

Two-part conjunctions

— ZWEITEILIGE KONNEKTOREN

Two-part conjunctions (zweiteilige Konnektoren) are German connectors built from two halves that complete each other's meaning: *entweder...oder*, *je...desto*.

weder ... noch is already negative — add **nicht** and the sentence breaks. English “neither ... nor” works the same way, so your instinct is right here. Six patterns, the word-order rules, and German's strangest word order: **je ... desto**.

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01 00:10

Right now: six patterns

⚡ SHORTCUT Both halves join **the same kind of thing**: two nouns, two adjectives or two clauses — **never a mix**. And **weder ... noch** is already negative, so you never add **nicht**.

PATTERN	IN ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
<i>entweder ... oder</i>	either ... or	<i>Ich nehme entweder den Bus oder den Zug .</i>
<i>weder ... noch</i>	neither ... nor	<i>Ich trinke weder Kaffee noch Tee .</i>
<i>sowohl ... als auch</i>	both ... and	<i>Ich spreche sowohl Türkisch als auch Deutsch .</i>
<i>nicht nur ... sondern auch</i>	not only ... but also	<i>Er ist nicht nur nett , sondern auch klug .</i>
<i>zwar ... aber</i>	admittedly ... but	<i>Das Auto ist zwar alt , aber gut .</i>
<i>je ... desto / umso</i>	the more ... the more	<i>Je mehr ich lerne , desto besser verstehe ich .</i>

Everything except the last row **leaves the word order alone** — you drop the words in place and the sentence holds. **je ... desto** imposes its own order; it has a section of its own.

You already do this in English — “neither ... nor” included

English has counterparts for these patterns, which makes your life easier. One of them even **shares German’s odd rule**: in English, too, a sentence with “*neither ... nor*” keeps a **positive** verb.

- ✓ **Neither my mom nor my dad came.**
Positive verb — we don’t say “didn’t come”.
- ✓ **Ich trinke **weder** Kaffee **noch** Tee.**
Same logic: no nicht, positive verb.
- ✗ **Ich trinke ~~nicht~~ weder Kaffee noch Tee.**
Double negative — wrong in German, too.

So for this one rule you **have a head start**: your English instinct works here. Once you notice that, **weder ... noch** stops causing trouble.

- ① **weder ... noch** can be stretched to more than two items: **weder A noch B noch C** — every new item is added with **noch**.

Word order: when it flips

Most of these patterns sit **in the middle** of the sentence and break nothing. But when one half moves to **the front**, it takes the first slot and the subject drops behind the verb — the verb-second rule works as always.

SENTENCE	ORDER	WHY
Wir fahren entweder nach Berlin oder nach Köln .	normal	pattern in the middle , no slot taken
Entweder fahren wir nach Berlin , oder wir bleiben hier .	inverted	entweder is in the first slot
Er ist nicht nur nett , sondern er ist auch klug .	normal	sondern sits in position 0

oder and **sondern** are always in position 0 — the sentence carries on normally after them. It is the same rule as for the five conjunctions on the conjunctions page.



TRAP 1

Joining two different kinds of thing

After the two halves, **the same kind** of thing has to follow: two nouns, two adjectives, two clauses. Learners put a noun after one half and a clause after the other, and the sentence falls apart.

✗ Er ist ~~nicht nur~~ nett, ~~sondern auch~~ er hat Geld.

One adjective, one clause — unbalanced.

✓ Er ist **nicht nur** nett, **sondern auch** klug.

Two adjectives — balanced.

✓ Er ist **nicht nur** nett, **sondern** er hat **auch** Geld.

Two full clauses — this works, too.

Notice that **auch** moved in the second sentence: when you join full clauses, **auch** goes **behind the verb**. A small detail, but exams ask about it.

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04 03:50

Je ... desto: German's strangest word order

This pattern matches English "*the more I study, the better I understand*". The meaning is easy, the **order is hard** — because the two halves follow two different rules.

HALF	STRUCTURE	WHERE THE VERB GOES
je + comparative	subordinate clause	AT THE END
desto / umso + comparative	main clause	RIGHT AFTER IT (second slot)

So **two separate verb rules** run inside one sentence at the same time. That is why you should memorise not a rule but **the pattern itself**.

✓ **Je** mehr ich **lerne**, **desto** besser **verstehe** ich.

The more I study, the better I understand.

✓ **Je** älter man **wird**, **desto** schneller **vergeht** die Zeit.

The older you get, the faster time passes.

✗ ~~Je mehr ich lerne ich, desto besser ich verstehe.~~

Both halves are wrong.

Both sides **require the comparative** (Komparativ): **mehr** • **besser** • **älter** • **schneller** • **weniger**. How to build these forms is on the [adjective degrees page](#).

① **desto** and **umso** are **exactly the same**; both are used. If you hesitate, write **desto** — it is more common.

05 05:00

The part nobody tells you: **zwar** is a softening signal

Textbooks translate **zwar ... aber** as “admittedly ... but” and move on. In German it has a **social job**: it is the standard way to say “*I’m about to object, but first I’m giving you that point*” — you hear it constantly in meetings, debates and job interviews.

✓ **Die Wohnung ist **zwar** klein, **aber** sehr hell.**

The flat is small, yes — but very bright.

✓ ****Zwar** habe ich wenig Zeit, **aber** ich helfe dir.**

I don’t have much time, true — but I’ll help you.

The key point: **the weight is always on the side after aber**. If a rental ad says **zwar klein, aber sehr hell**, the seller is selling the “bright” side. Learners who read it the other way round miss the tone of the sentence.

The second unspoken thing: **sowohl ... als auch is written language**. In speech, Germans mostly say **... und ... auch**. In an exam essay **sowohl ... als auch** shows level; used in a café, you sound like you are talking out of a textbook.

06 05:30

What to do this week

This topic works by **describing one subject with six patterns**. Five minutes a day:

- Pick one topic — say, the city you live in.
- Build six sentences with the six patterns: **entweder...oder** • **weder...noch** • **sowohl...als auch** • **nicht nur...sondern auch** • **zwar...aber** • **je...desto**.
- Check that your **weder ... noch** sentence **has no nicht**.
- In your **je ... desto** sentence, mark the two verbs: one at the end, one right behind the comparative.
- Once a week, move **entweder** to the front of a sentence and write out **the flipped subject**.

① Next up: [indirect questions](#) — putting a question inside a sentence, and **ob**.

07 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

07 05:50

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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