

Ich helfe ~~den~~ dem Mann

English marks this same split — it just hides it on pronouns. *He / him, who / whom*: that is a case system, and you already run it without thinking. German writes the same information on **the article**, where you can see it. Below: the full table, the traps that catch every learner, the verbs that ignore all logic, and the part nobody teaches — the sentences that flip.

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01 00:12

You already do this in English

You say *I see him*, never *I see he*. You say *to whom*, never *to who* (at least on paper). Nobody taught you a rule there — you learnt the forms as forms. That is a case system, running quietly in the back of your English.

English kept case on **pronouns** and dropped it everywhere else. German kept it on **articles**. Same job, different place. So this is not a new kind of thinking — it is the same thinking, moved to a different word.

- ✓ Ich sehe **den** Mann.
I see the man. → he is the thing being seen
- ✓ Ich helfe **dem** Mann.
I help the man. → help goes *to* him

In English both lines end in «the man» and the difference is invisible. German refuses to hide it: **den** for the direct object, **dem** for the indirect one.

CASE	QUESTION	ENGLISH QUESTION	WHAT IT MARKS
Nominativ	Wer? / Was?	who? / what?	the subject — who does it
Akkusativ	Wen? / Was?	whom? / what?	the direct object — what is affected
Dativ	Wem?	to whom?	the indirect object — who receives

Ask the verb the question and the case answers itself — **most** of the time. Section 5 is about the verbs where it does not.

① Historical footnote you can keep: Old English had a separate accusative *hine* and dative *him*. The dative form won and swallowed both. German simply never let that merger happen.

02 00:55

The table — this is the part you save

Every article word in German — **der, ein, kein, mein, dieser** — takes the **same set of endings**. Learn one block and the other three come free.

WORD	NOMINATIV	AKKUSATIV	DATIV
der (masc.)	der Mann	den Mann	dem Mann
die (fem.)	die Frau	die Frau	der Frau
das (neut.)	das Kind	das Kind	dem Kind
die (plural)	die Kinder	die Kinder	den Kindern
ein (masc.)	ein Bruder	einen Bruder	einem Bruder
eine (fem.)	eine Freundin	eine Freundin	einer Freundin
ein (neut.)	ein Auto	ein Auto	einem Auto
kein (plural)	keine Kinder	keine Kinder	keinen Kindern
mein (masc.)	mein Vater	meinen Vater	meinem Vater
meine (fem.)	meine Mutter	meine Mutter	meiner Mutter
mein (neut.)	mein Haus	mein Haus	meinem Haus
meine (plural)	meine Eltern	meine Eltern	meinen Eltern
dieser (masc.)	dieser Tisch	diesen Tisch	diesem Tisch
diese (fem.)	diese Lampe	diese Lampe	dieser Lampe
dieses (neut.)	dieses Buch	dieses Buch	diesem Buch
diese (plural)	diese Bücher	diese Bücher	diesen Büchern

Read the table by what **stays still**, not by what moves. Feminine and neuter never move in the accusative. That is half the table already done.

The pronouns carry the same three cases, and here the English bridge is exact — this is the one column of German grammar you can more or less read off your own language.

NOMINATIV	AKKUSATIV	DATIV	ENGLISH
ich	mich	mir	I / me / to me
du	dich	dir	you / you / to you
er	ihn	ihm	he / him / to him
sie	sie	ihr	she / her / to her
es	es	ihm	it / it / to it
wir	uns	uns	we / us / to us
ihr	euch	euch	you (pl.) / you / to you
sie	sie	ihnen	they / them / to them
Sie	Sie	Ihnen	you (formal)

Notice that **sie** and **Sie** look identical in three cells. German solves this by context and by the capital letter, not by a different word. You will get used to it faster than you expect.

03 01:50

Accusative moves one cell. Dative moves all four.

If you only remember one sentence from this page, remember this: **the accusative changes exactly one thing. der becomes den.** Feminine, neuter and plural do not move at all.

✓ Ich kaufe **den** Tisch.

I'm buying the table. → der Tisch is the only one that changed

✓ Ich kaufe **die** Lampe.

I'm buying the lamp. → die stays die

✓ Ich kaufe **das** Buch.

I'm buying the book. → das stays das

Three of four boxes are free. Beginners lose weeks on the accusative because they treat it as a whole new table — it is one cell.



TRAP 01

The «der» that is not masculine

✓ Ich helfe **der** Frau.

I'm helping the woman. → dative feminine

✗ Ich helfe ~~die~~ Frau.

Wrong — helfen takes the dative, and the dative of die Frau is der Frau.

