

Time expressions (Zeitangaben)

— ZEITANGABEN

German time expressions say when, how often or for how long something happens: *jeden Tag*, *morgens*, *vor einem Jahr*.

The ways of saying when something happens, how often, or for how long it has been going on.

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01 00:10

The big picture: three ways to mark time

SHORTCUT ⚡ German has three basic tools for time: **1. Akkusativ of time** (expressions with no preposition: *jeden Tag*), **2. -s adverbs** (repeated times: *morgens*) and **3. time prepositions** (*vor*, *seit*, *ab*, *bis*).

✓ Ich arbeite **jeden Tag**.

I work every day.

✓ **Morgens** trinke ich Kaffee.

In the mornings I drink coffee.

✓ Ich lerne **seit einem Jahr** Deutsch.

I have been learning German for a year.

You already do this in English (with different tools)

English does the same thing: “*every day*”, “*next week*”, “*all day*” need no preposition, while “*in the evening*” or “*on Mondays*” do. German solves the same job with cases and adverbs.

ENGLISH	GERMAN	STRUCTURE
I work all day .	Ich arbeite den ganzen Tag .	Akkusativ of time
I'm going next week .	Ich fahre nächste Woche .	Akkusativ of time
I read in the evenings .	Ich lese abends .	-s ending

If a time word (Tag, Woche, Monat) has no preposition (an, in, etc.) in front of it, that word must be **Akkusativ**. This is called the “Akkusativ der Zeit”.

✗ Ich arbeite ~~jeder~~ Tag.

I work every day.

✓ Ich arbeite **jeden** Tag.

I work every day.

Table: time prepositions and their rules

Whatever case the time preposition demands, the word after it goes into that case.

PREPOSITION	MEANING	CASE	EXAMPLE
vor	ago (in the past)	Dativ	vor einem Jahr (a year ago)
seit	since - for (still going)	Dativ	seit einem Monat (for a month now)
ab	from (in the future)	Dativ	ab nächster Woche (from next week)
bis	until	Akkusativ	bis nächsten Montag (until next Monday)

Reminder: for **am**, **um**, **im**, take a look at the pages on [the preposition an](#), [the preposition um](#) and [the preposition in](#).

✗ Ich lerne ~~seit ein Jahr~~ Deutsch.

I have been learning German for a year.

✓ Ich lerne **seit einem Jahr** Deutsch.

I have been learning German for a year.

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04 04:00

Two places where people slip



TRAP 1

Using Nominativ in expressions without a preposition

✗ Ich bleibe ~~ein Monat~~ hier.

An expression of time can't be left in the basic (Nominativ) form.

✓ Ich bleibe **einen Monat** hier.

With no preposition it has to be Akkusativ (den Monat → einen Monat).



TRAP 2

Capitalising -s adverbs

✗ Ich gehe ~~Montags~~ schwimmen.

Inside a sentence montags is an adverb (every Monday) and is written in lower case; it is not a noun.

✓ Ich gehe **montags** schwimmen.

Adverbs start with a small letter (unless it is the first word of the sentence).

der Morgen is a noun and is capitalised. But **morgens** (in the mornings) is an adverb and is written in lower case.

05 05:30

The part nobody tells you: the TeKaMoLo rule

Where time expressions sit in the sentence matters. Courses teach the **TeKaMoLo** reminder for this (Temporal, Kausal, Modal, Lokal): in a neutral sentence, **time (Temporal)** normally comes before the other information (reason, manner, place). It is not a hard law but a safe default — a speaker who wants to stress something can change the order. A direction (**nach Berlin**) is tied closely to the verb, so it usually stays near the end. English is looser ("I'm going to Berlin on Monday"); German prefers the time first.

✗ Ich fahre ~~nach Berlin am Montag~~.

In a neutral sentence the place (Berlin) doesn't come before the time.

✓ Ich fahre **am Montag nach Berlin**.

Neutral order: time first, then place.

If you want to stress it, you can also move the time expression to the very start of the sentence: **Am Montag fahre ich nach Berlin**.

06 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

Time expressions
without a preposition
are **Akkusativ**

Time words with no
preposition in front of them
are always in the Akkusativ.

jeden Tag, letzten Monat,
dieses Jahr

02

-s adverbs start with a
small letter

Adverbs that show an
action is repeated, such as
morgens, abends, montags,
are written in lower case
(except at the start of a
sentence).

Ich lese abends.

03

The **TeKaMoLo** rule

In German the time
expression (Temporal)
normally comes before the
place expression (Lokal).

Ich gehe heute ins Kino.
(not: ins Kino heute)

✗ ~~Ich bin hier seit ein Jahr.~~

✓ Ich bin hier seit einem Jahr.

✗ ~~Ich arbeite jede Tag.~~

✓ Ich arbeite jeden Tag.

seit always takes Dativ (das Jahr →
einem Jahr).

Tag is der. Its Akkusativ form has to be den
Tag → jeden Tag.

06 07 : 20

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

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