

German, Step by Step, Root by Root

An etymology-driven curriculum, built one word at a time

Adhithya Rajasekaran

This edition compiled incrementally — new chapters added as they
are written.

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Preface

This book teaches German one word at a time, and it teaches each word by taking it apart. It is written for someone starting from zero, whose only shared language is English. The method is the same as its companion volumes — one word per lesson, gone deep — but the etymology flows through a different channel. Spanish and French are Latin’s children; *German is English’s sibling*. Both are Germanic languages, so German words are most often *direct cousins* of English words, with no Latin middleman: *gut* is English *good*, *Tag* is *day*, *Nacht* is *night*. The gaps between them are not random — they follow the **High German Consonant Shift** ($d \rightarrow t$, $t \rightarrow s$, $k \rightarrow ch$), a single sound-law you can learn once and then use to guess the English cousin on sight (the Romance languages have their own such laws — Latin *-ct-* became Spanish *-ch-*).

Where it lights something up, the book sets German beside its cousins — English always, and Spanish and French as Latin’s side of the family, each form supplied in full so no prior knowledge of them is needed. The richest moment is *Nacht*, where German *Nacht*, English *night*, Spanish *noche*, and French *nuit* turn out to be the same Indo-European word, split four ways.

How to use this book

Every numbered section is one word, or one small phrase, and takes a few minutes — the length of a queue, an errand, or the walk to the bus. Read them in order the first time through: each section stands on the ones before it, and nothing is used before it has been taught. After that the book becomes reference, and you can open it anywhere.

Say the German out loud wherever you can. The prompts under *Your turn* are written to be spoken, and saying a word is most of what makes it stay. The questions under *Before you move on* carry their own answers in brackets: cover them, answer from memory, then look.

Nothing here is gated behind pronunciation. Each lesson names the one

or two sounds its own word needs, exactly where they are needed. The whole system is gathered in a reference at the back of the book — somewhere to look things up when you are curious, never a chapter to sit through first.

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Chapter 1

Greetings

Modes: 🗣️ voice (12) ✍️ pen (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 16 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone in German, recognize the reply, and choose an appropriate response.

The German greetings, built from their pieces — a word for “good,” the day-parts, and the three-gender article system. Because German and English are siblings, most words here are direct cousins, reshaped by the High German Consonant Shift; where it helps, Spanish and French stand alongside for contrast. Writing begins with the same familiar cousin: follow one visible Hallo, then copy it once while the model stays in sight — no hidden spelling and no second word are due. GE-C01-practice closes the chapter by running the whole arc, casual to bedtime.

1.1 hallo — “hello,” and this time it *is* a cousin

Your first German word — and a reassuring one, because German and English are close cousins: *both are Germanic languages*. That kinship will help you all through this book, and *hallo* is the first proof.

Sounds you’ll need

- German **h** is pronounced (not silent like Spanish/French): *HA-lo*.
- German **a** is a clean, open *ah*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

hallo — informal “hello / hi.” Unlike Spanish *hola* (which only *looks* like “hello” by coincidence — a false friend), German **hallo** and English **hello** are the real thing: both grew from the same old Germanic hailing call (*hala*, a shout to get attention or hail a ferryman), the same family as English *holla*, *hollo*, and *hail*. Nineteenth-century English “hello” was even shaped partly by German *hallo*.

The pattern to carry through this whole book: because English is a Germanic language, German words are often **direct cousins** of English words — same family, no Latin middleman. (The Romance languages like Spanish and French reach English mostly *through* Latin; German reaches it directly.)

Why it’s said this way

hallo is informal-to-neutral — fine among friends, and increasingly common generally. Polite or first meetings often use a daytime greeting instead. You will build that greeting one familiar piece at a time over the next few lessons.

Writing — follow one word you can see

Keep **Hallo** visible. Trace directly over it, then copy it once in large, slow letters. Say *HA-lo* while your hand moves. Stop there.

