

Prepositions and their cases

— DIE PRÄPOSITIONEN

German prepositions are small words that come before a noun, link it to the sentence and decide its case: für dich, mit dir.

Not “Ich gehe in der Schule” but “in die Schule”. The preposition decides Akkusativ or Dativ, not you. English never asks you to do this — “to the school” and “in the school” only differ in the little word — so this is where the case habit has to be built from scratch.

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01 00:10

Prepositions fall into three groups

⚡ SHORTCUT You don't choose the case, **the preposition does**: für demands Akkusativ, mit demands Dativ — no exceptions.

When you meet a preposition, the only question to ask is: **which group is it in?** The answer is one of three, and once the group is clear, the article that follows is clear too.

GROUP	WHAT IT DOES	EXAMPLE
Always Akkusativ	Always followed by Akkusativ	für den Mann · ohne mich
Always Dativ	Always followed by Dativ	mit dem Mann · bei mir
Two-way (Wechsel)	Changes with the question: wo? → Dativ, wohin? → Akkusativ	in der Stadt / in die Stadt

The third group is a topic of its own and has nine prepositions — the wo? / wohin? page covers it in detail. This page nails down the lists for the first two groups.

Akkusativ prepositions — the five core ones

PREPOSITION	MEANING	EXAMPLE
durch	through	Wir gehen durch den Park .
für	for	Das ist für dich .
gegen	against · towards	Ich bin gegen diesen Plan .
ohne	without	Ohne dich gehe ich nicht .
um	around · at (a time)	um den Tisch · um acht Uhr
bis	until · as far as	bis nächsten Montag
entlang	along (after the noun)	Ich gehe den Fluss entlang .

Memory line: **durch · für · gegen · ohne · um** — say all five in one breath. **bis** and **entlang** belong to the same group, but in everyday German they are mostly used without an article, so they come later.

- ① **ohne** usually **takes no article**: ohne Auto · ohne Geld · ohne Zucker. That is a habit, not a rule — it gives the sense of “none at all”.

Dativ prepositions — nine of them

PREPOSITION	MEANING	EXAMPLE
aus	out of · from (home country)	Ich komme aus der Türkei .
bei	at · with (someone's home , a workplace)	Ich wohne bei meinen Eltern .
mit	with	Ich fahre mit dem Bus .
nach	after · to (city/country)	nach dem Essen · nach Berlin
seit	since · for (still going)	seit einem Jahr

PREPOSITION	MEANING	EXAMPLE
von	from · of	Das Buch von meinem Bruder .
zu	to (a person/place of business)	Ich gehe zu dem Arzt . → zum Arzt
außer	except	Alle außer mir .
gegenüber	opposite (after the noun)	Der Bank gegenüber .

Memory line: **aus • bei • mit • nach • seit • von • zu** — the seven fit into one rhythm, the other two are rare. These seven cover most of the sentences you will meet at A1.

- **mit mir • mit dir • mit ihm • mit ihr • mit uns • mit euch • mit ihnen • mit Ihnen**
- The same set works for **bei • von • zu • aus • nach • seit**.
- Compare: **für mich • ohne dich • gegen ihn** — those are Akkusativ. The whole table is on the [pronoun page](#).

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04 03:40

Every preposition has its own page

The two lists above answer “which preposition takes which case?”. But when you want to learn **everything** a single preposition does, a list isn’t enough: **bei** has five separate uses, **für** has four. Each page below opens up one preposition completely — its meanings, its contractions, the prepositions it gets mixed up with, and the traps specific to it.

- ① You can open these nine one by one from above. What they share — **standing still means Dativ, moving means Akkusativ** — and the **wo? / wohin?** pair that asks the question is a separate system, covered together on the [wo? • wohin? • woher? page](#).

05 04:00

Contractions — im • am • zum • zur

In speech, the preposition and the article fuse. These are not abbreviations, they are the **normal form**: Germans almost never say the spelled-out version in everyday talk.

SPELLED OUT	CONTRACTED	EXAMPLE
in dem	im	im Kino • im Mai • im Sommer
in das	ins	ins Kino gehen
an dem	am	am Montag • am Bahnhof
an das	ans	ans Meer fahren
zu dem	zum	zum Arzt • zum Bahnhof
zu der	zur	zur Schule • zur Arbeit
bei dem	beim	beim Arzt • beim Essen
von dem	vom	vom Bahnhof

Careful: **zum** and **zur** are Dativ (**zu** always takes Dativ). **ins** and **ans** are Akkusativ — there is a direction, there is movement.

