

Introduction

German is a language of huge cultural and economic significance. It is the language of some of the greatest writers, scientists, composers, theologians and philosophers. Those who gain fluency in German gain access to cultural and academic riches beyond measure. It is also the language of one of the world's most vibrant and important economies and is an official language of the European Union. The ability to speak and write German with precision is essential for those who wish to be influential and effective in European business and political spheres. And, indeed, the greater the fluency in a language, the easier and more pleasurable it is to communicate with native speakers. Approximately 100 million people speak German as their first language, and many more across Eastern Europe speak it as a *lingua franca*. Linguistic competence is one thing, but real confidence and effectiveness come with the ability to understand the subtleties of a language and to express one's ideas accurately.

Grammar is not usually associated with glamour, though the two words have the same root. Getting to grips with the complexities of a language may feel at times like trying to master a never-ending and definitely unglamorous maze of new structures. The user of this volume will be relieved to know that the author's aim is, if not to make German grammar glamorous, then at least to make it as straightforward and accessible as possible. Learners are often surprised to discover that the grammar of German is simpler than that of many other languages and has fewer exceptions to the 'rules'. Its main structures can be gathered under just three headings:

- ♦ verbs and tenses
- ♦ prepositions and cases
- ♦ word order (especially verb position).

Almost everything else is a subdivision of one of these.

This book, which covers all the grammar required by undergraduates and other intermediate and advanced learners, has been written to help the student of the language to develop fluency and accuracy. It takes as its basis modern standard German (*Hochdeutsch*), but it also includes differences between spoken and written language, as well as variations found in German-speaking countries such as Austria and Switzerland, where these differences are significant and common. Although the emphasis is on contemporary usage, older forms that may still be encountered with some regularity are also noted.

INTRODUCTION

The main features of *A Student Grammar of German* are as follows:

- ♦ **Overview** Each chapter starts with an outline of the contents, and with definitions and examples of the terms and structures described in the following pages.
- ♦ **‘TIP’ boxes** Short summaries of difficult points, or useful ways of remembering patterns appear throughout the text.
- ♦ **The main rules** are printed in **bold**, to highlight the key points.
- ♦ **Examples** Each point is illustrated by several examples, with translations, to enable the reader to get a feel for current usage. They are drawn from a wide variety of sources, including the press and the internet.
- ♦ **List of strong and irregular verbs**
- ♦ **Summary of tenses**
- ♦ **Glossary** A list of grammatical terms used, with brief definitions and examples.

1

Cases

OVERVIEW

What are cases?

Cases show how certain classes of words, such as nouns, pronouns and determiners (such as articles) function within a sentence or clause. In English, case is unmarked on nouns and determiners, but is clearly marked on the forms of the pronoun:

She likes me I like her but not: Her like I

- The group (or **case**, to give it its proper name) of personal pronouns we can use in the subject (or ‘doer’) position is

I, you, he, it, she, we, they

They are said to be in the **nominative** case.

- The group of pronouns we can use in the object (or ‘done to’) position is

me, you, him, her, it, us, them

These are said to be in the **accusative** case. Only *you* and *it* have identical forms in both nominative and accusative cases.

Cases in German

The marking of case is vital to the structure of German. Changes to the forms of words affect not only personal pronouns, as in English, but also articles (*der, die, das; ein, eine, ein*), adjectives and other words. There are four cases: nominative, accusative, genitive and dative.

However, it is not quite as complicated as it at first looks.

- There are many similarities between the endings in each group of words:
e.g. masculine accusative: **den, einen, meinen, ihn, welchen?**
- Because the role of a pronoun or noun phrase is usually clear from its case ending, other aspects of the language, such as word order, are often more flexible than in English (once some basic rules have been mastered).

