

Fill in the blank, the sentence is ready: German set phrases

— REDEMittel

A German set phrase (Redemittel) is a ready-made sentence with a gap: put coffee, a ticket or an appointment into Ich hätte gern ... and the sentence builds itself.

The reason you can't speak is rarely a missing word: it is **trying to build the sentence from scratch**. Germans don't build from scratch either; they fill the gap in a ready-made phrase. One phrase, dozens of sentences.

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01 00:10

The problem: you have words, you have no sentence

⚡ SHORTCUT Learn the phrase **together with its gap**: Ich hätte gern ... The gap takes coffee, a ticket or an appointment. **hätte** on its own won't stick; Ich hätte gern ... will.

You're at the café and it's your turn. You know what you want, you know the word: **Kaffee**. But the sentence won't come. In your head you build the English version first, then you work out where the verb goes and which ending it needs. The cashier is waiting and the calculation can't keep up.

The cause is rarely a missing word: it is **trying to build the sentence from scratch**. Germans don't do that either. Most of what they say at the till, on the phone or in a meeting is **a ready-made phrase and a gap**. The only thing that changes is the word that goes in the gap.

✓ Ich hätte gern **einen Kaffee**.

Could I have a coffee? → the phrase is fixed, coffee goes in the gap.

✓ **Ich hätte gern eine Fahrkarte nach Köln.**

Could I have a ticket to Cologne? → same phrase, a ticket in the gap.

✗ **Ich einen Kaffee möchte.**

“I a coffee want” — built piece by piece, the verb slid to the end. This is the spot where people fall when they build from scratch.

- ① This page has 50 phrases, split into five situations: **asking for** • **asking about** • **rescue** • **opinion** • **formal**. Don't try to memorise them all in one day; the last section has a one-week study order.

02 00:50

You already do this in English

In English you don't build every sentence from scratch either. When you say “Could I have a tea?”, “Could I have” is ready-made; you only swap “a tea”. At the post office “I'm here to ...”, on the phone “I'm calling about ...”, in the street “Where is ...?”. The frame is fixed, the gap changes.

German phrases work the same way. There is one difference: in English the gap usually sits at the end (“Could I have ___?”), while in German it can sit **at the start, in the middle or at the end**, depending on the phrase. That is why you learn the phrase together with the position of its gap.

ENGLISH PHRASE	GERMAN PHRASE	FILLED-IN EXAMPLE
Could I have ...?	Ich hätte gern ...	Ich hätte gern einen Tee . — Could I have a tea?
Do you have ...?	Haben Sie ...?	Haben Sie Hafermilch? — Do you have oat milk?
Where is ...?	Wo ist ...?	Wo ist die Toilette? — Where is the toilet?
What does ... mean?	Was bedeutet ...?	Was bedeutet «Felerabend»? — What does “Felerabend” mean?
I'm calling about ...	Ich rufe an wegen ...	Ich rufe an wegen der Rechnung . — I'm calling about the invoice .
In my opinion ...	Meiner Meinung nach ...	Meiner Meinung nach ist das zu teuer . — In my opinion that is too expensive .

Look at the last row: in English “In my opinion” goes first and the sentence keeps its order. In German, once the phrase takes the front, the verb comes **right behind it: ... nach ist das ...**. The trap for this is in the opinion group.

✓ **Haben Sie das auch in Größe M?**

Do you have this in size M too? → the “Do you have ...?” frame, a size in the gap.

In short, you are not learning a new skill. You do what you already do in English, **keep the frame ready and swap the gap**, only with German frames.

03 01:40

Table 1 • asking for: at the till, in the café, at the counter

The first group is for **asking for** something. The first two phrases do the same job: **Ich hätte gern ...** is the softest, **Ich möchte ...** is neutral and polite. When ordering in a restaurant, **Ich nehme ...** is also completely normal, like “I'll have

the ...”.

PHRASE	IN ENGLISH	FILLED-IN EXAMPLE
Ich hätte gern ...	I'd like ... (polite)	Ich hätte gern einen Cappuccino . — Could I have a cappuccino?
Ich möchte ...	I'd like ...	Ich möchte zwei Brötchen , bitte . — I'd like two rolls , please .
Kann ich bitte ...?	Can I have ... please?	Kann ich bitte die Rechnung haben? — Can I have the bill , please?
Könnten Sie ...?	Could you ...?	Könnten Sie mir das bitte einpacken? — Could you wrap this for me , please?
Darf ich ...?	May I ...?	Darf ich das anprobieren? — May I try this on?
Ich brauche ...	I need ...	Ich brauche eine Tüte . — I need a bag .
Ich suche ...	I'm looking for ...	Ich suche ein Geschenk für meine Mutter . — I'm looking for a present for my mother .
Haben Sie ...?	Do you have ...?	Haben Sie das auch in Blau? — Do you have this in blue too?
Was kostet ...?	How much is ...?	Was kostet ein Kilo Tomaten? — How much is a kilo of tomatoes?
Ich nehme ...	I'll have / take ...	Ich nehme einen Tee . — I'll have a tea .

