

# German Grammar Guide

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## der, die, das — A Complete Guide to German Noun Genders

Every German noun carries a gender — masculine, feminine or neuter — and that gender decides which article it takes. There is no way to work it out from the object itself: a *table* is masculine, a *lamp* is feminine, a *window* is neuter, and none of that follows from what the things are. The gender is a property of the word, not the object, which is why native speakers learn it as part of the noun rather than as a rule.

**The practical advice:** never learn a noun on its own. Learn *der Tisch*, not *Tisch*. The article is part of the word.

### The three articles

German has one definite article that changes shape by gender, and it changes again by case. In the nominative — the form you meet first — it looks like this:

| GENDER    | DEFINITE   | INDEFINITE | EXAMPLE                  |
|-----------|------------|------------|--------------------------|
| masculine | <i>der</i> | ein        | der Tisch — the table    |
| feminine  | <i>die</i> | eine       | die Lampe — the lamp     |
| neuter    | <i>das</i> | ein        | das Fenster — the window |
| plural    | <i>die</i> | —          | die Tische — the tables  |

Notice that masculine and neuter share the same indefinite article, *ein*. That is not laziness on German's part: the two genders overlap in several places, and telling them apart often depends on the ending of the word rather than the article in front of it.

### Endings that give the gender away

Roughly forty per cent of German nouns announce their gender through their ending. These patterns are reliable enough to be worth memorising, and they cover a large share of the vocabulary you meet at A1 and A2.

#### Almost always feminine

| ENDING  | EXAMPLE                 | MEANING     |
|---------|-------------------------|-------------|
| -ung    | <i>die Wohnung</i>      | flat        |
| -heit   | <i>die Freiheit</i>     | freedom     |
| -keit   | <i>die Möglichkeit</i>  | possibility |
| -schaft | <i>die Freundschaft</i> | friendship  |
| -ion    | <i>die Nation</i>       | nation      |
| -tät    | <i>die Universität</i>  | university  |
| -ei     | <i>die Bäckerei</i>     | bakery      |
| -ie     | <i>die Energie</i>      | energy      |

The *-ung* group alone accounts for hundreds of nouns, and it is fully productive: any verb can be turned into an *-ung* noun, and the result is always feminine. *wohnen* gives *die Wohnung*, *rechnen* gives *die Rechnung*, *meinen* gives *die Meinung*.

#### Almost always neuter

| ENDING | EXAMPLE             | MEANING    |
|--------|---------------------|------------|
| -chen  | <i>das Mädchen</i>  | girl       |
| -lein  | <i>das Fräulein</i> | young lady |
| -ment  | <i>das Dokument</i> | document   |
| -um    | <i>das Museum</i>   | museum     |
| -ma    | <i>das Thema</i>    | topic      |

**das Mädchen** is the classic example of grammatical gender overriding meaning. A girl is obviously female, but *-chen* is a diminutive ending and every diminutive is neuter. The ending wins.

#### Almost always masculine

| ENDING      | EXAMPLE                 | MEANING    |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------|
| -er (agent) | <i>der Lehrer</i>       | teacher    |
| -ling       | <i>der Frühling</i>     | spring     |
| -ismus      | <i>der Kapitalismus</i> | capitalism |
| -or         | <i>der Motor</i>        | engine     |
| -ant        | <i>der Elefant</i>      | elephant   |

Days, months and seasons are masculine — *der Montag, der Januar, der Sommer* — as are most weather words: *der Regen, der Schnee, der Wind*.

### Compound nouns take the gender of the last word

This is the single most useful rule in the whole topic, because German builds compounds constantly and the rule has almost no exceptions.

*die Hand* + *der Schuh* gives **der Handschuh** — a glove is masculine because *Schuh* is. *der Tisch* + *die Lampe* gives **die Tischlampe**. However long the compound, only the final element matters: *die Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft* is feminine because *Gesellschaft* is.

This means learning one noun's gender often gives you dozens for free.

### How the article changes with case

The article is not fixed. It shifts depending on the noun's job in the sentence, and this is where most learners feel the ground move. The full picture:

| CASE      | MASCULINE       | FEMININE | NEUTER   | PLURAL          |
|-----------|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Nominativ | <i>der</i>      | die      | das      | die             |
| Akkusativ | <b>den</b>      | die      | das      | die             |
| Dativ     | <i>dem</i>      | der      | dem      | <b>den</b> (+n) |
| Genitiv   | <i>des</i> (+s) | der      | des (+s) | der             |

The good news is how little actually changes. Feminine and neuter are identical in the nominative and accusative, so the only difference in the accusative is masculine *der* becoming **den**. If you learn one thing about the accusative, learn that.

### Words that follow the same pattern

*ein, kein* and the possessives *mein, dein, sein, ihr, unser, euer* all take the same endings as the definite article, with one wrinkle: in the masculine nominative and the neuter nominative and accusative they take no ending at all. *ein Tisch, ein Fenster* — but *einen Tisch* in the accusative.

### How to actually learn them

Gender is not learned by rule alone. The endings above cover a good share of the vocabulary, compounds cover more, and the rest is exposure. What works:

**Learn the article with the noun, every time.** Write *die Tür* in your notes, never *Tür*. If you learn the bare noun you will have to relearn it later with the article attached.

**Say the noun in a short phrase.** *Ich sehe den Tisch* fixes both the gender and the accusative form in one go, and phrases stick better than isolated words.

**Drill the ones you get wrong, not the ones you know.** Repetition of things you already have right feels productive and is not. The practice app tracks which nouns you miss and brings them back.

## German Noun Plurals — die Hunde, die Frauen, die Kinder

German has no single plural ending. There are five main patterns, an umlaut that may or may not join them, and a group of nouns that change nothing at all. Which one a noun takes is a property of the word — but gender predicts a great deal, so the system is far less arbitrary than it first appears.

### The five endings

| ENDING           | EXAMPLE                        | TYPICAL OF                            |
|------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>-en / -n</b>  | <i>die Frau → die Frauen</i>   | most feminine nouns                   |
| <b>-e</b>        | <i>der Hund → die Hunde</i>    | many masculine and neuter             |
| <b>-er</b>       | <i>das Kind → die Kinder</i>   | mostly neuter, usually with an umlaut |
| <b>-s</b>        | <i>das Auto → die Autos</i>    | loanwords and abbreviations           |
| <b>no ending</b> | <i>der Lehrer → die Lehrer</i> | masculine and neuter in -er, -en, -el |

### Gender predicts the pattern

**Feminine nouns take -n or -en** almost without exception, and they never take an umlaut. Since the feminine endings are themselves predictable — anything in *-ung*, *-heit*, *-keit*, *-schaft* or *-ion* is feminine — a large share of German plurals can be worked out rather than memorised.

die Wohn**ung** → die Wohnung**en** · die Frei**heit** → die Freiheiten**en** · die Nation**en** → die Nation**en**

Feminine nouns ending in **-in** double the n before the ending: *die Lehrerin → die Lehrerinnen*, *die Ärztin → die Ärztinnen*. This group is large, because it covers the feminine form of every profession.

### The nouns that change nothing

Masculine and neuter nouns ending in **-er**, **-en** or **-el** usually add no ending at all. Only the article tells you it is plural.