This is not spelling from memory and not free writing. Your eye and hand are only following a word whose meaning and sound are already on the page.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “hallo” — *HA-lo*, with a real *h*
- “hallo” then English “hail”, “holler” — the true hailing family

Before you move on

Is German *hallo* a real cousin of English *hello*, or a coincidence like Spanish *hola*? (A real cousin — same Germanic hailing root.)

1.2 Hallo — copy one greeting with help

Point to **Hallo** and say it once: *HA-lo*. The model stays on the page.

Writing — one guided copy

Copy **Hallo** once on the line below it. Begin with the tall capital **H**, then follow with **allo**. Look back at the model whenever you want.

Say the word as you finish. Then draw one small line under the **H** that German and English inherited in the same old hailing family.

Before you move on

Compare your copy with the model. If one letter differs, repair only that letter. No hiding, no spelling test, and no second word today.

1.3 Hallo — write it with the model covered

Look at **Hallo** once and say it: *HA-lo*. Then cover it.

Writing — delayed copy

With the model covered, wait ten seconds, then write **Hallo** once from memory.

Ten seconds is long enough that your hand cannot be copying a shape it can still see, and short enough that a word you met a minute ago is still there.

Only after the word is finished, uncover the model. Compare, and repair **one** letter — the first that differs and no others.

Before you move on

Check the **H** before anything else. Hearing *HA-lo* tells you nothing about whether the first letter is tall, and an English-trained hand writes *hallo* without noticing.

Both spellings exist in German, which is exactly why the capital is worth checking rather than assuming: the double **l** is the part the sound guarantees, and the capital is the part it does not.

1.4 Hallo — write it from the sound

Cover every **Hallo** on the page. Nothing to copy and nothing to uncover.

Writing — dictation

Say *HA-lo* aloud, or play it, and write what you hear. Once.

A delayed copy asks your hand to remember a shape. Dictation asks it to turn a **sound** into a shape, which is the thing writing is actually for, and the two do not always arrive together.

Before you move on

Uncover the model and compare. You heard **one** *l* and the page wants **two**.

That doubled letter is not decoration and it is not about the *l* at all — it is German telling you about the vowel in front of it. A doubled consonant means the vowel before it is **short**, so *Hallo* has the clipped *a* of *HA-lo* rather than a long one. German writes the length of its vowels by what comes after them, and this greeting is the first place you meet the rule.

1.5 gut — “good,” and the sound-law that reshapes German

This word starts most German greetings. It’s a direct twin of English “good” — and the *tiny* difference between them (*good* vs *gut*) opens the single most useful decoding rule in the language.

Sounds you'll need

- German **u** = *oo* as in *food* or English *boot*: *goot*. The final **t** stays crisp — never softened. → reference

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

gut — “good.” Root: Proto-Germanic ***gōdaz** — and English **good** comes from the *exact same* word. No Latin in sight; German and English just inherited it from their shared Germanic parent.

So why *gut* and not *good*? One sound-law:

The High German Consonant Shift. Long ago, German (but not English) pushed a whole set of consonants forward. One of its rules: **d** → **t**. So every English *d* tends to show up as *t* in German:

English	German
good	gut
day	Tag
bed	Bett
do	tun

It's a single regular sound-law — the same kind of trick that reshaped the Romance languages (Latin *-ct-* became Spanish *-ch-*, *noche*). Learn the shift once, and you can guess the English cousin behind a German word (and vice-versa) on sight. More rules of the shift as we go.

Grammar Lens: German merges “good” and “well”

English splits *good* (adjective) from *well* (adverb); Spanish splits *bueno* from *bien*; French splits *bon* from *bien*. **German does not** — *gut* is *both*. “A good day” is *ein guter Tag* — and the very same *gut* is how you say you are doing well, which is what the wellbeing exchange is built on. One word covers the whole job, so the Romance *bien/bueno* pair collapses back into a single German word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “gut” — *goot*
- “gut” then “good” — the d→t shift

- “Tag” then “day”; “gut” then “good” — same shift, twice

Before you move on

English *d* becomes which letter in German? (*t* — *good* → *gut*, *day* → *Tag*.) Does German split “good” and “well” like English? (No — *gut* is both.)

