

es phrases

— DAS WÖRTCHEN ES

The German little word **es** is a dummy subject: it fills the subject slot when nobody really does the action (**es** regnet, **es** gibt) and stands in for a subject clause (**Es** ist wichtig, dass ...).

Every German sentence needs a subject. But when it is not clear who does the action, as in “it’s raining”, **es** steps in as a joker to fill the gap. English does the same with “it” and “there”, and this page shows where German follows the same pattern and where it goes its own way.

CONTENTS

01 Right now: sentences without a real subject

02 You already do this in English (but not always the same way)

03 Table: the placeholder “es” (Es freut mich...) 04 Trap: using the Nominativ with es gibt

05 What nobody tells you: can “es” drop out? 06 Test yourself

01 00:15

Right now: sentences without a real subject

SHORTCUT ⚡ Some sentences have no real doer: “It’s raining”, “It’s late”. German does not allow a sentence without a subject. So when there is nobody to name, you build a “dummy subject” with the word **es**.

✓ **Es** regnet.

It’s raining. (Who is raining? -> es)

✓ **Es** ist spät.

It’s late.

02 01:30

You already do this in English (but not always the same way)

English uses a dummy “it” for weather and time, and “there is / there are” for existence. German builds all of these with “es”. The pattern is the same for weather and time; for “there is”, German uses a different structure, **es** gibt.

USE	GERMAN PHRASE	EXAMPLE
There is / there are	es gibt (+ Akkusativ)	Es gibt ein Problem . (There's a problem .)
Weather	es regnet , es schneit	Morgen wird es regnen .
Time	es ist früh/spät	Es ist schon 8 Uhr .
Topic / content	es geht um (+ Akkusativ)	Es geht um das Geld . (It's about the money .)

These phrases are fixed. You cannot drop es, just as you cannot say “Is raining” in English.

03 02:45

Table: the placeholder “es” (Es freut mich...)

Sometimes the real content is in a subordinate clause with “dass”. But German wants to see a subject at the start of the main clause, so “es” is put there. English does the same: “It is important that we learn.”

PLACEHOLDER	MAIN CLAUSE	REAL SUBJECT (SUBORDINATE CLAUSE)
Es	freut mich ,	dass du kommst .
Es	ist wichtig ,	dass wir lernen .
Es	tut mir leid ,	dass ich zu spät bin .

The es in these sentences is only there to fill the first position of the sentence.

✓ **Es ist wichtig, dass wir gesund essen.**

It’s important that we eat healthily.

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Trap: using the Nominativ with es gibt



TRAP

Saying "Es gibt der..."

es gibt means "there is / there are", but grammatically it is built as "it (es) gives (gibt)". So it always needs the Akkusativ (den) after it. English has no cases here ("there is a new teacher"), which is why the Nominativ slips in so easily.

✗ **Es gibt ~~ein~~ neuer Lehrer.**

Wrong. The Nominativ was used.

✓ **Es gibt **einen** neuen Lehrer.**

Correct. It has to be the Akkusativ.

What nobody tells you: can "es" drop out?

If "es" is only a placeholder filling the first position of the sentence (Vorfeld-es), it must drop out when something else takes that first position. For example: "Dass du kommst, freut mich." (Here "es" has disappeared because the subordinate clause moved to first position.) In the same way, "Es bleibt keine Zeit" becomes "Mir bleibt keine Zeit" once the first position is filled. But the fixed "es" in phrases such as "es regnet" or "es tut mir leid" / "mir tut es leid" **never drops**.

✓ **Dass du kommst, freut mich.**

It makes me happy that you're coming. (es dropped)

✓ **Mir bleibt keine Zeit.**

I'm left with no time. (es dropped)

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

06 05:00

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

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10 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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