



# **A Radical German Grammar**

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# A Radical German Grammar

setting out

The Basics in under 10 pages

(with a few extras)  
for

those who know some German  
and want to understand it better  
and speak and/or write more correctly

anyone more bewildered than enlightened  
by traditional German grammars  
who would appreciate a fresh start

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## **Introduction**

### Layout

The complexities of German Grammar have been reduced to nine basic topics, each presented on just one page.

The first two relate to the case system, which everyone should at least examine, even if written accuracy is not considered a major priority.

The next four are essential for anyone seriously interested in German at any level, since they are concerned with the verb, not only in its various forms but also as the fundamental structural component of any sentence.

The remaining sections are concerned with further features and structures of which anyone wishing to read real German must be at least aware.

The facing pages often include useful examples and/or practice material as well as supplementary notes on the topic.

The Notes should be used selectively in order to confirm the basics rather than add too many further complications. Occasionally a number in parentheses will refer you to a particular Note on the facing page.

### Terminology

Many grammatical terms in general use are undoubtedly a hindrance to understanding, either because they make something essentially simple sound alarmingly obscure or because they are not directly or conveniently transferable from one language to another.

I have used traditional terms wherever feasible, but, as many of these need to be redefined, the familiar words are given a capital letter as a reminder that they are used as defined here, and not necessarily as in other German or English grammars.

The more unfamiliar terms I have introduced are very much down-to-earth and hopefully self-explanatory.

The index of topics and grammatical features on pages 23-24 includes both the terminology of this course and most other terms traditionally used.

## I Articles and Adjectives

Articles I

**ein kein mein dein sein unser euer ihr Ihr**

Articles II

The definite article, **der/das/die**, and **dies-, jed-/all-, welch-** (etc)

Articles III

Any Adjective serving as/instead of an Article has the same endings as **dies-**

---

An Article is either NORMAL or NOT

For Group I Articles, Normal is either:

with an **-e** (e.g. *meine*) for a plural or a feminine (die-type)

or:

without (e.g. *mein*) for the rest.

For Group II Articles (and Adjectives as Articles) the rest are split further into

either: **der/dieser/jeder** etc for a "masculine" (referred to as 'der-type')

or **das/dieses/jedes** etc for a "neuter" (referred to as 'das-type')

---

The Article is NOT Normal after **aus bei mit nach seit von zu** (1);

it changes to something DIFFERENT:

plural -e becomes **-en** (+ **-n** on the noun if not already present)

die-type -e becomes **-er**

the rest have **-em**

The same happens after Position words such as:

**an auf hinter in neben über unter vor zwischen** ... *(unless the "Position word" is used not to give a position but to express a movement, not to say 'where' but 'where to', in which case there is no change (unless ..... the noun is a **der-type** in which case we use an Awkward (Annoying/Accusative) version with the ending **-en**)*

If the noun is the Object of the sentence  
or comes after other prepositions such as:

**durch für ohne gegen um**

this makes no difference at all *(unless ..... the noun is a **der-type** in which case we use an Awkward (Annoying/Accusative) version with the ending **-en**)*

---

**Adjectives** after an Article have either:

**-e** if the Article is Normal and singular ... *(unless it is a Group I Article with no ending, in which case an extra **-r** or an extra **-s** is added to show what the Article does not, i.e. whether the noun is der- or das-type)*

or **-en** if it is not

---

The Genitive also exists and can be used to express 'of', as in 'the roof of the house', (though *von* is often used in preference) or to provide the 'of' after **statt trotz wegen während** (etc);

the ending is either: **-er** for plural and die-type  
or **-es** (+ **-s** on the noun) for the rest

---

For time expressions not involving a preposition use either:

the "Genitive" -s for vague time: *eines Tages, abends, nachts*

or Normal/Awkward for definite time:

*nächste Woche, dieses Jahr, jeden Monat, letzten Dienstag*

## Supplementary Notes on Articles and Adjectives

### 1 Other prepositions:

For **seit** see page 19 Note 5

**außer**, 'apart from' (a development of *aus*) also produces the change to Different.

**gegenüber**, 'opposite, facing', is a Position word even when used metaphorically and usually comes after the noun: *der Post gegenüber, seinem Sohn gegenüber war er herzlos*

Where Position words are used metaphorically, the image is often one of movement, though this is far from obvious in the case of *über* as in: *ein Buch über das Wetter/meinen Vater*; the only common metaphorical position is in time: *im Frühling, am Dienstag*.

**entlang** usually comes after the noun as *die Straße entlang* or with *an*: *am Fluß entlang*.

### 2 Contractions:

*zu der* is almost always contracted to **zur** and *zu/in/an dem* become **zum/im/am**; *beim* and *vom* are also possible; *das* is similarly abbreviated to give **ins/ans/aufs** etc, especially in such common expressions as *ins Kino*.

### 3 Article or Adjective?

It seems best to treat *solch-* as an Adjective; it is mainly used in the plural (*solche Krankheiten*) or after *ein* (*eine solche Stunde, ein solcher Sturm, ein solches Buch*).

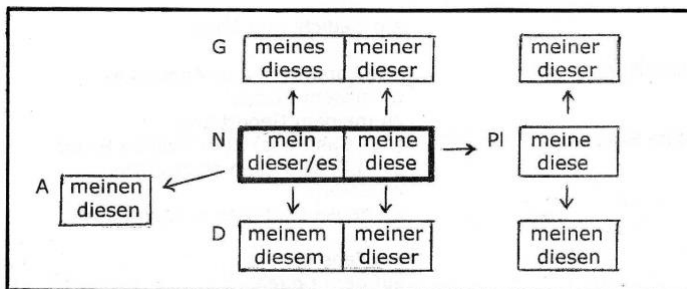
Numbers do not usually take endings (nowadays) and vague invariable words such as *allerlei*, *ein paar* and *viel* & *wenig* (singular) are definitely not Articles; *viele*, *wenige* and *einige* work as Adjectives in the plural.

### 4 For Adjectives serving as Articles, (almost\*) all the endings of *dies-* are possible:

*holländischer Käse, frisches Obst, warme Milch, reife Birnen, bei gutem Wetter, aus grüner Seide, in kleinen Mengen, ohne großen Erfolg, trotz vieler Warnungen*

but the one to note is the plural **-e**; after a plural Article, the Adjective ending is **-en**.

5 The distinction between Normal and any change (including plural) is made clear by the following diagrammatic presentation of the Articles pattern; Adjectives after an article from the central Normal block have an **-e** (with an extra -r or -s after plain *mein, sein, ihr* etc), whereas after any Article from the periphery the Adjective has **-en**:



### 6 Adjectives made into nouns still have Adjective endings as appropriate.

Just who is meant by 'the accused' in court would be made immediately clear in German as:  
*der Angeklagte, die Angeklagte or die Angeklagten*

Several other verb participles are commonly used to denote people in this way:

*ein Verwandter, der Vorsitzende, meine Bekannten, sie ist Angestellte*

but in theory any adjective can be used in this way:

*eine Weiße, ein Jugendlicher, die Papierlosen*

With the neuter, abstract concepts can also be coined at will:

*das Schöne, mein Äußeres, das Beunruhigende an seiner Rede, etwas Interessantes*

some being so familiar as to drop their capital letter:

*unter anderem, bei weitem, im großen und ganzen, im allgemeinen*

\*The exceptional -en Adjective version of the -es Genitive is fortunately very rare, except in a few expressions such as *kalten Blutes*, 'in cold blood'.

