

Questions

FRAGESÄTZE

German has two kinds of questions: a W-question starts with a question word and a yes/no question starts with the verb: Wo wohnst du?

“Wo du gehst?” — not even accepted in casual speech. English rescues its questions with “do” (“Where *do* you live?”); German has no “do”, so the verb itself jumps forward and the whole sentence is rebuilt.

CONTENTS

01 Two kinds of question, two word orders 02 Question words — the full list

03 Answering: ja · nein · doch 04 Three traps 05 Test yourself

01 00:10

Two kinds of question, two word orders

 **SHORTCUT** In a W-question the verb is in slot **two**, in a yes/no question it is in slot **one**.

In a German statement the verb stands in **second position**: **Du wohnst in Berlin**. That rule does not break when you ask a question; only what stands in front of the verb changes. And no “do” — English “Where *do* you live?” is simply **Wo wohnst du?**

TYPE	ORDER	EXAMPLE
W-question	question word → verb → subject	Wo wohnst du? — Where do you live?
Yes/no question	verb → subject	Wohnst du in Berlin? — Do you live in Berlin?
Statement (for comparison)	subject → verb	Du wohnst in Berlin. — You live in Berlin.

In all three rows the verb is the same: **wohnst**. The only thing that changes is **what stands in front of it**. The question mark builds nothing — the word order does.

- ✓

Sprichst du Deutsch?

Do you speak German? — verb first
- ×

Du **sprichst** Deutsch?

a question by intonation alone — happens in casual speech, not in an exam

Question words — the full list

QUESTION WORD	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
wer	who	Wer kommt heute?
was	what	Was machst du?
wo	where	Wo ist die Post?
wohin	where to	Wohin gehst du?
woher	where from	Woher kommst du?
wann	when	Wann beginnt der Kurs?

QUESTION WORD	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
warum	why	Warum lernst du Deutsch?
wie	how	Wie geht es dir?
wie viel · wie viele	how much · how many	Wie viele Kinder hast du?
welcher · welche · welches	which (used with a noun, declined)	Welches Buch liest du?
wen	whom (Accusative)	Wen siehst du?
wem	to whom (Dative)	Wem hilfst du?

wer · wen · wem are cases of one word — like English “who · whom”, only with one more form. Which one you use is decided by the **verb**: **helfen** takes the Dative, so it is **wem**.

- **wo** asks for a place, **wohin** asks for a direction. English blurs this (“Where are you going?”), German keeps “where” and “where to” apart.
- **wie viel** is for things you cannot count (**Wie viel Zeit?**), **wie viele** for things you can (**Wie viele Bücher?**) — just like “how much” and “how many”.
- **welcher** never stands alone; it always comes with a noun and changes with that noun’s gender.

Answering: ja · nein · doch

English answers a negative question with “yes” or “no” — and it is famously confusing: “Don’t you have time?” — “Yes.” (Yes, I do? Yes, I don’t?) German solves it with a **third word**: **doch**.

QUESTION	ANSWER	WHAT IT MEANS
Hast du Zeit?	Ja , ich habe Zeit.	positive answer to a positive question
Hast du Zeit?	Nein , ich habe keine Zeit.	negative answer to a positive question
Hast du keine Zeit?	Doch , ich habe Zeit.	contradicting a negative question
Hast du keine Zeit?	Nein , ich habe keine Zeit.	agreeing with a negative question

The rule in one sentence: **if the question is negative and you want to say “on the contrary, I do / I am”, your answer is doch.** English has no single word for this (“Yes, I do!” comes closest), so it takes a while to become a reflex.

- ✓ — **Kommst du nicht mit? — Doch, ich komme!**
— Aren’t you coming? — Yes I am, of course!
- ✗ — **Kommst du nicht mit? — Ja, ich komme!**
confusing: it can also be understood as “yes, I’m not coming”

04 04:20

Three traps



TRAP 01

Building the question in English order

Translate “Where you live?” word for word and you get **Wo du wohnst?** — and that is subordinate-clause order, not a question. Right after the question word the **verb** has to come: **Wo wohnst du?**



TRAP 02

Mixing up wo and wohin

Wo gehst du? ✗ — that would mean “where are you at, while walking”. If there is movement, use **wohin**: **Wohin gehst du?** ✓. The same logic works in the answer: **Ich gehe in die Stadt** (direction) · **Ich bin in der Stadt** (place).



TRAP 03

Leaving the prefix of a separable verb at the front

In a question, too, the prefix goes to the end of the sentence: **Wann rufst du mich an?** ✓ · Wann anrufst du mich? ✗. The conjugated half goes forward, the prefix goes to the very end.

05 05 : 40

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