

Conjunctions

— DIE KONJUNKTIONEN

German conjunctions join two clauses or words by meaning, and they split into groups by how they treat word order: **und**, **aber**, **denn** leave it alone, while **deshalb** flips subject and verb.

aber leaves the sentence alone, **deshalb** flips the subject behind the verb. In English a linking word never changes the order, so the second group keeps tripping people up. Here: which conjunctions take up the first slot and which do not, the rule for **sondern**, and how **und** lets you shorten a sentence.

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01 00:10

Right now: two groups, two behaviours

⚡ SHORTCUT If the conjunction **takes up the first slot**, the subject drops behind the verb. **und** · **aber** · **denn** do not take up a slot; **deshalb** · **trotzdem** · **dann** do.

The one law of the German sentence was: **the conjugated verb sits in second position**. Conjunctions relate to that law in three different ways, and the groups are named after that relationship.

① The third box is not the topic of this page — it lives on the [subordinate clauses page](#). Here we only join **two main clauses**.

Position 0: the five that change nothing

These are the easiest conjunctions, and your English instinct **works fine** here. The conjunction sits in slot zero, so it does not count; after it the clause carries on as if it were starting fresh.

CONJUNCTION	IN ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
und	and	Ich koche und er deckt den Tisch .
aber	but	Ich bin müde , aber ich komme mit .
oder	or	Wir gehen ins Kino oder wir bleiben hier .
denn	because - for	Ich komme nicht , denn ich bin krank .
sondern	but rather - instead	Nicht heute , sondern morgen .

In every row the **subject comes right after the conjunction**, with the verb behind it. So the clause is not disturbed. An easy way to memorise the five: **“und aber oder denn sondern”** — it comes out in one breath and sticks within a week.

denn is the most valuable member of this group. It means exactly what **weil** means — “because” — but it **leaves the word order alone**. It is the word to grab when you freeze mid-sentence.

- ✓ Ich komme nicht, **denn** ich **bin** krank.
I’m not coming, because I’m sick. → normal order.
- ✓ Ich komme nicht, **weil** ich krank **bin**.
Same meaning, but the verb went to the end.

ⓘ Both are correct. **weil** looks better in writing, while **denn** saves your life when you are speaking. In an exam you need to be able to use both.

sondern: the “but” English doesn’t split

aber and **sondern** are both translated as “but”, and that translation **misleads you**. The difference between them follows one very clear rule.

CONJUNCTION	WHEN	EXAMPLE
aber	both things are true , and they contrast with each other	Das Auto ist alt , aber gut . — Old , but good .
sondern	the first part is negative and the second replaces it	Das Auto ist nicht alt , sondern neu . — Not old , but new .

Rule of thumb: **if nicht or kein comes first, use sondern**, otherwise **aber**. English has the same split (“not old but new”, “not X but rather Y”) but uses one word for both, so we rarely notice it. German always makes

the choice.

- ✓

Ich trinke keinen Kaffee, sondern Tee.
I’m not drinking coffee, I’m drinking tea.
- ✗

Ich trinke keinen Kaffee, aber Tee.
Sounds wrong in German.

① Read the **nicht ... sondern** pair together with the negation page: without knowing where **nicht** goes in the sentence, you cannot build this pattern correctly.

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04 03:20

Position 1: the group that flips the sentence

The second group is not really made of conjunctions but of **adverbs**. And because they are adverbs, they **sit in the first slot** of the clause. Once that slot is filled, the verb has to stay second, so the subject drops behind the verb.

WORD	IN ENGLISH	EXAMPLE	ORDER
deshalb	that's why	Ich bin krank . Deshalb komme ich nicht .	flipped
deswegen	that's why	Deswegen bleibe ich zu Hause .	flipped
trotzdem	still - anyway	Es regnet . Trotzdem gehe ich raus .	flipped
dann	then	Ich esse . Dann gehe ich schlafen .	flipped
danach	afterwards	Danach trinken wir Kaffee .	flipped
sonst	otherwise	Beeil dich , sonst kommen wir zu spät .	flipped
außerdem	besides - also	Außerdem habe ich keine Zeit .	flipped

The same thing happens in all seven: word → **verb** → subject. English does this too after words like “never” or “hardly” (“Never have I seen...”), only much more rarely. Once this pattern settles in your ear, you build it without thinking.



TRAP 01

“deshalb ich komme nicht” — mixing up the groups

The most common mistake at A2. Using **deshalb** like **denn**, meaning putting the subject right after it. A German ear catches this **instantly**.

✗ **Deshalb ich komme nicht.**

Wrong.

✓ **Deshalb komme ich nicht.**

That’s why I’m not coming.