## II Genders and plurals

To get the Article right, it is often enough to know whether the noun is *die*-type or not; fortunately **die-types** are relatively easy to identify:

all words formed by adding *-ung, -heit, -keit, -schaft, -in, -ei,*

or foreign feminine ending such as *-ur, -ion, -anz, -enz, -ät, -a, -ie, -ik*

and almost all words ending in **-e**

are **die-type**;

and they all form their plural by adding **-(e)n**:

*Tassen, Zeitungen, Mannschaften, Lehrerinnen, Strukturen*

There are very few common exceptions to the **-e** rule other than:

*der Käse, das Auge, das Ende*

and a number of words denoting male people, such as *der Junge* (1)

Assuming that all other words are not die-type is over 80% safe.

---

**"Der or das?"** is a much more difficult choice:

Many words ending in **-er** are **der-type**;

and statistically *der* is over three times as likely to be correct as *das* (7).

The only words guaranteed to be **das-type** are:

diminutives formed by adding *-chen or -lein*: *Märchen, Fräulein*

and infinitives used as nouns: *Vertrauen, ein Grinsen*

For their Plural:

most **der**-types have: **-e** and an Umlaut if possible (4): *Stühle, Pässe, Söhne, Bäume*

many **das**-types have: **-er** and an Umlaut if possible: *Gläser, Dörfer, Kinder*

Diminutives in *-chen* and *-lein* and words ending in *-el, -en* or *-er* add nothing at all on the end:

*Mädchen, Schlüssel, Schatten, Lehrer;*

but several do add an Umlaut, notably:

*Äpfel, Brüder, Väter, Gärten, Häfen, Läden, Mäntel*

An *-s* is used for imported words when nothing else is feasible:

*Kameras, Büros, Autos, Fans, Drinks*

---

If you are striving for perfection, you will have to learn to cope with many **exceptions**:

Some die-types look like der-types in the plural; the more important ones are:

*Städte, Hände, Nächte, Wände, Nüsse, Würste, Früchte*

A few der-types look like das-types in the plural; only three really matter:

*Götter, Männer, Wälder*

Many das-types look like der-types in the plural, notably:

*Beine, Boote, Brote, Feste, Haare, Hefte, Jahre, Netze, Paare, Pferde, Rechte, Schafe, Schiffe, Schweine, Seile, Spiele, Stücke, Tiere, Werke, Zelte, Ziele* + those with a *-nis* ending: *Geschehnisse*

and some even add **-(e)n**: *Betten, Hemden, Ohren, Augen, Enden*

making it even more difficult to believe they really are das-type.

## Supplementary Notes on Genders and Plurals

### 1 Problematical der-types:

Words such as *Junge* add **-n** for their plural: *Jungen, Neffen, Boten, Archeologen*  
and also whenever they are not Normal: *ich habe einen Neffen, mit dem Jungen*

This applies to some not ending in *-e*; but, apart from *Fels* (rock), the most common ones again refer to people:

*Herr, Mensch, Nachbar, Christ, Fürst, Graf, Prinz, Held, Bauer, Bayer, Narr,*

Another group is very similar, but has the extra *-s* for the Genitive:

*Er hat einen komischen Namen/zwei Vornamen, mit diesem Namen, wegen seines Namens*

but: *Mein Name ist Meier*

similarly: *Gedanke, Friede, Wille, Glaube, Buchstabe, Funke*

Some *der*-types are odd in having an **-(e)n** plural making it easy to mistake them for *die*-types:

*Muskeln, Pantoffeln, Seen, Staaten, Vettern*

2 One of the few worthwhile other "rules" on offer assumes a fair knowledge of **strong/irregular verbs**; it states that most nouns derived from such verbs are **der-type**, unless they have a suffixed **-t** or **-e** : *der Beginn, Stoß, Stich, Gang, Trieb, Fluß, Schluß, Zug* etc

but: *die Schrift, Flucht, Macht, Zukunft, Hilfe, Gabe*

Exceptions:

*das Leid, Schloß, Floß, Schmalz Gift*

*die Schur, Burg, Wand*

3 A **Ge-** prefix usually makes the noun **das-type** (*die Sicht* but *das Gesicht*); but the strong verb rule prevails with:

*der Gewinn, Gesang, Genuß, Gestank, Gefallen, Gedeih, Gebrauch*

and there is no accounting for:

*die Gebühr, Gefahr, Gewähr*

*der Verlust, Gedanke*

Note: *der Gehalt*, content; but also *das Gehalt*, salary (think of *das Geld*)

*der Band* (*pl Bände*), volume, book; but also *das Band* (*pl Bänder*), tape, ribbon etc

4 Beware *Teil*: it is normally *der*-type, but not always, e.g.:

*das Gegenteil, das Urteil, das Abteil, das Drittel/Viertel* etc

5 Some *der*-types do not add an Umlaut, notably:

*Arme, Hunde, Monate, Punkte, Rufe, Schuhe, Tage*

6 Most words ending in **-nis** are *das*-type; and all form their plural in **-nisse**, even if they are *die*-type, such as *Finsternis, Erlaubnis, Kenntnis*

7 Many foreign words are **das**-type:

*das Kino, Büro, Auto, Team, Recycling*

but sometimes analogies determine otherwise: *der Computer, die Software*  
*der Hit (Schlager), der Safe (Geldschrank), der Euro (écu?/Dollar?), der Shop (Laden?),*  
*der Job (Arbeitsplatz?), der Trend (?), die E-mail (Post) die Band (Gruppe?)*

8 The plural of foreign words ending in *-or* and *-um*, and most ending *-a*, is **-en**:

*Doktoren, Professoren*

*Museen, Ministerien*

*Dramen, Themen, Firmen*

This *-en* plural is also used for many well assimilated foreign *das*-type, including:

*Insekten, Interessen, Juwelen, Mythen, Risiken*

### III Verbs - Weak and Strong

Verbs usually have endings to match the Subject. In the **Present** these are:

<i>ich</i>	<b>-e</b>	<i>gehe</i>	<i>arbeite</i>	<i>handle</i>
<i>du</i>	<b>-(e)st</b>	<i>gehst</i>	<i>arbeitest</i>	<i>handelst</i>
<i>er etc</i>	<b>(e)t</b>	<i>geht</i>	<i>arbeitet</i>	<i>handelt</i>
<hr/>				
<i>wir/sie (pl)/Sie</i>	<b>-en</b>	<i>gehen</i>	<i>arbeiten</i>	<i>handeln</i>
<i>ihr</i>	<b>(e)t</b>	<i>geht</i>	<i>arbeitet</i>	<i>handelt</i>

Apart from Modal verbs (see below), almost all German verbs follow this pattern.

The verb 'to be' (*sein*) is irregular (*bin/bist/ist/sind/seid*); but in all other cases the only complications to arise are in the **du** and **er** forms:

*ich habe* is odd only in dropping the **b** in the same way that we drop the **v** in 'has':

*du hast, er hat* (similarly 'had' and 'hatte')

*ich werde* is slightly more irregular (and of the utmost importance):

*du wirst, er wird*

Some **Strong** verbs have a vowel change in the *du* and *er* forms (see the samples from Groups 5 to 8 opposite and/or the full listings in Appendix A)

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The **Past** tense of **Weak** verbs is arrived at by inserting a **-t-** before the Present endings and dropping the final **t** on the third person; this makes the *ich* and *er* forms the same:

*ich/er etc spielte, kaufte, arbeitete*

**Strong** verbs use a vowel change to indicate the past; the *ich* and *er* forms are again identical, but they have no ending at all; for the other persons, the usual endings are added.

