

The preposition hinter

— DIE PRÄPOSITION HINTER

hinter (“behind”) is a two-way preposition: it takes the Dativ for position and the Akkusativ for direction.

hinter takes two cases: Dativ for position (Wo?), Akkusativ for direction (Wohin?). English uses one word, “behind”, for both (“the car is behind the house” · “he drives the car behind the house”), so the change of article is easy to forget in German.

CONTENTS

- 01 hinter: two cases, two meanings 02 Saying where something is (Dativ / Wo?)
03 Saying where something goes (Akkusativ / Wohin?) 04 Contractions and a special note 05 Traps
06 The other two-way prepositions 07 Test yourself

01 00:00

hinter: two cases, two meanings

hinter is a **Wechselpräposition** (two-way preposition). If the question is **Wo? (Where?)**, it takes the **Dativ**; if the question is **Wohin? (Where to?)**, it takes the **Akkusativ**. The rule is simple: movement or a direction means Akkusativ, a state or a position means Dativ.

The same verb pairs steer the preposition (position: **stehen/liegen/sitzen** vs. direction: **stellen/legen/setzen**). If the verb does not express movement, use the Dativ; if it does, use the Akkusativ.

QUESTION	CASE	GERMAN SENTENCE	MEANING
Wo? (Where?)	Dativ	Das Auto steht hinter dem Haus.	The car is behind the house.
Wohin? (Where to?)	Akkusativ	Er fährt das Auto hinter das Haus.	He drives the car behind the house.

The rule never changes: movement (Wohin?) means Akkusativ, no movement (Wo?) means Dativ.

02 01:10

Saying where something is (Dativ / Wo?)

With the Dativ, hinter says that something is “behind” something else and stays put. Articles: **der** → **dem**, **das** → **dem**, **die** → **der**, plural **die** → **den** (+ an -n on the noun).

GERMAN SENTENCE	ENGLISH	ARTICLE CHANGE
Die Katze schläft hinter dem Sofa .	The cat is sleeping behind the sofa .	das → dem
Unser Fahrrad steht hinter der Garage .	Our bike is standing behind the garage .	die → der
Der Spielplatz liegt hinter dem Bahnhof .	The playground is behind the train station .	der → dem
Wir sitzen hinter den Büschen .	We are sitting behind the bushes .	die (Pl .) → den (+ -n)

In the Dativ, **dem/der/dem/den** should come automatically; do not memorise them as a list, learn them as a system.

03 02:20

Saying where something goes (Akkusativ / Wohin?)

When the goal of the movement is “behind” something, you use the Akkusativ. Only the masculine article visibly changes: **der → den**. Neuter **das** and feminine **die** look the same as in the Dativ, but the case is Akkusativ. Plural **die → die** stays.

GERMAN SENTENCE	ENGLISH	ARTICLE CHANGE
Die Katze springt hinter das Sofa .	The cat jumps behind the sofa .	das → das
Er schiebt den Stuhl hinter den Tisch .	He pushes the chair behind the table .	der → den
Sie stellt das Fahrrad hinter die Garage .	She puts the bike behind the garage .	die → die
Wir laufen hinter das Haus .	We run behind the house .	das → das

Only the masculine (**der → den**) changes visibly; neuter and feminine articles can look like the Dativ, but the case is still Akkusativ.

728 × 90

04 03:30

Contractions and a special note

In spoken German, **hinter + dem = hinterm** and **hinter + das = hinters** merge. **hinter den** and **hinter der** do not. In formal writing the long form (**hinter dem**, **hinter das**) is preferred.

A figurative use is almost non-existent. **hinter** nearly always means physically “behind”; for “to stand behind someone” (to support them) you use the phrase **hinter jemandem stehen** — the preposition alone does not carry that meaning.

- ① Write **hinterm** and **hinters** only when the case is clear from the context; otherwise write the long form.

05 06:00

Traps



TRAP 01

Using the Akkusativ with stehen/liegen/sitzen

These verbs describe a position; nothing moves. To say “I’m putting it behind...” you need **stellen/legen/setzen**.

✗ **Er stellt sich hinter dem Baum.**

Dativ used, but the verb “sich stellen” (to take up position / to move) expresses direction.

✓ **Er stellt sich hinter den Baum.**

He positions himself behind the tree (puts himself there).



TRAP 02

Building a position with the Akkusativ

Playing is not **going** somewhere, it is **being** somewhere → the question is Wo? → Dativ.

✗ **Die Kinder spielen hinter den Baum.**

position → Dativ → hinter dem

✓ **Die Kinder spielen hinter dem Baum.**

The children are playing behind the tree.



TRAP 03

Forgetting the -n in the Dativ plural

In the Dativ plural the article becomes **den** and the noun itself takes an **-n**. English has nothing like it, so the -n keeps falling off.

✗ **Die Katze schläft hinter den Möbel.**

plural Dativ → Möbeln

✓ **Die Katze schläft hinter den Möbeln.**

The cat is sleeping behind the furniture.

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



ADVERTISEMENT

728 × 250

GENAU — NOT RULES, THE MOMENT IT CLICKS.

GENAU · FREE GERMAN LIBRARY