

MFLE German Reference Grammar

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Introduction

'Grammar is the way that words make sense. It is a code or set of rules accepted by any community who share a language.' (Language into Languages Teaching, University of Glasgow, Scottish Executive Education Department, 2001)

What follows is an attempt to set out the rules of grammar for the structures which are often used in the teaching of German for P6 and P7.

Why use this resource?

It is appreciated that some teachers who have completed their MLPS training may feel a little insecure in their knowledge of basic German grammar. This is understandable, and this reference grammar offers some help. It is by definition very restricted, but closely tied to the requirements of teachers offering German in the primary school.

This does not mean that primary school teachers will now be expected to teach grammar formally as it is laid out here. There is no expectation that pupils should work through this grammar resource.

It is a reference resource for teachers, to try to make them more comfortable with the rules behind the communicative language which they are offering in class. It is felt that a degree of security about the rules of grammar will make teachers more comfortable in their use of German.

How should I use this resource?

There is, of course, no ban on teachers explaining simple rules of grammar to pupils - quite the contrary. Quite often a simple explanation will be a quick and effective way for pupils to make sense of how a particular bit of language works. Drawing an analogy with English will often help further.

It is important for teachers to judge when, how, and for which pupils they should offer a simple grammatical explanation. Having access to this resource will enable teachers to use their own words to clarify things for pupils in their own way, where and when they think that will help.

Any overly formal use of this resource - projecting tables of adjective endings onto a whiteboard, for example - should be avoided.

In the same spirit, this resource is not intended to be an extra burden for teachers, something to be learned off by heart as a set of rules. It offers a slightly more analytical way of seeing how language works, how structures can be unpicked for easier understanding, and how you can use that understanding to generate more language yourself. Then you can apply things learned in one context to another - and with the knowledge you have gained, help pupils to do the same.

Viel Spaß!

Nouns, pronouns and articles

Nouns

The rules for nouns concerning gender and plurals are explained here.

Gender

All nouns in German, as in English, fall into three groups, or genders - masculine, feminine and neuter. In English the vast majority of nouns, the ones that refer to things, are neuter, such as 'arm', 'hand', 'leg' and so on. Normally, only nouns referring to people are masculine or feminine, such as 'man', 'woman', 'mother', 'father' etc. An odd exception still exists when people refer to a 'ship', or perhaps a 'car', as 'she'.

In German, things are different. Nouns referring to things can be any one of the three genders. For example, the word for 'arm', 'hand' and 'leg' each belongs to a different gender in German.

arm	der Arm (m)
hand	die Hand (f)
leg	das Bein (n)

Points to note

All nouns in German **always** start with a capital letter.

The word for 'the' in German - 'der', 'die', 'das' - varies according to the gender of the noun. Unfortunately, there is no logic to explain which noun will have which gender in German. The only solution is, each time you learn a new noun, to learn the word for 'the' at the same time, so that you learn 'die Katze', for example, rather than just 'Katze' on its own.

A third, reassuring, thing to note from two of the three nouns above is that many words in English and German are similar. For example, the verb to 'drink', and the past tenses 'drank'/'drunk' are almost exactly the same in German: 'trinken', 'trank', 'getrunken'.

Plurals

German is again very different from English in that there are different ways of forming the plural of nouns. Rather than trying to memorise rules for how different groups of nouns form their plural in different ways, not forgetting the odd exception, it is better to follow the advice given on gender, above, and learn the plural form for each new noun that you learn.

Pronouns

Pronouns can be divided into two main groups: personal and impersonal.

Personal pronouns

As the name suggests, **personal pronouns** refer to **people**.

ich	I	wir	we
du	you (singular, familiar)	ihr	you (plural, familiar)
Sie	you (singular, polite)	Sie	you (plural, polite)
er	he	sie	they (masculine and feminine, plural)
sie	she		

Saying 'you' in German

As you can see from the table above, there are different ways of saying 'you' in German.

Use 'du' (singular) and 'ihr' (plural) when talking to close friends and relatives and to children, people you would naturally call by their first name.

Use the 'Sie' (both singular and plural), when talking to adult strangers and other adults in positions of authority, people you would naturally address by 'Mr' or 'Mrs'.

NB: Note that 'Sie' used in this way always has a capital letter.

Impersonal pronouns

Impersonal pronouns are used as a substitute for nouns referring to **things**: 'it' and 'they' in English.

As we have already seen in the section on nouns, nouns which are neuter in English, referring to things, can in German be masculine, feminine or neuter. In the same way, pronouns which replace these nouns must also become masculine, feminine or neuter.

it	er (m)
	sie (f)
	es (n)
they	sie (plural, all genders)

NB: Try to avoid the temptation to always use 'es' for 'it' when referring to things.

Sentence using the noun	Sentence using the impersonal pronoun	Gender/ number	English translations
Das ist mein neuer Pullover.	Er ist schön, nicht wahr?	(m)	That is my new pullover. It is nice, isn't it?
Ich mag deine neue Jacke.	Sie ist sehr schön.	(f)	I like your new jacket. It is very nice.
Dein neues Hemd gefällt mir.	Es ist sehr schön.	(n)	I like your new shirt. It is very nice.
Deine neuen Kleider finde ich schön.	Ja, sie sind sehr hübsch.	(plural)	I think your new clothes are nice. Yes, they are very pretty.

Articles

There are two types of article: the definite and the indefinite.

The definite article

In English the definite article is the word 'the', for both singular and plural.

In German, as we have seen in the section on nouns, the definite article is:

- 'der' if the noun is masculine
- 'die' if the noun is feminine
- 'das' if the noun is neuter.

All three genders become 'die' in the plural.

Singular noun and article	Plural noun and article
der Schuh (the shoe)	die Schuhe (the shoes)
die Socke (the sock)	die Socken (the socks)
das Kind (the child)	die Kinder (the children)

NB: Note the three different ways of forming the plural in the above examples. These three are in fact fairly typical.

1. Many **masculine** nouns form the plural by adding '-e' at the end, often adding an Umlaut to the vowel (though 'der Schuh' is an exception!)
2. Many **feminine** nouns add '-e' or '-en' at the end.
3. Many **neuter** nouns add '-er', again adding an Umlaut if possible (eg 'das Buch' becomes 'die Bücher' in the plural).

The indefinite article

In English the indefinite article is the word 'a', 'an' or 'some'.

In German it again has three forms, according to the gender of the noun:

1. 'ein' if the noun is masculine
2. 'eine' if the noun is feminine
3. 'ein' if the noun is neuter.

ein Bleistift (m)	a pencil
eine Heftklammer (f)	a staple
ein Lineal (n)	a ruler

Using the indefinite article in the plural form

In both English and German, you do not always need to use the indefinite article in the plural form. In practice, in the classroom, you will commonly use plural nouns with numbers, or with the indefinite article missing, as in the examples below:

Braune Augen sind schön.	Brown eyes are nice.
Neue Schuhe sind teuer.	New shoes are dear.

Adjectives

Introduction

Adjectives add some sort of description to nouns; in grammatical terms, they qualify nouns.

Adjectives agree with the noun they qualify in German. Adjectives used with a noun in German will add various endings according to whether the noun is masculine, feminine, neuter or plural.

Adjectives with the definite article

Article + adjective	Noun	English translation
der kleine	Elefant (m)	The little elephant
die linke	Hand (f)	The left hand
das rechte	Bein (n)	The right leg
die neuen	Schuhe (plural, all genders)	The new shoes

Adjectives with the indefinite article

Article + noun	Noun	English translation
ein kurzer	Rock (m)	a short skirt
eine bunte	Jacke (f)	a brightly coloured jacket
ein graues	Hemd (n)	a grey shirt
neue	Schuhe (plural, all genders)	new shoes

Adjectives without a noun

When adjectives stand alone, if they are not followed by a noun, they have no endings.

Adjective not followed by noun	Adjective followed by noun
Peter ist jung. (Peter is young.)	Er ist ein junger Mann. (He is a young man.)
Die Oma ist nett. (Granny is nice.)	Sie ist eine nette Oma. (She is a nice Granny.)
Das Baby ist schön. (The baby is beautiful.)	Das ist ein schönes Baby. (That is a beautiful baby.)
Ihre Schuhe sind neu. (Her shoes are new.)	Sie hat neue Schuhe. (She has new shoes.)

Adjectives with verbs of different cases

Adjectives also change their endings depending on the case being used – see Verb cases.

Comparative adjectives

Just as in English ('big' and 'bigger') the comparative form of the adjective in German is made by adding '-er' at the end.

Adjective	Comparative adjective	English translations
langsam	langsamer	slow/slower
schnell	schneller	fast/faster
schön	schöner	beautiful/more beautiful
klein	kleiner	small/smaller

Adding an Umlaut

Some adjectives add an Umlaut (a double dot above a letter) to the vowel.

Adjective	Comparative adjective	English translations
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warm	wärmer	warm/warmer
kalt	kälter	cold/colder
alt	älter	old/older
lang	länger	long/longer
stark	stärker	strong/stronger
arm	ärmer	poor/poorer
nah	näher	near/nearer
groß	größer	big/bigger
jung	jünger	young/younger
kurz	kürzer	short/shorter

Irregular comparative forms

Some comparative forms are irregular.

Adjective	Comparative adjective	English translations
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gut	besser	good/better
hoch	höher	high/higher

Comparison in positive statements

Comparison in positive statements means saying 'something/someone is more [...] than something/someone else'.

