

The 50 most common German adjectives (25 opposite pairs)

— ADJEKTIVE UND IHR GEGENTEIL

The 50 most common German adjectives, in 25 pairs of opposites: everyday basics, people and character, things and states. Plus the three rules for using an adjective in a sentence and the four most common traps.

Learn adjectives as pairs, not one by one: pick up **groß** and you get **klein** for free. The 50 most common adjectives in 25 pairs, plus the three rules for using them in a sentence — no ending after the verb, an ending before a noun, **als** when you compare — and the four most common traps.

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Right now: take each adjective together with its opposite

SHORTCUT ⚡ Don't memorise adjectives one by one — learn them **together with their opposite**: pick up **groß** and **klein** comes for free. After the verb the adjective takes no ending; before a noun it does.

A word learnt with its opposite sticks better: one pops into your head and the other follows. And when you describe something you already talk in contrasts — the flat is big but the kitchen is small, the hotel is expensive but clean.

✓ **Die Wohnung ist groß, aber die Küche ist klein.**

The flat is big, but the kitchen is small.

✗ **Die Wohnung ist große.**

An adjective after the verb takes no ending.

This page holds the 50 most common adjectives as 25 pairs of opposites, in three groups: **everyday basics, people and character, things and states**. One word sits in two pairs at once — **alt** — and the reason is below.

① The order of the page: first the table of 25 pairs, then three rules (after the verb, before a noun, comparing), then the part of the list nobody mentions, and four traps. The study plan comes last.

02 00:50

The table: 25 pairs, three groups

One pair per row, with its English meaning and an example sentence. Most sentences use both ends of the pair together — so you hear the two words side by side while you memorise.

Group 1 • Everyday basics. Ten pairs you will meet in every conversation.

PAIR	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
01 · groß ↔ klein	big ↔ small	Das Haus ist groß , der Garten ist klein . — The house is big , the garden is small .
02 · gut ↔ schlecht	good ↔ bad	Die Idee ist gut , der Plan ist schlecht . — The idea is good , the plan is bad .
03 · neu ↔ alt	new ↔ old	Mein Handy ist alt , ich brauche ein neues . — My phone is old , I need a new one .
04 · jung ↔ alt	young ↔ old	Mein Opa ist alt , aber er fühlt sich jung . — My grandpa is old , but he feels young .
05 · lang ↔ kurz	long ↔ short	Der Film ist lang , die Pause ist kurz . — The film is long , the break is short .
06 · schnell ↔ langsam	fast ↔ slow	Der Zug ist schnell , der Bus ist langsam . — The train is fast , the bus is slow .
07 · richtig ↔ falsch	right ↔ wrong	Ist das richtig oder falsch? — Is that right or wrong?
08 · einfach ↔ schwierig	easy ↔ difficult	Die Frage ist einfach , die Antwort ist schwierig . — The question is easy , the answer is difficult .
09 · früh ↔ spät	early ↔ late	Ich stehe früh auf und gehe spät ins Bett . — I get up early and go to bed late .
10 · viel ↔ wenig	much ↔ little	Ich habe viel Arbeit und wenig Zeit . — I have a lot of work and little time .

alt sits in two pairs: “old” for things, “old” for people too. But the opposite of a thing is **neu**, the opposite of a person is **jung** — don’t mix them up.

Group 2 • People and character. Seven pairs for describing someone.

PAIR	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
11 · freundlich ↔ unfreundlich	friendly ↔ unfriendly	Die Nachbarin ist sehr freundlich . — The neighbour is very friendly .
12 · fleißig ↔ faul	hard-working ↔ lazy	Meine Schwester ist fleißig , ich bin faul . — My sister is hard-working , I'm lazy .
13 · ruhig ↔ laut	calm , quiet ↔ loud	Mein Sohn ist ruhig , meine Tochter ist laut . — My son is calm , my daughter is loud .
14 · lustig ↔ langweilig	funny ↔ boring	Der Lehrer ist lustig , der Kurs ist langweilig . — The teacher is funny , the course is boring .
15 · klug ↔ dumm	clever ↔ stupid	Das war eine kluge Entscheidung . — That was a clever decision .
16 · stark ↔ schwach	strong ↔ weak	Er ist stark , aber heute fühlt er sich schwach . — He is strong , but today he feels weak .
17 · glücklich ↔ traurig	happy ↔ sad	Heute bin ich glücklich , gestern war ich traurig . — Today I'm happy , yesterday I was sad .

dumm is a heavy word when said about a person — you don’t say it to someone’s face. The softer version: **Das habe ich nicht verstanden**. Pin the adjective on the thing, not the person.