1 CASES

The four cases

Here is a summary of the main functions of cases (excluding their use with prepositions):

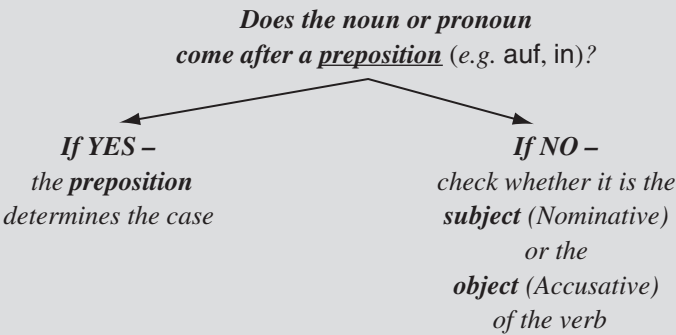
Case	Function	Example
Nominative	Subject ('doer') of the verb	Der Mann läuft über die Straße <i>The man is crossing the street</i>
Accusative	Object ('done to') of the verb	Ich kenne den Mann <i>I know the man</i>
Genitive	Possession between two nouns	Das Haus meines Freundes <i>My friend's house</i>
Dative	Indirect (additional) object of the verb	Ich schicke meinem Freund einen Brief <i>I'm sending a letter to my friend</i>

1.1 The cases

You will find grids of the case endings in the chapters on determiners (Chapter 3), pronouns (Chapter 4) and adjectives (Chapter 5).

TIP Deciding which case to use

- Whenever a noun phrase or a pronoun is used, a decision must be made about which case it is in.
 - If the noun phrase or pronoun is not in the plural, you will need to know the gender of the noun.
 - For the plural, there is a single set of endings for all genders.
- Then ask yourself this question, which will serve in most instances:



Other factors which determine the case

- Certain verbs and adjectives are used with a particular case; see 13.3 (verbs) and 5.3 (adjectives).

1.1 The cases

▶ 1.1.1 The nominative case

a The nominative case indicates the subject of the verb (the 'doer' of the action)

Meine Mutter hört Musik	<i>My mother is listening to music</i>
Der Lehrer unterrichtet Deutsch	<i>The teacher teaches German</i>
Was hat er gesagt?	<i>What did he say?</i>
Woher kommst du ?	<i>Where do you come from?</i>

Remember that the subject does not necessarily stand before the verb (as happens in English); see 18.1.

Diesen Wein finde ich nicht so gut	<i>I don't think this wine is all that good</i>
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b The nominative is used after certain verbs

The nominative is used after the 'copular' verbs: **sein** (to be), **werden** (to become), **bleiben** (to stay, remain) and a few other verbs. This is because the noun phrase after the verb refers to the same person (or thing) as the subject.

Peter ist mein bester Freund	<i>Peter is my best friend</i>
Er ist ein berühmter Politiker geworden	<i>He became a famous politician</i>
Sie ist und bleibt die Größte	<i>She is and will remain the best</i>

Note Other verbs require **als** before the nominative – (see also 1.1.2e):

Er erwies sich als ein guter Freund	<i>He proved himself a good friend</i>
Er bezeichnet sich als freier Photograph	<i>He describes himself as an independent photographer</i>

▶ 1.1.2 The accusative case

a The accusative case indicates the direct object (the thing or person on the receiving end of the action)

Ich kenne ihn seit Jahren	<i>I've known him for years</i>
Sie hat den Ball hart geschlagen	<i>She hit the ball hard</i>
Ich suche meinen Schlüssel , aber ich finde ihn nicht	<i>I'm looking for my key, but I can't find it</i>

Note The direct object does not have to stand after the verb. (See also the note about the position of the subject in 1.1.1a above.)