Sentence containing comparative adjective	English translation
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Schneewittchen ist schöner als die böse Königin.	Snow White is prettier than the wicked queen.
---	--

Klara ist älter als Peter.	Klara is older than Peter.
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Comparison in negative statements

Comparison in negative statements means saying 'something/someone is not as [...] as something/someone else'.

Sentence containing comparative adjective

English translation

Die böse Königin ist **nicht so schön wie** Schneewittchen.

The wicked queen is **not as pretty as** Snow White.

Meine Oma ist **nicht so alt wie** mein Opa.

My granny is **not as old as** my grandpa.

Superlative adjectives

Much the same as in English ('tall' and 'tallest') in German you add '-st' to the end of an adjective for the superlative form. Sometimes, after adjectives ending in 't', 'd' or 's' for example, you add '-est'.

Examples of superlative adjectives

'Barbara ist das kleinste Mädchen.' - Barbara is the smallest girl.

'Schneewittchen ist die Schönste.' - Snow White is the prettiest.

The second example here shows that you can turn an adjective in the superlative into a noun - 'the prettiest' - simply by making the first letter in German a capital.

Adding an Umlaut

Those adjectives which add an Umlaut (a double dot above a letter) in the comparative form also add the Umlaut in the superlative.

Adjective	Phrase using the superlative adjective	English translation
lang	der längste Fluß	long/the longest river
alt	die älteste Dame	old/the oldest woman
jung	das jüngste Mädchen	young/the youngest girl
groß	das größte Haus	big/the biggest house

Irregular forms of the superlative

Some superlative forms are irregular.

Adjective	Irregular form of superlative	English translation
gut	der/die/das beste	good/the best
hoch	der/die/das höchste	high/the highest
nah	der/die/das nächste	near/the nearest

For example:

- 'the best wine' - 'der beste Wein'
- 'next, please' - 'der/die Nächste bitte' (male/female)

Agreement of superlative adjectives with nouns

Both the comparative and superlative form of the adjective must be made **masculine, feminine or neuter**, or **plural** to agree with a noun.

When the superlative form of the adjective stands alone, ie is not followed by a noun, it takes the form 'am ...sten'.

For example:

Glasgow ist **groß**, London ist **größer**, aber Tokyo ist **am größten**. - Glasgow is **big**, London is **bigger**, but Tokyo is the **biggest**.

You will not need to use these forms very often.

Possessive adjectives

In English, possessive adjectives are the words 'my', 'his', 'her' etc.

mein	my
dein	your (singular, familiar)
Ihr	your (singular, polite)
sein	his/its
ihr	her/its
sein	its
unser	our
euer	your (plural, familiar)
Ihr	your (plural, polite)
ihr	their (plural, all genders)

NB: Note that 'Ihr', which corresponds to 'Sie', also always has a capital letter.

Agreement of possessive adjectives with nouns

These possessive adjectives operate in very much the same way as the indefinite article 'ein', 'eine' and 'ein'. They too must be made masculine, feminine or neuter, or plural to agree with a noun.

(see the table which follows)

Possessive adjective + noun English translation

mein Mann (m)	my husband
meine Frau (f)	my wife
mein Kind (n)	my child
meine Freunde (plural)	my friends
deine Banane (f)	your banana
sein Kopf (m)	his/its head
ihr Kopf (m)	her/its head
sein Kopf (m)	its head
unser Haus (n)	our house
ihre Kinder (plural)	her children
ihre Kinder (plural)	their children

NB: Note that 'its head' has been included three times, because:

- 'sein Kopf' could refer back to 'der Hund' (dog), which is **masculine** in German
- 'ihr Kopf' could refer back to 'die Katze' (cat), which is **feminine** in German
- 'sein Kopf' could refer back to 'das Kaninchen' (rabbit), which is **neuter** in German.

Possessive adjectives with other adjectives

In the introduction, we saw the following four examples of adjectives with the indefinite article:

Article + noun	Noun	English translation
ein kurzer	Rock (m)	a short skirt
eine bunte	Jacke (f)	a brightly coloured jacket
ein graues	Hemd (n)	a grey shirt
neue	Schuhe (plural, all genders)	new shoes

Adjectives with the possessive adjective follow exactly the same pattern in the singular.

Possessive adjective + noun English translation

mein kurzer Rock (m)	my short skirt
deine bunte Jacke (f)	your brightly coloured jacket
sein graues Hemd (n)	his grey shirt
ihre neuen Schuhe (plural)	her new shoes
meine neuen Kleider (plural)	my new clothes

NB: These examples are all in the nominative case. Some of the endings will change in the other cases.

Verbs and adverbs

Introduction to verbs in German

Verbs are often called 'doing words' in English. Most of them are exactly that: 'run', 'read', 'swim', 'talk' etc. But some, most commonly the verb 'to be' and the verb 'to have', are not. There is not much action going on, for example, in the phrases 'grass is green' or 'Rudolf has a red nose'.

The full form of the verb is called the **infinitive**. In English, the infinitive has the word 'to' in front, as in 'to sleep', 'to live', 'to eat', 'to drink' etc.

In German, almost all infinitives end in '-en', as in 'schlafen', 'wohnen', 'essen', 'trinken'. Some end in '-n', as in 'bummeln', to go for a stroll.

Verb endings

There are very few verb endings in English. For example, we say 'I work', but 'he works'; and in the past tense we say 'she worked'.

In German, there are more verb endings. First, you take off the '-en' or '-n' from the infinitive to leave the stem; then you add various endings to the stem. You can see this in the sections on the present tense and past tense.

Subject pronouns

Subject pronouns are:

ich	I
wir	we
du	you (singular, familiar)
ihr	you (plural, familiar)
Sie	you (singular, polite)
Sie	you (plural, polite)
er	he/it
sie	she/it
sie	they (all genders)
es	it
man	one

NB: The subject pronouns 'ich, du/Sie' and 'er/sie/es' are, in grammatical terms, called **first**, **second** and **third person singular** respectively. And 'wir, ihr/Sie' and 'sie' are **first**, **second** and **third person plural** respectively. These grammatical terms are not important in themselves, but are a useful shorthand way of referring to different parts of a verb.

Using 'you' with verbs

As you can see from the table above, there are different ways of saying 'you' in German. Use 'du' (singular) and 'ihr' (plural) when talking to:

- close friends and relatives
- children
- people you would naturally call by their first name.

Use 'Sie' (both singular and plural) when talking to:

- adult strangers or other adults in positions of authority
- people you would naturally address as 'Mr' or 'Mrs'.

NB: Note that 'Sie' used in this way always has a capital letter.

Using 'one' with verbs

While the use of 'one' in English is normally thought to be very formal, its equivalent in German, 'man', has no such overtones. It is used much more frequently in German where the very general 'you' would normally be used in English.

It is particularly useful for beginners in the question: 'wie sagt man...?' ('How do you say...?')

Wie sagt man 'book' auf Deutsch? How do you say 'book' in German?

NB: Note that 'man' used in this way has only one 'n', and does not have a capital letter. It should not be confused with the noun 'der Mann' meaning 'the man'.

Verb tenses

Present tense

Ideas covered in this section about the present tense are:

1. How do you express the present tense?
2. Regular (weak) verbs
3. Irregular (strong) verbs
4. The negative
5. Separable verbs
6. Impersonal verbs

How do you express the present tense?

In English, there are three different ways of expressing the present tense.

I play tennis. (when I have free time)

I am playing tennis. (eg in answer to the question: 'What are you doing?')

I do play tennis every day. (eg in answer to the question: 'You don't play tennis every day, do you?')

In German, there is only one way of saying all three of these.

ich spiele	I play
du spielst	you (singular familiar) play
Sie spielen	you (singular formal) play
er/sie/es spielt	he/she/it plays
man spielt	one plays
wir spielen	we play
ihr spielt	you (plural familiar) play

(cont...)

Sie spielen you (plural formal) play

sie spielen they play

Regular (weak) verbs

Many verbs follow this pattern.

Some regular (weak) verbs whose stem ends in '-t' add an extra '-e' in the second person familiar form, singular and plural, and in the third person singular.

Examples include: 'arbeiten' (to work), 'warten' (to wait), 'kosten' (to cost).

ich arbeite I work

du arbeitest you (singular familiar) work

Sie arbeiten you (singular formal) work

er/sie/es arbeitet he/she/it works

wir arbeiten we work

ihr arbeitet you (plural familiar) work

Sie arbeiten you (plural formal) work

sie arbeiten they work

For example:

Was kostet eine Melone? - What does a melon cost?

Irregular (strong) verbs

Strong verbs change the vowel in the stem of the infinitive, but only in the **second** and **third person singular**; and then add the normal endings.

