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## Life of an astronaut – Alexander Gerst's blog

17 February 2014

In 100 days, German European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Alexander Gerst will be launched to the International Space Station ISS with NASA astronaut Reid Wiseman and cosmonaut commander Maxim Surayev. Strapped to a seat on top of 274 tons of rocket fuel, their Soyuz launcher will propel them to the orbital outpost at speeds of 28,000 kilometres per hour in under seven hours.

The launch, currently scheduled for 28 May, will mark the start of Alexander's Blue Dot mission as part of Space Station Expedition 40/41. He will remain for six months on the world's only permanently staffed orbital laboratory.

After being selected as an ESA astronaut in 2009 and completing basic astronaut training, Gerst was nominated for his first mission to the ISS on 18 September 2011, during his visit to German Aerospace Day, organised by the German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR) and ESA in Cologne. Since then, he has been training for his mission. While he is based at ESA's European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, Germany, his spaceflight adventure has already taken him to Canada, the United States, Japan and Russia, where he has trained with robots, spacecraft, in hypergravity and learned survival techniques.

Alexander now invites you to follow his training and understand the life of an astronaut in his personal blog. He explains why he needs skills in science, engineering and medicine as well as orbital mechanics, flying and Russian.

"I want to convey what it feels like to travel to space and see our Earth from a distance, appearing like a blue spaceship carrying all of us through the Universe. I invite you to come with me on this trip!" says Alexander.

A volcanologist by trade, the astronaut is fascinated by the unknown and by exploration. He chose the theme 'shaping the future' for the Blue Dot mission.

"Human spaceflight not only gives us a unique perspective to better understand the planet on which we live, but also who we are. We are a species of explorers, and we are shaping our own future," Alexander explains.

His mission will include experiments on plasma, robotics, metals as well as educational experiments involving moving soap bubbles with sound.

Gerst is the second of ESA's class of 2009 to fly to space and the third German, after Thomas Reiter (Astrolab, 2006) and Hans Schlegel (Columbus, 2008), who will live and work aboard the ISS.

Join Alexander in his blog during the run-up to his mission launch and find out why astronauts must train to "be scientists, janitors, drivers, cleaners, doctors, fire-fighters, engineers and guinea pigs".

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### Contacts

DLR Web Portal Team  
DLR German Aerospace Center  
Tel.: +49 2203 601-2116  
webportal@dlr.de

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### En route to space: Astronaut Alexander Gerst during training



German astronaut Alexander Gerst will embark on his six-month mission to the ISS in May 2014. In this image, he is training for future spacewalks.

Credit: NASA.

### ISS mission announced on German Aerospace Day



The then Minister of Economy Philipp Rösler and Svenja Schulze seen with DLR Chairman Johann-Dietrich Wörner and ESA Astronaut Alexander Gerst on 18 September 2011.

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