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The **Past Participle** of Weak verbs ends in **-t**: *gemacht, gearbeitet, gewandert*

For **Strong** verbs it ends in **-en**, with a variety of vowel changes:

*geschrieben, geschlossen, gefunden, gewonnen, gegessen, geschlagen, gegangen*

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So-called **Mixed** verbs have endings like Weak Verbs but also vowel and/or other changes:

<i>denke</i>	<i>dachte</i>	<i>gedacht</i>
<i>bringe</i>	<i>brachte</i>	<i>gebracht</i>
<i>kenne</i>	<i>kannte</i>	<i>gekannt</i>

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The prefixed **ge-** is dropped from the Past Participle however for foreign (weak) verbs ending in **-ieren**:

*organisiert, kritisiert, komponiert,*

and for **all** verbs which already have a **Prefix**:

*begonnen, empfohlen, enttäuscht, erkannt, geschehen, hinterlassen,  
mißhandelt, zerschlagen, verkauft*

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**Modal Verbs** have no endings on the *ich* and *er* forms of the Present; and most have a different vowel in the plural; in the **Past** they are **Mixed**, using the plural vowel without any Umlaut:

<i>ich/er etc</i>	<i>kann</i>	<i>wir etc</i>	<i>können</i>	<i>ich/er</i>	<i>konnte</i>
	<i>will</i>		<i>wollen</i>		<i>wollte</i>
	<i>darf</i>		<i>dürfen</i>		<i>durfte</i>
	<i>muß</i>		<i>müssen</i>		<i>mußte</i>
	<i>soll</i>		<i>sollen</i>		<i>sollte</i>
	<i>mag</i>		<i>mögen</i>		<i>mochte</i>

---

The **Infinitive**, in all cases except *sein* (to be), is identical with the *wir/sie/Sie* form. For how to use Modals with Infinitives, see the next main page: 'Verb Extras'.



## Strong Verb group samples (from Appendix A)

The first three groups involve a single vowel change for both Past and Past Participle.

Group 1 the change is from an **ei** vowel to **ie**:

schreibe	schrieb	geschrieben
steige	stieg	gestiegen
bleibe	blieb	geblieben

In Group 2 the change is to an **i**, with a doubling of the consonant to keep the *i* short:

beiße	biß	gebissen
greife	griff	gegriffen
schneide	schnitt	geschnitten

In Group 3 the change is from an **ie** vowel to an **o**, short before a double consonant in part (a) and long before a single consonant in part (b):

(a)		
schließe	schloß	geschlossen
schieße	schoß	geschossen
(b)		
fliege	flog	geflogen
verliere	verlor	verloren

The next three all have a Past tense in **a**, but another different vowel for the Past Participle.

Group 4 verbs all have an **i** in the Present:

finde	fand	gefunden
trinke	trank	getrunken
binde	band	gebunden

Group 5 verbs\* have either an **i** or an **e** which changes to **i** in the *du* and *er* forms; most verbs in the later groups have a similar complication in the Present:

beginne	begann	begonnen
gewinne	gewann	gewonnen
spreche/spricht	sprach	gesprochen
helfe/hilft	half	geholfen
breche/bricht	brach	gebrochen
nehme/nimmt	nahm	genommen

In Group 6 the Past Participle has an **e**, which in many cases is the Present tense vowel:

gebe/gibt	gab	gegeben
vergesse/vergißt	vergaß	vergessen
sehe/sieht	sah	gesehen
lese/liest	las	gelesen

The next two groups also use the vowel of the Present tense for the Past Participle.

Group 7:

fahre/fährt	fuhr	gefahren
schlage/schlägt	schlug	geschlagen
trage/trägt	trug	getragen

Group 8:

falle/fällt	fiel	gefallen
schlafe/schläft	schlief	geschlafen
laufe/läuft	lief	gelaufen

Group 9 is for *gehen/hängen/fangen* and Group 10 covers the remaining oddities (*sein, stehen, werden, tun, hauen*); Mixed verbs, which have a vowel change as well as weak endings, form their own group.

\**komme/kam/gekommen* belongs to Group 5, at least as far as its changed vowels are concerned.

#### IV Verb Extras

Modal verbs work with an **Infinitive** expressing what it is we can/must/want to do. Even when used on their own to give a cryptic order or instruction, Infinitives come **last**:

*Bitte den Rasen nicht betreten*                      *Bitte Aschenbecher benutzen*

Infinitives therefore come at the end of the Statement or Question, so that any other details come between the Modal Verb and the Infinitive:

*Darf ich bitte auf die Toilette gehen?*

*Ich kann mit meinem Feldstecher zwei Vögel auf dem Baum neben dem Eingang zum Friedhof ganz deutlich sehen.*

Within a sentence we may have two or more Infinitives dependent on the one Modal:

*Ich muß eine Geschichte erfinden, sorgfältig überprüfen und verbessern, ins reine schreiben und vor fünf Uhr zur Post bringen.*

---

As in English, the **Future** is formed in this way, using *ich werde etc* with an Infinitive:

*Wir werden Sie sehr vermissen*      *Nächstes Jahr wird mein Paß nicht mehr gültig sein*

The Past tense with an Umlaut, *würde*, gives us the **Conditional**, i.e. what I would do if ....

*An Ihrer Stelle würde ich diesen Kerl einfach vergessen*

---

Combining a Future or Conditional and a Modal will give us the problem of two Extras, both needing to be last; in this case the first/primary Extra takes up the end position:

*Ich werde*    *müssen*

to express 'I will have to'; and the other has to make do with best available position, i.e. next to last:

*Ich werde meine Geschichte sorgfältig verbessern müssen*

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Another important type of verb **Extra**, coming at the end of the Statement but working together with the Verb, is best described as a **Modifier**. Many of these derive from prepositions such as *aus, nach, zu, an, vor, um* (4) but the way in which they affect the meaning of the basic Verb is often complex (see Appendix B):

<i>Die Deutschen stehen sehr früh <u>auf</u></i>	... get up very early
<i>Wir fangen erst <u>um acht Uhr an</u></i>	... don't begin till 8
<i>Ich schlafe oft <u>vor dem Fernseher ein</u></i>	... often go to sleep
<i>Der Zug fährt jetzt <u>ab</u></i>	... is setting off
<i>Wir schlagen im Wörterbuch <u>nach</u></i>	... look things up
<i>Machen Sie bitte das Fenster <u>zu</u></i>	... shut the window
<i>Sie ziehen nächste Woche <u>um</u></i>	... are moving house
<i>Das reicht aber nicht <u>aus</u></i>	... is not sufficient
<i>Ich habe heute nicht viel <u>vor</u></i>	... haven't much on/planned

---

If we change any of the above sentences by introducing a Modal (e.g. 'We must look this word up') we again have two Extras. Before we introduce the modifying effect of *nach*, the middle sentence above becomes basically:

*Wir müssen*    *schlagen*

The **Modifier** then takes up the best available position, i.e. next to last; **BUT** the distinctive feature of Modifiers is that whenever they come next to their basic verb, the two are **written together**:

*Wir müssen dieses Wort im Wörterbuch nachschlagen*

perhaps to indicate that they form a single unit of meaning, almost like a prefixed version such as *zerschlagen*.