Verb	First, second and third person singular	English translation
lesen	ich lese	I read
(to read)	du liest	you (singular formal) read
	er/sie/es liest	he/she/it reads
sprechen	ich spreche	I speak
(to speak)	du sprichst	you (singular formal) speak
	er/sie/es spricht	he/she/it speaks

geben	ich gebe	I give
(to give)	du gibst	you (singular formal) give
	er/sie/es gibt	he/she/it gives
nehmen	ich nehme	I take
(to take)	du nimmst	you (singular formal) take
	er/sie/es nimmt	he/she/it takes
essen	ich esse	I eat
(to eat)	du ißt	you (singular formal) eat
	er/sie/es ißt	he/she/it eats

Some change the **vowel** in the stem:

sehen	ich sehe	I see
(to see)	du siehst	you (singular familiar) see
	Sie sehen	you (singular formal) see
	er/sie/es sieht	he/she/it sees
	wir sehen	we see
	ihr seht	you (plural familiar) see
	Sie sehen	you (plural formal) see
	sie sehen	they see

Some add an **Umlaut** to the vowel in the stem:

Verb	First, second and third person singular	English translation
fahren	ich fahre	I go/travel
(to go/travel)	du fährst	you (singular familiar) go/travel
	er/sie/es fährt	he/she/it goes/travels
laufen	ich laufe	I run/walk
(to run/walk)	du läufst	you (singular familiar) run/walk
	er/sie/es läuft	he/she/it runs/walks

tragen	ich trage	I wear/carry
(to wear/ carry)	du trägst	you (singular familiar) wear/carry
	er/sie/es trägt	he/she/it wears/carries

Some are just irregular, such as the verb 'to have' - 'haben' - and the verb 'to know' - (facts/information, not people) - 'wissen':

haben – to have

ich habe - I have	wir haben - we have
du hast - you (singular familiar) have	ihr habt - you (plural familiar) have
Sie haben - you (singular formal) have	Sie haben - you (plural formal) have
er/sie/es hat - he/she/it has	sie haben - they have

wissen

ich weiß - I know	wir wissen - we know
du weißt - you (singular familiar) know	ihr wißt - you (plural familiar) know
Sie wissen - you (singular formal) know	Sie wissen - you (plural formal) know
er/sie/es weiß - he/she/it knows	sie wissen - they know

As in English, the verb '**to be**' - '**sein**' - is the most irregular of all:

ich bin	I am
du bist	you (singular familiar) are
Sie sind	you (singular formal) are
er/sie/es ist	he/she/it is
wir sind	we are
ihr seid	you (plural familiar) are
Sie sind	you (plural formal) are
sie sind	they are

NB: The grammatical terms 'regular/weak' and 'irregular/strong' are not important in themselves, and pupils certainly do not need to know them. They are used here as a useful shorthand for referring to certain groups of verbs.

The negative

The negative is formed in German by simply adding 'nicht' to the verb. Again there is no equivalent in German of the English 'I do not/don't', or 'he is/he's not ...-ing'.

Ich wohne nicht in Hamburg. I do not live in Hamburg.

Sie arbeiten nicht. They are not working.

The negative with '... not ... a'

In German, the single word 'kein' is used for this construction:

(Das ist) kein Problem! (n) No problem!

Sie hat keinen Bruder. (m) She does not have a brother.

Er hat keine Schwester. (f) He doesn't have a sister.

Ich habe kein Lineal. (n) I don't have a ruler. I have no ruler.

Das ist kein Mercedes, (n) That is not a Merc,

das ist ein BMW. (n) that's a BMW.

NB: Note that 'kein' used in this way must be made masculine, feminine or neuter, or plural according to the noun it is used with. Note also that it takes the same endings as 'ein'.

Separable verbs

In German, some verbs have two parts to them: the main part of the verb plus a separable prefix.

Some common examples are:

zumachen (to close)

anfangen (to begin)

aufmachen (to open)

anmalen (to paint/colour in)

aufstehen (to stand up)

These verbs are called 'separable' because the prefix separates and goes to the end of the sentence (or the end of a clause, or the end of a command).

Note, however, that when the verb is used in the infinitive form, the two parts stay together. (see tables which follow)

anfangen – to begin	du fängst an	you begin
	fangt bitte an!	Please begin! ('ihr' plural, familiar form)
	fangen Sie bitte an!	Please begin!
	Ich will nicht anfangen.	I don't want to begin.
aufmachen – to open	Wer macht die Tür auf?	Who is opening/who'll open the door?
	Karsten, bitte mach die Tür auf!	Karsten, open the door please!
	Ich kann das Fenster nicht aufmachen.	I can't open the window.
anmalen - to paint/colour in	Malt die Bilder an!	Colour in the pictures!
aufstehen - to stand up	Steht alle auf!	All stand (up)!

NB: Note how the past tense is formed:

zumachen – to close	Wer hat die Tür zugemacht?	Who shut the door?
anfangen – to begin	Warum hast du noch nicht angefangen?	Why have you not started yet?

Impersonal verbs

These are verbs where the subject is often the impersonal pronoun 'es' ('it') in German, but where the subject in English can be a personal pronoun such as 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', or a noun. They are very handy, very commonly used idiomatic phrases.

NB: The personal element is usually conveyed in the dative or accusative case.

Wie geht es dir/Ihnen? OR Wie geht's?	How are you?
Dieses Bild gefällt mir nicht.	I don't like that picture.
Gefällt es Ihnen hier in Deutschland?	Do you like (being in) Germany?
Hat's gefallen?	Did you like it? Was it OK? (a film, a meal, a day out, etc)

(cont.)

Mir ist warm/kalt.	I'm warm/cold.
Es ist mir schlecht.	I don't feel well.
Schmeckt das?	Do you like (the taste of) that? (food)
Es tut mir Leid.	I'm sorry.
Es fehlt das Bein.	The leg is missing.
Es fehlen die Haare.	The hair is missing.

NB: There are two ways of saying 'there is'/'there are' in German:

1. 'es gibt', always followed by the accusative and always used in the singular
2. 'es ist'/'es sind' followed by the nominative.

The idea conveyed by 'es gibt' is one of more permanent, general things, whereas the idea behind 'es ist'/'es sind' is more one of temporary, more specific things.

For example:

Es gibt in Köln einen berühmten Dom.	There's a famous cathedral in Cologne.
Es sind zwei Bücher auf dem Tisch.	There are two books on the table.

Past tense

In German, there are two main past tenses:

- the perfect tense
- the simple past

The perfect tense

The one most commonly used in simple conversations is the perfect tense. It corresponds most closely with the English 'I have worked', but it also corresponds to 'I worked' and 'I have been working'.

The perfect tense in German has two parts: the present tense of 'haben' (to have) or 'sein' (to be) plus the **past participle**.

The past participle of weak/regular verbs

Go to the stem of the infinitive, and add 'ge-' at the beginning and '-t' at the end:

Verb infinitive	Example using past participle	English translations
spielen	Ich habe Tennis gespielt.	I played tennis./I have played tennis.
machen	Was hast du gemacht?	What have you done?/What did you do?
kaufen	Anna hat einen neuen Pullover gekauft.	Anna has bought a new pullover.

NB: Note that weak verbs whose stem ends in '-t' add '-et' at the end. For example:

arbeiten	Ihr habt sehr gut gearbeitet.	You (plural familiar) have worked very well.
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The past participle of strong/irregular verbs

Go to the stem of the infinitive (see verb endings under verbs), add 'ge-' at the beginning and '-en' at the end. Note also that strong verbs mostly change the vowel in the stem:

Verb infinitive	Example using past participle	English translations
schreiben	Ich habe einen Brief geschrieben.	I wrote a letter/I have written a letter.
trinken	Sie hat ein Glas Wein getrunken.	She drank a glass of wine/She has drunk a glass of wine.
singen	Ihr habt sehr schön gesungen.	You (plural familiar) sang/have sung very nicely.
gewinnen	Wer hat gewonnen?	Who (has) won?

NB: As always, there are some exceptions:

Verbs which already begin with 'ge-', as in 'gewinnen' in the example above, do not add an extra 'ge-' in the past participle. Similarly, verbs which begin with 'be-', 'ver-' or 'er-' also do not add 'ge-' at the beginning of the past participle. (see table which follows)

Ich habe meinen Onkel besucht.	I visited my uncle.
Ihr habt die Geschichte sehr schön erzählt.	You told the story beautifully.
Wir haben nicht verstanden.	We didn't understand.
Ich habe vergessen.	I've forgotten.

The perfect tense with separable verbs

zumachen: Wer hat die Tür zugemacht?	Who shut the door?
anfangen: Haben sie noch nicht angefangen?	Have they not started yet?

NB: Note that the separable prefixes 'zu-' and 'an-' in these examples come before the 'ge-' of the past participle.

The perfect tense with reflexive verbs

Ich habe mich schnell umgezogen.	I got changed quickly.
Wir haben uns umgedreht.	We turned around.

The perfect tense with 'haben' or 'sein'

All verbs form the perfect tense with 'haben', unless they indicate some form of motion, or a change of state.

Examples of 'motion' verbs are:

- 'gehen' (to go)
- 'kommen' (to come)

Examples of verbs showing a 'change of state', much fewer in number, are:

- aufwachen (to wake up)
- einschlafen (to fall asleep)
- werden (to become)

Ich bin nach Paris geflogen.	I flew to Paris.
Wir sind durch den Tunnel gefahren.	We went/travelled through the Channel Tunnel.
Er ist zu Fuß nach Hause gegangen.	He went home on foot/he walked home.

(cont.)

Ich bin heute morgen sehr früh
aufgewacht.

I woke up very early this morning.

Sie ist schnell eingeschlafen.

She fell asleep quickly.

Er ist böse geworden.

He got angry.

NB: Two common exceptions which also form the perfect tense with 'sein' are 'sein' itself and 'bleiben' (to stay).

Ich bin nie im Ausland gewesen.

I have never been abroad.

Ich bin zu Hause geblieben.

I stayed at home.