Don't say **Ich will ...** Correct, but it sounds blunt; at the till, in an office, at the doctor's it is always **Ich hätte gern ...** or **Ich möchte ...**

✓ **Ich nehme die Suppe und ein Wasser.**

I'll have the soup and a water. → ordering in a restaurant: **Ich nehme ...**



TRAP 01

“Ich will ...” grammar right, tone wrong

✗ **Ich ~~will~~ einen Kaffee.**

“I want a coffee — give it to me.” → the sentence is correct, but at a counter it sounds like an order.

✓ **Ich hätte gern einen Kaffee, bitte.**

Could I have a coffee, please? → same request, polite tone.

wollen expresses intention and decision: **Ich will Deutsch lernen.** — I want to learn German. No problem there. The problem appears when you **ask someone else for something**: at that moment **will** sounds like “I want it, hand it over”. It is the same gap as between English “I want a coffee” and “Could I have a coffee?”.

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Table 2 • asking about: directions, time, what you don't know

The second group is for **asking**. Most phrases start with a question word (**wo** • **wie** • **wann** • **was**) and the verb comes right behind it. The gap takes a place, a time or the word you don't know.

PHRASE	IN ENGLISH	FILLED-IN EXAMPLE
Wo ist ...?	Where is ...?	Wo ist die Toilette? — Where is the toilet?
Wie komme ich zu ...?	How do I get to ...?	Wie komme ich zum Bahnhof? — How do I get to the station?
Wann beginnt ...?	When does ... start?	Wann beginnt der Kurs? — When does the course start?
Wie lange dauert ...?	How long does ... take?	Wie lange dauert die Fahrt? — How long does the journey take?
Können Sie helfen?	Can you help?	Entschuldigung, können Sie mir helfen? — Excuse me, can you help me?
Wissen Sie, ob ...?	Do you know if ...?	Wissen Sie, ob der Bus noch kommt? — Do you know if the bus is still coming?
Was bedeutet ...?	What does ... mean?	Was bedeutet «Kündigung»? — What does "Kündigung" mean?
Gibt es hier ...?	Is there ... here?	Gibt es hier in der Nähe eine Apotheke? — Is there a pharmacy nearby?
Ist das ...?	Is this ...?	Ist das der Zug nach Berlin? — Is this the train to Berlin?
Wo finde ich ...?	Where do I find ...?	Wo finde ich den Zucker? — Where do I find the sugar?

Wissen Sie, ob ... opens a subordinate clause: the verb goes last. **Wissen Sie, ob der Bus noch kommt?**

In **Wie komme ich zu ...?**, when a noun goes into the gap, **zu** merges with the article: **zu dem** → **zum**, **zu der** → **zur**. With the name of a city or country it is **nach**: **Wie komme ich nach Köln?**

✓ Wie komme ich **zur** Post?

How do I get to the post office? → **die Post** is feminine: **zu der** → **zur**.

✗ Wie komme ich ~~nach~~ Bahnhof?

→ **nach** only works with city and country names. For buildings and places use **zu**: **zum Bahnhof**.



TRAP 02

“Wissen Sie, ob ...” pushes the verb to the end

✗ Wissen Sie, ob ~~kommt der Bus~~ noch?

→ question order carried into the subordinate clause. After **ob** the conjugated verb goes to the very end.

✓ Wissen Sie, ob der Bus noch kommt?

Do you know if the bus is still coming?

The same rule works in **Können Sie mir sagen, ...: Können Sie mir sagen, wo ich das Formular finde?** After the question word the verb drops to the end. Details on the [indirect questions](#) page.

① Why the detour? Because **Wissen Sie, ob ...** adds politeness. Asking directly, **Kommt der Bus noch?**, is not wrong, just more direct. With a stranger the first is softer, just like English “Do you happen to know if ...” versus “Is the bus coming?”.

05 03:40

Table 3 · rescue: when you don't understand, don't flee

The third group ties you back in when the conversation breaks. Instead of going silent or giving up the moment you don't understand, you say one of these ten phrases, and the other person knows what to do. The full set and the tone ladder are on the [I didn't understand phrases](#) page.

