

Reflexive verbs

— DIE REFLEXIVEN VERBEN

Reflexive verbs show that the subject does the action to itself, using a reflexive pronoun: sich freuen, sich waschen, sich vorstellen.

“Ich wasche mich” means “I wash myself”. English often drops the “-self” (“I got dressed”, “I’m getting ready”); German never does, and the pronoun changes in three places.

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01 00:10

Right now: what a reflexive verb is



SHORTCUT

The pronoun of a reflexive verb is **not decoration, it is part of the verb**. Drop it and the sentence does not turn wrong — it **means something else**.

A verb is reflexive when the action **comes back to the subject**. English often leaves this invisible (“I washed”, “I got dressed”). German says it out loud, with a separate word:

The verb is the same in all three sentences: **waschen**. The only thing that changes is **who the object is**. English lets context do the work (“I wash” / “I wash the car”); German uses a pronoun.

You already half-do this in English

English hides the reflexive in phrases like “get dressed”, “get ready” or “wash up”, and uses “-self” only when it needs to (“introduce **myself**”). Many of those same verbs are reflexive in German:

ENGLISH (PLAIN)	ENGLISH (WITH “GET” / “-SELF”)	GERMAN
wash	get washed - wash myself	sich waschen
dress	get dressed	sich anziehen
prepare	get ready	sich vorbereiten
comb	comb my hair	sich kämmen
introduce	introduce myself	sich vorstellen

This group is the easy one: the English already hints at a reflexive, so you remember the pronoun. The real work is the verbs that are **not reflexive in English** — **sich freuen** (to be happy), **sich erinnern** (to remember). They come in a later section.

The pronoun table — one difference in three places

Reflexive pronouns are the object pronouns you **already know**. Only third person singular, third person plural and **Sie** get their own word: **sich**.

PERSON	ACCUSATIVE	DATIVE	EXAMPLE
ich	mich	mir	Ich wasche mich .
du	dich	dir	Du wäschst dich .
er / sie / es	sich	sich	Er wäscht sich .
wir	uns	uns	Wir waschen uns .
ihr	euch	euch	Ihr wascht euch .
sie / Sie	sich	sich	Sie waschen sich .

Good news: **Accusative and Dative differ only in the ich and du rows** — **mich/mir, dich/dir**. The other four rows use the same word. So you only have to make the decision for two persons.

How do you make that decision? One question: **is there another object in the sentence?**

① The rule in one sentence: **whoever takes the object's place is the Accusative**. If you are the object, it is **mich**; if something else is the object, you slide into the Dative — **mir**. With body parts it almost always comes out Dative.

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04 03:20

Verbs that are not reflexive in English — the part you memorise

This group is hard because English gives you no signal. You say “I’m happy” — there is no “I happy myself” — but German **requires the pronoun**. These you simply learn.

VERB	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
sich freuen	to be glad	Ich freue mich .
sich ärgern	to be annoyed	Er ärgert sich .
sich erinnern	to remember	Ich erinnere mich .
sich beeilen	to hurry	Beeil dich!
sich setzen	to sit down	Setz dich!
sich fühlen	to feel	Ich fühle mich gut .

VERB	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
sich interessieren	to be interested	Ich interessiere mich dafür .
sich unterhalten	to chat	Wir unterhalten uns .
sich verabreden	to arrange to meet	Wir verabreden uns .
sich entschuldigen	to apologise	Ich entschuldige mich .
sich bedanken	to say thank you	Ich bedanke mich .
sich vorstellen	to introduce oneself	Darf ich mich vorstellen?

If the dictionary lists the verb as **sich freuen**, the pronoun is mandatory. When you write the word in your notebook, **write it with “sich”** — if you try to add it later, you will always forget.



TRAP 01

sich vorstellen — two different meanings, one letter apart

The same verb says **two completely different things** with the Accusative and with the Dative. It is the best example of reflexive verbs, and the one people mix up most in job interviews.

✓ Ich stelle **mich** vor.

I'm introducing myself.

✓ Ich stelle **mir** das vor.

I'm imagining that / picturing that.

The logic fits the table: in the second sentence the object is **das** — it took the Accusative, so you slid into the Dative.

05 04:40

Fixed prepositions: freuen “auf” or “über”?

Most reflexive verbs come with a specific preposition, and **that preposition picks the case**. Learners tend to skip this part and then get stuck when building sentences.

VERB + PREPOSITION	CASE	MEANING	EXAMPLE
sich freuen auf	Accusative	look forward to something	Ich freue mich auf den Urlaub .
sich freuen über	Accusative	be glad about something that happened	Ich freue mich über das Geschenk .
sich interessieren für	Accusative	be interested in	Ich interessiere mich für Musik .
sich erinnern an	Accusative	remember	Ich erinnere mich an dich .
sich ärgern über	Accusative	be annoyed at	Ich ärgere mich über den Chef .
sich treffen mit	Dative	meet up with	Ich treffe mich mit ihm .
sich unterhalten mit	Dative	chat with	Ich unterhalte mich mit ihr .
sich bedanken für	Accusative	thank someone for something	Ich bedanke mich für die Hilfe .

The difference between **auf** and **über** is time: **auf** looks ahead, **über** looks back. Ich freue mich auf das Konzert = the concert has not happened yet. ...über das Konzert = it happened and it was great.

- ① When these prepositions are used with a pronoun, they fuse into **darauf** • **darüber** • **dafür**: Ich freue mich **darauf**. The fusion rule is explained in detail on the [pronouns page](#).

06 05:40

uns / euch can also mean “each other”

With plural persons, the same pronoun can carry **two different meanings**. German calls the second one **reziprok** (reciprocal); English says “*each other*” or “*one another*”.

- ✓ **Wir waschen uns.**
Each of us washes himself/herself. (reflexive)
- ✓ **Wir kennen uns.**
We know each other. (reciprocal)

If there is any doubt, German adds **einander** to make it clear — but in everyday speech the context is enough and nobody adds it.

- ✓ **Wir helfen einander.**
We help one another. — unambiguous.



TRAP 02

Dropping the pronoun does not make the sentence wrong, it changes the MEANING

This is the sneakiest mistake with reflexive verbs. When you forget the pronoun, you often produce a sentence that is **grammatically valid** but says something quite different — and the listener does not correct you, because what you said makes sense.

✓ **Ich ziehe **mich** an.**

I'm getting dressed.

✗ **Ich ziehe an.**

"I pull / I attract" — a completely different sentence.

✓ **Setz **dich**!**

Sit down!

✗ **Setz!**

To a German ear it sounds unfinished — like a command to a dog.

07 06:15

What to do this week

Reflexive verbs stick best when you **describe a daily routine**, because your whole morning is made of them. A five-sentence exercise:

- Write your morning routine in order: **Ich wache auf. Ich wasche mich. Ich putze mir die Zähne. Ich ziehe mich an. Ich beeile mich.**
- Repeat the same list with **er** — every pronoun becomes **sich**.
- Repeat the same list with **wir** — all of them become **uns**.
- Build three of the "not reflexive in English" verbs about your own life: **Ich freue mich auf...** • **Ich interessiere mich für...** • **Ich ärgere mich über...**
- Whenever you learn a new reflexive verb, write it in your notebook **always with "sich" and its preposition**: **sich freuen auf + A.**

- ① Next up is Präteritum: when you need to put these sentences into the past, you will meet **war** • **hatte** • **konnte**.

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

08 06:40

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Take the full test

13 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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