

schon · noch · nicht mehr · erst

— ZEITADVERBIEN SCHON, NOCH, ERST

schon, noch, noch nicht and nicht mehr look at what a situation was before and what it is now; erst means less than expected or later than expected. The German version of already, still, not yet, no longer and only.

Er ist schon da · Er ist noch da · Er ist nicht mehr da — same sentence, one word changes, the meaning flips. English keeps *already* · *still* · *not yet* · *no longer* apart without effort; the trap is that German packs them into words that look alike.

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01 00:10

Right now: same sentence, one word, opposite meaning

SHORTCUT



All four answer one question: **what was the situation before, and what is it now?**

Wasn't, now is → **schon**. Wasn't, still isn't → **noch nicht**. Was, still is → **noch**. Was, now isn't → **nicht mehr**.

These four words are taught in A1 but still get mixed up when you speak. The reason is simple: English has separate words for *already*, *still*, *yet* and *any more*, while German gets by with **schon**, **noch** and **mehr** and shifts the meaning with **nicht**. The same little word **noch** is “still” in one sentence and “yet” in another.

✓ Er ist **schon** da.

He's already here.

✓ Er ist **noch** da.

He's still here, he hasn't left.

✓ Er ist **nicht mehr** da.

He left, he's no longer here.

Three different situations, one word apart. If you pick the wrong one, the sentence doesn't break — it *flips*. Nobody corrects you, because the sentence is perfect German; you just said something else.

× Er ist ~~noch~~ da.

You meant “he’s already here” and said “he’s still here, he hasn’t left.” Grammar fine, meaning reversed.

02 00:50

Table: four places on the timeline

Put all four in one table and the system shows: two rows, two columns. The row tells you the **before**, the column tells you the **now**. Before you choose a word, ask the two questions in that order.

BEFORE	NOW : YES	NOW : NO
wasn't	schon — already , it has happened	noch nicht — not yet
was	noch — still going	nicht mehr — no longer

Opposites sit on the **same row**: the negative of **schon** is not “nicht schon” — it is **noch nicht**. The negative of **noch** is not “nicht noch” — it is **nicht mehr**. This is where most mistakes start.

WORD	GERMAN	ENGLISH
schon	Er ist schon da .	He's already here .
noch nicht	Er ist noch nicht da .	He's not here yet , he's coming .
noch	Er ist noch da .	He's still here .
nicht mehr	Er ist nicht mehr da .	He's gone , he's no longer here .

Same sentence frame, only the middle piece changes. If you get stuck, find the row first (what was it before?), then the column (what is it now?).

× Er ist ~~nicht schon~~ da.

You meant “he’s not here yet.” The negative of schon sits on the same row of the table.

✓ Er ist **noch nicht** da.

He’s not here yet.

03 01:50

Two positives: schon and noch

schon says something is **already** the case, or earlier than expected: “it has happened.” **noch** says something **keeps going**: “still, not over.” In the same sentence frame the two tell two different stories.

WORD	GERMAN	ENGLISH
schon	Ich bin schon da .	I'm already here .
schon	Hast du schon gegessen?	Have you eaten yet?
schon	Es ist schon 8 Uhr .	It's already 8 o'clock , we're late .
schon	Ich wohne schon 3 Jahre hier .	I have been living here for 3 years .
noch	Ich bin noch da .	I'm still here .
noch	Hast du noch Hunger?	Are you still hungry?
noch	Es ist noch früh .	It's still early .
noch	Ich lerne noch Deutsch .	I'm still learning German .

The word sits right after the verb, in the usual adverb spot. Only your point of view changes: **schon** is “it has happened,” **noch** is “it’s still going.”

Two bonus uses. **schon** + a length of time does the job of English “*I have been ... -ing for*”: **Ich wohne schon 3 Jahre hier.** = I have been living here for 3 years. (Note the present tense in German.) In everyday speech people often add **seit**: **Ich wohne schon seit 3 Jahren hier.**

noch carries both “still” and “one more”: **Noch ein Bier, bitte!** = One more beer, please. What the two share is **continuation**. With a masculine noun, **ein** still changes its ending: **Ich möchte noch einen Kaffee.**

✓ **Hast du noch Hunger?**

Are you still hungry?

✗ **Hast du schon Hunger?**

That means “are you hungry already?” — not “are you still hungry?” Correct sentence, different question.

