



The 4 German Cases Covered

German Lesson

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Video transcript

Hey there and welcome to Ablas! In German, words often change into a different form depending on where they're used in a sentence. These forms are the 4 German cases, which we'll be covering in-depth today with an example story and quick quiz at the end of the video. Be sure to download the PDF of today's lesson from the link in the description!

Nominative case

Let's dive right in and explore the nominative case.

We use the nominative case on the person or thing doing the action in the sentence – in other words, it's the subject.

When I say, "I am wrapping a present" (Ich verpacke ein Geschenk), I am the subject because I'm doing the action of wrapping.

Whereas in the sentence, "The child is playing in the garden" (Das Kind spielt im Garten), the word "das" or "the", is the subject because it's the child who's playing.

And lastly, can you guess where the subject is in this sentence? Ein Vogel singt im Baum. It's the bird, because it's doing the action of singing in the tree! Ein Vogel.

Words in German can either have a masculine, feminine or neuter gender, and this will have an effect on the nominative case.

For definite articles, for example, "the" dog or "the" cat, we use "der" for masculine words, "die" for feminine words, "das" for neuter words, and "die" for plurals. When we want to say "this" or "that", we can use "dieser", and follow a similar pattern.

Then for indefinite articles, such as "a" dog or "a" horse, we use "ein" for masculine and neuter words, and "eine" for feminine ones.

	the	this	a
Masculine	der	dieser	ein
Feminine	die	diese	eine

Neuter	das	dieses	ein
Plural	die	diese	—

The possessive pronouns have similar endings to the indefinite articles. If you wanted to say "my dog", for example, instead of "ein", it would be "mein". And instead of "eine", you'd say "meine".

	a	my	your
Masculine	ein	mein	dein
Feminine	eine	meine	deine
Neuter	ein	mein	dein
Plural	—	meine	deine

Let's take a look at the singular personal pronouns in the nominative case.

- "Ich gehe zum Markt." (I go to the market.)
- "Du bist sehr freundlich." (You are very friendly.) This is the informal you, used with friends and family.
- "Er/Sie/Es bestätigte den Auftrag." (He/She/It confirmed the order.)

And let's finish the nominative case with the rest of the personal pronouns.

- "Wir fahren morgen in den Urlaub." (We are going on vacation tomorrow.)
- "Ihr seid / Sie sind sehr pünktlich." (You are (all) very punctual.) Note that Sie can also be used as a singular you in informal situations.
- "Sie kommen aus Deutschland." (They come from Germany.)

Accusative case

We've already covered a lot of information so don't worry if you can't remember everything – it just takes a bit of practice. Let's cover the accusative case.

We use the accusative case with the direct object in a sentence.

In the first example, "He is holding a present" (Er hält ein Geschenk), the present is the direct object, because it's the thing in the sentence that's being held by the subject "er".

The next example has a possessive pronoun in it that we touched upon earlier: "I'm looking for my key" (Ich suche meinen Schlüssel). The key is the direct object here as it's the thing that I'm looking for.

Bear in mind that not every sentence will have a direct object. For example, "Der Sommer ist meine Lieblingsjahreszeit". Here we're saying that the summer is my favourite season, but because these two things are essentially the same, they're both subjects. That's why we're using the nominative case on both.

For definite articles that require the accusative case, we use "den" for masculine words, "die" for feminine words and plurals, and "das" for neuter words.

Then for indefinite articles, we use "einen" for masculine words, "eine" for feminine words, and "ein" for neuter words. And it's a similar sort of pattern for possessive pronouns like "my".

	the	a	my
Masculine	den	einen	meinen
Feminine	die	eine	meine
Neuter	das	ein	mein
Plural	die	—	meine

There are certain prepositions that always require the accusative case. Let's look at some examples in turn, each followed by a noun in the accusative case.

- durch den Tunnel – through the tunnel.
- für das Mädchen – for the girl.
- gegen die Idee – against the idea.
- ohne das Koffein – without the caffeine.
- um den Kreis – around the circle.

Let's look at the singular personal pronouns in the accusative case.

- "Sie sieht mich im Park." (She sees me in the park.)
- "Ich habe dich gestern vermisst." (I missed you yesterday.)
- "Ich kenne ihn/sie/es gut." (I know him/her/it well.)

And here's the plural personal pronouns...

- "Der Lehrer hat uns geholfen." (The teacher helped us.)
- "Ich habe euch/Sie beim Konzert gesehen." (I saw you (all) at the concert.)
- "Wir trafen sie im Restaurant." (We met them at the restaurant.)

Dative case

We're halfway through the cases! Let's cover the dative case next.

We use the dative case with the indirect object in a sentence. This is the person or thing that receives the action. Let's look at the sentence "She gave the man a present" (Sie gab dem Mann ein Geschenk.)

- The subject is Sie, which is in the nominative case that we covered earlier.
- The direct object is the present, ein Geschenk, because it's the thing in the sentence that's being given.
- And so that means the indirect object is the man, who is the recipient of the present – dem Mann.

For definite articles that require the dative case, we use "dem" for masculine and neuter words, "der" for feminine words, and "den" for plurals. Then for indefinite

articles and possessive pronouns, we use similar endings.

	the	a	my
Masculine	dem	einem	meinem
Feminine	der	einer	meiner
Neuter	dem	einem	meinem
Plural	den	—	meinen

There's a slight spelling change for plurals that require the dative case – we usually add an "n" on the end. For example, "den Männer" becomes "den Männern". Similarly, "den Freunde" becomes "den Freunden".

Similar to the accusative case, there are certain prepositions that always require the dative case.