Every learner reads **der Frau** and thinks «wait, Frau is feminine, why der?» Because **der** is doing a second job here. The same three letters mean *masculine nominative* in one sentence and *feminine dative* in another.

Compare, and let the difference sit for a second: **Der Mann ist hier.** (subject, masculine) versus **Ich gebe der Frau das Buch.** (dative, feminine). Nothing in the word tells you which — the position and the verb do.

① Full honesty: **der** has a third job you will meet later — genitive feminine and genitive plural (**das Auto der Frau, die Bücher der Kinder**). Three jobs, one word. Nobody designed this on purpose.



TRAP 02

Plural dative does two things at once

The plural dative is the one cell in the table above where **the noun itself changes too**. The article becomes **den** *and* the noun takes an extra **-n**.

✓ **Ich spiele mit **den** Kindern.**

I play with the children. → den + Kindern

✗ **Ich spiele mit ~~den~~ Kinder.**

Wrong — the -n is not optional here.

PLURAL	DATIVE PLURAL	EXTRA -N?
die Kinder	den Kindern	yes
die Bücher	den Büchern	yes
die Freunde	den Freunden	yes
die Lehrer	den Lehrern	yes
die Autos	den Autos	no — plural ends in -s
die Hotels	den Hotels	no — plural ends in -s
die Frauen	den Frauen	no — already ends in -n
die Eltern	den Eltern	no — already ends in -n
die Mädchen	den Mädchen	no — already ends in -n

So the rule is not «always add -n». It is «make sure it ends in -n». If it already does, or if the plural is an -s plural, leave it alone.

- ① One honest correction to the sentence above: the article table is not the only place a German noun takes an ending. A small masculine group — the *n-declension* — adds **-n / -en** in the singular too: **der Student** → **Ich helfe dem Studenten.** • **Ich sehe den Studenten.** Same for **der Junge** • **der Kollege** • **der Nachbar** • **der Mensch**. It is a short list and a separate topic — just do not file «the noun never changes» as a law.

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The preposition decides

Half of your case decisions never involve a verb at all. A preposition walks in and dictates the case, and you do not get a vote.

GROUP	PREPOSITIONS	CASE	EXAMPLE
Always accusative	durch · für · gegen · ohne · um · bis	Akk	Ich gehe durch den Park . · Das Geschenk ist für meinen Vater .
Always dative	aus · bei · mit · nach · seit · von · zu	Dat	Ich fahre mit dem Bus . · Seit einem Jahr wohne ich hier .
Also dative	gegenüber · außer	Dat	Die Bank ist gegenüber dem Bahnhof .
Two-way	an · auf · in · über · unter · vor · hinter · neben · zwischen	Akk <i>or</i> Dat	in die Küche · in der Küche

The fixed groups are pure memorisation and there is nothing clever to say about them. Say them out loud in one breath a few times — *durch-für-gegen-ohne-um-bis* — and they stick like a phone number. Watch **nach**, which does two jobs in one sentence: **Nach der Arbeit gehe ich nach Hause.** — dative after the first one, and a bare **nach Hause** with no article at all after the second.

The nine two-way prepositions (**Wechselpräpositionen**) are the interesting ones. They take **both** cases, and the case carries meaning:

✓ Ich hänge das Bild **an die** Wand.

I hang the picture on the wall. → wohin? movement to a place → accusative

✓ Das Bild hängt **an der** Wand.

The picture hangs on the wall. → wo? position → dative

QUESTION	MEANING	CASE	PAIR
Wohin?	where <i>to</i> — you cross a line	Akkusativ	Ich gehe in die Küche .
Wo?	where — you are already there	Dativ	Ich bin in der Küche .
Wohin?	onto the table	Akkusativ	Ich stelle die Tasse auf den Tisch .
Wo?	on the table	Dativ	Die Tasse steht auf dem Tisch .



TRAP 03

The wo/wohin test is not a movement test

Almost every course teaches it as «movement → accusative, no movement → dative». That description breaks the first time you meet a sentence with movement *inside* a place.

✓ Ich laufe **in der** Halle.

I'm running around inside the hall. → plenty of movement, still dative

✓ Ich laufe **in die** Halle.

I run into the hall. → I cross the threshold → accusative

The real question is not «am I moving?» but «**am I changing which place I am in?**» Crossing a boundary takes the accusative. Moving around within one place stays dative.

There is a shortcut that removes the thinking altogether. The verbs used with these prepositions come in **pairs** — one for putting something somewhere, one for it being there. Pick the verb and the case comes with it.