*der Lehrer → die Lehrer* · *das Fenster → die Fenster* · *der Löffel → die Löffel*

Some of this group take an umlaut instead of an ending: *der Vater → die Väter*, *der Bruder → die Brüder*, *der Garten → die Gärten*.

### The umlaut

The stem vowels **a**, **o**, **u** and **au** can shift to **ä**, **ö**, **ü**, **äu** in the plural, usually alongside an ending.

*der Mann → die Männer* · *die Hand → die Hände* · *der Baum → die Bäume* · *das Haus → die Häuser*

It never happens to **e** or **i**, and never to a feminine noun taking **-en**. So *die Frau* stays *die Frauen*, not *die Fräuen*.

### -s is for borrowed words

The smallest group, and the easiest to spot: *das Auto*, *das Hotel*, *das Baby*, *der Chef*, *das Sofa*, *die Kamera*. If the word looks like it came from English, French or Italian, it probably takes **-s**. Abbreviations do too: *der Lkw → die Lkws*.

### The article never varies

Whatever the ending, the plural article is **die** in the nominative and accusative — for every gender. That is one of the few places where German gets simpler in the plural rather than harder.

| CASE             | ARTICLE    | NOUN                |
|------------------|------------|---------------------|
| <b>Nominativ</b> | <i>die</i> | die Kinder          |
| <b>Akkusativ</b> | <i>die</i> | die Kinder          |
| <b>Dativ</b>     | <i>den</i> | die Kinder <b>n</b> |
| <b>Genitiv</b>   | <i>der</i> | die Kinder          |

The dative plural adds **-n** to the noun — unless it already ends in **-n** or **-s**, in which case there is nothing to add: *den Frauen*, *den Autos*.

### How to learn them

**Learn the plural with the noun, like the article.** The most efficient form to memorise is all three parts at once: *der Hund*, *die Hunde*. Learning the singular alone means relearning it later.

**Use gender as your first guess.** Feminine? Almost certainly *-n* or *-en*. Masculine or neuter ending in *-er*, *-en*, *-el*? Probably no ending. That covers a large share of everyday vocabulary before you have memorised anything.

**Drill the ones you get wrong.** The practice app tracks which nouns you miss and brings them back rather than repeating the ones you already know.

## German Verb Conjugation — A Complete Guide

German verbs change their ending according to who is doing the action. English does this too, but barely — *I work, you work, he works* — where German changes the ending for almost every person. The endings are consistent enough that once you have the regular pattern, most verbs follow it.

### The regular present tense

Take the infinitive, remove the *-en*, and add the ending. *machen* becomes the stem *mach-*:

| PERSON        | ENDING | MACHEN | MEANING                |
|---------------|--------|--------|------------------------|
| ich           | -e     | mach   | I do                   |
| du            | -st    | machst | you do                 |
| er / sie / es | -t     | macht  | he/she/it does         |
| wir           | -en    | machen | we do                  |
| ihr           | -t     | macht  | you do (plural)        |
| sie / Sie     | -en    | machen | they / you do (formal) |

**Notice:** *wir* and *sie/Sie* are always identical to the infinitive, and *er* and *ihr* are always identical to each other. That is four of the six forms accounted for by two patterns.

### When a spelling change is needed

If the stem already ends in *-t*, *-d* or a difficult consonant cluster, an *-e-* slips in to make the word pronounceable. *arbeiten* would give the unsayable *arbeitst*, so it becomes **du arbeitest**, **er arbeitet**, **ihr arbeitet**. The same applies to *finden*, *reden*, *öffnen* and *rechnen*.

If the stem ends in *-s*, *-ß*, *-z* or *-x*, the *du* ending loses its *s*, because you cannot hear two in a row: *heißen* gives **du heißt**, not *heißst*. *tanzen* gives **du tanzt**.

### Stem-changing verbs

A group of common verbs change their stem vowel — but only in the *du* and *er/sie/es* forms. Everywhere else they behave normally, which is why the change is easy to miss.

| CHANGE  | INFINITIVE      | DU       | ER / SIE / ES |
|---------|-----------------|----------|---------------|
| e → i   | <i>sprechen</i> | sprichst | spricht       |
| e → i   | <i>geben</i>    | gibst    | gibt          |
| e → ie  | <i>sehen</i>    | siehst   | sieht         |
| e → ie  | <i>lesen</i>    | liest    | liest         |
| a → ä   | <i>fahren</i>   | fährst   | fährt         |
| a → ä   | <i>schlafen</i> | schläfst | schläft       |
| au → äu | <i>laufen</i>   | läufst   | läuft         |

These have to be learned individually — there is no way to predict from the infinitive whether a verb changes. The consolation is that they are among the most frequent verbs in the language, so exposure does most of the work.

### The verbs that break every rule

Three verbs are irregular enough to be worth learning as complete paradigms on day one, because you cannot say much without them.

|                  | SEIN (TO BE) | HABEN (TO HAVE) | WERDEN (TO BECOME) |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>ich</b>       | <i>bin</i>   | habe            | werde              |
| <b>du</b>        | <i>bist</i>  | hast            | wirst              |
| <b>er/sie/es</b> | <i>ist</i>   | hat             | wird               |
| <b>wir</b>       | <i>sind</i>  | haben           | werden             |
| <b>ihr</b>       | <i>seid</i>  | habt            | werdet             |
| <b>sie/Sie</b>   | <i>sind</i>  | haben           | werden             |

### Separable verbs

Many German verbs carry a prefix that detaches in a main clause and moves to the end. *aufstehen* becomes *ich stehe um sieben **auf***. The prefix is still part of the verb — it has simply travelled.

Common separable prefixes: *ab-*, *an-*, *auf-*, *aus-*, *ein-*, *mit-*, *nach-*, *vor-*, *zu-*, *zurück-*. Inseparable prefixes never move: *be-*, *emp-*, *ent-*, *er-*, *ge-*, *ver-*, *zer-*. *Ich **besuche** dich* keeps its prefix; *ich rufe dich **an*** does not.

### The Präteritum

The simple past. In speech, German mostly uses the Perfekt instead, so you meet the Präteritum more in writing and narrative — with the important exception of *sein*, *haben* and the modal verbs, which use it constantly even in conversation.

Regular verbs insert *-te-* before the ending: *ich machte*, *du machtest*, *er machte*. Strong verbs change their vowel instead and take no ending in the *ich* and *er* forms: *ich ging*, *du gingst*, *er ging*.

Even if you plan to speak in the Perfekt, learn *war* and *hatte* early. *Ich war müde* is far more natural than *ich bin müde gewesen*.

### Konjunktiv II

The would-form, used for politeness and hypotheticals. For most verbs it is built with *würde* plus the infinitive: *ich **würde** gern kommen*. A handful of high-frequency verbs have their own form and sound stilted with *würde*: *wäre*, *hätte*, *könnte*, *müsste*, *möchte*.

*Ich hätte gern einen Kaffee* is how you order politely. *Könnten Sie mir helfen?* is how you ask for help without sounding brusque. These two sentences alone repay learning the form.