1.6 der, die, das — “the,” and the gender English *and* the Romance languages lost

Before your first noun: German’s words for “the.” Many European languages tag every noun with a grammatical *gender* — Spanish and French each run two — and German has it too, but with a twist neither of them kept.

Sounds you’ll need

- **der** = *dair*, **die** = *dee*, **das** = *dahss*. The **r** of *der* is barely a vowel-like murmur at the back of the mouth, not an English *r*; *die* rhymes with English *see*; the final **s** of *das* is a sharp *ss*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

der — “the” (masculine). **die** — “the” (feminine). **das** — “the” (neuter). Roots: the old Germanic demonstratives **sa* / **sō* / **pat* (“that one”) — the *same* family as English **the** and **that**:

- **das** ↔ English **that** (the High German shift again: English *t* → German *s*, so *that* → *das*).
- **die** ↔ the *-y* of English **the/they**.

Unlike Spanish *el/la* and French *le/la* (both from Latin *ille/illa*), German’s articles are cousins of English’s own “the” — Germanic all the way.

Grammar Lens: German kept **THREE** genders

Here’s the twist. Latin had three genders (masculine, feminine, neuter); Spanish and French **collapsed to two**, folding neuter into

masculine. German **kept all three**: *der* (masc.), *die* (fem.), *das* (neut.). So a German noun is one of *three* classes, not two — and, as everywhere, the gender is unpredictable and must be learned *with* the noun and its article. English, meanwhile, threw gender out entirely and kept a single “the” — the opposite extreme. Your next nouns will let you practise that pairing.

One more thing coming later: German articles also change by **case** (their job in the sentence), so *der* has other forms (*den*, *dem*, *des*). Ignore that for now; learn *der* / *die* / *das* as the three “the”s and leave it there.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der”, “die”, “das”
- “das” then English “that” — the t→s shift
- “der” for masculine, “die” for feminine, “das” for neuter

Before you move on

How many genders does German keep, vs Spanish/French? (Three vs two — German kept the neuter, *das*.) What English word is *das* a cousin of? (*That*.)

1.7 Tag — “day,” a straight cousin of English *day*

Your first German noun. In Spanish “day” was *día* (via Latin); in French, *jour* (via a longer Latin detour). In German it’s *Tag* — and it’s English “day” with one consonant shifted, and nothing else.

What to know first

- *der* / *die* / *das* — gender; *Tag* is masculine, *der Tag*.

Sounds you'll need

- **Tag** = *tahk* — a long open *a*, the vowel of English *father*; Germans harden a final *-g* to a *k* (**final devoicing**), so *Tag* rhymes with English *tock*, not with English *tag*. German nouns are always **Capitalized** (every noun, not only names).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

der Tag — “the day” (masculine). Root: Proto-Germanic ***dagaz** — and English **day** is the same word. The only difference is the High German Consonant Shift from the *gut* lesson (**d** → **t**): *dagaz* → English *day*, German *Tag*.

So the three Romance-and-Germanic “day” words line up by ancestry:

- Spanish *día*, French *jour* ← Latin *dies* / *diurnum*
- German **Tag** ↔ English **day** ← Germanic **dagaz*

Two entirely different roots for “day” (Latin *dies* vs Germanic *dagaz*) — which is why *día* and *Tag* look nothing alike, even though both languages are cousins far enough back.

Grammar Lens

Tag is **masculine** (*der Tag*) — learn it with its article, as always. Also note the capital *T*: German writes **every** noun with a capital letter, a spelling rule no other language here shares.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Tag” — *dair tahk*
- “Tag” then “day” — hear the *d*→*t* shift

Before you move on

Tag and English *day* share a Germanic root; the shift is which consonant change? (*d*→*t*.) What’s odd about how German writes *Tag*? (Capitalized — all German nouns are.)

