

the preposition unter

— DIE PRÄPOSITION UNTER

unter is a two-way preposition: it takes the Dativ for position and the Akkusativ for direction.

Unter is a **Wechselpräposition** (two-way preposition): if it answers **wo?** (where?), you use the **Dativ**; if it answers **wohin?** (where to?), you use the **Akkusativ**. Sentences about movement take the **Akkusativ**, sentences about a situation take the **Dativ**.

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01 00:00

Unter – two cases (Dativ / Akkusativ)

Unter expresses both position (where?) and direction (where to?). English does the same with the single word “under”: “The cat sits under the table” and “The cat runs under the table”. German marks the difference in the article.

For position the question **wo?** calls for the Dativ; for direction the question **wohin?** calls for the Akkusativ.

QUESTION	SENTENCE	CASE
wo? (where?)	Die Katze sitzt unter dem Tisch.	Dativ
wohin? (where to?)	Die Katze läuft unter den Tisch.	Akkusativ

Same verb, same object: only the movement changes the case.

02 01:10

Unter + Dativ – position (where?)

There is no movement in these sentences; the person or thing simply stays somewhere underneath.

GERMAN	ENGLISH	CASE
Der Hund schläft unter dem Bett.	The dog sleeps under the bed.	Dativ
Die Kinder spielen unter dem Baum.	The children play under the tree.	Dativ
Wir essen unter der Pergola.	We eat under the pergola.	Dativ
Die Katze liegt unter dem Sofa.	The cat lies under the sofa.	Dativ

None of these sentences contains movement, so they all take the Dativ.

03 02:20

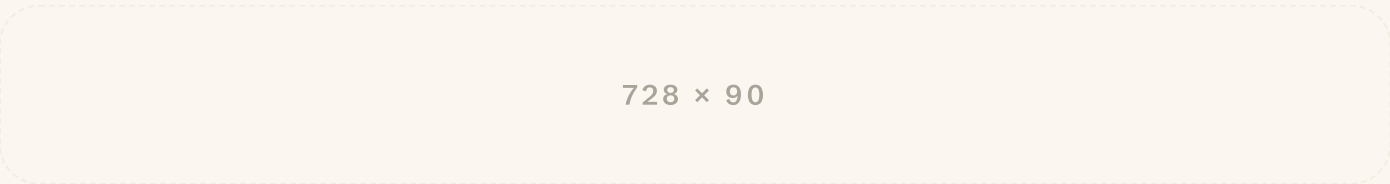
Unter + Akkusativ – direction (where to?)

In these sentences a person or thing moves to a place underneath something.

GERMAN	ENGLISH	CASE
Die Katze springt unter den Tisch .	The cat jumps under the table .	Akkusativ
Er schiebt die Kiste unter das Regal .	He pushes the box under the shelf .	Akkusativ
Wir stellen die Stühle unter die Markise .	We put the chairs under the awning .	Akkusativ
Sie legt die Decke unter das Auto .	She puts the blanket under the car .	Akkusativ

If the sentence stresses movement, the Akkusativ is a must.

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Contractions and the “among” meaning

Unter merges with two articles: **unter dem** → **unterm** (position), **unter das** → **unters** (direction). Both are mostly spoken; the full form is always correct in writing. The other articles do not merge.

In phrases like “unter Freunden” it takes on the meaning “among”, and the case is still the Dativ.

CONTRACTION	EXPANDED	MEANING
unterm	unter dem	under (position)
unters	unter das	under (direction)

It only merges with “dem” and “das”; with “der, die, den” the words stay separate.

Traps



TRAP 01

Using the Akkusativ in a sentence about a situation

English uses the same “under” whether the cat is resting or running, so nothing warns you. In German, when there is no movement, you must not write the Akkusativ.

✗ **Die Katze sitzt unter den Tisch.**

“Sitzen” describes a position, not a movement; the Dativ “dem” is needed.

✓ **Die Katze sitzt unter dem Tisch.**

The cat sits under the table.



TRAP 02

Using the Dativ in a sentence about movement

With verbs of movement or placing (legen, stellen, schieben) the Akkusativ is a must.

✗ **Er legt das Buch unter dem Tisch.**

“Legen” expresses movement; the Akkusativ “den” is needed.

✓ **Er legt das Buch unter den Tisch.**

He puts the book under the table.



TRAP 03

Using the wrong article “die” for the “among” meaning

In phrases like “unter Freunden” there is no definite article, just the Dativ plural.

✗ **Wir treffen uns unter die Freunde.**

“Unter” + “die” is the Akkusativ, but the “among” meaning takes the Dativ plural “Freunden”.

✓ **Wir treffen uns unter Freunden.**

We meet among friends.

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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