



Deutsche Grammatik

How German Sentences Work

One idea at a time • A1–A2

Anju Mishra



SURABHI VERLAG

Deutsche Grammatik: How German Sentences Work

Anju Mishra.

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All German and English text in this volume is original, written freshly for this book and graded for learners at levels A1 and A2 of the Common European Framework. The German follows the current *Amtliches Regelwerk* of the Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung (2024).

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About the author



Anju Mishra came to German the way most of her readers do: as an adult, mid-career, with a life already in motion. After five years in the United States she moved to Germany, where a small daughter with German homework became the best reason imaginable to master the language properly. She did, all the way to C1, and along the way discovered that German is not a mountain of exceptions but a system of patterns. An MBA in finance taught her to look for that structure; teaching learners from around the world taught her how to share it. She lives in Germany with her husband and daughter, who remains her favourite reason to get every *der*, *die* and *das* right.

How to use this book

German grammar has a reputation it does not deserve. It is not a pile of exceptions to be memorised. It is a small number of ideas, each of which explains a great deal, and this book introduces them one at a time, in the order that makes each one easy. Nothing here is presented before you have a reason to want it.

The road runs in four stages:

1. Chapters 1–7 put the verb in its place, build the bracket that holds every German sentence together, and close by joining sentences two different ways. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are the same bracket three times, which is why the past tense arrives so early.
2. Chapters 8–12 settle the noun: gender, plurals, possessives, numbers and dates, and the two little stand-in words.
3. Chapters 13–19 take the case system, the part of German that frightens people, and turn it into one table.
4. Chapters 20–22 tidy the middle of the sentence and add the past and comparison, so you can tell a story and weigh one thing against another.

The foot of every page names the strand a chapter belongs to, so you can follow one thread, *The Four Cases* or *Time*, straight through the book if you would rather read that way.

How to read a chapter:

1. Read the German scene first. The highlighted forms are what the chapter teaches; the English mirror below resolves anything unclear. Never look up a word before you have read the scene once.
2. Work through the explanation, and where the chapter has one, the green paradigm card. The card is that chapter in one picture, and it is worth more than any list you could copy out. A few late chapters teach a pattern rather than a set of forms, and those have no card to learn.
3. Read the examples aloud. Every German sentence in this book carries its English underneath, so you are never guessing.
4. Read the amber Watch out panel. It collects the mistakes learners actually make, with the correction beside each.
5. Do the Übungen. Answers are at the back. The last exercise is always yours: write, speak, produce.

*Every chapter carries a level chip, **A1** or **A2**, so you can stop wherever your goal is. The chips mark difficulty, not order: two early chapters are A2 because the book teaches each thing where it is needed rather than by level. Work in short visits rather than long ones. Grammar settles overnight, not in an afternoon.*

The videos. The lessons of this series also live on YouTube: vocabulary drills, stories read aloud by German voices, and dialogue practice, all free. Find them on the channel AllesKlarMitAnju, and all books and courses at AllesKlarMitAnju.com.

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THE SENTENCE • CHAPTER 1

Das Verb und Position zwei

One verb, one home

A1

German is built around one law, and you can learn it on the first page of this book: in an ordinary statement, the conjugated verb lives in position two. Everything else in Part One, questions, modal verbs, separable verbs, even the past tense, is a variation on this single idea. (Statements are where the law is strictest. Questions and commands put the verb first, and one kind of clause sends it to the very end, but each of those is a deliberate departure from position two, and each gets its own chapter.) But first the verb itself needs its endings. Meet Lena, who will keep you company for the whole book:

— DEUTSCH

ICH heiße Lena und wohne in Köln. Tom wohnt nebenan. Wir gehen zusammen zur Schule.

Am Morgen trinke ich Kakao. Tom trinkt immer Tee. „Tee ist gesund“, sagt er. „Und du trinkst zu viel Kakao!“

Nach der Schule **spielen** wir Fußball. Tom **spielt** gut. Ich **bin** besser.