PHRASE	IN ENGLISH	FILLED-IN EXAMPLE
Wie bitte?	Pardon?	Wie bitte? Ich habe Sie nicht verstanden. — Pardon? I didn't understand you.
Noch einmal, bitte.	Once more, please	Die Nummer noch einmal, bitte. — The number once more, please.
Etwas langsamer, bitte.	A bit slower, please	Etwas langsamer, bitte. Ich lerne noch Deutsch. — A bit slower, please. I'm still learning German.
Ich verstehe nicht.	I don't understand	Ich verstehe das Wort nicht. — I don't understand this word.
Wie schreibt man das?	How do you spell that?	Wie schreibt man Ihren Namen? — How do you spell your name?
Ich bin nicht sicher.	I'm not sure	Ich bin nicht sicher, ob das stimmt. — I'm not sure whether that's right.
Moment, bitte.	Just a moment	Moment, bitte. Ich suche meinen Ausweis. — Just a moment, I'm looking for my ID.
Ich lerne noch Deutsch.	I'm still learning German	Ich lerne noch Deutsch. Bitte sprechen Sie langsam. — I'm still learning German. Please speak slowly.
Sprechen Sie Englisch?	Do you speak English?	Entschuldigung, sprechen Sie Englisch? — Excuse me, do you speak English?
Meinen Sie ...?	Do you mean ...?	Meinen Sie den Termin am Montag? — Do you mean the appointment on Monday?

Don't say **Was?** on its own; it's rude. What a German says when they haven't understood is **Wie bitte?**, and the second choice is **Entschuldigung?**



TRAP 03

A bare "Was?" sounds rude

✗ ~~Was?~~

"What?" → fine to a friend; to a stranger in German it lands hard, just as in English.

✓ **Wie bitte? Ich habe das nicht verstanden.**

Pardon? I didn't understand that.

Rescue phrases work better in pairs: first the **situation**, then the **request**. **Ich lerne noch Deutsch. Etwas langsamer, bitte.** The other person hears both the reason and what to do.

✓ **Meinen Sie den Termin am Montag?**

Do you mean the appointment on Monday? → you are getting them to confirm that you understood.

06 04:40

Table 4 • opinion: in the exam and in a discussion

The fourth group is for **giving an opinion**: in an oral exam, in a meeting, in a chat with friends. These phrases hold the front of the sentence, and that is exactly where most mistakes happen, **in the position of the verb**.

PHRASE	IN ENGLISH	FILLED-IN EXAMPLE
Meiner Meinung nach ...	In my opinion ...	Meiner Meinung nach ist das zu teuer . — In my opinion that is too expensive .
Ich finde , dass ...	I think that ... (subordinate clause)	Ich finde , dass Deutsch schwer ist . — I think German is hard .
Ich glaube , ...	I believe ...	Ich glaube , er kommt heute nicht . — I believe he isn't coming today .
Das stimmt , aber ...	True , but ...	Das stimmt , aber die Miete ist hoch . — True , but the rent is high .
Einerseits ...	On the one hand ...	Einerseits ist die Stadt schön , ... — On the one hand the city is beautiful , ...
Andererseits ...	On the other hand ...	... andererseits ist sie sehr teuer . — ... on the other hand it is very expensive .
Ich bin dafür .	I'm in favour	Ich bin dafür , dass wir früher anfangen . — I'm in favour of us starting earlier .
Ich bin dagegen .	I'm against it	Ich bin dagegen , weil es zu teuer ist . — I'm against it because it is too expensive .
Es kommt darauf an .	It depends	Es kommt darauf an , wie viel Zeit wir haben . — It depends on how much time we have .
Zusammenfassend ...	To sum up ...	Zusammenfassend kann man sagen , dass beide Seiten recht haben . — To sum up , one can say both sides are right .

Say **Ich finde, dass ...** and the verb drops to the end: **Ich finde, dass Deutsch schwer ist.** For an oral exam three phrases are enough: **meiner Meinung nach • zum Beispiel • zusammenfassend.**

✓ **Einerseits ist die Stadt schön, andererseits ist sie sehr teuer.**

On the one hand the city is beautiful, on the other hand it is very expensive. → two phrases, twice the verb in second position.



TRAP 04

"dass" pushes the verb to the end

✗ **Ich finde, dass Deutsch ~~ist~~ schwer.**

→ **dass** opens a subordinate clause; the conjugated verb must stand last.

✓ **Ich finde, dass Deutsch schwer ist.**

I think German is hard.

