

Numbers · time · date

— ZAHLEN, UHRZEIT UND DATUM

German numbers, clock times and dates work like this: 21 = einundzwanzig, 10 Uhr, am 5. Mai.

Halb drei is not half past three, it is **half past two**. German counts the half hour toward the hour that is **coming**, not the one that has passed — the one place where your English instinct works backwards. Numbers, clock times and dates on one page.

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01 00:10

The skeleton of a number

 **SHORTCUT**

Two-digit numbers are read **backwards**: 21 = “one and twenty”. And **halb drei** is not half past three, it is **half past two**.

RANGE	RULE	EXAMPLE
0-12	Learn by heart — short list	null · eins · zwei · drei · vier · fünf · sechs · sieben · acht · neun · zehn · elf · zwölf
13-19	unit + zehn	dreizehn · vierzehn · fünfzehn · sechzehn · siebzehn · achtzehn · neunzehn
the tens	unit + zig	zwanzig · dreißig · vierzig · fünfzig · sechzig · siebzig · achtzig · neunzig
21-99	unit + und + tens · one single word	21 = einundzwanzig · 47 = siebenundvierzig · 99 = neunundneunzig
100 and up	Left to right, but the last two digits are still backwards	137 = hundertsiebenunddreißig · 2026 = zweitausendsechszwanzig

There are five irregular spellings, all in bold in this table: **sechzehn** and **sechzig** (sechs loses its s), **siebzehn** and **siebzig** (sieben loses its en), **dreißig** (ßig, not zig).

Why the backwards order hurts so much: in English you write a number **in the order you hear it** — “forty-seven”, 4 first. In German you hear the 7 first and your pen is still waiting for the 4. Phone numbers, IBANs and prices are where

your handwriting ends up in the wrong order. (Old English had this too — “four and twenty blackbirds” — so it is less alien than it feels.)

✓ **einundzwanzig**

21 — “one and twenty”

✓ **zweiundvierzig Euro**

42 euros

- ① Practical trick: Germans often read phone numbers **in pairs** — **0176 / 23 45 67** is said **null eins sieben sechs — dreiundzwanzig — fünfundvierzig — siebenundsechzig**. So inside every pair the order is still backwards. If you get lost, “**Können Sie bitte einzeln sagen?**” — “Could you say them one by one, please?” — is completely normal and nobody minds.

02 01:50

eins or ein

On its own, 1 is **eins**. But the moment it stands in front of a noun it is declined like an article and loses its **s**.

✓ **Wie viel? — Eins.**

How many? — One. (the bare number)

✓ **ein Buch • eine Frau • ein Kind**

with a noun — like an article

✓ **Es ist ein Uhr.**

It’s one o’clock. — not “eins Uhr”

✓ **Es ist eins.**

It’s one. — drop Uhr and the s comes back

03 02:40

Clock time — two separate systems

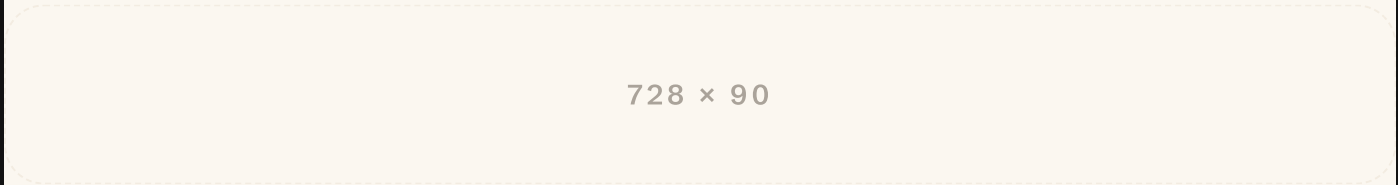
German has two ways of telling the time: **official** and **everyday**. Both are common; the everyday one turns up in the exam and at the door, and that is where the trap is.

TIME	OFFICIAL (STATIONS, APPOINTMENTS)	EVERYDAY (SPEECH)
14:00	vierzehn Uhr	zwei
14:15	vierzehn Uhr fünfzehn	Viertel nach zwei
14:30	vierzehn Uhr dreißig	halb drei
14:45	vierzehn Uhr fünfundvierzig	Viertel vor drei
14:10	vierzehn Uhr zehn	zehn nach zwei
14:50	vierzehn Uhr fünfzig	zehn vor drei

The official system uses the 24-hour clock and reads the digits as they are — it is almost impossible to get wrong. When you book an appointment or confirm a date, **prefer the official system**: say **vierzehn Uhr dreißig** and the risk of a mix-up drops to zero.