PUTTING → ACCUSATIVE	BEING → DATIVE	THE PAIR IN ONE LINE
stellen — to stand something up	stehen — to be standing	Ich stelle die Flasche auf den Tisch. / Die Flasche steht auf dem Tisch.
legen — to lay something down	liegen — to be lying	Ich lege das Handy auf das Bett. / Das Handy liegt auf dem Bett.
setzen — to seat someone	sitzen — to be sitting	Ich setze mich auf den Stuhl. / Ich sitze auf dem Stuhl.
hängen — to hang something	hängen — to be hanging	Ich hänge den Mantel in den Schrank. / Der Mantel hängt im Schrank.
stecken — to put something into	stecken — to be stuck in	Ich stecke den Schlüssel in die Tasche. / Der Schlüssel steckt in der Tasche.

hängen is the odd one: same infinitive for both jobs, different past forms. Hanging something up is regular (**hängte** · **hat gehängt**); being hung is irregular (**hing** · **hat gehangen**).

- ① Also honest: this whole wo/wohin logic only applies when the preposition is genuinely describing a location. Once the preposition is glued to a verb — **warten auf**, **denken an** — the case is fixed by the verb and wo/wohin has nothing to say. That is a separate topic.

Last thing here, and it is the fastest win on the page: Germans **fuse** the common preposition + article pairs. If you say the long form you are understood, but you sound like a textbook.

LONG FORM	FUSED	EXAMPLE
zu dem	zum	Ich gehe zum Arzt .
zu der	zur	Ich gehe zur Schule .
in dem	im	Ich bin im Kino .
an dem	am	Am Montag arbeite ich .
bei dem	beim	Ich bin beim Arzt .
von dem	vom	Ich komme vom Bahnhof .
in das	ins	Ich gehe ins Kino .
an das	ans	Wir fahren ans Meer .
auf das	aufs	Ich lege es aufs Bett .
um das	ums	Es geht ums Geld .

Notice the pattern: **-m** endings come from **dem** (dative), **-s** endings come from **das** (accusative). So **im Kino** = I am there, **ins Kino** = I am going there. The fused forms keep the case information; they just hide it in one letter.

05 03:50

The verb decides too — and here logic ends

A small group of very common verbs takes the dative even though the object looks completely direct in English. There is no rule underneath this. You learn the verb together with its case, the same way you learn a noun together with its article.

VERB	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
helfen	to help	Kannst du mir helfen?
danken	to thank	Ich danke dir .
antworten	to answer (a person)	Ich antworte dem Lehrer .
folgen	to follow	Ich folge dir .
glauben	to believe (a person)	Ich glaube dir .
vertrauen	to trust	Ich vertraue dir .
gratulieren	to congratulate	Ich gratuliere dir zum Geburtstag .
zuhören	to listen to	Hör mir zu .
gehören	to belong to	Das Auto gehört meinem Bruder .
passen	to fit , to suit	Die Hose passt mir nicht .
schmecken	to taste good to	Das Essen schmeckt mir .
gefallen	to please , to appeal to	Das Kleid gefällt mir .
fehlen	to be missing to	Du fehlst mir .
wehtun	to hurt	Mein Rücken tut mir weh .
passieren	to happen to	Was ist dir passiert?
begegnen	to run into someone	Ich bin ihm gestern begegnet .

Sixteen verbs. That is genuinely most of the dative-verb problem at A2 level. Not a system to understand — a shelf to stock.



TRAP 04

English will actively mislead you here

Look at the pairs below. In English every single one of these verbs takes a plain direct object. In German half of them do not, and there is nothing in the meaning that predicts which half.

ENGLISH	GERMAN — DATIVE	ENGLISH	GERMAN — ACCUSATIVE
I help you	Ich helfe dir .	I ask you	Ich frage dich .
I follow you	Ich folge dir .	I call you	Ich rufe dich an .
I answer you	Ich antworte dir .	I meet you	Ich treffe dich .
I thank you	Ich danke dir .	I support you	Ich unterstütze dich .

«Help» and «ask» are the same shape of action. One is dative, one is accusative. If you go looking for the reason you will waste an evening — there isn't one that survives contact with the next verb.

- ① This is the single honest sentence of the whole topic: you cannot reason your way to the case. You can only record it with the verb. Everything else on this page is a shortcut; this part is memory.

06 04:55

The part nobody teaches: the sentence flips

Now the piece that gets skipped in almost every A2 course, and that quietly ruins otherwise good sentences. With a handful of German verbs, **the thing you would call the object in English becomes the subject in German**, and you become the dative.

✓ **Das Buch gefällt mir.**

I like the book. → literally: the book pleases *to me*. The book is the subject.

✗ ~~Ich gefalle das Buch.~~

Wrong twice over: gefallen never takes an accusative object, and even the fixed version — **Ich gefalle dem Buch** — would mean «I appeal to the book».