1.8 Guten Tag — assembled, and a first taste of German endings

Snap *gut* and *Tag* together for the standard polite greeting. But notice — *gut* shows up as *guten*, and that extra *-en* is your first glimpse of how German adjectives work.

What to know first

- gut · Tag

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Guten Tag = **gut** (“good”) + **Tag** (“day”) = “good day,” the neutral polite “hello” for daytime. Said *GOO-ten tahk*.

Grammar Lens: why *guten*, not *gut*?

Like every Germanic and Romance adjective, German *gut* **agrees** with its noun — but German adjectives agree in *more* dimensions than Spanish or French: not only gender and number, but **case** (the noun’s job in the sentence). *Guten Tag* is a frozen piece of a longer wish — “I wish you a good day” — and in that fuller thought, “a good day” is the *object* of the wishing (the accusative case). For a masculine noun in that role, *gut* takes the ending **-en**: *guten*. The rest of the wish fell away and left the ending behind.

Don’t try to master German’s ending system now — it’s a later chapter. Just bank two things: (1) German adjectives take endings that shift with gender, number, *and* case; (2) the greeting is really “(I wish you a) good day,” which is why it’s *guten*. A later bedtime greeting will give you a gentle contrast with a feminine noun and a different ending.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Guten Tag” — *GOO-ten tahk*
- “Hallo” (casual) then “Guten Tag” (polite) — the register gap

Before you move on

Guten Tag literally shortens from what fuller phrase? (“[I wish you a] good day.”) Why the *-en* on *gut*? (Adjective agreement — masculine, accusative.)

1.9 Morgen — “morning,” hiding in your English *tomorrow*

The morning word — and a straight English cousin again, once you spot it.

What to know first

- Tag — same build ahead: *guten* + this noun.

Sounds you’ll need

- **Morgen** = *MOR-gun* — stress the first syllable; the *g* is a hard *g*; the German *r* is soft and guttural; the unstressed *-en* sinks to a soft *-un*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

der Morgen — “the morning” (masculine). Root: Proto-Germanic ***murganaz** — the same root as English **morning**, **morn**, and the *-morrow* in **tomorrow** (“to-morrow” = “at [the] morning [to come]”). No Latin detour; German *Morgen* and English *morning* are the same Germanic word, barely changed.

A small false-friend warning for later: German *Morgen* can also mean “**tomorrow**.” A later farewell will reuse it with that meaning. Context tells the two senses apart; English keeps them in separate words (*morning* vs *tomorrow*), while German lets *Morgen* do both jobs.

Grammar Lens

Morgen is **masculine** (*der Morgen*) — so, like *Tag*, it will take *guten* in the greeting.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Morgen” — *dair MOR-gen*
- “Morgen” then English “morning”, “tomorrow” — the same root

Before you move on

What English words share *Morgen*’s root? (*morning*, *morn*, *to-morrow*.) *Morgen* is masculine — so “good morning” will use *gut* with which ending? (*guten* — like *guten Tag*.)

1.10 Guten Morgen — good morning

Same assembly as *Guten Tag*, one noun swapped. Nearly free.

What to know first

- Guten Tag · Morgen

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Guten Morgen = **gut** (“good”) + **Morgen** (“morning”) = “good morning.” *Morgen* is masculine, exactly like *Tag*, so *gut* takes the same **-en**: *guten* — no new agreement to learn. Said *GOO-ten MOR-gen*. Used in the morning (roughly until midday); after that, German switches to *Guten Tag*. You will build the evening greeting next, from the same familiar pattern.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Guten Morgen” — *GOO-ten MOR-gen*
- “Guten Morgen” then “Guten Tag” — morning, then midday

Before you move on

Why is it *guten* Morgen (same ending as *Guten Tag*)? (*Morgen* is masculine too.)

1.11 Abend — “evening,” cousin of English *eve*

The evening word — a quieter English cousin than the others, but a real one.

What to know first

- Tag — the same *guten* + noun build.