Am Abend **habe** ich Hausaufgaben. Mama **hilft** mir manchmal.

ENGLISH

My name is Lena and I live in Cologne. Tom lives next door. We go to school together.

In the morning I drink cocoa. Tom always drinks tea. "Tea is healthy," he says. "And you drink too much cocoa!"

After school we play football. Tom plays well. I am better.

In the evening I have homework. Mum sometimes helps me.

The endings

A German verb in the dictionary ends in -en: wohnen, trinken, spielen. That form is called the infinitive, and it is a verb without an owner. Take the -en off and you hold the stem, wohn-, and the stem takes a small ending that tells everyone who is acting:

Ich **wohne** in Köln.

I live in Cologne.

Trinkst du Tee?

Do you drink tea?

Tom **spielt** gut Fußball.

Tom plays football well.

Die Endungen • wohnen, to live

ich	wohne	wir	wohnen
du	wohnst	ihr	wohnt
er/sie/es	wohnt	sie/Sie	wohnen

the signal **-e, -st, -t** **-en, -t, -en**

Two adjustments, both of them just the mouth being sensible. When the stem ends in -t or -d, an -e- slips in so you can say the word: du arbeitest, er arbeitet, ihr wartet. A small group does the same for the same reason, atmen, öffnen, rechnen, zeichnen: du atmest, er öffnet. And when the stem already ends in an s-sound, the du-form drops the -s of -st and keeps only -t: du heißt, du tanzt, du reist.

Wir lernen zusammen.

We study together.

Ihr wartet schon lange.

You have been waiting a long time.

Meine Eltern arbeiten viel.

My parents work a lot.

A handful of very common verbs change their stem vowel for du and er/sie/es: fahren, du fährst, essen, du isst, lesen, du liest, sprechen, du sprichst, sehen, du siehst. The endings stay exactly the same. Meet these verbs one at a time as they come; there is no need to memorise a list today.

Die zwei Unregelmäßigen • haben and sein

	HABEN	SEIN
ich	habe	bin
du	hast	bist
er/sie/es	hat	ist
wir	haben	sind
ihr	habt	seid
sie/Sie	haben	sind

Haben and sein

Two verbs refuse to follow the pattern, and of course they are the two you will use most. Haben, to have, and sein, to be, deserve a card of their own. Learn them cold now, because later chapters build the past tense on exactly these forms:

Ich **bin** vierzehn Jahre alt.

I am fourteen years old.

Bist du müde?

Are you tired?

Tom **ist** mein bester Freund.

Tom is my best friend.

Wir **haben** heute keine Schule.

We have no school today.

Habt ihr Hunger?

Are you hungry?

Meine Eltern **sind** nett.

My parents are nice.

Position two, the iron rule

Now the law itself. In an English sentence the subject comes first, out of habit. In a German sentence the verb comes second, out of law. The first position is a single free seat: the subject can sit there, but so can the time, the place, or anything you want to emphasise. Whatever takes the front seat, the verb does not move, and the subject simply slides in behind it:

Ich spiele heute Fußball.

subject in front

I am playing football today.

Heute spiele ich Fußball.

time in front, verb stays second

Today I am playing football.

Fußball spiele ich heute.

emphasis in front, verb stays second

Football is what I am playing today.

One seat, one idea. Heute fills the front seat alone, so ich must wait behind the verb. English speakers want to write *Today I play*, with two ideas before

the verb, and that is the single most common beginner mistake in German. Count to the verb in every sentence you write this week: one, two.

Am Montag **beginnt** die Schule um acht.

On Monday school starts at eight.

Um sieben **trinken** wir Kakao.

At seven we drink cocoa.

Nach der Schule **spielen** Tom und ich Fußball.

After school Tom and I play football.

Manchmal **hilft** Mama.

Sometimes Mum helps.

