

German Word Order — Nebensätze and Pronoun Order

Deutsch Üben · free practice, no account needed

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	fahre	morgen nach Berlin.
Morgen	fahre	ich nach Berlin.
Nach Berlin	fahre	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
weil	<i>because</i>	A2
dass	<i>that</i>	A2
wenn	<i>if / when</i>	A2
ob	<i>whether</i>	B1
obwohl	<i>although</i>	B1
damit	<i>so that</i>	B1
als	<i>when (a single past event)</i>	B1
bevor	<i>before</i>	B1
nachdem	<i>after</i>	B1
während	<i>while</i>	B1
bis	<i>until</i>	B1
seitdem	<i>since</i>	B1
falls	<i>in case</i>	B1
sodass	<i>so that (result)</i>	B2
indem	<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
subordinating conjunction	<i>weil, dass, obwohl, wenn</i>	goes to the end
coordinating conjunction	<i>denn, und, aber, oder</i>	nothing changes — stays second
adverb	<i>deshalb, trotzdem, darum, dann</i>	adverb takes position 1, verb second, subject after it

*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
und	<i>and</i>	stays second
oder	<i>or</i>	stays second
aber	<i>but</i>	stays second
denn	<i>because</i>	stays second
dann	<i>then</i>	second, subject after it
außerdem	<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
weil	<i>because</i>	to the end
dass	<i>that</i>	to the end
wenn	<i>if / when</i>	to the end
sondern	<i>but (only after a negative)</i>	stays second
deshalb	<i>therefore</i>	second, subject after it
trotzdem	<i>even so</i>	second, subject after it
entweder ... oder	<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
obwohl	<i>although</i>	to the end
damit	<i>so that</i>	to the end
ob	<i>whether</i>	to the end
als	<i>when (one past event)</i>	to the end
da	<i>since / because</i>	to the end
bevor	<i>before</i>	to the end
nachdem	<i>after</i>	to the end
während	<i>while</i>	to the end
bis	<i>until</i>	to the end
solange	<i>as long as</i>	to the end
seitdem	<i>since (+ clause)</i>	to the end
falls	<i>in case</i>	to the end
sodass	<i>so that (result)</i>	to the end
indem	<i>by ...-ing</i>	to the end
seit	<i>since (+ Dativ noun)</i>	stays second
danach	<i>after that</i>	second, subject after it
zwar ... aber	<i>admittedly ... but</i>	unchanged
um ... zu	<i>in order to</i>	zu + infinitive at the end
ohne ... zu	<i>without ...-ing</i>	zu + infinitive at the end
statt ... zu	<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
wohingegen	<i>whereas</i>	to the end
anstatt dass	<i>instead of</i>	to the end
außer dass	<i>except that</i>	to the end
allerdings	<i>however</i>	second, subject after it
dennoch	<i>nevertheless</i>	second, subject after it
folglich	<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
zumal	<i>especially as</i>	to the end
sofern	<i>provided that</i>	to the end
je ... desto	<i>the more ... the more</i>	end, then second
sowohl ... als auch	<i>both ... and</i>	unchanged
weder ... noch	<i>neither ... nor</i>	unchanged
Partizip I / II	<i>der seit Wochen andauernde Streik</i>	extended attribute
zu + Partizip I	<i>eine nicht zu unterschätzende Gefahr</i>	extended attribute
Nominalstil	<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
Perfekt	<i>er hat geschlafen</i>	..., weil er geschlafen hat
Modal	<i>sie muss arbeiten</i>	..., weil sie arbeiten muss
Passiv	<i>es wird unterschrieben</i>	..., ob es unterschrieben wird
Plusquamperfekt	<i>es war gekürzt worden</i>	..., weil es gekürzt worden war

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

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.