Sounds you’ll need

- **Abend** = *AH-bent* — stress the first syllable; a long open *a*; the final *d* hardens to a *t* sound (German de-voices final consonants, exactly as it did to the *-g* of *Tag*).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

der Abend — “the evening” (masculine). Root: Proto-Germanic ***ābanþs** — the same root as English **eve** and **even(ing)** (as in *Christmas Eve*, “the eve of...”). English wore it down to *eve*; German kept more of it as *Abend*. Same Germanic word for “the close of the day.”

Contrast worth banking across all four languages:
 “evening” has a *different* root in each branch — Germanic *ābanþs* (German *Abend*, English *eve*), vs Latin *sērus* “late” (French *soir*) and Latin *tardus* “late” (Spanish *tarde*). The Romance pair named it after *lateness*; the Germanic pair named it after the *evening-down* of the day.

Grammar Lens

Abend is **masculine** (*der Abend*) — so, again, *guten* in the greeting. Three masculine day-parts in a row (*Tag*, *Morgen*, *Abend*) all take *guten*. The next day-part is feminine, so it will gently show you a different ending without adding a new rule to memorize now.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Abend” — *dair AH-bent*
- “Abend” then English “eve”, “evening”

Before you move on

Abend is a cousin of which English words? (*eve, evening.*) Is it masculine or feminine? (Masculine — *der Abend*, takes *guten.*)

1.12 Guten Abend — good evening

The evening member of the set. Same *guten*, one more masculine noun.

What to know first

- Guten Tag · Abend

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Guten Abend = **gut** + **Abend** (masculine) = “good evening,” *GOO-ten AH-bent*. *guten* again — the third masculine day-part in a row.

You now have the daytime arc: **Guten Morgen** (morning) → **Guten Tag** (midday/afternoon) → **Guten Abend** (evening). All *guten*, all masculine. Only bedtime is left — and it breaks the pattern.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Guten Abend” — *GOO-ten AH-bent*
- the arc — “Guten Morgen, Guten Tag, Guten Abend”

Before you move on

All three day-greetings use *guten* — because their nouns are all which gender? (Masculine.)

1.13 Nacht — “night,” where all four of your languages meet

This is the best cross-language word in the whole chapter. German *Nacht*, English *night*, Spanish *noche*, French *nuit* — **all four are the same word**, traced back far enough. Here’s the family reunion.

What to know first

- der / die / das — *Nacht* is feminine, *die Nacht*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **Nacht** = *nahkht* — the **ch** is the guttural *loch* sound: a scrape at the back of the mouth, after the open *a*, and **not** an English *ch*. It is the same throat-scrape as Spanish *j* (*jamón*) and Arabic *kh*. → reference

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

die Nacht — “the night” (feminine). Root: it goes all the way back to **Proto-Indo-European *nókʷts** (“night”) — the deep ancestor of *every* one of your night-words:

Branch	Word
German (Germanic)	Nacht
English (Germanic)	night
Spanish (Latin)	noche
French (Latin)	nuit
(the Latin itself)	<i>noctem</i>

They split apart by each branch’s own sound-laws — Germanic turned the *kt* into *ht* (**Nacht**, **night**; that’s Grimm’s Law), while Latin kept *ct* (*noctem*), which Spanish then softened to *-ch-* (**noche**) and French to *-it-* (**nuit**). Four languages, four rules, one PIE word. When you say

Nacht, you’re saying the same ancient syllable as *noche* and *nuit*.

Grammar Lens

Nacht is **feminine** — *die Nacht* — inherited from its Germanic gender (and it matches feminine *noche/nuit/noctem*, all feminine too). Its gender matters immediately: it’s why “good night” is *gute Nacht*, not *guten*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Nacht” — *dee nahkht*, guttural *ch*
- the family — “Nacht, night, noche, nuit”

Before you move on

Nacht, *night*, *noche*, *nuit* all descend from one PIE word — roughly what? (**nókʷts*, “night.”) Is *Nacht* masculine or feminine? (Feminine — *die Nacht*.)

1.14 Gute Nacht — good night, and the ending that finally changes

The greeting that breaks the *guten* streak — and shows you exactly what German’s endings are tracking.