Example of the perfect tense with 'haben' and 'sein'

A good illustration of the perfect tense with both 'haben' and 'sein' is seen in the Goldilocks story.

Goldl ckchen ist in den Wald gegangen und sie hat sch ne Blumen f r ihre Mutti gepfl ckt. Sie hat sich aber verlaufen und ist traurig geworden. Sie hat lange geweint. Sie ist bei den B ren eingeschlafen, bis die B ren zur ckgekommen sind. Dann ist Goldl ckchen schnell nach Hause gelaufen. Danach ist sie zu Hause geblieben und ist nicht mehr alleine in den Wald gegangen.

Translated, this is:

Goldilocks went into the wood and picked pretty flowers for her mummy. However, she got lost and became sad. She cried for a long time. She fell asleep at the bears' house until the bears came back. Then Goldilocks ran home quickly. After that, she stayed at home and never went into the woods alone again.

The simple past tense

The only two verbs you will need to use in the classroom in the simple past tense are 'sein' and 'haben' and some modal verbs (see Modal verbs).

haben	ich hatte	I had
	du hattest	You (singular familiar) had
	Sie hatten	You (singular formal) had
	er/sie/es hatte	He/she/it had
	wir hatten	We had
	ihr hattet	You (plural familiar) had
	Sie hatten	You (plural formal) had
	sie hatten	They had
<hr/>		
sein	ich war	I was
	du warst	You (singular familiar) were
	Sie waren	You (singular formal) were
	er/sie/es war	He/she/it was
	wir waren	We were
	ihr wart	You (plural familiar) were
	Sie waren	You (plural formal) were
	sie waren	They were
<hr/>		

Future tense

There are different ways of expressing the future tense in both English and in German.

In both languages you can simply use the **present tense** plus an **adverb**, or **adverbial phrase**, of time.

Or you can form the 'real' future by using '**will**' plus **another verb** in English, and in German a part of the verb '**werden**' plus an **infinitive**.

Here are the parts of the verb 'werden' you will use (meaning 'will' in this case):

ich werde	wir werden
du wirst	ihr werdet
Sie werden	Sie werden
er/sie/es wird	sie werden

Examples using 'werden'

Ich werde am Wochenende schwimmen gehen. - I'll go for a swim at the weekend.

Mein Vater wird nächstes Jahr in Amerika arbeiten. - My dad will be working/is going to work in America next year.

Das wird schön sein. - That will be nice.

NB: The infinitive goes to the end of the sentence (or to the end of a clause).

Conditional tense

This tense conveys the meaning of 'would' in English. In German it is formed with a part of the verb 'werden' plus an infinitive.

In both languages, the conditional tense is often followed by a clause with 'if'.

Examples of the conditional tense

Ich würde gern nach Australien fahren, wenn ich genug Geld hätte. - I really would like to go to Australia, if I had enough money.

Ich würde ein neues Haus kaufen, wenn ich reich wäre. - I would buy a new house, if I were rich.

NB: Note that the infinitive goes to the end of the sentence; or, as in the two examples above, the end of the clause.

There is a special form for a small number of verbs in these clauses beginning with 'if':

sein - to be	ich wäre	wir wären
	du wärst	ihr wäret
	Sie wäre	Sie wäre
	er/sie/es wäre	sie wären

For example:

Was würdest du machen, wenn du reich wärst? - What would you do, if you were rich?

haben - to have	ich hätte	wir hätten
	du hättest	ihr hättet
	Sie hätten	Sie hätten
	er/sie/es hätte	sie hätten

For example:

Was würdest du machen, wenn du viel Geld hättest? - What would you do, if you had lots of money?

können - to be able to, can	ich könnte	wir könnten
	du könntest	ihr könntet
	Sie könnten	Sie könnten
	er/sie/es könnte	sie könnten

For example:

Ich würde im Ausland wohnen, wenn ich könnte. - I would live abroad if I could.

mögen - to want to	ich möchte	wir möchten
	du möchtest	ihr möchtet
	Sie möchten	Sie möchten
	er/sie/es möchte	sie möchten

For example:

Am Wochenende möchte ich ins Kino gehen. - I'd like to go to the cinema at the weekend.

Möchtest du mitkommen? - Would you like to come?

Verb cases

Introduction

There are four cases in both English and German:

1. nominative
2. accusative
3. dative
4. genitive

As elsewhere in this reference grammar, these grammatical terms are introduced purely as a useful form of shorthand.

Nominative

The nominative case is used to indicate the **subject** of a sentence - the person or thing that is doing the **action** in a sentence. The nominative case is always used with the verbs 'sein' (to be) and 'werden' (to become).

For example:

Die Katze schläft .	The cat is sleeping.
Unsere Lehrerin ist sehr nett.	Our teacher is very nice.
Ich esse gern Birnen.	I like eating pears.
Wir wollen Fußball spielen.	We want to play football.
Das ist ein schöner Pullover.	That is a nice pullover.
Das ist ein schönes Auto.	That's a nice car.

Accusative

The accusative case is used mainly to indicate the **direct object** of a sentence. If a verb conveys any form of action, then the direct object is the person or thing that has that action done to him/her/it.

Sometimes there is not much action in a verb, such as 'haben', 'to have', but there can still be direct objects with such verbs, of course.

For example:

Wer hat den (letzten) Apfel gegessen?	Who ate the (last) apple?
Hebt den rechten Arm!	Raise (plural) your right arm!
Er hat einen neuen Pullover gekauft.	He bought a new pullover.
Hast du sie gesehen?	Have you seen her?
Er trägt sein neues Hemd.	He's wearing his new shirt.
Hast du mich im Kino gesehen?	Did you see me at the cinema?
Ich kann meine Schuhe nicht finden.	I can't find my shoes.

The definite article in the accusative

The definitive article in the accusative is shown in the table below:

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	der	die	das	die
accusative	den	die	das	die

The indefinite article in the accusative

The indefinite article in the accusative is shown in the table below:

	masculine	feminine	neuter
nominative	ein	eine	ein
accusative	einen	eine	ein

Personal and impersonal pronouns in the accusative

Personal and impersonal pronouns in the accusative are as follows:

mich	me	uns	us
dich	you (singular, familiar)	euch	you (plural, familiar)
Sie	you (singular, polite)	Sie	you (plural, polite)
ihn/sie/es	he/she/it	sie	them (all genders)

Possessive adjectives in the accusative

All the possessive adjectives follow exactly the same pattern as the indefinite article.

masculine	feminine	neuter	plural	translation
meinen	meine	mein	meine	my
deinen	deine	dein	deine	your
seinen	seine	sein	seine	his
ihren	ihre	ihr	ihre	her
seinen	seine	sein	seine	its
unseren	unsere	unser	unsere	our
euren	eure	euer	eure	your
Ihren	Ihre	Ihr	Ihre	your
ihren	ihre	ihr	ihre	their

Adjective endings in the accusative

Adjective endings in the accusative are shown as follows. The 'xxx' represent the adjectives.

- With the definite article: 'the'

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	der xxx-e + noun	die xxx-e + noun	das xxx-e + noun	die xxx-en + noun
accusative	den xxx-en + noun	die xxx-e + noun	das xxx-e + noun	die xxx-en + noun

- with the indefinite article: 'a'

	masculine	feminine	neuter
nominative	ein xxx-er + noun	eine xxx-e + noun	ein xxx-es + noun
accusative	einen xxx-en + noun	eine xxx-e + noun	ein xxx-es + noun

- with possessive adjectives: 'my/your/his/her' etc

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	mein xxx-er + noun	meine xxx-e + noun	mein xxx-es + noun	meine xxx-en + noun
accusative	meinen xxx-en + noun	meine xxx-e + noun	mein xxx-es + noun	meine xxx-en + noun

NB: Note that 'kein' (not '-a') follows exactly the same pattern as the indefinite article 'ein', and the possessive adjectives 'mein' etc.

Dative

The main use of the dative case is to indicate the **indirect object** of a sentence. The indirect object is often, but not always, indicated in English with 'to' as in: 'I gave it to him/I gave him it'. The way to tell the difference between a direct and an indirect object is to see if you can add 'to'.

For example:

'I gave my brother a book' can be turned into 'I gave a book to my brother'. Therefore, in the first sentence, as well as in the second, 'my brother' is the indirect object and 'a book' is the direct object.

NB: In the context of German in the primary school, you will probably not need this particular use of the dative case. You will however, use the dative more frequently in two other ways: first with **impersonal verbs** (see that subsection within verbs); and also with prepositions (see that section).

The dative is useful for simple phrases such as:

'Gib mir das!' - 'Give me that!/Give that to me!'

The definite article in the dative

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	der	die	das	die
accusative	den	die	das	die
dative	dem	der	dem	den

NB: If a plural noun does not already have an '-n', it adds an '-n', in the dative plural.

For example:

Ich gehe mit den **Freunden** spazieren. - I am going for a walk with **friends**.