Once you see it in **gefallen** you see it everywhere. The person is never the subject in this family:

GERMAN	WORD FOR WORD	WHAT YOU WOULD SAY IN ENGLISH
Das Essen schmeckt mir .	the food tastes to me	I like the food
Du fehlst mir .	you are missing to me	I miss you
Der Kopf tut mir weh .	the head hurts to me	I have a headache
Das gehört mir .	that belongs to me	that's mine
Mir ist kalt .	to me it is cold	I'm cold
Wie geht es dir?	how goes it to you	how are you?

English has the same construction, just retired: *it seems to me*, *it appeals to me*, *methinks*. You are not learning an alien pattern — you are reactivating one your language dropped.

⚠

TRAP 05

«Ich bin kalt» does not mean what you think

✓

Mir ist kalt.

I'm cold. → the standard way to say it

✗

~~Ich bin kalt.~~

Grammatically fine, but it describes your personality, not your temperature — «I am a cold person».

Same shape for **Mir ist warm.** · **Mir ist schlecht.** (I feel sick) · **Mir ist langweilig.** (I'm bored). The state lands on you in the dative; you are not the subject of it.

And one more thing nobody spells out. When a sentence carries **two** objects, the order is not free — and it changes depending on whether they are nouns or pronouns:

WHAT YOU HAVE	ORDER	EXAMPLE
noun + noun	dative first , accusative second	Ich gebe dem Mann das Buch .
dative pronoun + accusative noun	the pronoun goes first	Ich gebe ihm das Buch .
accusative pronoun + dative noun	the pronoun still goes first	Ich gebe es dem Mann .
pronoun + pronoun	accusative first , dative second	Ich gebe es ihm .

Read the last two rows again. With two pronouns the order *reverses*: **Ich gebe es ihm.** and never **ihm es**. Nobody puts this on a slide, and it is exactly the detail that makes a sentence sound native.

- ① Honest limit: German word order does bend for emphasis, and you will occasionally see the accusative noun first in writing. But as a rule to speak by, the four rows above are safe, and «dative noun before accusative noun» is what you want in your mouth.

What to actually write in your notebook

This topic is not fixed by studying harder. It is fixed by **changing the shape of what you record**. If your notebook stores a verb without its case, you will recalculate the case every time you open your mouth — and in a real conversation you don't have that half second.

- Weak entry: **helfen** = to help
- Strong entry: **helfen + Dativ** = to help — **Kannst du mir helfen?**
- Weak entry: **Kind** = child
- Strong entry: **das Kind, die Kinder** → dative plural **den Kindern**

Three boxes per entry: **the word • the case it forces • one sentence from your own life**. Somebody else's example sentence evaporates. Yours doesn't.

- Copy the big table once by hand. Not to memorise it — to notice how few cells actually move.
- Take the 16 dative verbs and write one true sentence for each about a real person you know.
- Once a week, take five sentences you wrote and replace every noun with a pronoun. That is where **dem Mann** → **ihm** becomes automatic.
- When you catch yourself hesitating mid-sentence, note which verb caused it. That verb goes on tomorrow's list.

- ① Realistic pace: five verbs a week. In three months that is sixty — more dative verbs than you will ever need at A2 or B1. The table stops being a table and starts being a reflex somewhere around week six.

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.

der/das → dem, die
→ der

Masculine and neuter both become dem; feminine becomes der; plural becomes den + noun-n.

dem Mann • der Frau •
den Kindern

Dative verbs take no
accusative

helfen • danken • gefallen •
gehören • passen •
antworten — their object is
dative, always.

Ich helfe dem Mann.

Seven always-dative
prepositions

mit • nach • bei • seit • von •
zu • aus — no exceptions,
no thinking required.

mit dem Bus • bei der Arbeit

04

Location = dative on
two-way prepositions

in/an/auf/über/unter... take
dative when the answer is
wo? (where at), accusative
when it is wohin?
(where to).

auf dem Tisch ↔ auf
den Tisch

✗ ~~Ich helfe den Mann.~~

✓ Ich helfe dem Mann.

helfen is dative; den is accusative masculine.

✗ ~~mit den Kinder~~

✓ mit den Kindern

Dative plural adds -n to the noun.

✗ ~~Ich danke Sie.~~

✓ Ich danke Ihnen.

danken is dative; polite dative is Ihnen.

✗ ~~Die Tasse steht auf den Tisch.~~

✓ Die Tasse steht auf dem Tisch.

Standing is location → dative.

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Finish the topic: take the full test

10 questions · timed · exam style · 60% finishes the topic

↗

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