What to know first

- gut · Nacht

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Gute Nacht = **gut** (“good”) + **Nacht** (“night”) = “good night,”
GOO-te nahkht.

Grammar Lens: *gute*, not *guten*

Three greetings in a row were *guten* (Tag, Morgen, Abend — all masculine). This one is *gute*. The reason is the one you set up: *Nacht* is **feminine**, and a feminine noun in the “(I wish you a) good _____” accusative takes the ending **-e**, not **-en**. So the endings line up:

- *guten* Tag / Morgen / Abend — masculine → **-en**
- *gute* Nacht — feminine → **-e**

That single vowel is German’s adjective quietly reporting the noun’s gender — exactly the job *bueno/buena* and *bon/bonne* did in Spanish and French, just with German’s own endings.

Why it’s said this way

Like Spanish *buenas noches* and French *bonne nuit*, *Gute Nacht* is the **bedtime** farewell — “sleep well,” said on parting for the night, not an evening hello (that’s *Guten Abend*). Same split French makes; German keeps the greeting (*Abend*) and the send-off (*Nacht*) apart.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Gute Nacht” — *GOO-te nahkht*
- “Guten Tag” then “Gute Nacht” — hear *-en* vs *-e*, and say why

Before you move on

Why *gute* Nacht but *guten* Tag? (*Nacht* is feminine, *Tag* masculine — the ending agrees.) Is *Gute Nacht* a greeting or a bedtime farewell? (Bedtime farewell.)

1.15 die — one article for every plural

You have learned three words for “the,” one per gender. Here is the relief: in the plural there is only ever **one**.

You'll want to know: *die* for every plural

Singular: **der** Tag · **der** Morgen · **der** Abend · **die** Nacht

Plural: **die** Tage · **die** Morgen · **die** Abende · **die** Nächte

Whatever the noun's gender, the plural article is **die**. *der* → *die*, *das* → *die*, *die* → *die*. Three genders in the singular collapse to one form in the plural — German, like French with *les*, spends a single article on every plural noun there is.

Sounds you'll need

Many German plurals bend the vowel as well as adding an ending. *Nacht* → *Nächte*: the open *a* of *nakhkt* is fronted to *ä*, the vowel of English *bed*, so *Nächte* is *NEKH-tuh*. That two-dot mark is called an **umlaut**, and the vowel change it writes down is one of German's regular plural signals.

Grammar Lens: the four day-parts in the plural

singular	plural	what changed
der Tag	die Tage	article, plus <i>-e</i>
der Morgen	die Morgen	article only — the noun is unchanged
der Abend	die Abende	article, plus <i>-e</i>
die Nacht	die Nächte	article, plus <i>-e</i> , plus the umlaut <i>a</i> → <i>ä</i>

German plurals are not built from one rule the way English adds *-s*. Each noun carries its own plural, which is why a German noun is worth learning as a set of three: *der Tag*, *die Tage*. The one thing that never varies is the article.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Tag, die Tage” — singular, then plural
- “der Abend, die Abende”
- “die Nacht, die Nächte” — hear the *a* bend to *ä*
- “der Morgen, die Morgen” — only the article moved

Before you move on

Which article do German plurals take? (**die** — always, whatever the gender.) Which of the four day-parts looks the same in the plural? (*Morgen* — *der Morgen*, *die Morgen*.) What changed in *Nächte* besides the ending? (The vowel — *a* took an umlaut and became *ä*.)

1.16 Practice — the German greetings

No new words — only the day's arc, until the endings are automatic.

What you've built

- **hallo** — casual “hi” (a *real* cousin of English “hello”).
- **gut** — “good” and “well” (← Germanic **gōdaz* = English *good*; the d→t shift).
- **der / die / das** — “the,” and German’s *three* genders (kept the neuter).
- **Guten Morgen** → **Guten Tag** → **Guten Abend** — the daytime arc, all *guten* (masculine nouns).
- **Gute Nacht** — bedtime farewell, *gute* because *Nacht* is feminine.

