

auf

— DIE PRÄPOSITION AUF

The German preposition **auf** is a two-way preposition: it takes the dative for location (where?) and the accusative for direction (wohin? = where to?).

Auf is where learners mix up dative and accusative. Apply one rule in every sentence: **no movement = dative, movement = accusative**.

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01 00:00

Auf: dative or accusative?

Auf has two faces: if the question is **wo?** (where?), it takes the dative; if the question is **wohin?** (where to?), it takes the accusative.

The simple rule: if nothing changes place, use the dative; if something is being put somewhere, or someone is moving there, use the accusative.

QUESTION	CASE	EXAMPLE
Wo?	Dative	Das Buch liegt auf dem Tisch.
Wohin?	Accusative	Ich lege das Buch auf den Tisch.

Same sentence, same words: only the question changes, and the case changes with it.

02 01:10

Auf for location (dative): everyday examples

If nothing is moving and a thing or person is resting on top of a flat surface, use the dative.

GERMAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Die Katze schläft auf dem Sofa.	The cat is sleeping on the sofa.	Flat surface, no movement
Die Tasse steht auf dem Tisch.	The cup is on the table.	Dative
Die Kinder spielen auf dem Teppich.	The children are playing on the carpet.	Dative
Das Buch liegt auf dem Regal.	The book is on the shelf.	Dative

None of these sentences involves a change of place, so all of them take the dative.

03 02:20

Auf for direction (accusative): everyday examples

When you put something onto a surface, or a person moves to a place, you need the accusative.

GERMAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Ich stelle die Vase auf den Tisch .	I'm putting the vase on the table .	Movement → accusative
Er legt das Handy auf das Bett .	He puts the phone on the bed .	Accusative
Wir kleben den Zettel auf die Tür .	We're sticking the note on the door .	Accusative
Sie setzt sich auf den Stuhl .	She sits down on the chair .	Accusative (sich setzen)

Verbs that describe movement (stellen, legen, kleben, setzen) take the accusative.

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04 03:30

Contractions (aufs, aufm) and official places

In spoken German, **auf das** becomes **aufs** and **auf dem** becomes **aufm**. With official places such as **auf der Bank** and **auf der Post**, the dative stays as it is.

CONTRACTION	FULL FORM	EXAMPLE
aufs	auf das	Er springt aufs Sofa.
aufm	auf dem	Die Katze liegt aufm Teppich.
auf der Bank	—	Ich warte auf der Bank.
auf der Post	—	Sie arbeitet auf der Post.

With official places (bank, post office) you use **auf** + dative, with no contraction.

05 06:00

Traps



TRAP 01

At the bank, or to the bank?

English often gets by with one little word for both ideas (“on” for sitting and putting). German never does: you have to mark the difference with the case.

✗ **Ich gehe auf der Bank.**

“gehen” expresses movement, so it needs the accusative.

✓ **Ich gehe auf die Bank.**

I’m going to the bank.



TRAP 02

Sitting on the chair vs. putting it on the table

“Sitzen” is a location verb; “legen” is a direction verb.

✗ **Er sitzt auf den Stuhl.**

“sitzen” involves no movement, so it must be the dative.

✓ **Er sitzt auf dem Stuhl.**

He’s sitting on the chair.



TRAP 03

Working at the post office

With official places, “auf der Post” stays dative, and there is no contraction.

✗ **Ich arbeite aufs Post.**

“Post” is feminine, so the dative is “der”; the contraction “aufs” is wrong.

✓ **Ich arbeite auf der Post.**

I work at the post office.

06 07:00

The other two-way prepositions

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

07 07:30

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Take the full test

13 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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