06 05:10

nach · zu · in — three ways to say “to”

English has one little word for going somewhere: “to the doctor’s, to Berlin, to Turkey, to the cinema”. German **splits it in three**, and the choice depends on the kind of place you are heading for. This is where the most common mistake happens.

WHERE TO?	PREPOSITION	EXAMPLE
City · country without an article · direction	nach	nach Berlin · nach Deutschland · nach links · nach Hause
Person · institution · shop	zu	zum Arzt · zu meiner Mutter · zur Post · zur Arbeit
Enclosed space you go into · country with an article	in + Akkusativ	ins Kino · in die Stadt · in die Türkei · in die Schweiz

Most countries have no article → **nach**. The ones with an article can be counted and take **in**: **die Türkei · die Schweiz · die USA · der Iran · die Niederlande**.

- ×

Ich fahre **nach** der Türkei.

country with an article — nach doesn’t work
- ✓

Ich fahre **in die** Türkei.

I’m going to Turkey.
- ✓

Ich gehe **zum** Arzt.

I’m going to the doctor’s.

Traps



TRAP 01

für mir · mit mich

Once the case gets muddled on a pronoun, the sentence sounds foreign instantly. The rule only runs one way: **für** demands Akkusativ, **mit** demands Dativ — whatever you meant to say, the preposition has already decided.

✗ **Das ist für mir.**

für → must be Akkusativ

✓ **Das ist für mich.**

That's for me.

✓ **Kommst du mit mir?**

Are you coming with me?



TRAP 02

nach Hause / zu Hause

Both mean “home”, but one is **direction** and the other is **position**: **nach Hause** = (going) home. **zu Hause** = at home. English blurs them (“I’m going home” / “I’m home”); in German, mix them up and the sentence stops making sense.

✓ **Ich gehe nach Hause.**

I’m going home.

✓ **Ich bin zu Hause.**

I’m at home.



TRAP 03

Mixing up **seit** and **für**

The English “for two years” gets translated as **für zwei Jahre**, but in German something that is **still going on** takes **seit**, and the verb is in the **present tense** — just like “I have lived here for two years” becomes “I live here since two years”.

✗ **Ich wohne für zwei Jahre hier.**

“for two years” as a plan, not the current situation

✓ **Ich wohne seit zwei Jahren hier.**

I have been living here for two years.

seit takes Dativ; in the plural the Dativ **-n** appears: **zwei Jahren**. Where that **-n** comes from is explained on the [plural page](#).



TRAP 04

Putting **gegenüber** and **entlang** in front

These two prepositions come **after** the noun. Think of “opposite” being tacked on at the end: **der Bank gegenüber**, **den Fluss entlang**. Putting them in front is not wrong, but it sounds old-fashioned or formal.



TRAP 05

Looking for a verb's own preposition in this list

warten auf • **denken an** • **sich freuen über** — these prepositions don't come from meaning, they are **glued to the verb** and don't follow the grouping here (English does the same: “wait for”, not “wait at”). That is a separate topic: the [verb + preposition page](#).

✓ **Ich warte auf dich.**

I'm waiting for you. — not “on”, it's the verb's preposition

08 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

Learn two lists, solve the rest with a question

Five prepositions always take Akkusativ, nine always take Dativ — no arguing, you memorise them. The remaining nine change depending on the situation.

für · ohne · durch · gegen ·
um ↔ mit · nach · bei · seit ·
von · zu · aus

02

For the two-way ones, ask: *wohin* or *wo*?

With the nine two-way prepositions, what decides is not movement but the **destination**: heading to a place means Akkusativ, staying in a place means Dativ.

ins Kino (wohin?) · im
Kino (wo?)

03

Contraction isn't compulsory, but it is what sounds natural

Preposition and article very often shrink into one word. The spelled-out form isn't counted wrong; it's just that nobody talks like that.

in dem → im · zu der → zur ·
an das → ans

✗ ~~Ich gehe in der Schule.~~

✓ Ich gehe in die Schule.

gehen asks for a destination → Akkusativ. in
der Schule means "I'm at school".

✗ ~~Ich gehe nach dem Arzt.~~

✓ Ich gehe zum Arzt.

You go to people and institutions with
zu. nach is only for place names without
an article.

✗ ~~Ich fahre zu Berlin.~~

✗ ~~Ich bin seit zwei Jahre hier.~~

✓ Ich fahre nach Berlin.

Cities and countries without an article take **nach**. **zu** would treat the place like an *institution*.

✓ Ich bin seit zwei Jahren hier.

Two rules at once: **seit** takes Dativ *and* plural. Dativ adds -n to the noun.

08 07 : 30

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

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