Diesen Wein finde ich nicht so gut	<i>I don't think this wine is all that good</i>
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b The accusative is used after certain prepositions (see 9.1 and 9.3)

Dieser Brief ist für dich	<i>This letter is for you</i>
Sie ist ohne ihn in Urlaub gefahren	<i>She went on holiday without him</i>
Ich gehe in die Stadt	<i>I'm going into town</i>
Bitte stell die Flasche auf den Tisch	<i>Please put the bottle on the table</i>

c The accusative is used with certain adjectives (see 5.3)

Endlich sind wir den Hund los	<i>At last we're rid of the dog</i>
Ich bin die Arbeit satt	<i>I'm fed up with work</i>
Ich bin das Stadtleben nicht gewohnt	<i>I'm not used to city life</i>

1 CASES

d Certain verbs, sometimes of naming and calling, have a second accusative (see 13.3.3)

Ich nannte ihn einen Idioten	<i>I called him an idiot</i>
Sie schimpfte ihn einen Faulpelz	<i>She called him a lazybones</i>
Das hat ihn das Leben gekostet	<i>It cost him his life</i>

e The accusative after **als** is used with certain verbs of regarding, considering, etc.

Damals sah ich ihn als meinen besten Freund	<i>At that time I saw him as my best friend</i>
Jetzt betrachte ich ihn als meinen Feind	<i>Now I regard him as my enemy</i>
But halten für <i>to consider to be</i>	
Ich halte ihn für einen Faulpelz	<i>I think he's a lazybones</i>

f The accusative is used in certain phrases

- ♦ After **es gibt**:
 In meinem Zimmer gibt es **einen Tisch und einen Fernseher** *In my room there's a table and a television*
- ♦ Greetings and wishes (i.e. short for „Ich wünsche dir/Ihnen ...“ ‘I wish you ...’):
 Guten Tag! *Hello!*
 Herzlichen Glückwunsch! *Congratulations!*
 Schönen Tag noch! *Have a nice day!*
- ♦ Many phrases of time which denote a definite period of time or a point in time (cf. 1.1.3d below) not governed by a preposition:
 Sie blieb **den ganzen Tag** zu Hause *She stayed at home all day*
 Hast du **nächsten Dienstag** Zeit? *Are you free next Tuesday?*
 Ich war nur **einen Tag** in München *I only spent one day in Munich*
Einen Augenblick mal, bitte! *Just a moment, please!*
- ♦ Distance covered or direction with verbs denoting motion, and prices and measures:
 Sie ging **einen Schritt** weiter *She went a step further*
 Er stieg **den Berg** hinauf *He climbed the mountain*
 Dieses Stück ist **einen Meter** lang *This piece is one metre long*
 Das hier kostet nur **einen Euro** *This one only costs a euro*

▶ 1.1.3 The genitive case

a The genitive indicates possession (= whose?) between two nouns

Das ist das Büro meines Vaters	<i>That's my father's office</i>
Dieser Teil der Aufgabe ist leicht	<i>This part of the task is easy</i>
Peters Haus; Goethes Werke	<i>Peter's house; Goethe's works</i>

b The genitive is used after certain prepositions (see 9.4)

während der Sommerferien	<i>during the summer holidays</i>
trotz des Wetters	<i>despite the weather</i>
fünf Kilometer außerhalb der Stadt	<i>five kilometres outside town</i>

1.1 The cases

Note Colloquial German often prefers the dative (often after *von*) both to indicate possession and after prepositions:

das Büro **von meinem** Vater
 trotz **dem** Wetter
 fünf Kilometer außerhalb **von der** Stadt

c The genitive is used with certain adjectives and verbs (see 5.3.2 and 13.3.4)

Ist er dieses Verbrechens fähig ?	<i>Is he capable of this crime?</i>
Es ist nicht der Mühe wert	<i>It's not worth the trouble</i>
Haustiere bedürfen der täglichen Pflege	<i>Animals require daily care</i>

But simpler constructions or vocabulary are often preferred:

Ist er zu diesem Verbrechen fähig ?	<i>Is he capable of this crime?</i>
Haustiere brauchen tägliche Pflege	<i>Animals require daily care</i>

d The genitive is used in certain expressions

✦ Phrases of indefinite time not governed by a preposition (cf. 1.1.2f above):

eines Tages	<i>one day</i>
eines schönen Morgens	<i>one beautiful morning</i>
dieser Tage	<i>recently; soon</i>