- aus dem Haus – out of the house.
- außer meiner Schwester – except for my sister.
- bei meinen Eltern – at my parents' place.
- gegenüber der Kirche – opposite the church.
- mit einem Löffel – with a spoon.
- nach dem Unterricht – after class.
- seit dem Wochenende – since the weekend.
- von ihrer Mutter – from her mother.
- zu deinem Haus – to your house.

Let's see how the singular personal pronouns look in the dative case.

- "Kannst du mir helfen?" (Can you help me?)
- "Ich gebe dir mein Wort." (I give you my word.)

- "Wir helfen ihm/ihr/ihm bei der Arbeit." (We help him/her/it with the work.)

And now for the plural personal pronouns.

- "Kannst du uns bitte das Buch geben?" (Can you please give us the book?)
- "Darf ich euch/Ihnen die Speisekarte zeigen?" (Can I show you (all) the menu?)
- "Er hat ihnen die Geschichte erzählt." (He told them the story.)

Genitive case

Now it's time for the fourth and final case – the genitive case.

In German, instead of using an apostrophe, we use the genitive case to indicate possession; for example, when something belongs to someone.

"Das Geschenk meines Bruders." (My brother's present.) Here there's an "s" on the end of Bruders, which gives us a clue it's the genitive case.

The next example has a feminine noun which doesn't have an "s" on the end. "Das Haus der Frau." (The woman's house.) Or literally, the house of the woman.

In the last example, we simply add an "s" on the end of the name with no apostrophe: "Bens Kleider." (Ben's clothes.)

For definite articles that require the genitive case, we use "des" for masculine and neuter words, and "der" for feminine words and plurals. And we use similar endings for indefinite articles and possessive pronouns.

	the	a	my
Masculine	des	eines	meines
Feminine	der	einer	meiner
Neuter	des	eines	meines
Plural	der	—	meiner

There are quite a few prepositions that always take the genitive case. Here are some of the common ones.

- (an)statt des Buches – instead of the book.
- trotz des Regens – despite the rain.
- während der Feiertage – during the holidays.
- wegen ihres Hundes – because of her dog.

Let's finish the genitive case with some singular personal pronouns.

- "Die Farbe meiner Haare ist braun." (The colour of my hair is brown.)
- "Die Mutter deines Freundes ist Ärztin." (Your friend's mother is a doctor.)
- "Der Garten seines/ihrer Hauses ist schön." (The garden of his/her house is beautiful.)

And now for the plural personal pronouns.

- "Die Eltern unserer Freunde kommen." (Our friends' parents are coming.)
- "Das Auto eurer/Ihrer Familie ist schön." (Your family's car is nice.)
- "Die Fenster ihres Hauses sind neu." (The windows of their house are new.)

Story

Now we've learnt the differences between the 4 cases, let's put it all into practice with a short story.

English	German
On a sunny spring afternoon, the small town of Heidelberg was full of life.	An einem sonnigen Frühlingsnachmittag war die kleine Stadt Heidelberg voller Leben.

English	German
The tourists admired the historic bridge, while the locals went about their daily errands.	Die Touristen bewunderten die historische Brücke, während die Einheimischen ihre täglichen Besorgungen erledigten.
Mr. Schmidt, the baker, opened his shop early in the morning.	Herr Schmidt, der Bäcker, öffnete früh am Morgen seinen Laden.
Many customers waited in front of his store to buy the fresh bread.	Viele Kunden warteten vor seinem Geschäft, um das frische Brot zu kaufen.
Across from the bakery, Mrs. Müller served coffee and cake to the guests.	Gegenüber der Bäckerei bediente Frau Müller die Gäste mit Kaffee und Kuchen.
Despite the warm weather, many people ordered hot chocolate with cream.	Trotz des warmen Wetters bestellten viele Leute heißen Kakao mit Sahne.
During the afternoon, three students visited the university.	Während des Nachmittags besuchten drei Studenten die Universität.
They were working on a project for their professor.	Sie arbeiteten an einem Projekt für ihren Professor.
In the marketplace, a farmer sold his vegetables.	Auf dem Marktplatz verkaufte ein Bauer sein Gemüse.
He came from the neighbouring village every Thursday.	Er kam jeden Donnerstag aus dem Nachbardorf.
The quality of his products was excellent.	Die Qualität seiner Produkte war ausgezeichnet.
As the sun set, the people returned to their homes to enjoy delicious dinners.	Als die Sonne unterging, kehrten die Menschen in ihre Häuser zurück, um köstliche Abendessen zu genießen.

It's quiz time!

Don't worry if you missed all the examples in that story – you can download the PDF of today's lesson which will include the full translation. But now it's quiz time!

Which article fits the nominative case for the neuter noun "Haus"?

- A. das Haus
- B. der Haus
- C. die Haus

The correct answer is... das Haus.

Which sentence correctly uses the accusative case?

- A. Er hilft dem Freund
- B. Sie kauft einen Apfel
- C. Das Buch der Mutter

The correct answer is... Sie kauft einen Apfel.

Which part of a sentence is written in the dative case?

- A. The indirect object
- B. The subject
- C. The direct object

The correct answer is... The indirect object.

Which article correctly fits the genitive case for the masculine noun "Mann"?

- A. den Mann
- B. des Mannes
- C. der Mann

The correct answer is... des Mannes.

Your task

Well done for getting this far!

Now your task is to write a paragraph about your favourite foods using the definite articles we covered across all 4 cases. If you're feeling up for it, add in some of the prepositions and personal pronouns!

	Nom.	Acc.	Dat.	Gen.
Masculine	der	den	dem	des
Feminine	die	die	der	der
Neuter	das	das	dem	des
Plural	die	die	den	der

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