

Enjoy, and welcome to Dutch as it's really spoken.

Gabi te Riele
Founder, Language Empowers



Hoi, hoe is het?

This is how Dutch people actually greet friends and colleagues, more often than "Hoe gaat het?" which you'll learn in most courses.

→ You say: Goed, en met jou?
(Good, and you?)



 *Advanced tip: swallow part of the last word and say "Hoi hoe ist?"*

Doe maar.

One of the most useful Dutch phrases and it has no direct English translation. It means "go ahead", "why not" or "sure, that's fine."

Wil je koffie? → You say: Doe maar.
Someone offers to help → You say: Doe maar.



Fun fact: There was a ska band in the 1980s called Doe maar that only sang in Dutch

Gezellig!

The most Dutch word there is. It doesn't translate to one English word, it describes a warm, pleasant feeling. A cozy evening, a nice chat, a fun gathering, all of this can be "gezellig."

Someone asks you to come over for dinner. → You say "Gezellig!"



Advanced tip: when you say goodbye say "Het was gezellig!"

Zeg het maar.

Say it but! What?!? You'll hear this from a barista, a cashier or at the market when it's your turn. Don't translate, it means "What would you like?".

Zeg het maar.

→ You say: Een kilo bananen, alsjeblieft.



 *Advanced tip: whenever "maar" doesn't translate as "but" it's like a "softener" to make the message kind.*

Doei!

"Doei" is the everyday goodbye used by neighbours, shopkeepers, colleagues, everyone really.

Often combined: "Nou, doei!"
(Okay then, bye!)



Advanced tip: pay attention to the intonation the Dutch use when saying this word. It conveys the feeling of the get-together.

Alsjeblieft

You probably learned this word means "please", but that's only half the story. In daily life, Dutch people say it constantly when handing you something, where English might say "here you go."

Een koffie, alsjeblieft.
Alsjeblieft, hier is je bonnetje (receipt).



Advanced tip: More and more people use "alsjeblieft" also instead of "Geen dank" (My pleasure).

Gaat wel.

The honest answer to "How are you?" when things are fine, not bad, just okay. Dutch people are direct like this; there's no pressure to say "I'm great!" if you're not.

Hoe is het?

→ You say: Gaat wel, en met jou?



💡 *Advanced tip: you can use this, in case someone asks for your opinion on something, like the colour of a wall. "Wat denk je van deze kleur? Gaat wel." No need to sugarcoat it. 😊*

Is goed.

A short, casual way to agree to something "that's fine" or "sounds good." Short for "Dat is goed". You'll hear it constantly in quick exchanges, texts, and everyday conversations.

Ik ga naar de supermarkt.
→ You say: Is goed.



Advanced tip: in text messages people might write sgoed.

Spreek je Engels?

The phrase you need when you get stuck: "Do you speak English?" Most Dutch people will switch immediately without a second thought, nobody will mind that you asked

The formal version is:
Spreekt u Engels?



Fact: not everyone speaks English well, so be prepared to try in Dutch, especially outside the Randstad.

Nou, tot dan!

That small word "nou" at the start is very Dutch, a kind of verbal transition you won't find explained in any textbook, but it makes conversations sound much more natural.

Nou, tot dan!
→ You say: Ja, tot dan!



Advanced tip: The "nou" is also a way to let the other person know you want to finish the conversation and leave.

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