## Supplementary Notes on Modals and Verb Extras

### 1 Modals

*kann/können* = to be able; *darf/dürfen* = having permission

*muß/müssen* = to have to; *ich muß nicht* = I don't have to

I mustn't (because it is not allowed) = *ich darf nicht*

*will/wollen* = wanting, intending or being willing

*soll/sollen* = what is/is due/supposed to happen

or is said/supposed to be the case; *er soll sehr reich sein*

Putting the Umlaut back onto the Past tense (see page 26 for details) produces different shades of meaning:

*könnte* could (possibly/if ...)

*dürfte* might just possibly

*müßte* really/strictly speaking ought to

*sollte* ought to (unfortunately identical with Past tense 'was supposed to')

*möchte* would like (to); this is the only commonly used form of *mag/mögen*; it is sometimes used to express a rather weak form of (dis)liking (*Das mag ich nicht so gern*), and is also used in such expressions as *Das mag wohl sein* (That may well be).

### 2 Other Verbs with an Infinitive

*lassen* is used in the same way as a Modal with a variety of meanings:

*Laß mich sehen*

Let me see/have a look

*Er läßt seine Sachen überall liegen*

He leaves his things all over the place

*Ich lasse mein Auto reparieren*

I have my car repaired (by someone else)

*Das läßt sich nicht leugnen*

It cannot be denied

A number of other verbs may be used in this way, but in most cases the Infinitive is treated as a Modifier, i.e. written together\* when both come at the end:

*Er blieb plötzlich stehen*

He suddenly stopped (in his tracks)

*Bleiben Sie ruhig sitzen*

Do remain seated/Don't get up

*Sie muß leider sitzenbleiben*

I'm afraid she will have stay down (a year)

*Ich sah ihn aus der Bank kommen*

I saw him come/coming out of the bank

*Ich gehe heute nachmittag schwimmen*

I'm going swimming this afternoon

*Möchtest du vielleicht spazierengehen?*

Do you fancy a walk?

### 3 Infinitive with zu

Almost all other Verbs/constructions with an Infinitive need a grammatical *zu*:

*Ich beginne dieses Buch zu verstehen*

(I am beginning to understand)

*Wir haben vor, im Mai nach Italien zu reisen*

(We plan to travel)

*Ich mache Überstunden, um ein Auto kaufen zu können*

(in order to be able to)

If a Modifier is added, all three elements are written together, with the *zu* sandwiched between Modifier and Infinitive, sometimes producing rather odd results:

*Sie versucht abzunehmen*

*Darf ich Sie bitten, jetzt einzusteigen?*

*Wir haben vergessen, die Tür zuzumachen*

The verb *brauchen*, 'to need (to)', is increasingly treated as a Modal; and Infinitive phrases as the Subject often have no *zu*: *Kinder haben und zu Hause bleiben kommen nicht in Frage*

4 Some **Modifiers** are also used as **Prefixes**, notably *durch*, *über* and *um*, which means that listing Verbs as Infinitives is not particularly helpful.

\*The controversial *neue Rechtschreibung*, which many quite understandably reject, seeks to reverse this historically natural process of assimilation

## V Participles

The Present Participle ends in **-end**; it is rarely used except as an Adjective:

*kochendes Wasser, schlafende Kinder, der Fliegende Holländer, der Vorsitzende*

---

**Past Participles** are important verb **Extras**, but they too are often used as adjectives:  
*gestohlenes Geld, ein gepolsterter Stuhl, komplizierte Fragen, eine vereiste Fahrbahn,  
im vergangenen Jahr, die betroffenen Gebiete*

Part of the verb 'to be' may be followed by a Past Participle (PP) in German, but this is only possible if the PP is essentially an Adjective, giving a description of the state of affairs at the time:

*Wir sind besorgt                      Die Tür war geschlossen*

If we want to talk about things being **done**, i.e. something **happening** to the subject, we have to use *werden*, NOT *sein*. If we want to describe the door being closed slowly/quietly/violently etc we say:  
*Die Tür wurde langsam/leise/heftig geschlossen*

If we use the alternative verb for closing, *machen* + Modifier *zu*, the *zu* will be written together with the PP:  
*Die Tür wurde schnell wieder zugemacht*

Other tenses and constructions are of course possible:

*Diese Zeitung wird von Millionen gelesen  
Die Diebe werden überall gesucht  
Dieses Gebäude soll abgerissen werden  
Tränengas mußte eingesetzt werden*

If we wish to talk about what **has** or **had** been done, there are two complications:  
the PP of *werden*, which is normally *geworden*, is reduced to *worden*,  
**AND**

where we might expect part of *haben* for the 'have' or 'had', we find part of *sein*:

(has been)                      *Der Schlüssel ist leider verlegt worden*  
   *Seine Geschwister sind tot aufgefunden worden*  
(had been)                      *Der Brief war schon am Montag abgeschickt worden*  
   *Sie waren von einer ansteckenden Krankheit befallen worden*  
(must have been)              *Der Verletzte mußte überfahren worden sein*

---

Unfortunately *werden* is by no means the only verb to use *ich bin* etc rather than *ich habe* for its **Perfect tenses**. Any verb which expresses a change on the part of the **Subject** behaves in this way, so that *werden* in its own right, meaning 'to become', is a classic example:

*Es ist Lehrer geworden,              Es war plötzlich ganz still geworden*

If something happens, it changes the situation, hence:

*Was ist denn geschehen/passiert?*

Any verb of **movement** expresses a change of place/position:

*Ich bin oft nach Bonn gefahren              Sie sind nach Berlin geflogen  
Er war ins Wasser gefallen              Wir sind jetzt umgezogen*

and there is an element of movement in many of the other common examples:

*Ich bin ihm nie begegnet  
Das Geld war einfach verschwunden  
Die Zeit ist schnell vergangen  
Er ist gestorben/ertrunken/verblutet  
Sie waren eingeschlafen/aufgewacht  
Wir sind gewachsen/gereift/gealtert*

All these, like *sein* and *bleiben* (4) cannot have an Object; any Verb which **has** an Object (including a reflexive) **cannot** have *ich bin* for its Perfect (8):

*Er hat mich zum Bahnhof gefahren/den neuen Wagen noch nicht eingefahren  
Ich habe mich schon geduscht/angezogen*

## Supplementary Notes on Participles

1 The problem we met with Infinitives, where a **Prefix** may sometimes be confused with a **Modifier**, rarely arises with a PP. As we discovered under 'Weak and Strong Verbs' (q.v.), any verb with a Prefix cannot have *ge-* as another prefix on its PP, so that the PP of *umarmen* is *umarmt* and 'He embraced his mother' is: *Er hat seine Mutter umarmt*, whereas in: *Er hat sich zum Abendessen umgezogen* (He changed for dinner) we clearly see the Modifier *um* written together with the PP *gezogen*.

2 There is no need to shy away from the "passive" type of construction in German. On the other hand *man*, meaning 'one/someone/we/you/they/people in general' is very commonly used and sometimes offers a convenient alternative:  
*Beim Bäcker werden Brot und Kuchen verkauft/ Beim Bäcker verkauft man Brot und Kuchen*

3 If the word for 'by' is needed to introduce the person by whom something is done, this is usually *von*, as in the example opposite; for things it is usually *durch*:

*Er wurde durch den starken Verkehr aufgehalten*

but *von* is possible if the agent is particularly active or personalised:

*Die Insel ist von einem Orkan verwüstet worden*

4 The case for *ich bin geblieben* is that it represents the negation of a possible change.

5 If I have been ill and still am, this is expressed by a Present tense, with a phrase with *seit* giving information about how long or since when: *Ich bin seit Montag krank*

If I had been ill and still was at the relevant time in the past, a Past tense would be used:

*Ich war damals seit drei Monaten krank*

6 Apart from the *seit* construction above, the **Pluperfect (or Past Perfect)** corresponds exactly to our English Pluperfect tense.