### Which tense at which level

| LEVEL     | WHAT YOU NEED                                              |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A1</b> | <i>Präsens, including the stem-changers and sein/haben</i> |
| <b>A2</b> | <i>Präteritum of sein, haben and the modals</i>            |
| <b>B1</b> | <i>Konjunktiv II for politeness and hypotheticals</i>      |
| <b>B2</b> | <i>Konjunktiv I for reported speech</i>                    |

## The German Perfekt — Partizip II and haben vs sein

The Perfekt is the past tense Germans actually speak in. Where English distinguishes *I went* from *I have gone*, spoken German uses one form for both: *ich bin gegangen*. Getting the Perfekt right is what lets you talk about yesterday, and it needs two things — the right participle, and the right auxiliary verb.

### The shape of the sentence

The auxiliary takes the normal verb position; the participle goes to the very end. Everything else sits in between.

*Ich **habe** gestern einen Film **gesehen**.*  
I watched a film yesterday.

This bracket is a defining feature of German word order, and the participle waiting at the end is what gives spoken German its distinctive shape.

### Building the Partizip II

**Weak verbs** — the regular ones — take *ge-* at the front and *-t* at the end. *machen* gives **gemacht**, *kaufen* gives **gekauft**, *spielen* gives **gespielt**.

**Strong verbs** take *ge-* and *-en*, and usually change their stem vowel. *sehen* gives **gesehen**, *trinken* gives **getrunken**, *gehen* gives **gegangen**. These have to be memorised, but the list of genuinely common ones is shorter than it looks.

| TYPE   | INFINITIVE       | PARTIZIP II | MEANING     |
|--------|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| weak   | <i>machen</i>    | gemacht     | made / done |
| weak   | <i>arbeiten</i>  | gearbeitet  | worked      |
| strong | <i>trinken</i>   | getrunken   | drunk       |
| strong | <i>sprechen</i>  | gesprochen  | spoken      |
| strong | <i>schreiben</i> | geschrieben | written     |
| mixed  | <i>denken</i>    | gedacht     | thought     |
| mixed  | <i>bringen</i>   | gebracht    | brought     |

### When ge- is left out

Two groups of verbs never take *ge-*, and this trips up almost everyone at first.

**Verbs ending in -ieren.** *studieren* gives **studiert**, not *gestudiert*. The same for *telefonieren*, *fotografieren*, *reparieren*, *organisieren*.

**Verbs with an inseparable prefix** — *be-*, *emp-*, *ent-*, *er-*, *ge-*, *miss-*, *ver-*, *zer-*. *besuchen* gives **besucht**, *verstehen* gives **verstanden**, *erzählen* gives **erzählt**.

The reason is stress. German only adds *ge-* when the first syllable of the verb is stressed. In *stud**ie**ren* and *be**s**uchen* the stress falls later, so there is nowhere for *ge-* to attach.

### Separable verbs put ge- in the middle

When a separable prefix is involved, *ge-* slots in between the prefix and the stem. *aufstehen* gives **aufgestanden**, *einkaufen* gives **eingekauft**, *mitbringen* gives **mitgebracht**.

### haben or sein?

Most verbs take *haben*. Use *sein* only in three cases, and the first is by far the most common.

- 1. Movement from one place to another.** *gehen*, *kommen*, *fahren*, *fliegen*, *laufen*, *reisen* — *ich **bin** nach Berlin gefahren*.
- 2. A change of state.** *aufstehen*, *einschlafen*, *aufwachen*, *wachsen*, *sterben* — *er **ist** eingeschlafen*.
- 3. Three exceptions to memorise:** *sein*, *bleiben*, *werden*. *Ich **bin** zu Hause geblieben*.

| AUXILIARY    | WHEN                                                       | EXAMPLE                      |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>haben</b> | <i>everything else, and all verbs with a direct object</i> | Ich habe das Buch gelesen.   |
| <b>sein</b>  | <i>movement to a new place</i>                             | Ich bin nach Hause gegangen. |
| <b>sein</b>  | <i>change of state</i>                                     | Sie ist aufgewacht.          |
| <b>sein</b>  | <i>sein, bleiben, werden</i>                               | Er ist Arzt geworden.        |

### The same verb can take either

A few verbs switch auxiliary depending on whether they have a direct object. *fahren* with an object means *to drive something* and takes *haben*; without one it means *to travel* and takes *sein*.

Ich **bin** nach Köln gefahren. — I travelled to Cologne.

Ich **habe** das Auto gefahren. — I drove the car.

The same applies to *fliegen*, *schwimmen* and *ziehen*. If there is a direct object, it takes *haben*.

### Perfekt or Präteritum?

In conversation, use the Perfekt for almost everything. The exceptions are *sein*, *haben* and the modal verbs, where the simple past is more natural: say *ich war müde* rather than *ich bin müde gewesen*, and *ich hatte keine Zeit* rather than *ich habe keine Zeit gehabt*.

In writing — particularly narrative and journalism — the Präteritum dominates. Both are correct; the difference is register, not meaning.

## The German Cases — Nominativ, Akkusativ, Dativ, Genitiv

German marks what a noun is doing in a sentence by changing the article in front of it. English does this only with pronouns — *he* versus *him* — while German does it with every noun. There are four cases, and the article shifts in each.

### The four cases

| CASE      | ASKS             | ROLE                | EXAMPLE                     |
|-----------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nominativ | <i>wer? was?</i> | the subject         | <b>Der Mann</b> liest.      |
| Akkusativ | <i>wen? was?</i> | the direct object   | Ich sehe <b>den Mann</b> .  |
| Dativ     | <i>wem?</i>      | the indirect object | Ich helfe <b>dem Mann</b> . |
| Genitiv   | <i>wessen?</i>   | possession          | das Auto <b>des Mannes</b>  |

### The article table

Everything in this topic rests on one table. It is worth learning by heart, and it is smaller than it looks — many of the cells repeat.

|           | MASCULINE        | FEMININE | NEUTER    | PLURAL   |
|-----------|------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Nominativ | <i>der</i>       | die      | das       | die      |
| Akkusativ | <b>den</b>       | die      | das       | die      |
| Dativ     | <i>dem</i>       | der      | dem       | den (+n) |
| Genitiv   | <i>des (+es)</i> | der      | des (+es) | der      |

**The shortcut:** feminine and neuter never change between nominative and accusative. The only difference in the accusative is masculine *der* → **den**. If you learn one cell, learn that one.

### Where the case comes from

Three things decide the case, and knowing which one is in play is most of the skill.

#### 1. The verb

Most verbs take a direct object in the accusative: *Ich trinke **den** Kaffee*. But a specific group takes the dative instead, and these have to be learned as a list because nothing about them looks different:

*helfen, danken, gefallen, gehören, antworten, folgen, passen, schmecken, gratulieren, vertrauen, widersprechen.*

*Ich helfe **dem** Mann* — not *den*. The verb decides.

#### 2. A fixed preposition

Some prepositions always force the same case, whatever the meaning.

| ALWAYS AKKUSATIV            | ALWAYS DATIV                              | ALWAYS GENITIV              |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| durch, für, gegen, ohne, um | <i>aus, bei, mit, nach, seit, von, zu</i> | wegen, während, trotz       |
| bis, entlang                | <i>gegenüber, ab, außer</i>               | innerhalb, außerhalb, statt |

These are worth drilling until they are automatic. *mit* is always dative; there is nothing to think about.

#### 3. A two-way preposition

Nine prepositions take either case, and the choice carries meaning. This is the part learners find hardest, and the rule is genuinely simple once stated:

**Movement into a new place → Akkusativ.** Ask *wohin?*  
**Position, staying put → Dativ.** Ask *wo?*

The nine: *an, auf, hinter, in, neben, über, unter, vor, zwischen*.