Two threads: **register** (*hallo* vs *Guten Tag*) and **agreement** (*guten* for masculine day-parts, *gute* for feminine *Nacht*). And one big idea: German words are **direct Germanic cousins of English**, reshaped by the High German Consonant Shift (*good*→*gut*, *day*→*Tag*, *that*→*das*).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- greet a friend casually, then politely — *hallo* / *Guten Tag*
- the right greeting for right now — morning/day/evening

- “Guten Tag” then “Gute Nacht” — and say why the ending changes
- three shift-cousins — gut/good, Tag/day, das/that

Twice through: Run Guten Morgen → Guten Tag → Guten Abend → Gute Nacht without hesitating on *guten/gute*.

Before you move on

Which German greeting uses *gute*, not *guten*, and why? (*Gute Nacht* — *Nacht* is feminine.) Next chapter, you will learn to introduce yourself and then build the friendly and respectful ways to address someone.

Chapter 2

Introducing Yourself

Modes: 🗣️ voice (10) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 10 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can introduce myself in German, give my name, and understand the other person's name.

Now a first real exchange — giving your name, asking for someone else's, and saying you are glad to meet them: Ich heie Mira. — Wie heien Sie? — Ich heie Arun. — Freut mich. It is built the way the greetings were: each piece taken apart first, then assembled — and, because German is English's sibling, most of those pieces are direct English cousins. GE-C02-practice puts the four lines back together at the end.

2.1 ich — “I,” the same ancient word as Latin *ego*

To introduce yourself, first “I.” German's is a three-letter word hiding a very deep root.

Sounds you'll need

- **ich** = *ikh* — the *ch* here is **soft**: a light hiss at the front of the mouth (the “ich-sound”), *not* the throat-scrape of *Nacht*. German has both; after *i* and *e* it's the soft one.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ich — “I.” Root: Proto-Germanic ***ik**, from Proto-Indo-European ***eǵ** — the *same* deep root that became:

- Latin **ego** (and English **ego**), Greek *egō*,
- and, worn down hardest of all, English **I**.

So German *ich*, Latin *ego*, and English *I* are three survivals of **one** ancient word for “I” — English filed it down to a single letter, German kept a bit more.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich” (*ikh*, soft *ch*)
- the three cousins — *ich* / *ego* / *I*

Before you move on

What PIE root gave **ich**, and what Latin and English words are its cousins? (**eǵ* — Latin *ego*, English *I*.) Which *ch* sound does *ich* use — soft or the *Nacht* scrape? (The soft “ich-sound.”)

2.2 du / Sie — “you,” familiar and formal

To ask someone’s name you need “you” — and German’s formal one is the strangest of all the languages here.

Sounds you’ll need

- **du** = *doo* (long *u*, as in *boot*). **Sie** = *zee* (the *s* is a *z*-sound at the start).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

du (familiar “you”) ← Proto-Germanic ***þū**, from PIE ***tū** — the *same* root as:

- English archaic **thou**, Latin **tū**, French **tu**.

English kept *thou* only in old prayers and some dialects; German uses *du* every day.

Grammar Lens: two “you”s — and German’s is the odd one out

- **du** — friends, family, children, peers. Intimate, equal.
- **Sie** — the respectful “you,” for strangers and elders.

Here’s the twist: **Sie** is really the word for “**they**” (*sie*), promoted to a polite “you” and always **Capitalized** (*Sie*) to tell it apart from *sie* = “they/she.” So German is polite by addressing you in the **third person plural** — as if saying “might *they*...” about you to your face. Three languages, three escapes from the blunt “you”:

- Spanish coined **usted** (“your grace”),
- French uses the **2nd-person plural** *vous* (“you all”),
- German borrows the **3rd-person plural** *Sie* (“they”).

When unsure, use **Sie**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “du” (*doo*), “Sie” (*zee*)
- who gets *du* (friends), who gets *Sie* (strangers, elders)
- what *Sie* literally is (capitalized “they,” used as polite “you”)

Before you move on

What is the formal **Sie** literally, and why capitalized? (It’s “they,” *sie*, promoted to polite “you”; capitalized to distinguish it.) What old English word was the lost *du*? (*thou*.)