The indefinite article in the dative

	masculine	feminine	neuter
nominative	ein	eine	ein
accusative	einen	eine	ein
dative	einem	einer	einem

Personal and impersonal pronouns in the dative

Personal and impersonal pronouns in the dative are as follows:

mir	to me	uns	to us
dir	to you (singular, familiar)	euch	to you (plural, familiar)
Ihnen	to you (singular, polite)	Ihnen	to you (plural, polite)
ihm/ihr/ihm	to him/her/it	ihnen	to them

Possessive adjectives in the dative

All the possessive adjectives follow exactly the same pattern as the indefinite article.

masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
meinem	meiner	meinem	meinen
deinem	deiner	deinem	deinen
seinem	seiner	seinem	seinen
ihrem	ihrer	ihrem	ihren
seinem	seiner	seinem	seinen

(cont.)

unserem	unserer	unserem	unseren
eurem	eurer	eurem	euren
Ihrem	Ihrer	Ihrem	Ihren
ihrem	ihrer	ihrem	ihren

For example:

Ich gehe mit **meinen** Freunden spazieren. - I am going for a walk with **my** friends.

Adjective endings in the dative

Adjective endings in the dative are shown as follows. The 'xxx' represent the adjectives.

With the definite article: 'the'

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	der xxx-e + noun	die xxx-e + noun	das xxx-e + noun	die xxx-en + noun
accusative	den xxx-en + noun	die xxx-e + noun	das xxx-e + noun	die xxx-en + noun
dative	dem xxx-en + noun	der xxx-en + noun	dem xxx-en + noun	den xxx-en + noun

With the indefinite article: 'a'

	masculine	feminine	neuter
nominative	ein xxx-er + noun	eine xxx-e + noun	ein xxx-es + noun
accusative	einen xxx-en + noun	eine xxx-e + noun	ein xxx-es + noun
dative	einem xxx-en + noun	einer xxx-en + noun	einem xxx-en + noun

With possessive adjectives: 'my/your/his/her', etc

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	mein xxx-er + noun	meine xxx-e + noun	mein xxx-es + noun	meine xxx-en + noun
accusative	meinen xxx-en + noun	meine xxx-e + noun	mein xxx-es + noun	meine xxx-en + noun
dative	meinem xxx-en + noun	meiner xxx-en + noun	meinem xxx-en + noun	meinen xxx-en + noun

Genitive

The genitive is the least common of the four cases in German. It conveys the idea of **possession**, and in English is indicated either by the apostrophe or by the word 'of'. In German, the genitive case does for both.

The definite article in the genitive

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	der	die	das	die
accusative	den	die	das	die
dative	dem	der	dem	den
genitive	des	der	des	der

The indefinite article in the genitive

	masculine	feminine	neuter
nominative	ein	eine	ein
accusative	einen	eine	ein
dative	einem	einer	einem
genitive	eines	einer	eines

Possessive adjectives in the genitive

masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
meines	meiner	meines	meiner
deines	deiner	deines	deiner
seines	seiner	seines	seiner
ihres	ihrer	ihres	ihrer
seines	seiner	seines	seiner
unseres	unserer	unseres	unserer
eures	eurer	eures	eurer
Ihres	Ihrer	Ihres	Ihrer
ihres	ihrer	ihres	ihrer

Adjective endings in the genitive

Adjective endings in the genitive are shown as follows. The 'xxx' represent the adjectives.

With the definite article: 'the'

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	der xxx-e + noun	die xxx-e + noun	das xxx-e + noun	die xxx-en + noun
accusative	den xxx-en + noun	die xxx-e + noun	das xxx-e + noun	die xxx-en + noun
dative	dem xxx-en + noun	der xxx-en + noun	dem xxx-en + noun	den xxx-en + noun
genitive	des xxx-en + noun	der xxx-en + noun	des xxx-en + noun	der xxx-en + noun

With the indefinite article: 'a'

	masculine	feminine	neuter
nominative	ein xxx-er + noun	eine xxx-e + noun	ein xxx-es + noun
accusative	einen xxx-en + noun	eine xxx-e + noun	ein xxx-es + noun
dative	einem xxx-en + noun	einer xxx-en + noun	einem xxx-en + noun
genitive	eines xxx-en + noun	einer xxx-en + noun	eines xxx-en + noun

With possessive adjectives: 'my/your/his/her', etc

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural
nominative	mein xxx-er + noun	meine xxx-e + noun	mein xxx-es + noun	meine xxx-en + noun
accusative	meinen xxx-en + noun	meine xxx-e + noun	mein xxx-es + noun	meine xxx-en + noun
dative	meinem xxx-en + noun	meiner xxx-en + noun	meinem xxx-en + noun	meinen xxx-en + noun
genitive	meines xxx-en + noun	meiner xxx-en + noun	meines xxx-en + noun	meiner xxx-en + noun

For example:

Das ist das Auto meines Onkels. - That is my uncle's car.

Ich trage die Jacke meiner Schwester. - I'm wearing my sister's jacket.

NB: In the case of **masculine** and **neuter** nouns in the **singular**, '-es' is added to short nouns and '-s' to longer ones.

NB: In all genders, singular and plural, **adjectives** used with a **noun** in the genitive end in '-en'.

For example:

Ich werde euch die Geschichte einer bösen Königin erzählen. - I'm going to tell you the story of a wicked queen.

NB: In German, something similar to the apostrophe is possible when people are referred to by name.

For example:

Das ist Karls Bruder. - That is Karl's brother.

Das ist Herr Schumachers Auto. - That is Herr Schumacher's car.

But remember there is no apostrophe in German.

Avoiding the genitive case

Avoiding the genitive is easy, and commonly done. Instead, use 'von' plus the dative case.

Das ist das Auto von meinem Onkel. - That is my uncle's car.

Das ist ein Foto von meiner Oma. - That is a photo of my granny.

Modal verbs

What are modal verbs?

This is a small group of six verbs very commonly used in German. They are very often used with another verb, which is always the infinitive, and which is placed at the end of a clause, or the end of a sentence.

4. **können** - to be able to/can
5. **müssen** - to have to/must
6. **dürfen** - to be allowed/may
7. **wollen** - to want to
8. **sollen** - to be supposed to/ought
9. **mögen** - to like

können - to be able to/can

ich kann

wir können

du kannst

ihr könnt

Sie können

Sie können

er/sie/es kann

sie können

Examples using 'können'

Ich kann nicht richtig sehen. - I can't see properly.

Können Sie mir bitte helfen? - Can you help me please?

Er kann sehr gut schwimmen. - He's a very good swimmer./He can swim very well.

müssen – to have to/must	ich muß	wir müssen
	du mußt	ihr müßt
	Sie müssen	Sie müssen
	er/sie/es muß	sie müssen

Examples using 'müssen'

Du mußt sofort nach Hause gehen. - You must go home at once.

Ich muß heute einkaufen gehen. - I've got to go shopping today.

dürfen - to be allowed/may	ich darf	wir dürfen
	du darfst	ihr dürft
	Sie dürfen	Sie dürfen
	er/sie/es darf	sie dürfen

Examples using 'dürfen'

Darf ich bitte zur Toilette gehen? - May I go to the toilet?

In der Klasse darf man nicht essen. - You are not allowed to eat in class.

Darf ich aufstehen? - May I leave the table? (at a meal)

wollen - to want to	ich will	wir wollen
	du willst	ihr wollt
	Sie wollen	Sie wollen
	er/sie/es will	sie wollen

Examples using 'wollen'

Ich will heute abend ins Kino gehen. - I want to go to the cinema tonight.

Wollen Sie mitkommen? - Do you want to come too?

sollen - to be supposed to/ought/should	ich soll	wir sollen
	du sollst	ihr sollt
	Sie sollen	Sie sollen
	er/sie/es soll	sie sollen

Examples using 'sollen'

Du sollst nicht rauchen. - You should not smoke.

Jeden Tag soll man viel Obst essen. - You should eat lots of fruit every day.

Was sollen wir jetzt machen? - What are we to do/do we do now?

mögen - to like	ich mag	wir mögen
	du magst	ihr mögt
	Sie mögen	Sie mögen
	er/sie/es mag	sie mögen

NB: The most common use of this verb is to convey the meaning 'would like to'/'want to':

ich möchte	wir möchten
du möchtest	ihr möchtet
Sie möchten	Sie möchten
er/sie/es möchte	sie möchten

Examples using 'mögen'

Ich möchte ein Glas Wasser. - I'd like a glass of water.

Ich möchte nach Deutschland fahren. - I'd like to go to Germany.

More information about the verb 'mögen'

Most of the modal verbs can be used on their own, without an infinitive, such as:

- ich kann nicht (I can't)
- ich will nicht (I don't want to)
- ich darf nicht (I'm not allowed to)

But 'mögen' is slightly different in that it is sometimes used with a direct object (see the accusative), especially referring to people or food:

Ich mag ihn. - I like him.

Ich mag sie nicht. - I don't like her.

Bananen mag ich sehr gern. - I really like bananas.

Tomaten mag ich nicht so gern. - I don't like tomatoes very much.

Ich möchte ein Stück Kuchen, bitte. - I'd like a piece of cake please.

Ich möchte drei Pfund Kartoffeln. - I'd like 3 pounds of potatoes.

NB: When talking about quantities of something, as in the last two examples above, you do not need a word for 'of' in German.

Modal verbs in the conditional tense

See the note on the special form of the conditional tense for 'können' and 'mögen' in the section on the future/conditional tense.