*Ich gehe **in die** Küche.* — I go into the kitchen. Movement, accusative.

*Ich bin **in der** Küche.* — I am in the kitchen. Position, dative.

The test is not whether anything is moving in general, but whether the thing is *crossing into* the place named. Someone can be running hard — *ich laufe in dem Park* — and still take the dative, because the running happens inside the park rather than into it.

### When the verb overrides the rule

At B1 and beyond, some verbs fix the case of their preposition regardless of movement. *warten auf* always takes the accusative even though nothing moves: *Ich warte auf den Bus*. Likewise *sich freuen auf*, *denken an*, *sich erinnern an* — all accusative — while *bestehen auf*, *leiden unter* and *zweifeln an* take the dative.

These are learned as verb-plus-preposition pairs, not derived from meaning.

### Contractions

Some preposition-article pairs merge, and in writing the merged form is the standard one.

| FULL FORM | WRITTEN AS | FULL FORM | WRITTEN AS  |
|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| in dem    | <i>im</i>  | an dem    | <b>am</b>   |
| in das    | <i>ins</i> | an das    | <b>ans</b>  |
| zu dem    | <i>zum</i> | bei dem   | <b>beim</b> |
| zu der    | <i>zur</i> | von dem   | <b>vom</b>  |

Others — *aufs*, *fürs*, *durchs* — are common in casual writing but optional. A few, like *übers* and *unters*, belong to speech only; in writing keep *über das*.

### When to learn what

| LEVEL     | FOCUS                                                                               |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A2</b> | <i>Nominativ, Akkusativ, Dativ; the everyday prepositions; movement vs position</i> |
| <b>B1</b> | <i>Dative plural -n, the dative verbs, possessive Genitiv, wegen/während/trotz</i>  |
| <b>B2</b> | <i>Verb-preposition governance, the wider Genitiv prepositions</i>                  |

Genitiv is not part of the A2 syllabus and does not need to be rushed. It appears far less in speech than the other three, and the possessive can usually be expressed with *von* plus the dative instead.

## German Adjective Endings — All Three Declensions

An adjective standing in front of a noun takes an ending. Which one depends on three things at once — the case, the gender of the noun, and what comes before the adjective. That third factor is what gives German its three declension patterns, and it is the part learners usually miss.

The question is never just "which case?" It is **"which case, and is there an article doing the work already?"**

### 1. After der, die, das — the weak endings

The article has already marked the case, so the adjective does almost nothing. This entire pattern uses only two endings.

|                  | M   | F   | N   | PL  |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <b>Nominativ</b> | -e  | -e  | -e  | -en |
| <b>Akkusativ</b> | -en | -e  | -e  | -en |
| <b>Dativ</b>     | -en | -en | -en | -en |
| <b>Genitiv</b>   | -en | -en | -en | -en |

*der gute Mann · den guten Mann · mit dem guten Mann*

The shortcut: everything below the nominative row, and the whole plural column, is **-en**. Learn the top row and let -en cover the rest.

This pattern also applies after *dieser, jeder, welcher* and *alle*, because those carry the same case marking as the definite article.

### 2. After ein, kein, mein — the mixed endings

*ein* has no ending in three places: masculine nominative, and neuter nominative and accusative. In exactly those three places the adjective has to carry the case marking instead. Everywhere else this pattern is identical to the weak one.

|                  | M   | F   | N   | PL  |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <b>Nominativ</b> | -er | -e  | -es | -en |
| <b>Akkusativ</b> | -en | -e  | -es | -en |
| <b>Dativ</b>     | -en | -en | -en | -en |
| <b>Genitiv</b>   | -en | -en | -en | -en |

*ein guter Mann · ein gutes Buch · einen guten Mann*

Compare directly: **der gute** Mann but *ein guter* Mann. The -er did not disappear — it moved from the article onto the adjective.

The same applies after *kein* and every possessive: *mein, dein, sein, ihr, unser, euer*.

### 3. No article at all — the strong endings

With nothing in front of it, the adjective carries the full case marking alone. Its endings look almost exactly like the definite article, which is a useful way to remember them.

|                  | M   | F   | N   | PL  |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <b>Nominativ</b> | -er | -e  | -es | -e  |
| <b>Akkusativ</b> | -en | -e  | -es | -e  |
| <b>Dativ</b>     | -em | -er | -em | -en |
| <b>Genitiv</b>   | -en | -er | -en | -er |

*guter Kaffee · kaltes Wasser · mit kaltem Wasser*

This pattern appears where German naturally drops the article: with **mass nouns** (*Ich trinke gern warmen Kaffee*) and with **plurals** (*alte Freunde, mit alten Freunden*). You will rarely need it for a singular countable noun, because those almost always take an article.

### The rule that saves you most often

Look at the three tables together and one thing stands out: **-en** fills most of the space. Every dative and genitive form in the weak and mixed patterns is -en. Every plural in those two patterns is -en.

So a practical order of operations:

1. Is it dative or genitive, or plural, after *der* or *ein*? → **-en**. Done.
2. Is it nominative or accusative? → then you need the table, and only the top two rows.
3. Is there no article? → the adjective takes the article's own ending.

### Adjectives that change their stem

Three small groups adjust before an ending is added:

| ADJECTIVE     | WITH AN ENDING           | NOTE                                    |
|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>teuer</b>  | <i>die teure Jacke</i>   | -er loses its e                         |
| <b>dunkel</b> | <i>das dunkle Zimmer</i> | -el loses its e                         |
| <b>hoch</b>   | <i>das hohe Haus</i>     | c drops out                             |
| <b>müde</b>   | <i>der müde Mann</i>     | already ends in -e, so nothing is added |

Note that *sauber* keeps its e — *das saubere Zimmer*. Only *teuer* reliably drops it.

### When to learn what

| LEVEL     | FOCUS                                                                     |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A2</b> | <i>nominative and accusative, after der and after ein</i>                 |
| <b>B1</b> | <i>the dative, and the no-article pattern with mass nouns and plurals</i> |
| <b>B2</b> | <i>the genitive across all three patterns</i>                             |

## German Comparative and Superlative — größer, am größten

German makes comparisons more regularly than English does. Where English switches between *bigger* and *more interesting* depending on the length of the word, German simply adds an ending to everything — even to long adjectives. *interessanter*, not *mehr interessant*.

### The three forms

| FORM       | HOW                        | EXAMPLE      |
|------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Positiv    | <i>the plain adjective</i> | klein        |
| Komparativ | + <b>-er</b>               | kleiner      |
| Superlativ | <b>am + -sten</b>          | am kleinsten |

Mein Zimmer ist **kleiner** als deins.

Von allen Zimmern ist dieses **am kleinsten**.

The comparison word is **als**, not *wie*. *wie* is for things that are equal: *so groß wie* means *as big as*, while *größer als* means *bigger than*. Mixing them up is one of the most common errors at A2.

