

wollen

— DAS MODALVERB WOLLEN

wollen is a German modal verb meaning “to want”: ich will, du willst, er will.

The dictionary says “to want”, so a learner says **Ich will einen Kaffee** in a restaurant and the waiter’s eyebrow goes up. wollen is the right verb but the **wrong tone** — this page sets both the conjugation and the tone.

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01 00:10

Conjugation: ich and er are identical, and neither takes an ending



SHORTCUT

With modal verbs the **ich** and **er/sie/es** forms are **identical and take no ending: ich will • er will.**

With regular verbs the two split: **ich lerne • er lernt**. Modal verbs make no such distinction, and in the singular the stem vowel changes too: **wollen → will**. All six modal verbs follow the same pattern.

PERSON	WOLLEN	EXAMPLE
ich	will	Ich will schlafen .
du	willst	Willst du mitkommen?
er / sie / es	will	Er will nach Berlin .
wir	wollen	Wir wollen essen .
ihr	wollt	Wollt ihr kommen?
sie / Sie	wollen	Sie wollen bezahlen .

The two marked rows are the same: **ich will** and **er will**. English speakers add an ending here by reflex — “he wants” — and end up with **er willt**. Forms like **ich wille** and **er willt do not exist**.

What wollen means: a decision already made

wollen is not just “I want” — it is “**I’ve made up my mind**”. There is an intention, a plan, a will behind it. That makes it a strong verb, and depending on the situation it can sound harsh.

- ① When the direction is clear, the second verb **can drop**: **Ich will nach Hause** — you understand it even though “go” is never said. This shortcut is specific to modal verbs and very common in everyday speech.

Sentence structure: modal second, infinitive last

 **SHORTCUT**

The conjugated verb is in **second position**, the main verb is an **infinitive at the end of the sentence**. Everything in between stays in the middle.

SENTENCE TYPE	STRUCTURE	EXAMPLE
Statement	1 - will - ... - infinitive	Ich will morgen früh aufstehen .
Question	Will - subject - ... - infinitive	Willst du heute kommen?
Negative	nicht goes before the infinitive	Ich will heute nicht arbeiten .
W-question	W-word - will - subject - infinitive	Was willst du essen ?

The infinitive is **not conjugated**: **Ich will aufstehen**, not **Ich will aufstehe**. And no **zu** goes in front of the infinitive — unlike English “to”, modal verbs take no **zu**.

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04 04:00

wollen or möchten — this is the real issue

⚡ SHORTCUT When you are **asking for something** (café, shop, reception), always use **möchten**. **wollen** is for stating your decision.

Both are correct German; the difference is not grammar but **tone**. **wollen** says “I want this, my mind is made up” — like a child or a boss. **möchten** says “I’d like..., could I have...”. English has exactly the same split: “I want a coffee” sounds blunt to a waiter, “I’d like a coffee” sounds normal. The trap is that the dictionary gives you only “want” — so learners use it everywhere and sound rude without noticing.

✗ Ich **will** einen Kaffee.

I want a coffee. — sounds childish or blunt

✓ Ich **möchte** einen Kaffee, bitte.

I’d like a coffee, please.

✓ Ich **will** Ärztin werden.

I want to become a doctor. (my decision)

SITUATION	RIGHT VERB	WHY
Ordering in a café	möchten	You are asking , not commanding
In a shop	möchten	Same reason
Talking about your goal	wollen	It expresses decision and will
Offering something to someone	Möchten Sie...?	Wollen Sie...? sounds pushy

möchten is actually the polite form of the verb **mögen**; it has its own page [here](#).

Traps



TRAP 01

ich wille · er willt

Modal verbs take no personal ending; **ich** and **er** use the same form.

✗ **Er willt** nach Hause gehen.

no -t ending on a modal

✓ **Er will** nach Hause gehen.

He wants to go home.



TRAP 02

Conjugating the infinitive or adding zu

The second verb stays an **infinitive**, and no **zu** follows a modal verb.

✗ **Ich will zu schlafen.**

a modal takes no zu

✓ **Ich will schlafen.**

I want to sleep.



TRAP 03

Using wollen when ordering

You will be understood, but you come across as rude. In Germany the standard verb when you ask for a service is **möchten**.

✗ **Ich will zahlen.**

sounds blunt

✓ **Ich möchte zahlen, bitte.**

Could I have the bill, please?

06 06:00

The other modal verbs

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 06:10

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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GENAU — NOT RULES, THE MOMENT IT CLICKS.