How to check: delete **deshalb** and read the clause on its own. **Ich komme nicht** — verb second. Now put **deshalb** back at the front: the slot is filled, the verb still has to be second, so the subject shifts.

05 04:40

Both groups side by side: one meaning, three ways

You can express the same cause and effect with **three different conjunctions**, and each one lines the sentence up differently. Once you see it in a table, the system clicks:

CONJUNCTION	GROUP	SENTENCE
denn	Position 0	Ich komme nicht , denn ich bin krank .
weil	subordinate clause	Ich komme nicht , weil ich krank bin .
deshalb	Position 1	Ich bin krank , deshalb komme ich nicht .

Note that **deshalb** also **turns the logic of the sentence around**. **denn/weil** says “I’m not coming ← because I’m sick”, **deshalb** says “I’m sick → that’s why I’m not coming”. Cause and effect swap places.

For contrast there is the same trio, with exactly the same logic:

CONJUNCTION	GROUP	SENTENCE
aber	Position 0	Es regnet , aber ich gehe raus .
obwohl	subordinate clause	Ich gehe raus , obwohl es regnet .
trotzdem	Position 1	Es regnet , trotzdem gehe ich raus .

These six rows are the backbone of the A2 written exam. “Rewrite the same sentence with a different conjunction” is exactly what they ask.

The part nobody tells you: und shortens the sentence

Textbooks wave **und** through as “and”. In real German, after **und** you **drop the repeated subject** — and a sentence that doesn’t do this sounds like a beginner. English does the same (“I get up and go to the bathroom”).

✗ **Ich stehe auf und ich gehe ins Bad.**

Correct but heavy — the subject appears twice.

✓ **Ich stehe auf und gehe ins Bad.**

I get up and go to the bathroom. — this is the natural one.

Rule: **if both clauses have the same subject**, you can drop it in the second one. If the subject changes, you cannot drop it.

✓ **Ich koche und er deckt den Tisch.**

The subject changed — it can’t be dropped.

The same shortening works with **aber** • **oder**, but **not with denn**: after **denn** the subject is compulsory.

✓ **Ich komme nicht, denn ich bin krank.**

The subject can’t be dropped.

✗ **Ich komme nicht, denn ~~bin~~ krank.**

Wrong.

What to do this week

This topic sticks by **writing one sentence three times**. A five-minute daily exercise:

- Pick a cause-and-effect sentence from your day: “I was tired, so I went to bed early.”
- Build it with **denn**: **Ich bin früh ins Bett gegangen, denn ich war müde.**
- Build it with **weil** — the verb goes to the end: **..., weil ich müde war.**
- Build it with **deshalb** — the subject flips: **Ich war müde, deshalb bin ich früh ins Bett gegangen.**
- Repeat the same trio for contrast: **aber** • **obwohl** • **trotzdem**.

① Next up: subordinate clauses — every conjunction that sends the verb to the end, plus the difference between **wenn** • **wann** • **als**.

08 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

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

**Position 0: und · oder ·
aber · denn**

These four **never disturb** the word order: subject + verb follow them in the normal order.

Ich komme nicht, **denn** ich bin krank.

02

**Position 1: deshalb ·
trotzdem · dann**

These **fill the first slot** of the clause; the verb comes right after them, and the subject drops behind the verb.

Ich bin krank. **Deshalb** komme ich nicht.

03

**sondern only after a
negative**

sondern means “but rather” and only corrects a negative clause: **nicht X, sondern Y**. For a plain contrast, use **aber**.

Ich trinke keinen Kaffee, **sondern** Tee.

04

**weil sends the verb to
the end, denn does not**

Both give a reason, but **weil** builds a subordinate clause (verb last) while **denn** leaves a main clause (verb second). The verb's position gives away which one was used.

..., **weil** ich krank bin. · ...,
denn ich bin krank.

✗ ~~Deshalb ich komme nicht.~~

✓ Deshalb komme ich nicht.

deshalb fills the first slot; the verb moves to second position.

✗ ~~Ich trinke keinen Kaffee, aber Tee.~~

✓ Ich trinke keinen Kaffee,
sondern Tee.

The conjunction that corrects a negative and gives the right version is **sondern**.

✗ ~~Ich komme nicht, denn ich krank bin.~~

✓ Ich komme nicht, denn ich
bin krank.

denn does not build a subordinate clause; the verb stays where it is.

✗ ~~Es regnet, trotzdem ich gehe raus.~~

✓ Es regnet, trotzdem gehe ich raus.

trotzdem also fills the first slot; the verb comes right after it.

08 06 : 20

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

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