Group 3 • Things and states. Eight pairs for describing an object or a situation.

PAIR	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
18 · teuer ↔ billig	expensive ↔ cheap	Das Hotel ist teuer , das Hostel ist billig . — The hotel is expensive , the hostel is cheap .
19 · sauber ↔ schmutzig	clean ↔ dirty	Die Küche ist sauber , das Bad ist schmutzig . — The kitchen is clean , the bathroom is dirty .
20 · voll ↔ leer	full ↔ empty	Der Bus ist voll , der nächste ist leer . — The bus is full , the next one is empty .
21 · offen ↔ geschlossen	open ↔ closed	Das Fenster ist offen , die Tür ist geschlossen . — The window is open , the door is closed .
22 · warm ↔ kalt	warm ↔ cold	Der Tee ist warm , das Wasser ist kalt . — The tea is warm , the water is cold .
23 · hell ↔ dunkel	bright ↔ dark	Das Zimmer ist hell , der Flur ist dunkel . — The room is bright , the hallway is dark .
24 · schwer ↔ leicht	heavy ↔ light	Der Koffer ist schwer , die Tasche ist leicht . — The suitcase is heavy , the bag is light .
25 · nah ↔ weit	near ↔ far	Der Bahnhof ist ganz nah , der Flughafen ist weit weg . — The station is really close , the airport is far away .

schwer means both “heavy” and “hard”: **Die Tasche ist schwer • Die Prüfung ist schwer**. Its opposite splits in two as well — the opposite of heavy is **leicht**, the opposite of hard is **einfach**.

✓ **Ist es **weit**? — Nein, es ist ganz **nah**.**

Is it far? — No, it’s really close.

You already do this in English: adjectives after the verb take no ending

English adjectives never change: “the house is big”, “a big house”. German shares half of that with you. When the adjective stands after the verb, it stays bare, just like in English. Once it moves in front of a noun, it takes an ending — and that is the only part English doesn’t have.

AFTER THE VERB: NO ENDING	BEFORE A NOUN: ENDING	ENGLISH
Das Auto ist neu .	ein neues Auto	a new car
Die Wohnung ist groß .	eine große Wohnung	a big flat
Der Kaffee ist kalt .	ein kalter Kaffee	a cold coffee
Die Schuhe sind teuer .	teure Schuhe	expensive shoes

The ending changes with the gender of the noun, its case and the article in front. The only rule you need here: the ending comes **only before a noun**. **teuer** drops the middle **e** when it gets an ending: **teure Schuhe**.

✓ Ich habe ein neues Auto.

I have a new car. → before the noun, so an ending

✗ Ich habe ein neu Auto.

English habit: the adjective stayed bare before the noun.

There is a third place where there is no ending either: when the adjective describes the verb. English does the same with “he runs fast”: **Der Zug fährt schnell.** • **Sprich bitte langsam.**

① **viel** and **wenig** usually take no ending before something uncountable: **viel Zeit** • **wenig Geld**. Before a countable plural they do: **viele Leute** • **wenige Tage**.

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Comparing: the -er ending, als and wie

English does this in two ways: “bigger” for short words, “more expensive” for long ones. German only has the first way: an ending stuck onto the adjective, **-er**. What you compare with comes after **als**, which is “than”. For equality there is no ending: **so** + adjective + **wie** = “as ... as”.

✓ Meine Schwester ist älter als ich.

My sister is older than me.

✓ Er ist **so groß wie** ich.

He is as tall as me.

PATTERN	EXAMPLES FROM THE LIST	NOTE
plain -er	klein → kleiner · schnell → schneller · früh → früher · leicht → leichter	Most adjectives work like this .
one syllable , a · o · u get an umlaut	alt → älter · jung → jünger · groß → größer · lang → länger · kurz → kürzer · warm → wärmer · kalt → kälter · stark → stärker · schwach → schwächer · klug → klüger · dumm → dümmer · nah → näher	Not all of them : voll → voller · laut → lauter .
ending in -el or -er	dunkel → dunkler · teuer → teurer	The final e drops out .
irregular	gut → besser · viel → mehr	Learn by heart .

Most one-syllable adjectives get an umlaut, but it is a tendency, not a rule. If you are unsure, memorise the twelve in the table — every one on the list is there.