✓ **Noch ein Bier, bitte!**

One more beer, please!

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04 03:00

Two negatives: noch nicht and nicht mehr

Both end in “not” and both describe something that isn’t the case now, so they get mixed up. The difference is **direction**: **noch nicht** looks forward — it hasn’t happened but **will**. **nicht mehr** looks back — it did happen but **it’s over**.

WORD	GERMAN	ENGLISH
noch nicht	Er ist noch nicht da .	He's not here yet , he's coming .
noch nicht	Ich bin noch nicht fertig .	I'm not done yet .
noch nicht	Ich kann noch nicht gut Deutsch .	I can't speak good German yet .
nicht mehr	Er ist nicht mehr da .	He was here , he's gone .
nicht mehr	Ich arbeite nicht mehr dort .	I don't work there any more .
nicht mehr	Ich rauche nicht mehr .	I don't smoke any more .

The order inside each pair is fixed: **noch nicht** for “not yet,” **nicht mehr** for “no longer.” Swap the words and the meaning is gone.

In a sentence with two verbs the pair stays in the middle and the second verb stays at the end: **Ich habe noch nicht gegessen.** = I haven't eaten yet. · **Ich kann nicht mehr warten.** = I can't wait any longer.

When what you negate is a **noun**, both turn into **kein**: not yet any → **noch kein**, no more → **kein ... mehr**. **Ich habe noch keine Wohnung.** = I don't have a flat yet. · **Ich habe keine Wohnung mehr.** = I don't have a flat any more.

✓ **Ich bin noch nicht fertig.**

I'm not done yet.

✗ **Ich bin nicht mehr fertig.**

It comes out as “I was done, and now I'm no longer done” — nonsense.

05 04:10

English “more” and “yet” are not one word in German

English uses *more*, *any more*, *another*, *-er* and *only* in ways that look alike, and German splits them differently: time, quantity and comparison each get their own word. Mix them up and the sentence comes out odd or reversed.

ENGLISH	WHAT IT MEANS	GERMAN
he hasn't come yet	not yet	Er ist noch nicht da .
it's still early	still early	Es ist noch früh .
another beer	one more	Noch ein Bier , bitte!
it's only 8 o'clock	less than expected	Es ist erst 8 Uhr .
more time	quantity	Ich brauche mehr Zeit .
bigger	comparison	Das Haus ist größer .

Rule of thumb: if it is about time, use **noch** or **erst**; if it is about quantity, **mehr**; if it is a comparison, add **-er** to the adjective.



TRAP 01

Saying “no more” with **kein ... mehr**

When there is a **noun** in the sentence, the negation is **kein**, not **nicht** — and **mehr** goes to the **very end**.

✗ **Ich habe ~~nicht mehr~~ Zeit.**

You meant “I have no time left.”

✓ **Ich habe **keine** Zeit **mehr**.**

I have no time left.

✗ **Es gibt ~~nicht mehr~~ Brot.**

You meant “there’s no bread left.”

✓ **Es gibt **kein** Brot **mehr**.**

There’s no bread left.

✗ **Ich habe ~~nicht mehr~~ Geld.**

You meant “I have no money left.”

✓ **Ich habe **kein** Geld **mehr**.**

I have no money left.

Honesty note: the phrase **nicht mehr Zeit** **does exist** — but with another meaning, in a comparison: **Ich habe nicht mehr Zeit als du.** = I don’t have more time than you. To say “I have no time left,” the only way is **keine Zeit mehr**. With a verb, **nicht mehr** is fine: **Ich arbeite nicht mehr.**



TRAP 02

The negative of **schon** is not **nicht schon**

✗ **Ich bin ~~nicht schon~~ fertig.**

You meant “I’m not done yet.”

✓ **Ich bin **noch nicht** fertig.**

I’m not done yet.

English lets you say *not already* in a few cases, so it is tempting to slap “nicht” in front of **schon**. It doesn’t work here: the opposite is not crosswise, it sits on the same row of the table. **schon ↔ noch nicht · noch ↔ nicht mehr**.

“More” as a quantity has nothing to do with time; that job belongs to **mehr** alone:

✓ **Ich brauche **mehr** Zeit.**

I need more time. → quantity: mehr

What nobody tells you: the question already gives the answer

This is the one rule that moves these four words from “I know them” to “I speak them.” If the question came with **schon**, the “no” is **noch nicht**. If the question came with **noch**, the “no” is **nicht mehr**.