### The umlaut group

A set of common one-syllable adjectives add an umlaut as well as the ending. There is no way to predict which ones — but the list is short and the words are frequent, so exposure handles most of it.

| ADJECTIVE | KOMPARATIV     | SUPERLATIV   | MEANING |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|---------|
| alt       | <b>älter</b>   | am ältesten  | old     |
| jung      | <b>jünger</b>  | am jüngsten  | young   |
| lang      | <b>länger</b>  | am längsten  | long    |
| kurz      | <b>kürzer</b>  | am kürzesten | short   |
| warm      | <b>wärmer</b>  | am wärmsten  | warm    |
| kalt      | <b>kälter</b>  | am kältesten | cold    |
| stark     | <b>stärker</b> | am stärksten | strong  |
| groß      | <b>größer</b>  | am größten   | big     |

Also in this group: *arm, dumm, hart, klug, krank, scharf, schwach, schwarz, gesund*.

Note that the umlaut only appears in the comparative and superlative. The plain adjective keeps its original vowel: **alt**, not *ält*.

### The five irregulars

These change more than their ending, and they are among the most-used words in the language — worth learning as a single block on day one.

| ADJECTIVE | KOMPARATIV    | SUPERLATIV         | MEANING     |
|-----------|---------------|--------------------|-------------|
| gut       | <b>besser</b> | am <b>besten</b>   | good        |
| viel      | <b>mehr</b>   | am <b>meisten</b>  | much / many |
| gern      | <b>lieber</b> | am <b>liebsten</b> | gladly      |
| hoch      | <b>höher</b>  | am <b>höchsten</b> | high        |
| nah       | <b>näher</b>  | am <b>nächsten</b> | near        |

*hoch* loses its *c* before an ending — *höher*, never *hoher* — and *groß* takes **am größten** rather than the expected *am größesten*.

*gern* is worth special attention because it works with verbs rather than nouns: *Ich trinke **gern** Kaffee* → *Ich trinke **lieber** Tee* → *Am **liebsten** trinke ich Wasser*. That progression is how you express preference in everyday German.

### When -esten replaces -sten

The superlative usually adds **-sten**. But if the adjective ends in **-d, -t, -s, -ß, -z, -x** or **-sch**, an extra *e* slips in to make the word pronounceable. Adjectives ending in a vowel do the same: *neu* → *am neuesten*.

*laut* → *am laut**esten*** · *kalt* → *am käl**t**esten* · *interessant* → *am interessant**esten*** · *heiß* → *am heiß**esten***

Say *am laut**sten*** out loud and the reason becomes obvious.

**The one exception:** *groß* ends in *ß* but takes *am größ**t**en*, not *am größ**est**en*. It is the only common adjective that breaks this rule, so learn it as a one-off.

### Adjectives that adjust their stem

| ADJECTIVE     | KOMPARATIV             | NOTE                                     |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>teuer</b>  | <i>teur<b>er</b></i>   | the -er loses its e                      |
| <b>dunkel</b> | <i>dunkl<b>er</b></i>  | the -el loses its e                      |
| <b>leise</b>  | <i>leis<b>er</b></i>   | already ends in -e, so only -r is added  |
| <b>sauber</b> | <i>sauber<b>er</b></i> | keeps its e — only <i>teuer</i> drops it |

### Comparatives before a noun still take endings

A comparative used in front of a noun declines like any other adjective, so it carries two endings at once — the comparative -*er* and then the case ending.

ein **größ**er**es** Zimmer · mit dem **äl**t**eren** Bruder · die **bess**er**e** Lösung

The superlative behaves the same way and drops the *am*: *das größ**t**e* Zimmer, *der bess**t**e* Film.

### When to learn what

| LEVEL     | FOCUS                                                                       |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A1</b> | <i>gut → besser, viel → mehr, gern → lieber as vocabulary</i>               |
| <b>A2</b> | <i>the -er and am ...-sten pattern as a system, the umlaut group</i>        |
| <b>B1</b> | <i>the remaining irregulars, the -esten rule, comparatives before nouns</i> |
| <b>B2</b> | <i>longer adjectives and comparative forms in formal writing</i>            |

## German Word Order — Nebensätze and Pronoun Order

German word order is stricter than English in one respect and freer in another. The strict part: in a main clause the conjugated verb is **always second**. The free part: almost anything can occupy first position. And in a subordinate clause the rule flips entirely — the verb goes right to the end.

### The main clause: verb second

Position one can hold the subject, a time expression, an object, almost anything. Whatever goes there, the conjugated verb follows immediately.

| POSITION 1  | VERB         | THE REST            |
|-------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Ich         | <b>fahre</b> | morgen nach Berlin. |
| Morgen      | <b>fahre</b> | ich nach Berlin.    |
| Nach Berlin | <b>fahre</b> | ich morgen.         |

Notice that moving something to the front pushes the subject **after** the verb. It does not push the verb anywhere — the verb stays in second position throughout. This is the rule English speakers break most often, because English keeps the subject first.

### The subordinate clause: verb last

A subordinating conjunction sends the conjugated verb to the very end of its clause.

*Ich bleibe zu Hause. → ..., weil ich krank **bin**.*

| CONJUNCTION    | MEANING                           | LEVEL |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|-------|
| <b>weil</b>    | <i>because</i>                    | A2    |
| <b>dass</b>    | <i>that</i>                       | A2    |
| <b>wenn</b>    | <i>if / when</i>                  | A2    |
| <b>ob</b>      | <i>whether</i>                    | B1    |
| <b>obwohl</b>  | <i>although</i>                   | B1    |
| <b>damit</b>   | <i>so that</i>                    | B1    |
| <b>als</b>     | <i>when (a single past event)</i> | B1    |
| <b>bevor</b>   | <i>before</i>                     | B1    |
| <b>nachdem</b> | <i>after</i>                      | B1    |
| <b>während</b> | <i>while</i>                      | B1    |
| <b>bis</b>     | <i>until</i>                      | B1    |
| <b>seitdem</b> | <i>since</i>                      | B1    |
| <b>falls</b>   | <i>in case</i>                    | B1    |
| <b>sodass</b>  | <i>so that (result)</i>           | B2    |
| <b>indem</b>   | <i>by ...-ing</i>                 | B2    |

Do not confuse these with **und**, **oder**, **aber**, **denn** and **sondern**. Those join two main clauses and change nothing at all: *Ich bleibe zu Hause, **denn** ich **bin** krank* — verb still second.

### How the app splits this up

The practice app keeps the three behaviours in separate modes, because they are separate skills:

**Nebensätze** drills the conjunctions that send the verb to the end. **Hauptsätze verbinden** drills everything that joins two ideas without moving it — coordinating conjunctions, adverbs and the *um zu* family. **Wortstellung** covers pronoun order, and **Gemischt** mixes all three, which is where the real skill lies: you have to recognise which kind of connector you are looking at before you can place the verb.

### Three kinds of linking word, three results

This is the distinction that decides most word-order errors. Three different kinds of word can join two ideas, and they do three different things to the verb.

| TYPE                             | EXAMPLES                              | WHAT HAPPENS TO THE VERB                                      |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>subordinating conjunction</b> | <i>weil, dass, obwohl, wenn</i>       | goes to the <b>end</b>                                        |
| <b>coordinating conjunction</b>  | <i>denn, und, aber, oder</i>          | <b>nothing changes</b> — stays second                         |
| <b>adverb</b>                    | <i>deshalb, trotzdem, darum, dann</i> | adverb takes position 1, verb second, <b>subject after it</b> |

*Ich bleibe zu Hause, **weil** ich krank **bin**.* — subordinating, verb last.