The German **Perfect**, however, besides corresponding closely to our own Perfect Tense, i.e. expressing what we have done, is used extensively as an alternative **past** tense.

The distinction between the two is largely subjective: when something is considered as belonging to the past, we use the **Past**; but if it is recent, or still relevant to the Present, the **Perfect** is preferred:

*Wir sind gestern in den Zoo gegangen*

*Goethe hat unsterbliche Gedichte geschrieben* (and we still enjoy them)

The **Past** is the standard written narrative tense, whereas the **Perfect** predominates in conversation, if only because we tend to talk mostly about recent events; but even in conversation most Germans will use the **Past** for an "imperfect" such as 'it was raining', or simply for convenience, often preferring the Past for *haben*, *sein* and Modals.

7 The **Modals** are odd in that they have an official PP (*gekonnt*, *gemußt* etc) but hardly ever use it; when working with an Infinitive (which is most of the time) they use instead what looks exactly like their own infinitive form, which can be very confusing:

*Er hat seinen Wohnwagen verkaufen müssen*

*Ich habe seine Adresse nicht finden können*

The same applies to *lassen* and sometimes *hören/sehen* working with an infinitive:

*Er hat den Schlüssel fallenlassen/ sein Auto reparieren lassen*

*Ich habe ihn hereinkommen sehen*

8 Cases such as *Er ist die Treppe hinaufgegangen* can be seen as similar to *Er ist die Straße entlang gegangen*, i.e. *die Treppe* is not the Object of a verb *hinaufgehen*, which the writing together of Modifier and PP might suggest.

There are a few genuine oddities such as:

*Wir sind diesen alten Tisch endlich losgeworden*

*Er ist die Wette eingegangen*

## VI Statements and Clauses

A standard sentence consists of a **Statement** which has at least a subject and a verb, plus any number of extras ad lib: **Wir haben** ein großes Haus mit vier Schlafzimmern in Wuppertal

A German Statement either begins with the Subject or ..... it doesn't.

If a German Statement starts with the Subject, everything is more or less as you would expect, as in the sentence above.

If it does **not** start with the Subject, then the Verb comes next and the Subject comes **after** it:

**Heute** haben wir leider keine Zeit

**Ohne Brille** sehe ich nicht so gut

**In der Schweiz** spricht man nicht nur Deutsch

**Natürlich** kann er schwimmen

**Das** sagt meine Mutter immer

**"Kann ich Ihnen helfen?"** fragte er sehr höflich

**Diesen Mann** kann ich nicht leiden

**Verboten** ist das nicht aber ...

Almost any part of your sentence can be put first for the sake of convenience or emphasis, but the verb must come next, before the Subject.

---

Two or more Statements can be strung together using **Link Words**; these are separate from the Statements they link together and have no effect on either. There are the three obvious Link Words *und*, *aber* and *oder* and three others:

*denn*, which means 'and the reason is ...'

*sondern* follows and replaces/contradicts a negative: 'but rather/on the contrary'

*allein* is a development of *aber* and has the force of 'but the thing is: ...'

---

Any part of a sentence, which contains a Subject and a Verb is either a **Statement** or a **Clause**. A **Clause** does not make sense on its own out of context; it adds information, explaining the circumstances surrounding a Statement; or it may be a necessary addition, telling us what someone said/thought/knew etc. Typical starters for Clauses are:

<i>wenn</i>	if <u>or</u> when .....	<i>bis</i>	until, by the time ...
<i>als</i>	when .....(in the past)	<i>indem</i>	as/while .....
<i>während</i>	while ....	<i>weil</i>	Because .....
<i>nachdem</i>	after .....	<i>da</i>	Since/as/because
<i>bevor</i>	before .....	<i>obwohl/obgleich</i>	although ....
<i>sobald</i>	as soon as	<i>damit</i>	so that .... (purpose)
<i>weißt du), daß</i>	(do you know) that .....	<i>er fragte), ob</i>	... if/whether .....

**Clauses** have a very different pattern from that of a Statement: the subject comes after the starter, as we might expect; but the Verb must come last (4), which means that anything else must come between Subject and Verb:

*Ich weiß, daß sie kommt*

*Ich weiß, daß sie heute abend gegen acht Uhr kommt.*

*Ich weiß, daß sie normalerweise mit einem Taxi direkt vom Bahnhof kommt.*

*Wenn ich Zeit habe, ...*

*Weil wir heute leider keine Zeit haben, ...*

*Obwohl sie dieses Jahr wegen der Probleme mit den Kindern natürlich sehr wenig Zeit für solche Ausflüge hatten, .....*

---

If we use such a Clause to introduce our Statement, the Statement itself must of course begin with the Verb before the Subject, as in the first group of examples above:

*Weil wir heute leider keine Zeit haben, gehen wir nicht ins Kino*

## Supplementary Notes on Statement and Clauses

### 1 Questions

You will probably have noticed that German has just one way of forming a question, i.e. by swapping round subject and verb, something we do with only very few verbs in English:

Have they ...? Is he ... ? Can you ... ? Shall we? Must I ... ? etc

### 2 Negatives

German also has just one way of making a verb negative. i.e. by adding *nicht*, which is only possible with (mostly) the same verbs in English:

I am not, will not, cannot, haven't, won't, mustn't etc

### 3 Orders

The easiest form of order is probably the least useful (unless you often mix with two or more people you know well enough to call them collectively 'ihr'): simply use the *ihr* form of the verb:

*Seid still! Macht schnell! Kommt herein!*

You probably know the polite form from the very polite order '*Entschuldigen Sie*'.

The *Sie* seems rather unnecessary, but is probably there to distinguish direct orders from suggestions such as *Gehen wir jetzt*.

Orders to someone you address as 'du' are much more complicated.

It may seem sensible to start with the *du* form of the verb, but when we take off the *-st* ending, for most verbs we end up with the basic stem of the verb.

The simplest rule is to use either this basic stem (with or without an optional *-e*):

*Steh auf Komm mit Geh ins Wohnzimmer Warte hier*

or with any vowel change the verb may have in the 'du' form (with no optional *-e*):

*Gib mir die Zeitung Lies bitte vor Sprich langsamer*

and that does mean a changed vowel, not one modified with an Umlaut, so that for Verbs in Groups 7 and 8 (see the Strong Verbs listings in Appendix A) there is no problem:

*Fahr schneller Trag das in die Küche Schlaf gut*

With the verb 'to be', the *du* form comes straight from the infinitive and the *Sie* form follows suit:

*Sei still Seien Sie beruhigt*

4 It is of course the real **Verb** that must come last in a **Clause**; any Extras that would be at the end of a Statement have to take up the next best position before the Verb, giving Modifiers another opportunity to be written together with the Verb:

*Obwohl wir kein Schweinefleisch essen dürfen, ....*

*Nachdem wir unsere Hausaufgaben gemacht hatten, ....*

*Ich weiß nicht, ob die Täter schon verhaftet worden sind*

*Bevor ich einschlafe, ....*

*Weil er immer so früh aufsteht, ....*

*Wenn wir erst am Abend abfahren, ....*

5 **Relative** clauses require a special starter to link them to whatever/whoever they relate to. This is usually the appropriate form of the definite Article (*welch-* is also used), except that the Genitive ('whose') and the Different plural are given an extra **-en**:

*der Lehrer, der mich unterrichtet/ ein Rotwein, den ich sehr gern trinke/ ein Bild, das ich gemalt habe/ eine Krankheit, die viele getötet hat/Wörter, die ich nicht verstehe/ ein Onkel, von dem ich Geld bekomme/die Brücke, auf der ich jetzt stehe*

but:

*die Menschen, unter denen ich aufgewachsen bin/ der Briefträger, dessen Tochter bald heiraten soll/ eine Ärztin, deren Praxis in der Hauptstrasse ist/ Verwandte, deren Adresse ich verloren habe*

If the item related to has no particular gender, we use *was*:

*etwas/alles/das/nichts/wenig/das Einzige, was mich besonders interessiert*

6 The least obvious type of **Clause** is one beginning with a question word; just as it is:

*Er fragte, ob wir heute abend Fußball spielten*

so it is: *Er fragte, wann wir einkaufen gingen, wo wir unser Gemüse kauften, warum wir nicht in den Supermarkt gingen und Geld sparten, was es uns jede Woche kostete usw*

## VII Pronouns and the Dative

The third person pronouns follow the Articles pattern (q.v.); and we may add the polite 'you' forms, as these are essentially the same as the plural:

<i>er</i>	<i>es</i>	<i>sie</i>	<i>sie</i>	<i>Sie</i>
<i>ihn</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>
<i>ihm</i>		<i>ihr</i>	<i>ihnen</i>	<i>Ihnen</i>

To complete our set of personal pronouns we need:

<i>ich</i>	<i>wir</i>	<i>du</i>	<i>ihr</i>
<i>mich</i>	<i>uns</i>	<i>dich</i>	<i>euch</i>
<i>mir</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>dir</i>	<i>"</i>

The main differences between English and German are in the middle line, which we need for the Object of the sentence (and after prepositions such as *für* or *in* meaning 'into' etc) In English we do not distinguish between 'you' as subject and 'you' as Object or after a preposition; we do make this distinction, however, between 'she' and 'her', 'they' and 'them'; whereas the German for all these is *sie*; as with the Articles, the only one with a special Object form is the masculine.

---

The bottom line **Different** versions are needed after *aus bei mit nach von zu* and (real) Position words: *bei ihm, mit ihr, von ihnen, hinter mir, vor uns, neben dir, unter euch* and also for the **Dative**:

This more traditional term for the bottom line comes from the Latin *dare*, 'to give', and is appropriate for the other aspect of the Different forms, namely their capacity to express the idea of 'to' when we give/say/sell something to someone.

This Dative (or indirect) Object is understood as a Dative in the following English sentences, even though we have no longer have any such distinctive form:

Tell your teacher the truth, I will write her a letter, He gave his son a lot of problems, His name escapes me, Please order us a taxi, He is baking his mother a cake

In the last example it would be particularly disastrous to take the item underlined as the real/direct Object, but there is no chance of this happening in German:

*Er bäckt **seiner** Mutter einen Kuchen*

In most cases the reasons for the Dative will be clear and/or its use will become familiar, but there are a few verbs which have a Dative where we might fully expect a direct Object:

*ich folge/helfe/danke/begegne/drohe/traue/glaube/gratuliere/imponiere **ihm** (1)*

and vice versa in the case of:

*es kostet **mich** viel Geld, ich lehre **ihn** Deutsch, ich möchte **Sie** etwas fragen*

---

If we use pronouns **reflexively** (2) however, there is a special form *sich* which replaces ALL the Object and Different/Dative forms in the top group above:

*Ich wasche mich, kaufe mir neue Kleider, habe kein Geld bei mir*

*Wir beschwerten uns, lassen uns die Haare schneiden*

*Du solltest dich schämen, dir ein Auto kaufen*

*Ihr müßt euch beeilen, euch Zeit lassen*

but: *Er/sie beeilt sich, macht es sich bequem; das bringt Probleme mit sich  
sie/Sie beschwerten sich, waschen sich die Hände*

---

Pronouns are used not only for people but also for **things**, **except** after prepositions, where a completely different approach is used: we use **da-** attached to the front of the preposition:

*dafür, dagegen, damit, dabei, davon, darüber, darin, darauf etc (5)*

and this covers both singular and plural, i.e. 'it' and 'them', and it works with **any** preposition, except *ohne* and those requiring a Genitive.



## Supplementary Notes on the Dative

### 1 Verbs with Dative objects

In the case of some of the verbs given opposite, there is a good reason for the Dative Object. With *glauben*, for instance, the direct Object is reserve for what we believe (*Das glaube ich nicht*); believing people is seen as being at one remove from this.

*dienen* has a more common version with a prefixed *be-* for serving people in a restaurant etc:

*Sie bediente die Gäste*

A Prefix or Modifier may determine the need for a Dative:

<i>Der Schlüssel entfiel ihm</i>	The key fell from his grasp
<i>Ich weiche ihm aus</i>	I avoid him/it, get out of the way
<i>Ich stelle es mir vor</i>	I imagine it (in my mind's eye)
<i>Ich sehe ihr nach</i>	Watch her go, follow her with my eyes

The following constructions are worth noting:

<i>Das schmeckt mir nicht</i>	I don't like (the taste of) it
<i>Es fällt mir auf</i>	I notice it, it strikes me
<i>Das gehört mir</i>	That belongs to me, is mine
<i>Gefällt Ihnen das Zimmer?</i>	Do you like the room?
<i>Das Kleid paßt ihr gut</i>	The dress suits/fits her well
<i>Es fiel ihm ein</i>	It occurred to him
<i>Was fällt dir ein?</i>	What on earth do you think are you doing?
<i>Was fehlt Ihnen?</i>	What is the matter with you?
<i>Ihr fehlt der Sinn für Humor</i>	She lacks a sense of humour
<i>Es steht mir zur Verfügung</i>	It is at my disposal

2 In German many more verbs are used **reflexively** than in English:

<i>ich setze mich</i>	I sit down
<i>sie beeilt sich</i>	she hurries
<i>wir beschweren uns</i>	we complain
<i>ich freue mich</i>	I am glad
<i>Das trifft sich gut</i>	That works out well/is very convenient

3 When describing a movement of part of the body, we usually use the definite article:

*er hebt die Hand, geht in die Knie, dreht den Kopf*

but when doing something to part of the body, a Dative reflexive is often added:

They wash their hands	= <i>sie waschen sich die Hände</i>
We have our hair cut	= <i>wir lassen uns die Haare schneiden</i>

4 The reflexive may be used to mean 'each other', though *einander* is often preferred as being less ambiguous:

<i>Wir kennen uns ganz gut</i>	We know each other quite well
<i>Sie gehen sich aus dem Weg</i>	They avoid one another
<i>Sie geben einander die Hand</i>	They shake hands

5 Some of these combinations of *da-* with a preposition have acquired particular meanings

<i>Die Münzen rollten davon</i>	The coins rolled away
<i>Waren Sie auch dabei?</i>	Were you there/present/involved?
<i>Er war dabei, das Haus in Brand zu stecken</i>	He was in the process of setting fire to the house

They also provide a necessary bridge between a preposition and a Clause or Infinitive phrase (see also Exercise F on page 23):

<i>Wir rechnen damit, daß der Bericht bis Weihnachten fertig ist</i>	We are expecting the report to be ready by Christmas
<i>Was können wir dafür, daß er arbeitslos ist?</i>	What can we do about the fact that he is out of work?
<i>Ich freue mich darauf, Sie persönlich kennenzulernen</i>	I am looking forward to meeting you in person
<i>Er erinnerte uns daran, daß wir die Pflanzen begießen sollten</i>	He reminded us to water the flowers

## VIII The Big If

When is a past tense not a past tense? When it does not refer to the past, as in:

If I had a lot of money I would buy a sports car

In English we have no difficulty understanding this 'had' as an unreal idea and manage without a Variant version\* to make this clear. In German, Variant versions are available for many verbs and are used whenever possible.