QUESTION	ENGLISH	ANSWER: NO
Bist du schon fertig?	Are you done yet?	Nein , noch nicht .
Hast du schon gegessen?	Have you eaten yet?	Nein , noch nicht .
Hast du schon eine Wohnung?	Have you found a flat yet?	Nein , noch keine .
Bist du noch da?	Are you still there?	Nein , nicht mehr .
Wohnst du noch in Köln?	Do you still live in Cologne?	Nein , nicht mehr .
Hast du noch Fragen?	Do you have any more questions?	Nein , keine mehr .

Look at rows three and six: when the question has a **noun**, the answer is built with **kein** too — **noch keine** · **keine mehr**.

Germans don’t **calculate** this, it is a reflex. Don’t calculate either: look at the word in the question, and the word for the negative answer is **already decided**. The “yes” is even easier: **Ja**. or a full sentence, **Ja, ich bin fertig**.

- ✓

Bist du noch da? — Nein, nicht mehr.
Are you still there? — No, not any more.
- ✗

Bist du noch da? — Nein, noch nicht.
You’d be saying “I haven’t arrived yet”; the question was “are you still there?”

The fourth word, erst: same clock, different view

erst says a number or a time is “**less than expected**.” Facing it stands **schon**: “**more than expected**.” Same time, same number — a different view.

SITUATION	ERST · LESS THAN EXPECTED	SCHON · MORE THAN EXPECTED
time	Es ist erst 8 Uhr . only 8 , we have time	Es ist schon 8 Uhr . already 8 , we’re late
age	Ich bin erst 20 . I’m only 20	Ich bin schon 20 . I’m already 20
pages	Ich habe erst 10 Seiten gelesen . I have only read 10 pages so far	Ich habe schon 10 Seiten gelesen . I have already read 10 pages
day	Es ist erst Montag . it’s only Monday , the week is long	Es ist schon Freitag . it’s already Friday

English says *only* or *already* in front of the same number. German lets the word carry the view: saw it as little and early, **erst**; saw it as a lot and late, **schon**.

The second job of **erst** is “**not until**”: something will happen **later** than expected. **Er kommt erst morgen.** = He’s not coming until tomorrow, not today. • **Der Zug kommt erst um 10 Uhr.** = The train doesn’t arrive until 10.

✓ **Es ist erst 8 Uhr.**

It’s only 8 o’clock, no need to rush.



TRAP 03

erst and nur are not the same thing

Ich habe erst 10 Seiten gelesen. = I have only read 10 pages so far, and I’ll keep going. **Ich habe nur 10 Seiten gelesen.** = I read just 10 pages, that’s all. Same number, two stories: **erst** is still in progress, **nur** is finished.

✓ **Er kommt erst morgen.**

He’s not coming until tomorrow.

✗ **Er kommt nur morgen.**

That means “he’s coming only tomorrow, no other day” — not “not until tomorrow.”

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08 07:20

Test yourself, then pocket it

Six sentences, six gaps. The English in brackets tells you which meaning is wanted. Fill them in yourself first, then check the answers below.

- 1 • Er ist ___ da. (already here)
- 2 • Ich bin ___ fertig. (not done yet)
- 3 • Ich habe ___ Zeit ___. (no time left)
- 4 • Es ist ___ 7 Uhr. (only 7, still early)
- 5 • Wohnst du ___ in Köln? (still)
- 6 • Ich wohne ___ dort. (not any more)

✓ **Er ist schon da.**

1 • already here → schon

✓ Ich bin **noch nicht** fertig.

2 • hasn't happened but will → noch nicht

✓ Ich habe **keine Zeit mehr**.

3 • noun present → kein ... mehr

✓ Es ist **erst** 7 Uhr.

4 • earlier than expected → erst

✓ Wohnst du **noch** in Köln?

5 • is it still going → noch

✓ Ich wohne **nicht mehr** dort.

6 • it happened but it's over → nicht mehr

6/6 → all four words have landed. **4-5** → have another look at the trap section. **3 or fewer** → save the four-state table and, in every sentence, find the row first and the column second.

① One-line summary: **schon** has started · **noch** is still going · **noch nicht** hasn't started yet · **nicht mehr** is over.

09 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

09 08 : 10

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Take the full test

10 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end

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