*Ich bleibe zu Hause, **denn** ich **bin** krank.* — coordinating, verb second.

*Ich bin krank, **deshalb bleibe ich** zu Hause.* — adverb, verb straight after it.

All three sentences mean the same thing. Only the word order differs, and the linking word is what decides it.

The adverb case catches people out because the subject ends up **after** the verb: *deshalb **bleibe ich***, never *deshalb ich bleibe*. **trotzdem** behaves identically but means the opposite — *despite that*.

### sondern needs a negative first

**sondern** also translates as *but*, and it is not interchangeable with **aber**. It only works after a negative — *nicht* or *kein* — and corrects it.

*Das ist **kein** Tee, **sondern** Kaffee.* — correcting a negative.

*Das Zimmer ist klein, **aber** es ist hell.* — plain contrast, no negative.

If there is no *nicht* or *kein* in the first clause, you need **aber**.

### um zu, ohne zu, statt zu

These take an infinitive with **zu** instead of a subject and a conjugated verb, and the infinitive closes the clause.

*Ich lerne Deutsch, **um** in Wien studieren **zu können**.* — purpose.

*Er ging weg, **ohne** etwas **zu sagen**.* — something that did not happen.

*Er sah fern, **statt** die Hausaufgaben **zu machen**.* — instead of.

These only work when both clauses share the same subject. If the subject changes, use **damit** instead of *um zu*: *Ich spreche langsam, **damit du** mich verstehst*.

### seit or seitdem?

These look like the same word and behave completely differently.

**seit** is a **preposition** taking the Dativ. It is followed by a time expression, not a clause: ***Seit einem Jahr** wohne ich hier.*

**seitdem** is a **conjunction** introducing a whole clause, and it sends the verb to the end: *Es geht ihr besser, **seitdem** sie weniger **arbeitet**.*

The test: if what follows is a noun phrase, use **seit**. If it is a subject with its own verb, use **seitdem**.

### What each level covers

Connectors are introduced in the order the Goethe and Aspekte word lists introduce them. Each level adds new ones and keeps everything below it.

#### A1 — nothing moves the verb yet

| CONNECTOR       | MEANING        | EFFECT ON THE VERB       |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>und</b>      | <i>and</i>     | stays second             |
| <b>oder</b>     | <i>or</i>      | stays second             |
| <b>aber</b>     | <i>but</i>     | stays second             |
| <b>denn</b>     | <i>because</i> | stays second             |
| <b>dann</b>     | <i>then</i>    | second, subject after it |
| <b>außerdem</b> | <i>besides</i> | second, subject after it |

**denn** is the one to hold on to: it means the same as *weil* but leaves the word order alone. Meeting it before *weil* makes the contrast obvious later.

## A2 — subordinate clauses begin

| CONNECTOR                | MEANING                            | EFFECT ON THE VERB       |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>weil</b>              | <i>because</i>                     | <b>to the end</b>        |
| <b>dass</b>              | <i>that</i>                        | <b>to the end</b>        |
| <b>wenn</b>              | <i>if / when</i>                   | <b>to the end</b>        |
| <b>sondern</b>           | <i>but (only after a negative)</i> | stays second             |
| <b>deshalb</b>           | <i>therefore</i>                   | second, subject after it |
| <b>trotzdem</b>          | <i>even so</i>                     | second, subject after it |
| <b>entweder ... oder</b> | <i>either ... or</i>               | unchanged                |

*weil*, *dass* and *wenn* carry most of the weight at A2, and all three behave identically — learn one and you have all three.

## B1 — the bulk of the topic

| CONNECTOR            | MEANING                      | EFFECT ON THE VERB         |
|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>obwohl</b>        | <i>although</i>              | to the end                 |
| <b>damit</b>         | <i>so that</i>               | to the end                 |
| <b>ob</b>            | <i>whether</i>               | to the end                 |
| <b>als</b>           | <i>when (one past event)</i> | to the end                 |
| <b>da</b>            | <i>since / because</i>       | to the end                 |
| <b>bevor</b>         | <i>before</i>                | to the end                 |
| <b>nachdem</b>       | <i>after</i>                 | to the end                 |
| <b>während</b>       | <i>while</i>                 | to the end                 |
| <b>bis</b>           | <i>until</i>                 | to the end                 |
| <b>solange</b>       | <i>as long as</i>            | to the end                 |
| <b>seitdem</b>       | <i>since (+ clause)</i>      | to the end                 |
| <b>falls</b>         | <i>in case</i>               | to the end                 |
| <b>sodass</b>        | <i>so that (result)</i>      | to the end                 |
| <b>indem</b>         | <i>by ...-ing</i>            | to the end                 |
| <b>seit</b>          | <i>since (+ Dativ noun)</i>  | stays second               |
| <b>danach</b>        | <i>after that</i>            | second, subject after it   |
| <b>zwar ... aber</b> | <i>admittedly ... but</i>    | unchanged                  |
| <b>um ... zu</b>     | <i>in order to</i>           | zu + infinitive at the end |
| <b>ohne ... zu</b>   | <i>without ...-ing</i>       | zu + infinitive at the end |
| <b>statt ... zu</b>  | <i>instead of ...-ing</i>    | zu + infinitive at the end |

Watch the pairs that look alike. **seit** takes a noun phrase, **seitdem** takes a clause. **als** is for a single past event, **wenn** for repeated ones.

## B2 — contrast and consequence

| CONNECTOR           | MEANING             | EFFECT ON THE VERB       |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>wohingegen</b>   | <i>whereas</i>      | to the end               |
| <b>anstatt dass</b> | <i>instead of</i>   | to the end               |
| <b>außer dass</b>   | <i>except that</i>  | to the end               |
| <b>allerdings</b>   | <i>however</i>      | second, subject after it |
| <b>dennoch</b>      | <i>nevertheless</i> | second, subject after it |
| <b>folglich</b>     | <i>consequently</i> | second, subject after it |

B2 also brings the subordinate clause in first position, where the main clause then begins with its own verb.

## C1 — dense written German

| STRUCTURE                  | EXAMPLE                                     | WHAT IT DOES                    |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>zumal</b>               | <i>especially as</i>                        | to the end                      |
| <b>sofern</b>              | <i>provided that</i>                        | to the end                      |
| <b>je ... desto</b>        | <i>the more ... the more</i>                | end, then second                |
| <b>sowohl ... als auch</b> | <i>both ... and</i>                         | unchanged                       |
| <b>weder ... noch</b>      | <i>neither ... nor</i>                      | unchanged                       |
| <b>Partizip I / II</b>     | <i>der seit Wochen andauernde Streik</i>    | extended attribute              |
| <b>zu + Partizip I</b>     | <i>eine nicht zu unterschätzende Gefahr</i> | extended attribute              |
| <b>Nominalstil</b>         | <i>nach Abschluss der Verhandlungen</i>     | a noun phrase replaces a clause |

### When there is more than one verb

If the clause contains a verb group, the whole group moves to the end — and the **conjugated part goes last**, after the part that would normally sit at the end.

| STRUCTURE              | MAIN CLAUSE                   | SUBORDINATE CLAUSE                     |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>Perfekt</b>         | <i>er hat geschlafen</i>      | ..., weil er <b>geschlafen hat</b>     |
| <b>Modal</b>           | <i>sie muss arbeiten</i>      | ..., weil sie <b>arbeiten muss</b>     |
| <b>Passiv</b>          | <i>es wird unterschrieben</i> | ..., ob es <b>unterschrieben wird</b>  |
| <b>Plusquamperfekt</b> | <i>es war gekürzt worden</i>  | ..., weil es <b>gekürzt worden war</b> |

The pattern is consistent: the non-finite parts come first, the finite verb closes the clause.