Note Nacht, though feminine, takes masculine/neuter genitive endings:

eines Nachts	<i>one night</i>
Des Nachts konnte er nicht schlafen	<i>He couldn't sleep at night</i>

✦ Other phrases, often involving opinions:

Ich bin der Meinung, dass ...	<i>I'm of the opinion that ...</i>
Ich bin der Ansicht, dass ...	<i>It's my view that ...</i>
meines Erachtens	<i>in my opinion</i>
Ich fahre erster Klasse	<i>I travel first class</i>

▶ 1.1.4 Genitive replaced by dative

Even in formal German, there are instances when the genitive cannot be used; invariably, its place is taken by the dative, often after *von*.

a The genitive cannot be used with personal pronouns and some other constructions

ein Freund von mir	<i>a friend of mine</i>
viele von ihnen	<i>many of them</i>
Welches von diesen Bildern gefällt dir am besten?	<i>Which of these pictures do you like best?</i>

But a genitive construction is possible if no pronoun is used:

einer meiner Freunde	<i>one of my friends</i>
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Note also the genitive construction:

viele derer, die ...	<i>many of those who ...</i>
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b The genitive cannot be used if the case of the noun would be unclear (because it or the word it stands with does not add a case ending):

der Verkauf von Häusern	<i>the sale of houses</i>
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(der Verkauf Häuser would be so unclear as not to make sense)

1 CASES

c The genitive cannot be used in consecutive genitive noun phrases

(because it is regarded as clumsy):

die Karosserie vom Auto meines Vaters	<i>the bodywork of my father's car</i>
(rather than die Karosserie des Autos meines Vaters)	
Sie streiten sich wegen des neuen	<i>They're arguing about her</i>
Spielzeugs von ihrem Bruder	<i>brother's new toy</i>
(rather than ... wegen des neuen Spielzeugs ihres Bruders)	

▶ 1.1.5 The dative case

a The dative indicates the indirect object of the verb (see 13.3.2)

Er schickte seinem Bruder das	<i>He sent his brother the book</i>
Buch	
Reichst du mir bitte das Salz?	<i>Could you please pass me the salt?</i>
Ich habe meiner Schwester eine	<i>I bought my sister a CD</i>
CD gekauft	
Du musst es mir kaufen!	<i>You must buy it for me!</i>
Sie hat mir Geld gestohlen	<i>She stole money from me</i>

▶ TIP What are direct and indirect objects?

- Think of the sentence as a sequence, with the action passing from the subject to the object. In this sentence

Er schickte seinem Bruder das	<i>He sent his brother the book</i>
Buch	

the book has to be sent before *his brother* can receive it; it is therefore the direct object of the verb, and is in the accusative case. *His brother* is the indirect object and is in the dative case.

- Another 'test' for the indirect object is that the word **to** or **for** (or even **from**) can be placed in front of it (*I bought a CD **for** my sister*). In fact, the third example in 1.1.5a could be expressed (especially in spoken German) as:

Ich habe eine CD für meine	<i>I bought my sister a CD/a CD for</i>
Schwester gekauft	<i>my sister</i>

- The indirect object is an additional object, and even if it is left out, the sentence still makes sense: *I bought a DVD* makes sense; *I bought my sister* does not.

b The dative is used with some prepositions (see 9.2 and 9.3)

Ich habe bei Freunden gewohnt	<i>I stayed with friends</i>
seit meinem Besuch	<i>since my visit</i>
Die Kirche steht unserem Haus	<i>The church stands opposite our</i>
gegenüber	<i>house</i>
Ich arbeite in der Stadt	<i>I'm working in town</i>
Die Flasche ist auf dem Tisch	<i>The bottle is on the table</i>

c The dative is used after certain verbs (see 13.3.1)

Verbs such as danken, folgen, gefallen and helfen are followed by the dative; their English equivalents are followed by the accusative:

1.2 Apposition

Dieser Musik gefällt meinem	<i>My father really likes this music</i>
Vater gut, aber nicht mir	<i>but I don't</i>
Kann ich ihnen helfen?	<i>Can I help you?</i>

- d The dative is used after certain adjectives (see 5.3.3)**
The adjective usually follows the noun or pronoun in these constructions:
- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| Kann ich ihnen behilflich sein? | <i>May I help you?</i> |
| Ist es dir klar? | <i>Is that clear to you?</i> |

- e The dative object is often used to indicate possession**
For the possessive, especially with parts of the body or items of clothing, German often uses a dative pronoun (as an indirect object) plus the definite article, where English usually uses a possessive determiner (see also 3.2.3a):
- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Ich habe mir das Bein gebrochen | <i>I broke my leg</i> |
| Sie haben sich die Hände gewaschen | <i>They washed their hands</i> |
| Sie hat ihm die Hände gewaschen | <i>She washed his hands</i> |
| Er schlug dem Mann ins Gesicht | <i>He hit the man in the face</i> |

- f The dative is also used to indicate the person affected by the verb**
This is often an event to their advantage or disadvantage. This is sometimes called a 'free dative', meaning that the dative pronoun or phrase, though still an indirect object, is not essential to the construction of the predicate:
- | | |
|--|--|
| Die Tasse ist ihm beim Abwaschen zerbrochen | <i>The cup broke while he was washing it</i> |
| Der Bus ist ihr vor der Nase weggefahren | <i>She missed the bus by a whisker</i> |

- g Other expressions with the dative**
- | | |
|--|--|
| Wie geht es ihnen/dir ? | <i>How are you?</i> |
| Mir geht's gut/schlecht | <i>I'm fine/not so good</i> |
| Es geht mir gut/schlecht | <i>I'm fine/not so good</i> |
| Es ist mir viel zu warm/kalt | <i>It's much too warm/cold for me</i> |
| Es ist mir egal | <i>It's all the same to me</i> |
| Mir ist, als ob ich ihm schon mal begegnet wäre | <i>I have the feeling that I may have met him somewhere before</i> |

1.2 Apposition

- a A noun or noun phrase in apposition explains or adds information about the noun or pronoun which precedes it; it therefore appears in the same case to establish the grammatical link**
- | | |
|--|---|
| Helmut Schmidt, der große Staatsmann | <i>Helmut Schmidt, the great statesman</i> |
| Ich besuchte Richard, meinen Freund aus Berlin | <i>I visited Richard, my friend from Berlin</i> |
| Sie wohnen in Lübeck, einer schönen Stadt an der Ostsee | <i>They live in Lübeck, a pretty town on the Baltic</i> |

1 CASES

Besucher bestaunen die Fossilien eines <i>Argentinosaurus</i> <i>huinulensis</i> , des größten Sauriers aller Zeiten	<i>Visitors marvel at the fossil</i> <i>remains of an Argentinosaurus</i> <i>huinulensis, the largest</i> <i>dinosaur of all time</i>
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Note The case use in the noun phrase in apposition is often ignored in colloquial German:

„Er wohnt im Adler, ein bescheidenes Hotel “	<i>‘He’s staying at the Adler, a</i> <i>modest hotel’</i>
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b Days and dates: phrases with am + weekdays may be followed by the dative or the accusative

am Mittwoch, dem (or den) 19. Juli	<i>on Wednesday 19 July</i>
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c With names and titles that include an article, the article does not change its case in apposition

in der Zeitschrift Der Spiegel	<i>in Der Spiegel magazine</i>
in Manns Roman Der Zauberberg	<i>in Mann’s novel Der Zauberberg</i>

d With geographical and other names, German often uses apposition where English uses of

die Hansestadt Lübeck	<i>the Hanseatic city of Lübeck</i>
die Universität Tübingen	<i>the University of Tübingen</i>
die Insel Poehl	<i>the Island of Poehl</i>
die Regierung Angela Merkel	<i>the government of Angela Merkel</i>