Most **Weak verbs**, however, have no distinctive Variant forms, so that 'If I earned a lot of money' comes out as an apparently normal Past: *Wenn ich viel Geld verdiente*.

For most **Strong Verbs** the Variant form is arrived at by adding an **Umlaut** (if possible) to the vowel of the Past tense and an **-e** to the normally endingless *ich/er* forms:

war	becomes	wäre
zog		zöge
trug		trüge
lief		liefe

**Mixed verbs** either do the same:

brachte	brächte
---------	---------

or use the Present vowel:

kannte	kennte
--------	--------

In the plural, only the Umlaut remains distinctive, so that verbs in Groups 1,2 and 8 have distinctive forms only in the singular.

A few verbs use a different vowel altogether, notably:

stand	stünde
starb	stürbe

The Past of *werden* used to be *ward* (putting it in Group 5), but the Variant form *würde* was so frequently used as to make *wurde* accepted as the Past.

The Variant form **würde** is so well used because it provides us with the '**would**' for the other part of our sentence:

*Wenn ich viel Geld hätte, würde ich einen Sportwagen kaufen*

Since we use the Present of *werden* for the Future, it seems appropriate to use this Variant version for what amounts to an unreal future.

---

This type of sentence is open to possible future developments (I might get a better paid job!); but the other type holds out no such hope, as time has already moved on and we can only try to imagine what **would have** happened if only we **had done** something different.

Again the 'had' is unreal, and so we use the Variant version, i.e. **hätte** for most verbs and **wäre** for verbs of change and/or movement etc:

*Wenn ich mehr Geld gespart hätte, ... Wenn ich etwas früher abgefahren wäre, ....*

In the other half of the sentence, for 'would have' we expect *würde .... haben (or sein)*, and this is not impossible; but the two are usually reduced to one word in a kind of shorthand as *hätte (or wäre)*:

*Wenn ich früher abgefahren wäre, wären wir gleichzeitig angekommen  
hätte ich den Anfang nicht verpaßt*

*Wenn ich mehr Geld gespart hätte, wären wir nicht in Schwierigkeiten geraten  
hätten wir das Haus kaufen können*

The last example makes clear that 'could have (bought)' in English means 'would have been able (to buy)' and provides the model for 'should have' or 'ought to have' which cannot be paraphrased logically in this way:

*Wir hätten das Haus kaufen sollen  
Ich hätte mehr Geld sparen sollen*

## Supplementary notes on conditionals

### 1 Alternatives

Germans who feel the need to make matters clear when dealing with a Weak verb, or are not comfortable with the Variant form of a Strong verb, may use an alternative version which is potentially confusing. It involves using *würde* with an Infinitive, which is what we expect to find in the 'would' half of the sentence:

*Wenn ich mehr Geld verdienen würde, würde ich einen Sportwagen kaufen*

Moreover: the same sort of shorthand which reduces *würde ... haben* to *hätte* and *würde ... sein* to *wäre* is also applied to reduce *würde ... können* to *könnte*, (just as we might say 'could' rather than 'would be able'); and all these can be used as alternatives in the 'would' half of the sentence, making it possible to have everything apparently the wrong way round:

*Wenn ich weniger Geld verdienen würde, hätten wir vielleicht auch weniger Freunde  
Wenn wir nicht so viel fettes Fleisch essen würden, wären wir nicht so dick  
Wenn wir ein zweites Auto kaufen würden, könnten wir beide arbeiten gehen*

In theory, the alternative shorthand version is possible with any strong verb. Thankfully this option is rarely used and anything beyond *hätte*, *wäre* and *könnte*\* is considered by many to be rather pretentious; but the following might be met, in written form at least:

*Wenn wir uns nicht so streng an die Regeln halten würden, gäbe es vielleicht ein paar andere  
Möglichkeiten  
Wenn wir die Situation ganz anders darstellen würden, liefen wir die Gefahr, mißverstanden zu  
werden  
Wenn die Wahrheit etwas früher ans Licht käme, fänden wir nicht so leicht eine alternative Lösung*

A further alternative to *kommen würde* in the above example would be *kommen sollte*, with the sense of 'if it should (perchance happen to)'.  
\*The only other common Modal form used in this way is *möchte*; but this is used so frequently for the polite 'I would like' that it is virtually impossible to have it understood as a true conditional. The Variant forms of *müssen* and *dürfen* are mainly used to suggest a subtle weakening of their meaning (see Note 1 on page 17) and so are also not viable as alternative conditionals.

### 2 Conditional without 'if'

Constructions such as 'Had I known that beforehand (I would have told him)' are also possible in German:

*Hätte ich das schon vorher gewußt, dann hätte ich es ihm natürlich gesagt  
Wären wir nur ein paar Kilometer weitergefahren, so hätten wir das Haus gesehen*

This type of construction is also possible with a Present tense:

*Gelingt das aber nicht, dann soll etwas anderes versucht werden*  
If that does not succeed, then something else is to be tried

*Wird diese Plastiktasche vernichtet, entstehen keine schädlichen Rückstände*  
If this plastic bag is destroyed no harmful residues will be produced

*Kriegen Kühe schlechtes Futter,  
wird's Margarine anstatt Butter*  
If cows get bad feed, the result is margarine instead of butter

\*The only other common Modal form used in this way is *möchte*; but this is used so frequently for the polite 'I would like' that it is virtually impossible to have it understood as a true conditional. The Variant forms of *müssen* and *dürfen* are mainly used to suggest a subtle weakening of their meaning (see Note 1 on page 17) and so are also not viable as alternative conditionals.

## IX Hearsay

The 'was' in 'My secretary told me she was ill' is unreal in two ways: we cannot be sure what the secretary actually said, though it was probably a Present: 'I am ill'; and the person hearing 'My secretary told me she was ill' cannot be sure whether she was actually ill or not.

**Two principles** apply in German. The first is that we should indicate the tense of the original statement; the second is that we should try to indicate the second-hand nature of the statement by using a **Variant** form of the Verb.

If the original statement was in the **Present** ('I am ill') we simply use a **Variant form** of the Verb. If it was in any **past** tense ('I have been/had been/was ill') we use a **Perfect** tense with an Variant form of *haben* or *sein*; and if **future** ('I shall be ill'), a **Future** with an Variant form of *werden*.

---

Just what the Variant form is, will depend on what is available. We are supposed to use a **Variant Present**, but the only form guaranteed to be distinctive is the *er* form which ends in **-e** rather than **-t**. As the Variant Present is derived from the Infinitive, verbs with irregularities in their standard Present, will have an even more distinctive *er* form:

*er/es/sie fahre/trage/lese/gebe/breche etc*

as will the *du* form:

*du fahrest/tragest/laufest/ledest/gebest/brechest etc*

and with Modals it will show even in the *ich* form:

*ich könne/müsse/wolle/dürfe/möge/solle(1)*

For *sein* we have a full set:

*ich/er etc sei wir/sie/Sie seien*

*du seist ihr seit*

This Variante Present is therefore viable and usable at least some of the time.