### Separable verbs join back up

A separable prefix splits off in a main clause. At the end of a subordinate clause it rejoins the stem and the verb is written as one word.

Der Film **fängt** um acht **an**. → ..., bevor der Film **anfängt**.

### When the subordinate clause comes first

The whole subordinate clause can move to the front of the sentence. It then counts as position one — so the main clause has to begin with its own conjugated verb, immediately after the comma.

**Weil** ich krank **war**, **bin** ich zu Hause geblieben.

This puts two verbs side by side across the comma, which looks wrong to English speakers and is entirely correct. It is very common in writing, and worth practising until it stops feeling strange.

### Two objects: which comes first?

When a sentence has both a dative and an accusative object, their order depends on whether each is a noun or a pronoun. There are three cases, and one of them reverses.

| OBJECTS             | ORDER                        | EXAMPLE                             |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>two nouns</b>    | <i>Dativ, then Akkusativ</i> | Ich gebe <b>dem Mann das Buch</b> . |
| <b>one pronoun</b>  | <i>the pronoun first</i>     | Ich gebe <b>ihm</b> das Buch.       |
|                     |                              | Ich gebe <b>es</b> dem Mann.        |
| <b>two pronouns</b> | <i>Akkusativ, then Dativ</i> | Ich gebe <b>es ihm</b> .            |

One rule covers all three: **a pronoun always moves forward**. With two nouns the dative leads; with two pronouns the accusative leads. That reversal is the part learners get wrong, because it contradicts the noun pattern learned first.

Never *Ich gebe ihm es*. Two pronouns are always accusative then dative.

### Where the rest goes: TeKaMoLo

When several adverbial phrases pile up in the middle of a sentence, the default order is **T**emporal, **K**ausal, **M**odal, **L**okal — time, reason, manner, place.

Ich fahre **morgen wegen der Arbeit mit dem Zug nach Berlin**.

This is a tendency rather than an iron rule — moving a phrase earlier gives it emphasis — but it is a reliable default when you are unsure.

## German Pronouns — Personal, Reflexive, Possessive and Relative

Pronouns stand in for nouns, and like nouns they carry a case. You use them in almost every sentence you speak, which means an error here is far more visible than one in a rarer structure. This guide covers the four groups that cause the most trouble.

### Personal pronouns

The case comes from the verb or the preposition, exactly as it would for a noun. *Ich sehe **ihn*** is accusative because *sehen* takes a direct object; *ich helfe **ihm*** is dative because *helfen* governs the dative.

| NOMINATIV | AKKUSATIV   | DATIV | POSSESSIV |
|-----------|-------------|-------|-----------|
| ich       | <i>mich</i> | mir   | mein      |
| du        | <i>dich</i> | dir   | dein      |
| er        | <i>ihn</i>  | ihm   | sein      |
| sie (sg)  | <i>sie</i>  | ihr   | ihr       |
| es        | <i>es</i>   | ihm   | sein      |
| wir       | <i>uns</i>  | uns   | unser     |
| ihr       | <i>euch</i> | euch  | euer      |
| sie (pl)  | <i>sie</i>  | ihnen | ihr       |
| Sie       | <i>Sie</i>  | Ihnen | Ihr       |

The formal *Sie* is always capitalised, in every case. That capital is the only thing distinguishing it from *sie* meaning *she* or *they*.

### Reflexive pronouns: mich or mir?

This is the one worth learning properly, because the rule is exact and the error is common.

A reflexive pronoun is **accusative** by default. It becomes **dative** as soon as the sentence already has a direct object — because that slot is taken.

*Ich wasche **mich**.* — Nothing else is being washed. Accusative.

*Ich wasche **mir** die Hände.* — *die Hände* is the direct object, so the reflexive moves to the dative.

The same pattern runs through a whole family of everyday sentences: *ich putze **mir** die Zähne*, *ich ziehe **mir** eine Jacke an*, *ich kaufe **mir** ein Buch*.

|              | AKKUSATIV   | DATIV |
|--------------|-------------|-------|
| ich          | <i>mich</i> | mir   |
| du           | <i>dich</i> | dir   |
| er/sie/es    | <i>sich</i> | sich  |
| wir          | <i>uns</i>  | uns   |
| ihr          | <i>euch</i> | euch  |
| sie (pl)/Sie | <i>sich</i> | sich  |

In the third person the distinction is invisible — *sich* covers both. That is precisely why learners miss the rule: it only shows itself in the first and second person singular.

### Possessive determiners

Two decisions at once. The stem says *whose*; the ending says *which case*. The endings are the same as for *ein* and *kein*.

The stems are in the last column of the personal pronoun table above. Whichever one you need, the endings below are the same.

|                  | MASCULINE     | FEMININE | NEUTER | PLURAL |
|------------------|---------------|----------|--------|--------|
| <b>Nominativ</b> | <i>mein</i>   | meine    | mein   | meine  |
| <b>Akkusativ</b> | <i>meinen</i> | meine    | mein   | meine  |
| <b>Dativ</b>     | <i>meinem</i> | meiner   | meinem | meinen |
| <b>Genitiv</b>   | <i>meines</i> | meiner   | meines | meiner |

*euer* drops its second *e* when an ending is added: *euer Zimmer*, but **eure** Zimmer and **euren** Vorschlägen.

Standing alone without a noun, a possessive takes the *der/die/das* endings instead: *Ist das dein Buch?* — *Nein, das ist **meins**.*

### Relative pronouns

The rule people get wrong: gender and number come from the noun the clause refers back to, but the **case comes from the relative clause itself**. Look at what the verb inside the clause needs.

*Der Mann, **der** dort steht* — subject of *steht*, so nominative.

*Der Mann, **den** ich sehe* — direct object of *sehen*, so accusative.

*Der Mann, **dem** ich helfe* — *helfen* takes the dative.

|                  | MASCULINE     | FEMININE | NEUTER | PLURAL |
|------------------|---------------|----------|--------|--------|
| <b>Nominativ</b> | <i>der</i>    | die      | das    | die    |
| <b>Akkusativ</b> | <i>den</i>    | die      | das    | die    |
| <b>Dativ</b>     | <i>dem</i>    | der      | dem    | denen  |
| <b>Genitiv</b>   | <i>dessen</i> | deren    | dessen | deren  |

The genitive forms mean *whose*: *der Mann, **dessen** Auto vor der Tür steht*. If a preposition is involved it comes first and sets the case: *das Projekt, **an dem** wir arbeiten*.