In Köln **wohnen** viele Menschen.

Many people live in Cologne.

Watch out

✗ *Heute ich spiele Fußball.*

✓ *Heute spiele ich Fußball.* Today I am playing football.

Position two belongs to the verb. If heute takes the front seat, the subject moves behind the verb.

✗ *Ich bin heiße Lena.*

✓ *Ich heiße Lena.* My name is Lena.

Heißen is a full verb and needs no bin. One clause, one conjugated verb.

Watch out (continued)

× *Er arbeitest in Berlin.*

✓ *Er arbeitet in Berlin.* He works in Berlin.

-st belongs to du alone. Er takes -t: er arbeitet.

× *Ich trinken Tee.*

✓ *Ich trinke Tee.* I drink tea.

-en is the ending for wir and sie. Ich takes -e.

That is the foundation. Endings tell you who acts, position two tells you where the action stands, and the front seat is yours to play with. The next chapter shows what happens when the verb leaves home: to ask a question, German simply moves it to position one.

Übungen • Exercises**Exercise 1. Put in the ending.**

1. Ich wohn _____ in Hamburg.
2. Du spiel _____ sehr gut.
3. Tom trink _____ keinen Kaffee.
4. Wir lern _____ Deutsch.
5. Ihr wart _____ auf den Bus.
6. Meine Eltern arbeit _____ in Köln.

Exercise 2. Haben or sein? Put in the right form.

1. Ich _____ vierzehn Jahre alt.
2. _____ du Geschwister?
3. Tom _____ mein Nachbar.
4. Wir _____ heute keine Zeit.

Übungen (continued)

5. _____ ihr müde?
6. Lena und Tom _____ Hunger.

Exercise 3. Begin with the underlined idea and build the sentence again.

Beispiel: Ich spiele heute Fußball. → Heute spiele ich Fußball.

1. Wir trinken um sieben Kakao.
2. Die Schule beginnt am Montag um acht.
3. Ich lerne am Abend Deutsch.
4. Tom spielt nach der Schule Fußball.

Exercise 4. Each sentence has one mistake in the verb form or the word order. Correct it; the subject stays the same.

1. Heute wir lernen Deutsch.
2. Du wohnt in Berlin.
3. Ich bin heiße Tom.
4. Am Morgen ich trinke Tee.

Exercise 5. Your turn.

Introduce yourself in five sentences: name, age, town, family, one thing you do every day. Start at least two sentences with something other than ich.



THE SENTENCE • CHAPTER 2

Fragen und Nein

Asking, and saying no

A1

Chapter 1 gave you the law: the verb lives in position two. This chapter shows the two most useful things German does with that law. To ask a question, it moves the verb one seat forward. To say no, it drops one of two small words into the sentence. Questions and negation, one short chapter, and you can already have an argument in German:

— DEUTSCH

DAS Telefon klingelt laut durch das ganze Haus. „Hallo, Lena! **Hast** du heute Zeit?“

„Nein, heute **nicht**. Oma ist da, und wir backen einen Apfelkuchen.“

„**Was** backt ihr? Apfelkuchen? Ich esse **keinen** Apfelkuchen.“

„**Warum** denn nicht?“

„Äpfel sind Obst. Obst ist gesund. Und gesund schmeckt **nicht**.“

Lena lacht. „**Trinkst** du auch **keinen** Kakao?“

„**Doch!** Kakao ist super.“

„Dann komm morgen. Es gibt Kakao, und du isst **keinen** Kuchen.“

— ENGLISH

The telephone rings loudly through the whole house. “Hello, Lena! Do you have time today?”

“No, not today. Grandma is here, and we are baking an apple cake.”

“What are you baking? Apple cake? I don’t eat apple cake.”

“Why ever not?”

“Apples are fruit. Fruit is healthy. And healthy doesn’t taste good.”

Lena laughs. “Don’t you drink cocoa either?”

“Yes I do! Cocoa is great.”