Modal verbs in the past tense

For modal verbs, the simple past tense is more useful, and more common, than the perfect tense.

	wollen - to want to	können - to be able to/can	müssen - to have to/must	dürfen - to be allowed/may
ich	wollte - I wanted to, etc.	konnte - I could, etc.	mußte - I had to, etc.	durfte - I was allowed, etc.
du	wolltest	konntest	mußtest	durftest
er/si e/es	wollte	konnte	mußte	durfte
wir	wollten	konnten	mußten	durften
ihr	wolltet	konntet	mußtet	durftet
Sie	wollten	konnten	mußten	durften
sie	wollten	konnten	mußten	durften

Example

Sie wollte spazierengehen, She wanted to go for a walk,
aber sie konnte nicht; but couldn't;
sie mußte im Schlafzimmer aufräumen. she had to tidy her bedroom.

Verbs in questions

The grammatical term for questions is the **interrogative**, a term which is again used as a useful form of shorthand.

As in English, the simplest way to ask a question in German is simply to turn the subject and the verb round:

Bist du müde?	Are you tired?
Hat er eine Schwester?	Does he have a sister?
Spielst du Tennis am Wochenend?	Are you playing tennis at the weekend?

NB: Note that there is only one way to ask the simple form of the question in German. There is no equivalent in German of asking a question with 'do' in it; nor an equivalent of asking a question with a part of the verb 'to be' plus '-ing'.

Questions with 'what', 'where', 'when' etc

These sorts of questions are formed in exactly the same way in German as in the examples above - the subject and the verb are turned round.

Wie heißt du?	What are you called?
Was machst du?	What are you doing?
Wo wohnst du?	Where do you live?
Wann kommt der Bus?	When does the bus come?

Commands using verbs

The grammatical term for commands is the **imperative**.

There are three forms of the command in German:

1. one for when you are speaking to someone to whom you would say 'du' (singular, familiar)
2. one for 'ihr' (plural, familiar)
3. and one for 'Sie' (singular and plural, polite)

To form the 'du' command

To form the 'du' command, use the 'du' form of the present tense of the verb, and remove the word 'du' and the '-st' ending:

sprechen: du sprichst Sprich nicht so laut! Do not speak so loudly!

geben: du gibst Gib mir das! Give me that!

Note that verbs whose stem ends in '-s' or '-ss' or '-ß' drop only the '-t':

lesen: du liest Lies das! Read that!

essen: du ißt Iß das nicht! Do not eat that!

Note also that irregular/strong verbs which add an Umlaut in the 'du' form do not keep the Umlaut in commands:

schlafen: du schläfst Schlaf nicht! Do not sleep!

fahren: du fährst Fahr nicht so schnell! Don't drive so fast!

To form the 'ihr' command

To form the 'ihr' command, use the 'ihr' form of the present tense of the verb, and remove the word 'ihr', but keep the '-t' ending:

schreiben: ihr schreibt Schreibt euren Namen! Write your names!

sprechen: ihr sprecht Sprecht nicht so laut! Don't speak so loudly!

geben: ihr gebt Gebt mir das! Give me that!

To form the 'Sie' command

To form the 'Sie' command, use the 'Sie' form of the present tense of the verb, and turn the two words around:

schreiben: Sie schreiben Schreiben Sie Ihren Namen! Write your name(s)!

Note that the verb 'to be' - 'sein' - is, as always, irregular:

du bist Sei ruhig! Be quiet!

ihr seid Seid ruhig! Be quiet!

Sie sind Seien Sie ruhig! Be quiet!

Reflexive verbs

About reflexive verbs

Some of these verbs have an equivalent in English of doing something to oneself. An example is 'sich waschen' - 'to wash oneself', or more commonly 'to get washed', or simply, 'to wash'.

But many have no such equivalent, and they simply have to be learned as reflexive verbs. Some reflexive verbs are also separable verbs (see Present tense, p.14).

Example of a reflexive verb

sich anziehen: to get dressed	ich ziehe mich an	wir ziehen uns an
	du ziehst dich an	ihr zieht euch an
	Sie ziehen sich an	Sie ziehen sich an
	er/sie/es zieht sich an	sie ziehen sich an

The command form of the reflexive

sich setzen	setz dich!	(singular, familiar)	Sit down!
	setzt euch!	(plural, familiar)	Sit down!
	setzen Sie sich!	(singular and plural, polite)	Sit down!

sich umdrehen	dreh dich um!	(singular, familiar)	Turn around!
	dreht euch um!	(plural, familiar)	Turn around!

The past tense of the reflexive

Note how the past tense is formed:

Ich habe mich gewaschen .	I got washed.
Er hat sich angezogen .	He got dressed.

The infinitive of reflexive verbs

Note how the infinitive is used:

Ich muß mich umziehen .	I must get changed.
Ihr solllt euch nicht umdrehen .	You should not turn around.

A list of reflexive verbs in German

Here are the reflexive verbs you may find useful:

sich anziehen	to get dressed
sich ausziehen	to get undressed
sich umziehen	to get changed
sich entschuldigen	to apologise
sich erinnern	to remember
sich waschen	to get washed
sich freuen	to be pleased
sich umdrehen	to turn round

Adverbs

What do adverbs do?

Just as **adjectives** add some sort of description to **nouns**, **adverbs** add a description to **verbs**.

While English forms the adverb by adding '-ly' to the adjective, in German there is **no difference** between the adjective and the adverb.

For example:

Dornröschen ist schön. - Sleeping Beauty is beautiful.

Sie singt schön. - She sings beautifully.

Comparative

The comparative form of the adverb is formed by adding '-er', just the same as the adjective.

For example:

Meine Mutter fährt schneller als mein Vater. - My mother drives faster than my father.

Superlative

The superlative of the adverb takes the form of 'am ...sten'.

For example:

Maria singt am schönsten. - Maria sings the most beautifully.

Lewis Hamilton fährt am schnellsten. - Lewis Hamilton drives the fastest.

Adverbial use of 'gern'

You can add the adverb 'gern' to a verb in German to convey the meaning of 'liking to do something'. Used in this way it has very much the same meaning as the modal verb 'mögen'.

Ich esse gern Äpfel	I like (eating) apples.
Ich gehe gern ins Kino.	I like going to the cinema.
Was tust du gern am Wochenende?	What do you like doing at the weekend?

NB: The comparative and superlative forms are irregular:

gern lieber	am liebsten
-------------	-------------

For example:

Ich spiele lieber Tennis. - I prefer (playing) tennis.

Ich fahre am liebsten nach Spanien. - I prefer (going to) Spain most of all.
Spain is my favourite place to go to.

NB: Note the position of 'lieber' and am 'liebsten' in these two examples.

Prepositions

Introduction

Prepositions are words such as 'in', 'on', 'with', 'for', 'at', 'to', used before nouns and pronouns. In German, different groups of prepositions are followed by the accusative, dative or genitive cases. (See Verb cases, p.25, for an explanation of these terms)

Prepositions with the accusative

These are listed in the table below. A useful acronym with which to remember them is **f-u-d-g-e-b-o-w**.

für	for
um	around
durch	through
gegen	against
entlang	along
bis	until
ohne	without
wider	against

NB: 'entlang' is unusual in that it comes **after** the word it refers to.

Examples of prepositions which take the accusative

Ist das ein Geschenk für mich? - Is that a present for me?

Sie sind ohne mich ins Kino gegangen. - They went to the cinema without me.

Geh die Hauptstraße entlang, und dann siehst du den Dom. - Go along the main street, and then you'll see the cathedral.

Prepositions with the dative

These are:

aus	from / out of	mit	with
außer	except / apart from	nach	after/to
		h	
bei	at the house of / with	seit	since (for an amount of time)
gegenüber	opposite (with place	von	of/from
er	names)		
		zu	to

Examples of prepositions which take the dative

Sie wohnt bei ihrer Großmutter. - She lives with her granny./She lives at her granny's.

Ich will heute nicht zur* Schule gehen. - I don't want to go to school today.

Ich gehe mit meinen Brüdern schwimmen. - I go swimming with my brothers.

Wir lernen Deutsch seit zwei Jahren. - We have been learning German for two years.

Geradeaus bis zum* Marktplatz. - Straight on as far as the market square.

NB: * 'Zur' is a contraction of 'zu der' and 'zum' is a contraction of 'zu dem'.
See 'Short forms of some prepositions' for more information.

Prepositions with the genitive

These are:

statt	instead of	während	during
trotz	despite	wegen	on account of / because of

Examples of prepositions which take the genitive

Statt einer neuen Hose habe ich einen schönen Rock gekauft. - Instead of new trousers I bought a nice skirt.

Während der Ferien hat es jeden Tag geregnet. - It rained every day during the holidays.

Some different uses of prepositions

an

Ich bin Lehrerin an der Grundschule. - I'm a teacher at a primary school.

auf

Meine Tante wohnt auf dem Lande. - My aunt lives in the country.

Darf ich auf die Toilette? - May I go to the toilet?

aus

Er kommt aus Berlin. - He comes from Berlin.

Ich komme aus Spanien. - I come from Spain.

nach

Nächstes Jahr fahre ich nach Berlin. - Next year I'm going to Berlin.

Letztes Jahr sind wir nach Spanien gefahren. - Last year we went to Spain.

Gehst du nach Hause? - Are you going home?

Countries

Some countries have the definite article as well as the simple name in German. A good example is 'die Schweiz' (Switzerland). Always use the preposition 'in' for these countries.

For example:

Ich wohne in der Schweiz. Ich fahre in die Schweiz. - I live in Switzerland. I am going to Switzerland.