### da-Wörter: damit or mit ihm?

When a preposition points at a **thing**, German merges the two into one word — *da-* plus the preposition, with an *r* inserted if the preposition begins with a vowel. When it points at a **person**, the preposition keeps a normal pronoun.

| PREPOSITION | A THING        | A PERSON       |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>auf</b>  | <i>darauf</i>  | auf ihn / sie  |
| <b>an</b>   | <i>daran</i>   | an ihn / sie   |
| <b>über</b> | <i>darüber</i> | über ihn / sie |
| <b>für</b>  | <i>dafür</i>   | für ihn / sie  |
| <b>mit</b>  | <i>damit</i>   | mit ihm / ihr  |
| <b>vor</b>  | <i>davor</i>   | vor ihm / ihr  |

*Ich warte auf den Bus* → *Ich warte **darauf**.*

*Ich warte auf meinen Bruder* → *Ich warte **auf ihn**.*

English uses *for it* and *for him* in the same shape, which is exactly why this is easy to get wrong. Animals are usually treated as things.

### Other pronouns worth knowing

*man* is the impersonal subject — *man kann hier nicht rauchen* — and exists only in the nominative. In the other cases it borrows from *ein*: *einen* in the accusative, *einem* in the dative.

|                | NOMINATIV      | AKKUSATIV | DATIV     | GENITIV |
|----------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| <b>man</b>     | <i>man</i>     | einen     | einem     | —       |
| <b>jemand</b>  | <i>jemand</i>  | jemanden  | jemandem  | —       |
| <b>niemand</b> | <i>niemand</i> | niemanden | niemandem | —       |
| <b>wer</b>     | <i>wer</i>     | wen       | wem       | wessen  |

*dieser, welcher, jeder* and *keiner* all follow the *der/die/das* endings.

## How to Tell Time in German

Telling the time in German trips up a lot of learners — not because it is complicated, but because Germans use two completely different systems depending on context. Once you understand both, everything clicks.

This guide covers the formal 24-hour system, the casual colloquial system with its quirky "halb" logic, and the regional variations you will hear in everyday conversation.

### The Two Systems

German has a **formal system** used in official contexts — train timetables, news broadcasts, appointments — and a **casual system** used in everyday conversation. Both are correct. You just need to know which fits the situation.

#### Formal German Time 24-HOUR

The formal system is the simpler of the two. It follows a straightforward pattern: say the hour, say "Uhr" (o'clock), then say the minutes.

| TIME  | GERMAN                             | NOTES                      |
|-------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 13:00 | <i>dreizehn Uhr</i>                | Simply "thirteen o'clock"  |
| 08:30 | <i>acht Uhr dreißig</i>            | Hour + Uhr + minutes       |
| 17:45 | <i>siebzehn Uhr fünfundvierzig</i> | Full 24-hour format        |
| 09:00 | <i>neun Uhr</i>                    | Drop the minutes when zero |

**Rule:** [Hour] Uhr [Minutes]. If the minutes are zero, you can leave them out entirely.

#### Casual German Time 12-HOUR

The casual system is where German gets interesting — and where most learners make mistakes. Instead of always counting forward from the hour, Germans count *toward* the next hour. The entire system revolves around the half-hour mark.

### Understanding "Halb" — The Most Important Concept

The single most important thing to understand about casual German time is that **"halb" refers to half the way TO the next hour**, not half past the current one.

"Halb vier" literally means "halfway to four" — which is 3:30, not 4:30. This confuses English speakers because in English "half four" often means 4:30. In German it is the opposite.

| TIME  | GERMAN           | MEANING          |
|-------|------------------|------------------|
| 3:30  | <i>halb vier</i> | Halfway to four  |
| 7:30  | <i>halb acht</i> | Halfway to eight |
| 12:30 | <i>halb eins</i> | Halfway to one   |

**Memory trick:** Think of "halb vier" as a countdown. You are halfway through the journey to four o'clock. The next hour is the destination, not the current one.

### Viertel — Quarter Hours

Quarter past and quarter to follow a similar logic, but the quarter-to form uses the *next* hour, not the current one:

| TIME | GERMAN                   | LITERAL MEANING                   |
|------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 3:15 | <i>viertel nach drei</i> | Quarter after three               |
| 3:45 | <i>dreiviertel vier</i>  | Three-quarters to four            |
| 3:45 | <i>viertel vor vier</i>  | Quarter before four (also common) |

Note that 3:45 has two valid expressions. "Dreiviertel vier" is more common in southern Germany and Austria, while "viertel vor vier" is used throughout all German-speaking regions. Both are correct.

### Around the Half Hour

One of the most distinctly German features is counting minutes relative to the half-hour mark. These expressions are used throughout Germany and are essential for understanding native speakers.

| TIME | GERMAN                     | LOGIC                                |
|------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 3:20 | <i>zehn vor halb vier</i>  | Ten minutes before halb vier (3:30)  |
| 3:25 | <i>fünf vor halb vier</i>  | Five minutes before halb vier (3:30) |
| 3:35 | <i>fünf nach halb vier</i> | Five minutes after halb vier (3:30)  |
| 3:40 | <i>zehn nach halb vier</i> | Ten minutes after halb vier (3:30)   |

**How to think about it:** Once you know "halb vier" = 3:30, you can navigate the surrounding minutes by counting before (vor) and after (nach) that midpoint. It is like using a landmark.

Simple Nach and Vor — Minutes Past and To

For times that do not fall near the half-hour, Germans use straightforward nach (past) and vor (to) expressions:

| TIME | GERMAN                |
|------|-----------------------|
| 3:05 | <i>fünf nach drei</i> |
| 3:10 | <i>zehn nach drei</i> |
| 3:50 | <i>zehn vor vier</i>  |
| 3:55 | <i>fünf vor vier</i>  |

Regional Differences

Germany, Austria, and Switzerland all use slightly different expressions for the same times. Northern Germany tends to prefer "viertel vor vier" for 3:45, while Bavaria and Austria use "dreiviertel vier". Both are correct — understanding both will help you sound natural across all German-speaking countries.

Complete Quick Reference

| TIME | CASUAL GERMAN              |
|------|----------------------------|
| 3:00 | <i>drei Uhr</i>            |
| 3:05 | <i>fünf nach drei</i>      |
| 3:10 | <i>zehn nach drei</i>      |
| 3:15 | <i>viertel nach drei</i>   |
| 3:20 | <i>zehn vor halb vier</i>  |
| 3:25 | <i>fünf vor halb vier</i>  |
| 3:30 | <i>halb vier</i>           |
| 3:35 | <i>fünf nach halb vier</i> |
| 3:40 | <i>zehn nach halb vier</i> |
| 3:45 | <i>dreiviertel vier</i>    |
| 3:50 | <i>zehn vor vier</i>       |
| 3:55 | <i>fünf vor vier</i>       |

Why This Matters for Real Conversations

If you are learning German for travel, work, or daily life, understanding casual time expressions is essential. German trains, buses, and shops run on precise schedules, and locals will almost always use the casual system when speaking — not the 24-hour format you see on signs and timetables.

Imagine asking someone on the street in Berlin what time it is. They will not say "vierzehn Uhr dreißig." They will say "halb drei" — and if you have not practised the casual system, you might mishear it as half past three (3:30) when they actually mean 2:30 in the afternoon.

The gap between reading about German time and being able to use it fluently under pressure is where most learners struggle. Repeated practice across all 60 minutes, in both directions, is the only reliable way to close that gap.

## Ready to Practice?

Zeit Master offers two quiz modes covering every minute from 0 to 59, with weak-spot tracking that automatically serves you more of the patterns you find difficult. Free, no sign-up required.

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