

Personal pronouns

— DIE PERSONALPRONOMEN

Personal pronouns are the words that stand in for a noun and point to a person or thing: ich, du, er, sie, es.

There are three **sie**: she, they, and you (formal). English tells them apart with three different words (she, they, you); German uses one spelling and lets the verb ending and the capital letter do the work.

CONTENTS

- 01 The subject never disappears 02 Nine pronouns — the table to save
- 03 Three sie — the sure way to tell them apart
- 04 er · sie · es — grammatical gender is not about people 05 es — the empty subject 06 Traps
- 07 Test yourself

01 00:10

The subject never disappears

 **SHORTCUT** What separates the three **sie** is not the letters but **the verb ending**: -t means “she,” -en means “they” or formal “you.”

English and German agree on one thing: you have to **say the subject**. You can't answer “Are you coming?” with just “Coming.” In German the verb ending helps more than in English (*ich komme, du kommst, er kommt*), but it still isn't enough on its own — the subject **is written in every sentence**.

- ✗ **Komme nach Hause.**
no subject — not a sentence
- ✓ **Ich komme nach Hause.**
I'm coming home.

- ① The only exception is the imperative: **Komm!** (Come!) — there the subject is left out on purpose, because it is obviously the person you're talking to.

Nine pronouns – the table to save

GERMAN	ENGLISH	VERB ENDING	EXAMPLE
ich	I	-e	ich komme
du	you (one person , informal)	-st	du kommst
er	he	-t	er kommt
sie	she	-t	sie kommt
es	it	-t	es kommt

GERMAN	ENGLISH	VERB ENDING	EXAMPLE
wir	we	-en	wir kommen
ihr	you all (informal plural)	-t	ihr kommt
sie	they	-en	sie kommen
Sie	you (formal)	-en	Sie kommen

The table holds only **three different endings** for the singular: **-e • -st • -t** (plus **-en** in the plural). Four endings, nine pronouns. The [verb conjugation page](#) covers all of it.

The plural pronouns come with a big advantage: **wir** (we), **sie** (they) and **Sie** (formal you) always use the **dictionary form (the infinitive)** of the verb.

✓ Wir **lernen** Deutsch.

We’re learning German.

Three sie – the sure way to tell them apart

The same three letters, three different meanings. To tell them apart you look at **two things: the capital letter and the verb ending**. No other clue is needed.

SPELLING	VERB	MEANING	EXAMPLE
sie lowercase	-t	she	Sie kommt aus Berlin .
sie lowercase	-en	they	Sie kommen aus Berlin .
Sie always capital	-en	you (formal)	Kommen Sie aus Berlin?

At the start of a sentence the capital-letter clue is useless — everything is capitalised there. Then your only support is the verb ending: **-t** means “she,” **-en** means “they” or “you.” If you see a capital **Sie** in the middle of a sentence, it is definitely the formal “you.”

✓ **Sie arbeitet hier.**

She works here. — -t

Sie arbeiten hier.

They work here. *or* You work here.

✓ **Arbeiten Sie hier?**

Do you work here? — capital S in the middle = formal you

ADVERTISEMENT

728 × 90

04 03:40

er · sie · es — grammatical gender is not about people

English uses “it” for things and he/she for people, so the choice follows *who or what* you mean. German splits it three ways too, but the choice depends on **the article of the noun, not on the person’s sex**. Lifeless objects also become **er** or **sie**.

NOUN	ARTICLE	PRONOUN
der Tisch — table	der	er
die Lampe — lamp	die	sie
das Buch — book	das	es
das Mädchen — girl	das	es

The last row is surprising but true: **das Mädchen** is neuter (the diminutive ending **-chen** always makes a noun **das**), so its pronoun is **es**. In everyday speech Germans sometimes say **sie**; the grammatically correct one is **es**.

✓ **Wo ist der Tisch? — Er ist dort.**

Where is the table? — It’s over there. (“it” = er)

✓ **Wo ist die Lampe? — Sie ist dort.**

Where is the lamp? — It’s over there.

05 04:40

es — the empty subject

es is not only “it.” Just as in English (*it’s raining, it’s cold, it’s eight o’clock*), it **fills the subject slot** in sentences about weather, time and feelings. Nobody is doing the raining, but German still wants a subject.

- **Es regnet.** — It’s raining.

- **Es ist kalt.** — It's cold.
- **Es ist acht Uhr.** — It's eight o'clock.
- **Es gibt einen Supermarkt hier.** — There's a supermarket here.
- **Wie geht es dir?** — How are you?

- ① **Es gibt** = “there is / there are.” It is a fixed phrase that never changes and is followed by the **Akkusativ**: **Es gibt einen Park.** Think of English “there is,” but remember the thing that follows takes the object form.

06 05:20

Traps



TRAP 01

Leaving out the subject

The most common mistake, and the easiest to spot. In casual English you can say “Tired, honestly.” A German sentence needs its subject: **a verb alone does not make a sentence.**

✗ **Bin müde.**

no subject

✓ **Ich bin müde.**

I'm tired.



TRAP 02

Mixing up ihr and Sie

English has only one “you,” but German has two ways to say it to several people, and the difference is sharp: **ihr** = **informal, to more than one person** (a group of friends). **Sie** = **formal**, and it can be a single person too.

✓ **Kommt ihr mit?**

Are you all coming along? — to friends

✓ **Kommen Sie mit?**

Are you coming along? — formal



TRAP 03

Looking for the object in this table

The nine pronouns on this page are in the **nominative** — they are the subject of the sentence. The moment you say “me, him, us, them” the table changes, just as in English (I → me): **ich** → **mich** · **mir**, **du** → **dich** · **dir**. All of that is on the [pronoun page](#).

✓ **Ich** sehe **dich**.

I see you. — subject ich, object dich



TRAP 04

Saying es for every “it”

The pronoun comes from the noun’s **article**, not from the English “it.” When you say “I saw it,” the book is **das**, so **es** — but the table is **der**, so **er**.

✗ **Der** Tisch ist neu. **Es** ist schön.

wrong pronoun

✓ **Der** Tisch ist neu. **Er** ist schön.

The table is new. It’s nice.

07 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

A cast of nine

ich · du · er · sie · es · wir · ihr · sie · Sie. The confusion is always **sie**: she / they / Sie (polite, capital).

Sie kommen aus Berlin.
(they, or you formal)

02

du is informal, Sie is formal

The wrong choice is not a grammar mistake but a **politeness** mistake. Use **Sie** with people you don't know, and switch to **du** once they offer.

Kommen Sie herein!

03

Things carry a gender

der Tisch → er · die Lampe → sie · das Mädchen → es. Saying **es** for every "it" is the most common A1 mistake.

Der Tisch? Er ist neu.

04

es is the subject of weather and fixed phrases

Es regnet · Es ist kalt — nobody is doing the raining, so **es** fills the empty subject slot.

Es regnet.

✗ ~~Die Lampe? Es ist neu.~~

✓ Die Lampe? Sie ist neu.

The pronoun follows the grammatical gender.

✗ ~~sie kommen = definitely "they are coming"~~

✓ Check the capital letter: Sie = you (formal)

At the start of a sentence both are capitalised — then context decides.

✗ ~~Regnet.~~

✓ Es regnet.

German doesn't like a sentence without a subject; es fills the gap.

✗ ~~In a job interview: Kommst du morgen?~~

✓ Kommen Sie morgen?

In a formal setting du counts as rude.

07 06:30

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



ADVERTISEMENT

728 × 250

GENAU — NOT RULES, THE MOMENT IT CLICKS.
GENAU · FREE GERMAN LIBRARY