- **Wie spät ist es? / Wie viel Uhr ist es?** — What time is it?
- **Es ist halb neun.** — It’s half past eight.
- **Um wie viel Uhr...?** — At what time...?
- **Um acht Uhr.** — At eight. • **Gegen acht.** — Around eight.
- **Von neun bis fünf.** — From nine to five.
- **Ab Montag.** — From Monday on.

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04 04:30

Dates — ordinals and am

In a date the number no longer answers “how many” but “which one” — so it turns into an **ordinal**, just like English “the fourth”, “the twentieth”. The rule in two lines:

RANGE	ENDING	EXAMPLE
1-19	-te	der vierte · der zehnte · der neunzehnte
20 and up	-ste	der zwanzigste · der einunddreißigste
Three irregular ones	—	1. der erste · 3. der dritte · 7. der siebte

In writing an ordinal is shown as **digit + full stop**: **3. Mai = dritter Mai**. Forget the full stop and you have written “3 May (as a plain count)” instead of “the 3rd of May”.

- **Der Wievielte ist heute?** — What’s the date today?
- **Heute ist der 3. Mai.** — Today is 3 May. (nominative: **der dritte**)

- Ich habe **am 3. Mai** Geburtstag. — My birthday is on 3 May. (**am dritten** — dative)
- **im Mai** · **im Sommer** · **im Jahr 2026** — month, season, year
- **am Montag** · **am Wochenende** — day
- **in der Nacht** — the one exception: night takes in

① Because **am** = **an dem** (dative), the ordinal takes **-en**: **am dritten Mai**. In the nominative it is **-e**: **der dritte Mai**. Why it changes is explained on the [cases page](#).

05 06:00

Traps



TRAP 01

halb drei = 2:30, not 3:30

In British English “half three” means 3:30 — it comes *after* three. German **halb drei** means “half the way to three” — so **2:30**. This one trap sends people to an appointment an hour early or an hour late.

✓ **halb drei**

14:30 / 02:30 — “half past two”

✓ **halb acht**

07:30 — “half past seven”

Sentence to memorise: **Germans look forward when they tell the time.** Take the number you hear and think one less.



TRAP 02

Writing the number in the order you hear it

When you hear **sechsendvierzig**, your hand writes 6 first. The right answer is **46**. If you are holding a pen, leave room for two digits and fill in the units *from the right*.

✓ **dreieundachtzig**

83 — not 38

✓ **achtunddreißig**

38 — not 83



TRAP 03

dreizig · sechszehn · siebenzig

There are five spelling exceptions and they are misspelled all the time: **dreißig** (not dreizig), **sechzehn** · **sechzig** (not sechszehn), **siebzehn** · **siebzig** (not siebenzig).



TRAP 04

Decimal and thousands separators are swapped

German uses the **comma for decimals** and the **full stop for thousands** — the exact opposite of English.
1.500,50 € = one thousand five hundred euros fifty cents, and it is read: **eintausendfünfhundert Euro fünfzig**.

✓ **3,5 = drei Komma fünf**

three point five



TRAP 05

Writing the date in American order

German dates are written **day.month.year**: **03.05.2026** = 3 May 2026. If you are used to the American order (month/day), you will miss your appointment date.



TRAP 06

Saying the year with “in”

A year is said either **on its own** or with **im Jahr**. The English habit of “**in 2026**” is wrong in German.

✗ **In 2026 fahre ich nach Berlin.**

extra preposition

✓ **2026 fahre ich nach Berlin.**

I’m going to Berlin in 2026.

✓ **Im Jahr 2026 fahre ich nach Berlin.**

same meaning, formal tone

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

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

Numbers are built backwards

21 = einundzwanzig (one-and-twenty). 67 = siebenundsechzig. Units first, then tens.

einundzwanzig = 21

02

halb looks FORWARD

halb neun = 8:30 — half of nine, NOT half past nine. Viertel vor/nach is the quarter you already know.

halb neun = 8:30

03

Dates use ordinals

am ersten Mai • am dritten Oktober. 1st, 3rd, 7th and 8th are irregular: erste • dritte • siebte • achte.

am dritten Mai

04

Full stop and comma are swapped

1.500,50 € — full stop for thousands, comma for decimals. dreißig is written with ß.

1.500,50 €

✗ ~~halb neun = 9:30~~

✓ halb neun = 8:30

The English “half nine” reflex turns it around; halb looks at the coming hour.

✗ ~~zwanzigeins~~

✓ einundzwanzig

The unit is said first.

✗ ~~dreisig~~

✓ dreißig

30 is written with ß (except in Switzerland).

✗ ~~am drei Mai~~

✓ am dritten Mai

A date needs an ordinal; drei → dritte is irregular.

06 08:00

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Finish the topic: take the full test

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



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GENAU — NOT RULES, THE MOMENT IT CLICKS.

