

the preposition zwischen

— DIE PRÄPOSITION ZWISCHEN

zwischen (“between”) is a two-way preposition: it takes the Dative for a location and the Accusative for a direction.

The preposition **zwischen** takes the **Dative for a location (where?)** and the **Accusative for a direction (where to?)**. English “between” never changes, so the usual slips are mixing up “I’m putting it between...” (movement) with “it’s sitting between...” (location), and getting the case wrong on pronouns.

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01 00:00

1. zwischen: Wo? (Dative) or Wohin? (Accusative)?

zwischen belongs to the group of two-way prepositions (*Wechselpräpositionen*). If the sentence has **no movement, only a location**, the question is **Wo?** (Where?) and the case is the **Dative**. If the sentence has **movement toward a target**, the question is **Wohin?** (Where to?) and the case is the **Accusative**.

The same preposition takes a different case: **Ich sitze zwischen den Freunden**. (I’m **sitting between** my friends — location, Dative) vs. **Ich setze mich zwischen die Freunde**. (I’m **sitting down between** my friends — movement, Accusative). The first states a situation; the second describes an action.

- ① The rule is simple: change of place means Accusative, no change of place means Dative.

02 01:10

2. Sentences about location (Dative / Wo?)

In the sentences below nothing is moving; we are asking where something is (**Wo?**). That is why the articles and pronouns are in the Dative. Don’t forget the Dative *-n* on plural nouns.

GERMAN	ENGLISH	HINT
Der Ball liegt zwischen dem Tisch und dem Stuhl .	The ball is lying between the table and the chair .	dem (masculine and neuter nouns take dem in the Dative)
Wir parken das Auto zwischen den Bäumen .	We park the car between the trees (the result is a location) .	den (plural Dative : -n ending , Bäum-e-n)
Sie steht zwischen ihrer Mutter und ihrem Vater .	She is standing between her mother and her father .	ihrer (feminine Dativ) , ihrem (masculine Dativ)
Das Buch ist zwischen den Heften .	The book is between the notebooks .	den + Heft-e-n (plural Dative -n)

In the Dative the article changes: der→dem, die→der, das→dem, die (plural)→den, and the plural noun takes -n.

03 02:20

3. Sentences about direction (Accusative / Wohin?)

Here something is **being put between** two things or is **moving** there. The question is **Wohin?** (Where to?). The articles are in the Accusative (only masculine *der* → *den* changes; the others look the same as in the Dative, but the case is still Accusative).

GERMAN	ENGLISH	HINT
Er stellt die Vase zwischen die Blumen .	He puts the vase between the flowers .	die = die (the feminine article doesn't change in the Accusative)
Ich schlebe den Brief zwischen die Seiten .	I slip the letter between the pages .	die Seiten (plural Accusative article <i>die</i>)
Das Kind läuft zwischen die Beine .	The child runs between the legs .	die Beine (plural) , movement : laufen + Acc
Wir bauen einen Zaun zwischen das Haus und die Garage .	We are building a fence between the house and the garage .	das (neuter Accusative) , die (feminine Accusative)

In the Accusative only the masculine article changes (*der* → *den*). Feminine, neuter and plural articles (*die*, *das*, *die*) look the same as in the Dative, but their job is to show direction.

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4. Contractions and time expressions

zwischen does not contract with articles in writing (the way **ins**, **am**, **zum** do). In speech you may hear **zwich'm** (**zwischen dem**), but it isn't written. Because it always sits between two things or people, it normally comes **between two nouns/adverbs: zwischen ... und**

Time expressions use the same pattern, and the case is the Dative (just like a location): **zwischen 8 und 9 Uhr** (between 8 and 9 o'clock), **zwischen Montag und Freitag** (between Monday and Friday). With articles: **zwischen dem 1. und dem 5. Mai**.

① Time expressions always take the Dative, because they state a “position in time”, not a direction.

Traps



TRAP 01

Wrong case on a pronoun (using the Nominative)

After a preposition, pronouns can never be Nominative (ich, du, er, sie, es, wir, ihr, sie). They must be Dative or Accusative. English speakers slip here because “between you and I” sounds natural in casual speech.

- ✗ **Das ist ein Geheimnis zwischen ich und du.**

ich/du are Nominative (1st case) and can't follow a preposition.

- ✓ **Das ist ein Geheimnis zwischen mir und dir.**

mir/dir are Dative (3rd case) — it states a position.



TRAP 02

Using zwischen with only one thing

zwischen describes the space **between two things**. With a single noun the sentence is left hanging — either the second noun follows, or you use a plural.

- ✗ **Ich stelle die Flasche zwischen den Kühlschrank.**

between it and what? The second side is missing.

- ✓ **Ich stelle die Flasche zwischen den Kühlschrank und die Wand.**

I'm putting the bottle between the fridge and the wall.



TRAP 03

Missing plural Dative -n

In the Dative plural the noun takes an -n (and so does any adjective or article ending that needs it). If you forget it, the grammar breaks.

✗ **Er sitzt zwischen den Freund.**

Freund is still singular, but *den* is a plural article → the noun must be Freunden.

✓ **Er sitzt zwischen den Freunden.**

Freund-e-n (plural Dative -n added).

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

07 07:30

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

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