The shortcut: don't use **dass** at all. **Ich finde, Deutsch ist schwer.** is also correct, and even more common in speech. **Ich glaube, ...** already works like that: **Ich glaube, er kommt heute nicht.** The rule in one line: no **dass**, normal order; with **dass**, verb last.



TRAP 05

“Meiner Meinung nach” fills the first slot

✗ **Meiner Meinung nach ~~das ist~~ zu teuer.**

→ English order: “In my opinion” + a plain sentence. In German the phrase has taken the first slot, so the verb must come right behind it.

✓ **Meiner Meinung nach ist das zu teuer.**

In my opinion that is too expensive.

✗ **~~In meiner Meinung~~ ist das zu teuer.**

→ a copy of English *in my opinion*. There is no such phrase in German.

The same rule holds for **Einerseits ..., Andererseits ...** and **Zusammenfassend ...**: if the phrase is in first place, the verb is in second place. **Einerseits ist die Stadt schön, andererseits ist sie sehr teuer.** The full rule is on the word order page.

07 05:40

Table 5 • formal: on the phone, in an email, at the Amt

The fifth group is the **Sie world**: phone, email, the Amt (government office). The phrases are longer here, because formal German doesn’t like shortening. The good news: these sentences always come in the same order.

PHRASE	IN ENGLISH	FILLED-IN EXAMPLE
Hier spricht ...	This is ... (on the phone)	Guten Tag , hier spricht Ayşe Yılmaz . — Hello , this is Ayşe Yılmaz .
Ich rufe an wegen ...	I’m calling about ...	Ich rufe an wegen der Rechnung . — I’m calling about the invoice .
Ich brauche einen Termin .	I need an appointment	Ich brauche einen Termin für die Anmeldung . — I need an appointment for the address registration .
Können Sie mir sagen ...?	Can you tell me ...?	Können Sie mir sagen , wo ich das Formular finde? — Can you tell me where to find the form?
Ich melde mich später .	I’ll get back to you later	Ich melde mich morgen noch einmal . — I’ll get in touch again tomorrow .
Vielen Dank im Voraus .	Thanks in advance	Vielen Dank im Voraus für Ihre Hilfe . — Thank you in advance for your help .
Anbei finden Sie ...	Please find attached ...	Anbei finden Sie meinen Lebenslauf . — Please find my CV attached .
Ich schicke Ihnen ...	I’m sending you ...	Ich schicke Ihnen die Unterlagen per E-Mail . — I’m sending you the documents by email .
Ich warte auf ...	I’m waiting for ...	Ich warte auf Ihre Antwort . — I’m waiting for your reply .
Mit freundlichen Grüßen	Kind regards	Mit freundlichen Grüßen — no comma , your name on the line below

This group is the **Sie** world. The sign-off of a formal letter is **Mit freundlichen Grüßen**; when writing to a friend it is **Liebe Grüße** (LG for short).

Ich rufe an wegen ... is how it is said in speech; in writing and in careful speech **an** goes to the very end: **Ich rufe wegen der Rechnung an**. Both are correct. **anrufen** is a separable verb; when speaking, Germans often drop the **wegen ...** part behind the prefix.

✓ **Guten Tag, hier spricht Ayşe Yilmaz.**

Hello, this is Ayşe Yilmaz. → first sentence on the phone: your name first.



TRAP 06

"I'm calling about ...": about here is wegen, not für

✗ **Ich rufe ~~für~~ die Rechnung an.**

→ don't translate "for" literally: German keeps two jobs apart here.

✓ **Ich rufe wegen der Rechnung an.**

I'm calling about the invoice. → topic: **wegen**.

✓ **Ich rufe für meine Mutter an.**

I'm calling on behalf of my mother. → on someone's behalf: **für**.

In English "calling *for* my mother" and "calling *about* the invoice" already use different words, so keep that split: **topic (wegen)** versus **on someone's behalf (für)**. There is a second easy way to name the topic: **Es geht um die Rechnung**. — It's about the invoice.



TRAP 07

No comma after the sign-off

✗ **~~Mit freundlichen Grüßen,~~**

→ the English email habit ("Best regards,"). In German no comma follows the sign-off line.

✓ **Mit freundlichen Grüßen**

Kind regards → no comma; your name on the line below.

One more subtlety for closing an email: **Ich warte auf Ihre Antwort**. is correct but can sound a little impatient. In formal writing the warmer version is **Ich freue mich auf Ihre Antwort**. Word for word "I'm looking forward to your reply", which is what you would write in English too.

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08 06:40

The part nobody tells you: a phrase carries grammar you haven't learned yet

Look at the list again. **hätte** and **könnten** are Konjunktiv II, a B1 topic on this site. **Wissen Sie, ob ...** and **Ich finde, dass ...** build subordinate clauses. **Meiner Meinung nach** contains a Dativ. On paper half of this list is above your level.