“Then come tomorrow. There will be cocoa, and you won’t eat any cake.”

— Questions without a question word

English builds questions with an extra word: *do* you drink tea? German has no *do* and needs none. It simply moves the verb from position two to position one, and the sentence becomes a question:

Du trinkst Tee.

statement: verb second

You drink tea.

Trinkst du Tee?

question: verb first

Do you drink tea?

Hast du heute Zeit?

haben works the same way

Do you have time today?

Wohnst du in Köln?

Do you live in Cologne?

Spielt Tom Fußball?

Does Tom play football?

Seid ihr müde?

Are you tired?

Haben Sie Kinder?

Do you have children?

Ist das dein Bruder?

Is that your brother?

Questions with a question word

When you want information rather than a yes or a no, a question word takes the front seat, and the verb returns to its beloved position two. The law of chapter 1 holds even here:

Die W-Wörter • the question words

wer	who	wann	when
was	what	warum	why
wo	where	wie	how
woher	where from	wohin	where to

Wo wohnst du?*Where do you live?***Was** backt ihr?*What are you baking?***Wann** beginnt die Schule?*When does school start?***Warum** trinkst du keinen Kaffee?*Why don't you drink coffee?***Wie** heißt deine Katze?*What is your cat called?***Woher** kommst du?*Where are you from?***Wer** kommt heute Abend?*Who is coming this evening?*

The last one repays a second look. **Wer** is not only the question word here, it is also the subject, so there is no separate subject to come after the verb. Position one is filled, position two holds the verb, and the sentence is complete. The law never bends; it simply has less to hold.

Nicht or kein?

One word of reassurance before this section, because it is about to use *der*, *die* and *das* without having explained them. All three simply mean *the*. German has three words where English has one, and chapter 8 is entirely about why. Until then, read whichever one appears as *the* and lose no sleep over it.

German has two words for negation, and the choice between them is mercifully mechanical. *Kein* negates a noun that has *ein* or no article at all; it simply replaces the *ein* and takes its endings: *kein Problem*, *keine Zeit*, and before a masculine object *keinen*, as in *keinen Hunger*. *Nicht* negates everything else: verbs, adjectives, and nouns that keep their definite article or a possessive like *mein*.

Ich esse **keinen** Kuchen.

I don't eat cake.

Wir haben **keine** Zeit.

We have no time.

Tom hat **kein** Fahrrad.

Tom does not have a bicycle.

Ich wohne **nicht** in Berlin.

I don't live in Berlin.

Der Tee ist **nicht** heiß.

The tea is not hot.

Das ist **nicht** mein Hund.

That is not my dog.

A rough rule of thumb for *nicht*'s position: it stands directly before the thing it denies (*nicht heiß, nicht in Berlin*), and at the end when it denies the whole sentence (*Ich komme nicht*).



Doch, the little victory

German keeps a third answer word that English lost centuries ago. *Ja* answers a plain question. But when someone asks a negative question and you want to contradict it, the answer is *doch*:

Trinkst du Kakao? — Ja!

Do you drink cocoa? — Yes!

Trinkst du keinen Kakao? — Doch!

Don't you drink cocoa? — Yes, I do!

Kommst du nicht mit? — Doch, ich komme.

Aren't you coming along? — Yes, I am coming.

One syllable flips the whole question on its head. Learners who master *doch* early sound German years before their grammar catches up.

Watch out

✗ *Wo du wohnst?*

✓ *Wo wohnst du?* Where do you live?

After a question word the verb comes immediately, in position two.
The subject waits behind it.

✗ *Ich habe nicht Zeit.*

✓ *Ich habe keine Zeit.* I have no time.

Zeit stands without an article, so its negation is *kein*, with the right ending: *keine Zeit*.

✗ *Das ist nicht ein Problem.*

✓ *Das ist kein Problem.* That is not a problem.

