



Mastering Word Order in German

German Lesson

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Video transcript

Hey there and welcome to Ablas! Today we're going to be mastering how to write sentences in German. We'll find out what the V2, V1 and V-Final rules are and how to use them in everyday conversations. Be sure to download the PDF of today's lesson from the link in the description!

The V2 rule: Main clauses

Let's start off with the most common word order using the V2 rule.

Let's split this first sentence into its component parts. In main clauses, the conjugated verb must be the second element in the sentence. For example: Ich arbeite im Garten, (I'm working in the garden).

If you have a modal verb, which is a verb with an infinitive, (for example, "can play" or "must do"), then the modal verb stays in second place, and the infinitive goes at the end of the sentence. Let's look at a couple of examples.

Ich kann Klavier spielen, (I can play the piano). Here kann is the modal verb in second place, and spielen is the infinitive at the end. Ich werde heute einen Kurs besuchen, (I will attend a class today).

Now let's take things one step further. When we want to place a time expression at the start of the sentence, that will become the first element in the sentence. So for the verb to stay in second place, we need to flip the subject into position 3.

So instead of saying, "Heute ich arbeite im Garten," we say, "Heute arbeite ich im Garten."

However, the second element doesn't necessarily have to be the second word. In this example, "Jeden Tag arbeite ich im Garten," the first element is jeden Tag, which is the time expression, and so the verb comes straight after it.

Some verbs in German have prefixes that can be separated, like aufstehen and mitkommen. In main clauses, the main verb stays in second place, and the prefix goes at the end of the sentence.

Ich stehe um 7 Uhr auf, (I get up at 7 o'clock). Here the verb stehe goes in second place, and auf goes at the end. Er kommt heute mit, (He's coming along today).

And lastly, W-questions like wo, wer, was, wann, also follow this rule. That means the verb has to go in second place, and the subject flips into position 3. For example: Wie lernst du Deutsch? How are you learning German?

The V1 rule: Questions + commands

Now let's explore how to write yes or no questions and commands.

When asking a question that expects a yes or no answer, the verb shifts to the first position in the sentence. For example: Sprechen Sie Deutsch? Do you speak German?

Commands also follow the V1 rule. If we're telling someone to come here, we'd say: "Komm hierher!" In this case, the verb comes first.

The V-Final rule: Subordinate clauses

And the last rule is the V-Final rule for subordinate clauses.

Subordinate clauses are parts of a sentence that provide additional information and can't stand on their own. In the sentence, "We attend class because we want to learn German", "we attend class" is the standard part of the sentence, and "because we want to learn German" is the subordinate clause that adds on some extra information.

Subordinate clauses usually start with certain conjunctions like dass, weil, wenn or a relative pronoun.

Here's an example with a conjunction: Es ist kalt, weil es Winter ist. "It is cold, because it is winter." The verb in the subordinate clause moved to the end of the sentence here.

And here's an example with a relative pronoun: Das ist der Mann, der in Berlin wohnt. "That is the man who lives in Berlin."

Subordinate clauses don't always have to be at the end of the sentence. If we put the clause at the start of the sentence, we treat the clause as the first element and apply the V2 rule. That means we're left with a sentence that starts with the subordinate clause, followed by the verb in position 2, the subject in position 3, and so on.

Weil wir Deutsch lernen, besuchen wir den Kurs. "Because we're learning German, we attend class." Notice that besuchen is in second place, with everything before the comma being the first place.

We saw earlier that verbs with a separable prefix like mitkommen can separate, where the prefix moves to the end of the sentence. However, if this verb is in the subordinate clause, it doesn't separate. For example: Wir brauchen noch einen Platz, weil Jan mitkommt. "We need one more seat because Jan is coming along."

Bonus tips

And lastly, here are some bonus tips.

When you're dealing with multiple adverbs in a sentence, remember the order: Time, Manner, Place (or TMP for short). In the sentence, "Ich fahre um 8 Uhr mit dem Bus zur Schule," we put the time expression first (8 o'clock), then the manner of going there (by bus), and lastly the place (the school).

Secondly, the dative (which is the indirect object) goes before the accusative (the direct object). To find out more about the dative and accusative, check out the video on the channel about the 4 German cases. But let's look at an example: "Ich gebe dem Mann das Buch," (I give the book to the man). The dative or indirect object, the man, came before the direct object, the book. However, if we decide to use a pronoun like "it", this typically goes first: "Ich gebe es dem Mann."

And lastly, when we want to negate a sentence with "nicht", this typically goes near the end of the clause.

"Ich kann nicht kommen. Ich stehe morgen nicht auf." I can't come. I'm not getting up tomorrow.

Story

Now that we've covered all the rules, let's put it all into practice with a short story.

English	German
Anna and Jonas walk by the Rhine early.	Am Rheinufer gehen Anna und Jonas früh spazieren.
The sun is shining, and the city slowly wakes up.	Die Sonne scheint, und die Stadt wacht langsam auf.
Today, they want to see the old town.	Heute wollen sie die Altstadt sehen.
If they have time, they'll visit the art museum.	Wenn sie Zeit haben, besuchen sie das Kunstmuseum.
They visit a café first.	Sie besuchen zuerst ein Café.
"Would you like a coffee?" the barista asks.	„Möchten Sie einen Kaffee?“ fragt der Barista.
Then they walk to Carlsplatz.	Dann laufen sie weiter zum Carlsplatz.
There, Anna admires the old houses.	Dort bewundert Anna die alten Häuser.
Because Jonas is hungry, they later eat potato pancakes with apple sauce.	Weil Jonas Hunger hat, essen sie später Reibekuchen mit Apfelmus.
While eating, Anna says she chose Düsseldorf because she likes tradition and modernity.	Während sie essen, erzählt Anna, dass sie Düsseldorf gewählt hat, weil sie Tradition und Moderne mag.
If the weather stays nice, they'll take a boat ride.	Wenn das Wetter gut bleibt, fahren sie mit dem Boot.
But they don't make it in time.	Aber sie schaffen es nicht rechtzeitig.
Suddenly, it rains.	Plötzlich regnet es.
They run to the subway to stay dry.	Schnell laufen sie zur U-Bahn, damit sie trocken bleiben.

English	German
Although the day ends differently, they laugh.	Obwohl der Tag anders endet, lachen sie.
They still had a great time.	Sie hatten trotzdem eine schöne Zeit.

It's quiz time!

How did you get on with that story? You can always download the PDF of today's lesson which will include the full translation. But now it's quiz time!

How do you say "I'm working today"?

- A. Heute arbeite ich.
- B. Ich heute arbeite.
- C. Heute ich arbeite.

The correct answer is... Heute arbeite ich. We follow the V2 rule here.

Which rule do we follow for a question that has a yes or no answer?

- A. The V-Final rule
- B. The V2 rule
- C. The V1 rule

The correct answer is... the V1 rule. Don't get confused with the V2 rule here, which we use for W-questions like wer, was, wann.

Which of these conjunctions triggers the V-Final rule for a subordinate clause?

- A. und
 - B. dass
 - C. oder
-

The correct answer is... dass. The other conjunctions don't change the word order of the sentence.

Your task

Well done for getting this far!

Now your task is to write 3 sentences about your weekend plans. Try to make use of the V1, V2 and V-Final rules, and feel free to look back through the video to refresh your memory.

Be sure to leave a like if you enjoyed this lesson and hit the subscribe button so you don't miss out on future videos. Our website is full of fun games across 7 languages, so head on over and put your skills to the test! Until next time, thanks for watching!