Short forms of some prepositions

Some prepositions combine with the article in a shortened form.

ins (in + das) - into (accusative) im (in + dem) - in the (dative)

ans (an + das) - to the (accusative) zum (zu + dem) - to the (dative)

zur (zu + der) - to the (dative)

am (an + dem) - at the (dative)

Nächstes Jahr fahren wir ans Meer. - Next year we're going to the seaside.

Wir gehen ins Kino. - We're going to the cinema.

Ich sitze am Tisch und lese ein Buch. - I'm sitting at the table reading a book.

Phrases containing the word 'home'

Note the stock phrase 'zu Hause', meaning 'at home', where 'zu' means 'at', and not 'to'.

Note also the phrase 'nach Hause', meaning '(to) home', as illustrated in the following examples.

Heute abend bleibe ich zu Hause und sehe fern. - I'm staying in/at home this evening (and) watching television.

Wann gehst du nach Hause?' - 'When are you going home?

Points to note

Of the prepositions used in these particular ways, 'an' and 'auf' can take either the accusative or dative, and follow the normal rules about movement / no movement. (See the section on 'Prepositions with the accusative OR dative', below.)

Ich fahre aufs/auf das Land. - I'm going to the country. (accusative case)

Ich wohne auf dem Lande. - I live in the country. (dative case)

Prepositions with the accusative OR the dative

The rule here is that the following prepositions take the **accusative** case when there is **movement/change of place** involved, and the **dative** when there is **no movement or change of place**.

an	at, on up to	neben	next to, near
auf	on, on top of	über	over, above, across
hinter	behind	unter	among
in	in, into, to	vor	in front of, outside
		zwischen	between

Examples

Leg das Buch auf den Tisch und nicht in den Schrank, bitte. - Put the book on (to) the table and not in(to) the cupboard, please. (**accusative** for both, as movement is involved)

Ich habe das Buch auf dem Tisch im Wohnzimmer gefunden. - I found the book on the table in the living room. (**dative**, as no movement is involved)

Die Katze schläft auf dem Stuhl. - The cat is sleeping on the chair. (**dative**, as no movement is involved)

Ich gehe jedes Wochenende ins Kino. - Dad is in the kitchen. (**dative**, as no movement is involved)

Vati ist in der Küche und Mutti ist in den Garten gegangen. - Dad is in the kitchen and Mum has gone into the garden. (**dative** for Dad, as no movement is involved; **accusative** for Mum, as movement is involved)

Numbers, time and date

Numbers

Here are the **cardinal** (most basic) numbers you will use most regularly in German.

0 null	23 dreiundzwanzig
1 eins	24 vierundzwanzig
2 zwei	25 fünfundzwanzig
3 drei	26 sechsundzwanzig
4 vier	27 siebenundzwanzig
5 fünf	28 achtundzwanzig
6 sechs	29 neunundzwanzig
7 sieben	30 dreißig
8 acht	40 vierzig
9 neun	50 fünfzig
10 zehn	60 sechzig
11 elf	70 siebzig
12 zwölf	80 achtzig
13 dreizehn	90 neunzig
14 vierzehn	100 hundert
15 fünfzehn	101 hunderteins
16 sechzehn	109 hundertneun
17 siebzehn	125 hundertfünfundzwanzig
18 achtzehn	200 zweihundert
19 neunzehn	600 sechshundert
20 zwanzig	700 siebenhundert
21 einundzwanzig	1000 tausend
22 zweiundzwanzig	1,000,000 eine Million

Examples of some larger numbers

In German, the words which make up larger numbers are all run together.

3456 - dreitausendvierhundertsechsfünfzig (drei-tausend-vier-hundert-sechs-und-fünfzig)

1997 - neunzehnhundertsiebenundneunzig (neunzehn-hundert-sieben-und-neunzig)

Arithmetic

In maths and all forms of counting in German, use 'eins' (but 'ein', 'einen' etc before a noun) for 'one'. For example, 'Ich habe nur einen Bruder.' - 'I have only one brother.'

Here are some examples of arithmetical terms.

Example

English translation

Zwei **plus** vier ist sechs.

Two **plus** four is six.

Neun **weniger** eins ist acht.

Nine **minus** one is eight.

Acht **mal** acht ist vierundsechzig.

Eight **times** eight is 64.

Zwanzig **durch** vier ist fünf.

Twenty **divided by** four is five.

NB: German uses a comma, in both the spoken and the written language, where English uses the decimal point.

einskommafünf (1,5)

one point five (1.5)

Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers are 'first', 'second', 'third', etc. They are, in effect, adjectives. In German they take normal adjective endings, as shown in the examples.

Example

English translation

Der **erste** Monat im Jahr ist Januar.

The **first** month of the year is January.

Mein **zweites** Auto war ein Käfer. My **second** car was a Beetle.

Ein **drittes** Bier wäre zu viel

A **third** beer would be too much.

The other ordinal numbers are more regular:

der vierte	fourth
die fünfte	fifth
das sechste	sixth
der siebte	seventh
der achte	eighth
die neunte	ninth
das zehnte	tenth

NB: The 'en' is dropped from 'sieben' to make 'siebte'.

NB: After '19th', add '-ste' to the basic number.

der zwanzigste	twentieth
der zweiundzwanzigste	twenty-second

Once, twice...

The German equivalent of 'once', 'twice', etc is formed by adding '-mal' to the end of a number.

Spinat habe ich nur **einmal** gegessen. - I've only eaten spinach **once**.

Ich bin schon **dreimal** im Ausland gewesen. - I've already been abroad **three times**.

Peter war schon **zweimal** in Spanien. - Peter has been to Spain **twice**.

Time

German has two ways of asking what time it is:

10. Wie spät ist es? - What's the time?

11. Wieviel Uhr ist es? - What's the time?

Here are some possible answers, using times between six and seven o'clock.

sechs Uhr	6.00 Uhr	six o'clock
zehn (Minuten) nach sechs	6.10 Uhr	ten past six
Viertel nach sechs	6.15 Uhr	quarter past six
zwanzig (Minuten) nach sechs	6.20 Uhr	twenty past six
halb sieben	6.30 Uhr	half-past six
zwanzig vor sieben	6.40 Uhr	twenty to seven

(cont.)

Viertel vor sieben	6.45 Uhr	quarter to seven
fünf vor sieben	6.55 Uhr	five to seven
sieben Uhr	7.00 Uhr	seven o'clock

Points to note

- For half past the hour (except when using the 24-hour clock), German looks forward to the **next** hour, not the past one.
- As in English, you do not use 'half past' when referring to times of the 24-hour clock in German. Instead, you would use 'dreißig' (thirty) as in the example below ('fünfzehn Uhr dreißig').
- The 24-hour clock is mainly used for travel times, but can sometimes be used in normal conversation.

siebzehn Uhr	17:00 (5 pm)
fünfzehn Uhr dreißig	15:30 (3.30 pm)
zwölf Uhr/Mittag	12 noon/midday
vierundzwanzig Uhr/Mitternacht	12 midnight

Clock time with 'at'

To say 'at a particular time', German uses 'um'.

'Ich gehe um neun Uhr in die Schule.' - 'I go to school at 9 o'clock.'

'Um vier Uhr nachmittags bin ich wieder zu Hause.' - 'I'm back home at 4 in the afternoon.'

Other expressions of time

nie	never	zu Weihnachten	at Christmas
immer	always	zu Ostern	at Easter
oft	often	endlich	at last
manchmal	sometimes	bis	until
meistens	mostly	bald	soon

NB: Note some common uses of 'bis':

bis bald	see you soon
bis Morgen	until/see you tomorrow
bis nächste Woche	until/see you next week

Saying 'ago' in German

To say 'ago' in German, use 'vor' plus the dative.

For example:

'Vor zwei Jahren sind wir nach München gefahren.' - 'We went to Munich two years ago.'

The date

The date is treated in a similar way in English and in German.

What is today's date?

Der wievielte ist heute? What is today's date?

Heute ist der dritte Februar. Today is the 3rd of February.

NB: You omit the idea of 'of' before the month in German in a date.

Birthdays

Here's an example of how to say your birthday in German:

'Ich habe am zwanzigsten Mai Geburtstag.' - 'My birthday is (on) the 20th of May.'

Days and weeks

The days of the week in German are as follows:

- 'Sonntag' - 'Sunday'
- 'Montag' - 'Monday'
- 'Dienstag' - 'Tuesday'
- 'Mittwoch' - 'Wednesday'
- 'Donnerstag' - 'Thursday'
- 'Freitag' - 'Friday'
- 'Samstag' (or sometimes Sonnabend) - 'Saturday'

NB: All the days of the week are **masculine** in German, and have a capital letter as in English.

Days and parts of days with 'on'/'in'

am Freitag	on Friday
am Morgen	in the morning
am Abend	in the evening
am Wochenende	at the weekend

NB: To say 'on Saturdays', German also adds an '-s'. The capital letter at the beginning is then made into a small letter. Note you do not need to use a preposition in the German version.

samstags	on Saturdays
morgens	in the morning(s)
abends	in the evening(s)

Today, tomorrow, etc

heute	today
heute morgen	this morning
heute abend	this evening
morgen	tomorrow
morgen früh	tomorrow morning
morgen abend	tomorrow evening
übermorgen	the day after tomorrow
gestern	yesterday
gestern morgen	yesterday morning
gestern abend	yesterday evening
vorgestern	the day before yesterday

Every day, etc

jeden Tag - every day	jeden Abend - every evening	jeden Monat - every month
jeden Morgen - every morning	jede Nacht - every night	jedes Jahr - every year
jeden Nachmittag - every afternoon	jede Woche - every week	jedes Wochenende - every weekend

NB: These are all in the accusative (see Verb cases). Note this other use of the accusative:

Ihr habt den ganzen Morgen sehr gut gearbeitet. - You have worked hard all morning.