Nicht ein collapses into *kein*. Wherever you want to say *not a*, say *kein*.

✗ *Isst du keinen Fisch? — Ja, ich esse Fisch!*

✓ *Isst du keinen Fisch? — Doch, ich esse Fisch!* Don't you eat fish? — Yes, I do eat fish!

To contradict a negative question, German needs *doch*. A plain *ja* leaves everyone confused.

You can now state, ask and deny, which is most of what language does all day. The next chapter adds wanting, needing and being allowed to, and with the modal verbs the sentence grows its most famous feature: the bracket.

Übungen • Exercises

Exercise 1. Turn the statement into a yes/no question.

Beispiel: Du wohnst in Köln. → Wohnst du in Köln?

1. Tom spielt Fußball.
2. Ihr habt heute Zeit.
3. Das ist dein Fahrrad.
4. Du trinkst Kaffee.
5. Sie sind müde. (Sie = polite you)

Exercise 2. Put in the question word: wer, was, wo, wann, wie or warum.

1. _____ heißt du?
2. _____ wohnt ihr?
3. _____ beginnt der Film?
4. _____ ist dein Lieblingsessen?
5. _____ kommt heute zu Besuch?
6. _____ isst du keinen Apfelkuchen?

Exercise 3. Nicht or kein? Mind the ending of kein.

1. Ich habe _____ Hunger.
2. Wir wohnen _____ in Hamburg.
3. Tom hat _____ Schwester.
4. Der Kaffee ist _____ gut.
5. Lena isst _____ Fleisch.
6. Das ist _____ meine Tasche.

Übungen (continued)**Exercise 4. Ja, nein or doch?**

1. Bist du müde? — _____, sehr müde.
2. Hast du keine Geschwister? — _____, ich habe einen Bruder.
3. Trinkst du keinen Tee? — _____, ich trinke nur Wasser.
4. Kommst du nicht mit? — _____, natürlich komme ich mit!

Exercise 5. Your turn.

You meet a new classmate. Write five questions for them: two yes/no questions and three with different W-words.

Answers

Where an exercise asks you to write your own German, the key gives one sample answer. Yours will differ, and that is the point: check that the pattern is right, not that the words match.

Chapter 1 • One verb, one home

Exercise 1: 1. wohne 2. spielst 3. trinkt 4. lernen 5. wartet 6. arbeiten

Exercise 2: 1. bin 2. Hast 3. ist 4. haben 5. Seid 6. haben

Exercise 3: 1. Um sieben trinken wir Kakao. 2. Am Montag beginnt die Schule um acht. 3. Am Abend lerne ich Deutsch. 4. Nach der Schule spielt Tom Fußball.

Exercise 4: 1. Heute lernen wir Deutsch. 2. Du wohnst in Berlin. 3. Ich heiße Tom. 4. Am Morgen trinke ich Tee.

Exercise 5: Answers will vary. Sample answer: Ich heiße Anna. Ich bin vierzehn Jahre alt. In Bonn wohne ich mit meiner Familie. Meine Eltern sind nett, und ich habe einen Bruder. Am Morgen trinke ich immer Kakao.

Chapter 2 • Asking, and saying no

Exercise 1: 1. Spielt Tom Fußball? 2. Habt ihr heute Zeit? 3. Ist das dein Fahrrad? 4. Trinkst du Kaffee? 5. Sind Sie müde?

Exercise 2: 1. Wie 2. Wo 3. Wann 4. Was 5. Wer 6. Warum

Exercise 3: 1. keinen 2. nicht 3. keine 4. nicht 5. kein 6. nicht

Exercise 4: 1. Ja 2. Doch 3. Nein 4. Doch

Exercise 5: Answers will vary. Sample answer: Wohnst du hier in der Nähe? Hast du Geschwister? Wie heißt du? Woher kommst du? Was ist dein Lieblingsfach?

Read the rest.

The full book is available at AllesKlarMitAnju.com

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