But you can use all of it comfortably today, because you **don't have to work out the grammar**: the phrase brings the solution ready-made. When you say **Ich hätte gern ...** you are not conjugating Konjunktiv II; you are putting a word into a frame you have memorised. Textbooks explain the grammar first and give you the phrase later. Speaking wants the opposite: phrase first, grammar afterwards.

PHRASE	GRAMMAR HIDDEN INSIDE	WHERE ON THE SITE
Ich hätte gern ...	Konjunktiv II (hätte)	Konjunktiv II - B1
Könnten Sie ...?	Konjunktiv II (könnten)	Konjunktiv II - B1
Wissen Sie, ob ...?	subordinate clause, verb last	Indirect questions - B1
Ich finde, dass ...	subordinate clause, verb last	weil - dass - wenn - A2
Meiner Meinung nach ...	Dativ + verb in second position	Word order - A2
Wie komme ich zum ...?	zu + Dativ, zum = zu dem	the preposition zu - A1
Ich rufe an wegen ...	separable verb (anrufen)	Separable verbs - A1

Don't memorise this table; just see this: **every phrase is the first example of a grammar topic**. When you get to that topic you will say "I was already saying this".

✓ Könnten Sie mir das bitte zeigen?

Could you show me this, please? → you are using Konjunktiv II without knowing Konjunktiv II.

The second hidden gain: a phrase carries **tone** too. A grammar book won't tell you the politeness gap between **Ich hätte gern** and **Ich will**; the phrase does. Whoever memorises the phrase correctly has memorised the tone correctly.

09 07:30

What to do this week

Don't memorise fifty phrases in one sitting. A phrase is learned not like a word but like a **scene**: the phrase whose place you know stays, the phrase sitting in a list goes. One group a day, two phrases from each group.

- **Day 1 • asking for:** **Ich hätte gern ...** and **Kann ich bitte ...?** Put five different words in the gap and say them aloud.
- **Day 2 • asking about:** **Wo ist ...?** and **Wie komme ich zu ...?** Ask about five places around your home.
- **Day 3 • rescue:** **Wie bitte?** and **Etwas langsamer, bitte.** Save them in your phone notes and read them once before you go out.
- **Day 4 • opinion:** **Meiner Meinung nach ...** and **Ich finde, dass ...** Give your own opinion on three topics; watch the position of the verb.
- **Day 5 • formal:** **Ich rufe an wegen ...** and **Mit freundlichen Grüßen.** Write a draft for a real phone call or email.
- **Days 6 and 7:** try the ten phrases in mixed order in a real situation: at the till, at the stop, on the phone.

✓ **Ich hätte gern einen Termin bei Frau Dr. Weber.**

I'd like an appointment with Dr. Weber. → same phrase, in the doctor's scene.

- ① The last rule is the last sentence of the post: learn the phrase **together with its gap**. **hätte** on its own won't stick, **Ich hätte gern ...** will.

10 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 the phrase with its gap

One phrase means dozens of sentences. The frame stays fixed, and you put whatever you like in the gap.

Ich hätte gern ... → Ich hätte gern einen Termin.

02

To ask for something, not wollen

Ich will ... is correct but sounds rude in a request. At the till, in an office, at the doctor's: Ich hätte gern ... or Ich möchte ...

Ich möchte zwei Brötchen, bitte.

03

dass and ob push the verb to the end

After a phrase that opens a subordinate clause, the conjugated verb stands last.

Wissen Sie, ob der Bus noch kommt?

04

Phrase in first place, verb in second

Meiner Meinung nach, Einerseits, Zusammenfassend fill the first slot; the verb comes right behind.

Meiner Meinung nach ist das zu teuer.

× ~~Ich will einen Kaffee.~~

× ~~Was?~~

✓ Ich hätte gern einen Kaffee.

Grammar right, tone wrong: in a request *will* sounds rude.

✓ Wie bitte?

A bare *Was?* lands hard on a stranger.

✗ ~~Ich finde, dass Deutsch ist schwer.~~

✓ Ich finde, dass Deutsch schwer ist.

dass pushes the conjugated verb to the end.

✗ ~~Ich rufe an für die Rechnung.~~

✓ Ich rufe an wegen der Rechnung.

For a topic, “about” = *wegen*; *für* means “on someone’s behalf”.

10 08 : 20

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Finish the topic: take the full test

10 questions · timed · exam style · 60% finishes the topic



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GENAU — NOT RULES, THE MOMENT IT CLICKS.