---

Before looking at typical examples, some Good News. What follows *Sie sagte, daß ...* is of course a **Clause**; but with *sagen* and other common verbs introducing reported speech, it is common practice to omit the *daß* (as we often do in English) and to treat what follows as a **Statement**:

*Meine Sekretärin sagte, sie sei krank*

Reporting '*Ich bin krank*' is no problem. If she had said: 'I was ill on Thursday' or 'I have been ill three times this month' or '(I was in on Friday but) I had been ill the day before', this would also be no problem, as the **Perfect** of *sein* is formed with *ich bin* etc:

*Sie sagte, sie sei (am Montag/dreimal/am Tag davor) krank gewesen*

It would still work with a more normal verb like *arbeiten*:

*Sie sagte, sie habe am Freitag gearbeitet*

Put this into the plural, however, and we no longer have a distinctive Variant Present, and so we use the next best thing, which is .... a **Variant Past**:

*Die beiden Arbeiter sagten, sie hätten am Freitag gearbeitet*

and we do so even if this is still not much better, as when reporting a Present with a Weak verb like *arbeiten*: *Sie sagten, sie arbeiteten immer noch*

or in the plural as in the multiple example at the bottom of page 21.

With *werden* the only distinctive Present forms are *du werdest* and *er etc werde*, so that in the plural we have the same problem and apply the same solution:

*Sie sagte, sie werde zu Hause arbeiten*

*Wir sagten, wir würden zu Hause arbeiten*

---

This is the official version, but **in practice** many Germans will not bother to consider whether the Variant Present is viable and will go straight for the **Variant Past** every time, as this offers a much better chance of being **distinctive**, which is all that really matters.

In the end, the Variant Present turns out to be no more than an oddity we must be prepared to meet occasionally. In the examples opposite it has been included wherever it is an option, but merely for the sake for completeness.

## Supplementary notes on reported speech

1 This form of *sollen* (or the Past version *sollte*) is needed if what was said amounts to an order or instruction. We cannot use *sagen* with a following Infinitive along the lines of 'He told me to forget it', and so this comes out as: *Er sagte mir, ich solle/sollte es vergessen*

2 If the original statement includes a Variant form, we have no option but to report it as it stands:

*Er sagte, er würde einen Sportwagen kaufen, wenn er das Geld hätte.*

We cannot make a Variant form any more distinctive than it is, even though the resulting version may be rather ambiguous: *Er sagte, ich sollte mehr Fleisch essen* could have been originally:

*'Essen Sie mehr Fleisch' or 'Sie sollten mehr Fleisch essen'*

3 Variant forms are hardly ever used for immediate or future statements:

*Du sagst, du hast Kopfschmerzen? Frag ihn, ob er mitkommen will.*

4 One positive advantage of having these Variant forms is the possibility of subtly implying whether something is actually true or not. By not using a Variant form where it might be expected, we can imply that we know or accept the truth of the person's statement:

*Sie hat mir gestern gesagt, daß sie letzte Woche krank gewesen sei/wäre*

= That is what she said, whereas:

*Sie hat mir gestern gesagt, daß sie letzte Woche krank gewesen war*

= I know because she told me yesterday

It is also possible to give an extended report without the need for introductory verbs to indicate whether the words are reported or comments of our own:

*Der Minister sagte, er werde bald bekanntgeben können, wann diese Maßnahmen eingeführt würden. Es sei schwierig festzustellen, ob die Lage im Irak sich genügend normalisiert habe, und das sei der Grund für die Verzögerung seiner Pläne, eine Ausrede, die er schon mehrmals benutzt hat.*

### Practice examples

Complete the reported version:

'Ich bin viel zu müde'

Er sagte, ....

*Er sagte, er sei(wäre) viel zu müde*

'Wir haben keine Zeit'

Sie sagten, ....

*Sie sagten, sie hätten keine Zeit*

'Die Polizei wußte schon längst von dem Diebstahl'

Er meinte, ....

*Er meinte, die Polizei habe/hätte schon längst von dem Diebstahl gewußt*

'Meine Mutter muß am Mittwoch ins Krankenhaus'

Sie sagte,

*Sie sagte, ihre Mutter müsse/müßte am Mittwoch ins Krankenhaus*

'Können Sie einen passenden Wein empfehlen?'

Er hat mich gefragt, ob .....

*Er hat mich gefragt, ob ich einen passenden Wein empfehlen könne/könnte*

'Ich werde keine Angst haben, wenn du mitkommst'

Sie sagte, ....

*Sie sagte, sie werde/würde keine Angst haben, wenn ich mitkäme*

'Sie werden zwei Autos stehlen, in denen sie nachher entkommen wollen'

Er sagte, ....

*Er sagte, sie würden zwei Autos stehlen, in denen sie nachher entkommen wollten'*

'Möchten Sie auch noch einen Nachtisch?'

Er fragte höflich, ob ...

*Er fragte höflich, ob ich auch noch einen Nachtisch möchte(möge\*)*

\*This sounds false and pedantic; all other second versions are acceptable and/or more likely.

## X The Last Word

Congratulations if you have made it this far!

You may well have found the previous two sections heavy going but they (and much of the first two sections) are relatively unimportant if you merely want to improve your ability to decipher written German, which is the final challenge on the opposite page.

The really important factors are structural; you need to be able to find your way around in a German sentence, looking for things in the right places.

After an introductory *Deswegen ...* or *Nach dem Frühstück ...* look **beyond** the Verb to find the Subject.

The next place to look is at **The End**, where you may find an Infinitive or a Past Participle or a little Modifier possibly making a big difference to the meaning of the basic Verb; and if you come across a **Clause** starter (followed by the Subject) you will need to look to **The End** to find the **Verb** itself.

But where exactly is **The End**? This is where German **punctuation** proves very useful, because marking the end of each Statement or Clause or Infinitive phrase, and/or the beginning of the next, should be a **comma**, until, that is, you come to the full stop. Only in the case of a further Verb with the same Subject following on is the comma omitted.

Having found The End it is as well to look at what comes just before it as this may be another **Verb Extra**, which you will need to deal with next.

Look carefully at the **first** item of the sentence: it is far less likely to be the Subject than in English. You will need to know your Articles system well enough to be able at least to recognise a Dative; and if it is the Object of the verb that comes first, this may not be at all obvious until you find something else beyond the Verb which can only be the Subject.

Until you become used to recognising them, **Relative Clauses** can be confusing, starting as they do with what looks like a word for 'the'.

---

The only structural feature of German which the foregoing pages have not warned you about is the **attributive adjectival phrase** (AAP), which most English learners take to immediately and seem to relish. Here are a few (genuine) examples, with suggested translations, to whet your appetite:

*(Die Nobelpreisträger halten) eine Vorlesung über ein von ihnen selbst gewähltes Thema*  
a lecture on a topic they themselves have chosen

*(Die Postbeamten haben) ihren seit Montag andauernden Streik (verlängert)*  
their strike which started on Monday

*die an Baudenkmalern und Kunstschätzen reichste Stadt Italiens*  
the town with the greatest wealth of art and architecture

*die Zahl der in diesem Jahr in Südafrika vollstreckten Todesurteile*  
the number of executions carried out in South Africa this year

*eine gegen ihren hochwürdigen Herrn gerichtete Konkurrenz und Berufsstörung*  
a form of competition and professional interference directed at her reverend master

*die Erzeugung der für den jährlichen Bevölkerungszuwachs erforderlichen zusätzlichen Nahrungsmittel*  
the production of the additional amount of food required for the annual increase in population

## Index of topics and grammatical features

Special terms used in this Grammar are in **bold**  
 Traditional terms used are in normal print  
 Other terms are given in *italic* and/or quotation marks  
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