There are four irregular ones, and you memorise them. Two are on this list, two come up so often when you compare that they belong here too:

ADJECTIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
gut	besser	am besten
viel	mehr	am meisten
gern	lieber	am liebsten
hoch	höher	am höchsten

The superlative of **nah** is irregular too: **am nächsten**.

05 05:00

The part nobody tells you: the two ends of a pair are not equal

The list matches pairs neatly, but in real language some ends open up into more than one word. Four of these fifty adjectives do:

- **alt** — “old” for things, “old” for people. The opposite of a thing is **neu**, the opposite of a person is **jung**.
- **schwer** — both “heavy” and “hard”. The opposite of heavy is only **leicht**. The opposite of hard is **einfach**, but **leicht** also means “easy”: **Die Prüfung war leicht**.
- **laut** — “loud” for a person, opposite **ruhig**. If you mean the sound itself, the opposite is **leise**: **Sprich bitte leise, das Baby schläft**.
- **billig** — “cheap”, but sometimes it is heard as “cheap and nasty”. To praise a price, **günstig** is safer: **Das Hotel ist günstig**.

✓ Das Auto ist alt, aber der Motor ist **neu**.

The car is old, but the engine is new.

✗ Das Auto ist ~~jung~~.

A thing isn't "young" here: the opposite of old is neu.

✓ Die Prüfung war leicht.

The exam was easy. → leicht here means "easy"

✗ Die Tasche ist ~~einfach~~.

It slides into "the bag is plain, simple". A light bag is leicht.

- ① In short: **leicht** opens both doors (light and easy), **einfach** only one (easy, simple). If you are unsure, use **einfach** as the opposite of hard and **leicht** as the opposite of heavy — neither is ever wrong.

06 06:10

Four traps

Even students who know the adjectives make these four mistakes all the time. Two are grammar, two are meaning.



TRAP 01

No "mehr + adjective" — use the -er ending

✓ Mein Auto ist schneller.

My car is faster.

✗ Mein Auto ist ~~mehr schnell~~.

English "more" translated word for word — it works for "more expensive", but German has no such pattern.

In German, "more" for adjectives is an ending, not a separate word — even for long ones like "expensive".
mehr only means "more" of something: **Ich habe mehr Zeit.**



TRAP 02

als or wie?

✓ Er ist größer als ich.

He is taller than me.

✗ Er ist größer ~~wie~~ ich.

Germans mix these up in speech too, but it counts as wrong in an exam.

One question is enough: did the adjective take an ending? If it did, like **größer**, use **als** ("than"). If it didn't, as in **so groß**, use **wie** ("as").



TRAP 03

Ich bin langweilig = I am a boring person

✓ **Mir ist langweilig.**

I'm bored.

✗ ~~Ich bin~~ langweilig.

"I am boring." If you are bored, the pattern changes.

The same goes for **kalt**: **Ich bin kalt** means "I'm a cold person"; if you are freezing, say **Mir ist kalt**. The whole pattern is on the [page about feelings and states](#).



TRAP 04

dumm is said about a thing, not a person

✗ **Du bist dumm.**

The grammar is right, and the conversation ends there.

✓ **Das war keine gute Idee.**

That wasn't a good idea. → it criticises the act, not the person.

Using it about a situation is normal, even about yourself: **Das war dumm von mir.** — "That was stupid of me."
Once the adjective sticks to the event instead of the person, the sting is gone.

07 07:20

How to study: one pair a day

One pair a day is a good pace: the list is done in 25 days. To finish in two weeks, take two pairs a day. Four steps per pair — all four with the same pair, so you use the three rules once every day:

STEP	WHAT YOU DO	EXAMPLE PAIR: SCHWER ↔ LEICHT
1	Say the pair out loud	schwer ↔ leicht
2	Put both ends in one sentence	Der Koffer ist schwer , die Tasche ist leicht .
3	Compare	Der Koffer ist schwerer als die Tasche .
4	Put it before a noun	ein schwerer Koffer - eine leichte Tasche

The next day, before you move on to a new pair, make one sentence with yesterday's. Repeating does more than the first memorising.

✓ **Der Koffer ist *schwerer als* die Tasche.**

The suitcase is heavier than the bag.

Study it side by side with the verb list: the 50 most common verbs build the sentence, these 50 adjectives fill it in. Together they make the skeleton of everyday conversation.

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

08 08 : 10

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

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