

Als ob: acting “as if”

— IRREALE VERGLEICHSSÄTZE

Unreal comparisons in German are built with **als ob**, **als wenn** or plain **als** plus Konjunktiv II, and they mean “as if” or “as though”.

When you describe something as if it were true while it really is not, German uses Konjunktiv II with “als ob” or with inverted “als”.

CONTENTS

01 Right now: acting as if you know everything 02 You already do this in English

03 Table: three conjunctions, one meaning 04 The tense-agreement trap

05 The part nobody tells you: “als” sounds smarter 06 Test yourself

01 00:15

Right now: acting as if you know everything

 **SHORTCUT** To describe a situation that is not real through a comparison, use **als ob** (“as if”) and **Konjunktiv II**. **so tun, als ob** (“to act as if”) is the most common pattern.

✓ **Er tut so, als ob er alles **wüsste**.**

He acts as if he knew everything.

✓ **Du siehst aus, als ob du krank **wärst**.**

You look as if you were sick.

The main part of the sentence is real (he is acting that way, you do look that way). But the part that starts with **als ob** is **not real**, so it asks for Konjunktiv II.

02 01:30

You already do this in English

English has the same trick. When you say “He lives **as if he were** rich”, you are telling us he is not rich, he just behaves that way. And notice the odd “were” instead of “was”: that is English’s leftover subjunctive. German builds the same logic with Konjunktiv II.

REAL SITUATION	ENGLISH COMPARISON	GERMAN COMPARISON
He isn't rich .	...he lives as if he were rich .	Er lebt , als ob er reich wäre .
He hears me .	He acts as if he didn't hear me .	Er tut so , als ob er mich nicht hören würde .
She isn't sleeping .	She acts as if she were sleeping .	Sie tut so , als ob sie schlafen würde .

Because the situation described is not real, **wäre/hören würde/schlafen würde** replaces **ist/hört/schläft**.

- ✓ **Es sieht so aus, als ob es bald regnen würde.**

It looks as if it were going to rain soon.

03 02:45

Table: three conjunctions, one meaning

You have three ways to start the comparison. They mean exactly the same; only the **position of the verb** changes. At B2 level, the inverted structure with **als** is the one that earns points.

CONJUNCTION	WORD ORDER	EXAMPLE (AS IF HE WERE THE BOSS)
als ob	Verb at the very end	Er tut so , als ob er der Chef wäre .
als wenn	Verb at the very end	Er tut so , als wenn er der Chef wäre .
als	Verb right after the conjunction	Er tut so , als wäre er der Chef .

With **als** the sentence becomes **inverted**: als + verb + subject.

- ✓ **Er redet, als ob er mich nicht kennen würde.**

He talks as if he didn't know me.

- ✓ **Er redet, als würde er mich nicht kennen.**

He talks as if he didn't know me.

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04 03:45

The tense-agreement trap

- ✓ **Er tut so, als ob er gestern nichts gewusst hätte.**

He acts as if he hadn't known anything yesterday.



TRAP

Describing past events as if they were happening now

If the event you compare with happened **earlier than the main clause**, you must use past Konjunktiv II (**hätte/wäre + Partizip II**).

- × Er tut so, als ob er nichts ~~weiß~~.

Indicative: you hear it in speech; in writing Konjunktiv II (**wüsste**) is recommended.

- × Er tut so, als ob er gestern nichts ~~wüsste~~.

wüsste refers to the present; **gestern** points to the past, so you need past Konjunktiv II: **gewusst hätte**.

For comparisons that hold now, use ordinary Konjunktiv II; for earlier actions, past Konjunktiv II.

05 04:30

The part nobody tells you: “als” sounds smarter

In everyday speech **als ob** is very common, but especially in writing or in professional speech the inverted **als** structure flows much better and sounds much more “German”.

- × Er sieht aus, als ob ~~hätte er~~ nicht geschlafen.

After **als ob** the verb goes to the end; inverted order works only with **als** alone.

- ✓ Er sieht aus, als **hätte** er nicht geschlafen.

Shorter and more professional.

In B2 exams (ÖSD, Goethe), building one inverted sentence with **als** in the speaking part shows that you really understand the grammar and earns extra points.

06 BUILD

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TIPS

Know this before the test

The core of the topic in three lines, then the mistakes people make most often.

01

als ob / als wenn send the verb to the end

These two conjunctions follow the normal subordinate-clause (Nebensatz) rules, so the verb goes last.

Er tut so, als ob er schlafen würde.

02

After plain als the verb comes right away

If you use just “als”, the conjugated verb must stand right next to it (inversion).

Er tut so, als würde er schlafen.

03

For earlier events: hätte/wäre + Partizip II

If there is a time difference between the actions, use past Konjunktiv II.

Er tut so, als hätte er mich nicht gesehen.

✗ ~~Er redet, als ob er der Chef ist.~~

✓ Er redet, als ob er der Chef wäre.

The indicative (ist) is heard in speech; because the comparison is unreal, Konjunktiv II (wäre) is recommended in writing.

✗ ~~Er tut so, als er wäre reich.~~

✓ Er tut so, als wäre er reich.

With “als” the verb comes right after it, and the subject follows.

06 05 : 00

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

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