One day

'One day' is translated as 'eines Tages'.

Eines Tages werde ich kochen lernen. - One day I'll learn to cook.

Talking about specific weeks/weekends

nächste Woche - next week nächstes Wochenende - next weekend

letzte Woche - last week letztes Wochenende - last weekend

diese Woche - this week dieses Wochenende - this weekend

NB: These are all in the accusative (see Verb cases). Note, however, that 'next Monday', 'next Tuesday', etc is different.

For example:

am nächsten Montag - next Monday

Months, years and seasons

These are the rules to help you to talk about longer periods of time.

Months of the year

In German these are:

Januar	Februar	März	April
Mai	Juni	Juli	August
September	Oktober	November	Dezember

NB: All the months are **masculine** in German, and start with a capital letter as in English.

Years

Years are written and spoken as one word, for example 'neunzehnhundertsiebenundneunzig' (neun-zehn-hundert-sieben-und-neunzig) for 1997.

NB: You miss out the word 'in' in German when saying the year you were born.

For example:

Ich bin 1995 geboren. - I was born in 1995.

Note that you can also add, but do not need to, 'im Jahr', or 'im Jahre', before the year.

This/last/next year

To refer to 'this year', 'last year' or 'next year':

dieses Jahr - this year letztes Jahr - last year nächstes Jahr - next year

Seasons

In German these are:

der Frühling - spring der Sommer - summer der Herbst - autumn der Winter - winter

NB - The four seasons are **masculine** in German, and start with a capital letter - unlike in English - as they are nouns.

Months and seasons with 'im' ('in')

German also uses 'im', with the dative:

Im Juli gehen wir nicht in die Schule. - In July, we don't go to school.

Im Sommer spielen wir gern Tennis. - In summer, we like playing tennis.

Weather and greetings

Weather

Here are some commonly used phrases to describe the weather.

Wie ist das Wetter heute?	What's the weather like today?
Es regnet.	It's raining.
Es hat gestern viel geregnet.	It rained a lot yesterday.
Es schneit.	It's snowing
Es hat dieses Jahr noch nicht geschneit.	It hasn't snowed yet this year.
Es donnert und blitzt.	There's thunder and lightning.
Es ist kalt/warm/kühl/sonnig/windig/wolkig/nebelig.	It is cold/warm/cool/sunny/windy/cloudy/foggy.
Die Sonne scheint.	The sun is shining.
Der Himmel ist blau/grau/dunkel.	The sky is blue/grey/dark.

Greetings

Here are some commonly used phrases for greeting others when speaking German.

guten Morgen - good morning/hello

guten Tag - hello

guten Abend - good evening/hello

gute Nacht - good night (used when going to bed)

(auf) Wiedersehen - goodbye

Tschüß - bye/cheerio

NB: 'Tschüß' is less formal than 'auf Wiedersehen'.

In Bavaria (in the south of Germany) and in Austria, you will very often hear 'Gruß Gott' (roughly translated as 'God bless you') instead of 'Guten Tag'.

Word order

Introduction

Word order in German is quite different from English, and it follows strict rules.

First, some more grammatical terms to make it easier to talk about word order.

Subject and object

We have already talked about the **subject** of a sentence. This can be:

- an **ordinary noun**: the **cat** sat on the mat.
- a **name** or **proper noun**: **Peter** likes reading books.
- a **pronoun**: **she** lives in a village.

We have also talked about the **object** in a sentence, direct or indirect, as in:

- I have not seen that **film**.
- I don't like **him**.
- Give the book to **Katie**.

Clauses

Now we need to talk about **clauses**. Clauses can be divided into **principal** clauses and **subordinate** clauses.

A principal clause makes sense in its own right, and can form a sentence on its own, with nothing extra needing to be added. For example: 'I'm afraid of tigers'.

A subordinate clause - 'because they have sharp teeth' - does not make enough sense on its own and must be added to a principal clause to make a sentence. For example: 'I'm afraid of tigers, because they have sharp teeth.'

Adverbial phrases

Finally, there are also adverbial phrases, mostly of time and place. These are simply ideas such as 'heute' (today), 'morgen' (tomorrow), 'am Wochenende' (at the weekend), 'nächstes Jahr' (next year), etc.

For the purposes of German in the primary school, the following rules about word order are the most important.

Verb second

This rule means that the verb must be the second **grammatical element** in the sentence, NOT necessarily the second **word**. A grammatical element could be:

- a simple, one-word subject
- an adverbial phrase of time
- or a whole clause.

Examples

Ich **spiele** am Wochenende Golf. - I play golf at the weekend.

Am Wochenende **spiele** ich Golf. - At the weekend, I play golf.

Am Montag **habe** ich Nudeln gegessen. - On Monday, I ate pasta.

Im Kino **schläft** Vati immer ein. - Dad always falls asleep in the cinema.

Leider kann ich nicht mitkommen. - Unfortunately I can't come (with you).

Time, manner, place

When there is more than one adverbial phrase in a sentence, the rule is that time (T) comes before manner (M), which comes before place (P).

Examples

Ich fahre heute abend (T) mit dem Auto (M) nach Glasgow (P). - I am going by car to Glasgow this evening.

Ich bin letztes Jahr (T) mit dem Zug (M) nach Paris (P) gefahren. - I went to Paris last year by train.

Letztes Jahr (T) sind wir mit dem Rad (M) durch den Schwarzwald (P) gefahren. - Last year, we went by bike through the Black Forest.

NB: Note that the word order in English for the second of these examples is quite different from the German.

Past participle to the end

We have already seen examples of this in the perfect tense. (See section on Past tense, p.19)

Ich bin letztes Wochenende nach Paris gefahren. - I went to Paris last weekend.

Er hat einen neuen Pullover gekauft. - He bought a new pullover.

Infinitive to the end

We have already seen examples of this in modal verbs and the future and conditional tenses.

Ich kann nicht richtig **sehen**. - I can't see properly.

Sie können sehr gut **schwimmen**. - They can swim well.

Wir werden nächstes Jahr nach Amerika **fahren**. - We shall go to America next year.

Ich würde mehr Bücher lesen, wenn ich mehr Freizeit **hätte**. - I would read more books if I had more free time.

Ich gehe am Donnerstag mit der Klasse **schwimmen**. - I am going swimming on Thursday with the class.

NB: Remember that the infinitive can go to the end of a **clause**, as well as to the end of a **sentence**.

Verb to the end in subordinate clauses

Subordinate clauses begin with conjunctions such as 'if' ('wenn'), 'that' ('daß'), 'until' ('bis'), 'because' ('weil'), so that ('damit'), when ('wenn'). The rule is that the verb goes to the end in a subordinate clause.

For example:

Steh auf, wenn du gern Milch trinkst. - Stand up if you like drinking milk.

Die Königin weiß, daß sie die Schönste ist. - The queen knows that she is the most beautiful.

Wartet, bis ich das Zeichen gebe. - Wait until I give the sign.

Aschenputtel weint, weil sie keine neuen Kleider hat. - Cinderella is crying because she has no new clothes.

Ich trage immer Shorts, wenn ich im Urlaub bin. - I always wear shorts when I am on holiday.

NB: 'Wenn' can mean both 'if' and 'when' (in the sense of 'whenever').

If you want to say 'when' in the sense of a specific occasion in the past - 'When I was in Berlin two years ago, I lost my passport' - you must use 'als'. In practice, you will probably not need to use that in the classroom.

We have already seen that 'when' in a question is 'wann'.

Wann beginnt die Pause? In zwei Minuten. - When is the break? In two minutes.

NB: In written German (eg if you are putting up classroom notices), there is always a comma between a principal clause and a subordinate clause.

Subordinate clause before principal clause

If you put the subordinate clause before the principal clause in German, then the verb must come before the subject in the principal clause.

This is really another example of the 'verb second' rule, where the whole subordinate clause is the first grammatical item in the sentence.

For example:

Wenn ich hungrig bin, esse ich immer eine Banane. - When I am hungry, I always eat a banana.

Two principal clauses

If you join two principal clauses together in German with und (and), aber (but), oder (or) or denn (for), that does not affect word order; it does not invoke the verb second rule.

For example:

Ich esse gern Bananen, aber ich esse nicht so gern Tomaten. - I like eating bananas, but I don't like tomatoes so much.

Ich sitze in meinem Schlafzimmer und chatte mit Freunden. - I sit in my bedroom and chat with friends.

Note that this very modern German verb 'chatten' means 'to chat on the internet', and not more generally. You do not need to add the equivalent of 'on the computer', because the verb already has that meaning contained within it.

For example:

Ich chatte mit Freunden, oder ich spiele Computer. - I chat with friends (online) or I play computer games.

NB: You can, but you do not need to, say: 'Ich spiele Computerspiele.' ('I play computer games.')

'Denn' (for) is a useful substitute for 'weil' (because), in that 'denn' does not affect word order, whereas 'weil' does.

For example:

Ich bin müde, denn ich habe nicht gut geschlafen. - I am tired because I didn't sleep well.

Ich bin müde, weil ich nicht gut geschlafen habe. - I am tired because I didn't sleep well.