2.3 heißen — “to be called,” the verb English almost lost

German gives its name with one plain verb — *heißen*, “to be called.” No “myself” needed, unlike the Romance languages.

Sounds you'll need

- **heißen** = *HY-ssen*. The **ß** (*Eszett*) is a sharp “ss.” **ei** is the vowel of English *eye*. So **heiße** = *HY-ssuh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

heißen — “to be called / to be named.” Root: Proto-Germanic ***haitanā**. English *had* this verb:

- **hight**, “named” — now archaic (“a knight *hight* Gawain”), and
- **behest**, “a command” — literally something *called for*.

So German kept as an everyday word a verb English let fade to poetry. And where Spanish and French say “I call *myself*” (a reflexive), German uses *heißen* as a plain verb of **being** called — no “myself” at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “heißen” (*HY-ssen*)
- the English fossil — *hight* (“named”), *behest*

Before you move on

What does **heißen** mean, and what archaic English word is its cousin? (“To be called”; *hight*.) How is German’s way of giving a name different from Spanish/French? (A plain verb “to be called,” no reflexive “myself.”)

2.4 heißen with a person on the front — one verb, three endings

You have the verb and you have the people. *heißen* is the form a dictionary prints; it is not the form you say. Put a person in front of it and the tail of the word moves.

Grammar Lens: one verb, changing its ending

heißen is the dictionary (infinitive) form. German swaps the ending for each person:

- **ich heiße** — I am called
- **du heißt** — you (familiar) are called
- **Sie heißen** — you (formal) are called

That ending-swap is the same machine on every German verb. You'll use *ich heiße* and *Sie heißen* in the next lessons.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three forms — *ich heiße* / *du heißt* / *Sie heißen*
- the infinitive, then the *ich* form — *heißen*, *ich heiße*
- the tails alone — *-e*, *-t*, *-en*

Before you move on

Which ending goes with *ich*? (*-e* — *ich heiße*.) With formal *Sie*? (*-en* — *Sie heißen*, the same as the dictionary form.) Is this ending machine special to *heißen*? (No — every German verb runs it.)

2.5 **ich heiße... — “my name is...,” literally “I am called”**

Assemble the two pieces — *ich* and *heißen* — into the sentence you need for meeting anyone.

You'll want to know: **ich heiße...**

- **ich** (I) + **heiße** (am called).

ich heiße... = word for word “I am called...” = “**my name is...**”

Ich heie Arun. → “My name is Arun.” *Ich heie Mira.* → “My name is Mira.”

Why it’s said this way

German also has the literal “my name is”:

- **mein Name ist...** — where **Name** ← Proto-Germanic ***namō**, the *same* root as English **name** and Latin **nōmen** (→ English **noun**, **nominate**). It’s correct and common.

But **ich heie** is warmer and more idiomatic — German prefers the **verb** (“I am called”) over the **noun** phrase (“my name is”). (Note **Name** is Capitalized: German capitalizes *every* noun — you’ll see it on every naming word.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich heie...” then your own name
- what it literally says (“I am called”)
- the literal alternative — “mein Name ist...”

Before you move on

What does **ich heie** literally mean? (“I am called.”) What’s the more literal “my name is,” and what English words is *Name* cousin to? (*mein Name ist*; *name*, *noun*.)

2.6 wie — “how,” cousin of English *how*

German asks “what’s your name?” as “**how** are you called?” — so first, “how.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **wie** = *vee*. Two traps: German **w** is an English *v*, and **ie** is a long *ee*. So *wie* sounds like English “vee,” never “wy.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

wie — “how.” Root: Proto-Germanic ***hwī**, from the PIE interrogative root ***k^wo-** — the very root behind the English **wh**-words:

- **how, what, who, why** — and, through Latin, the **qu-** of *question, quantity*, and the *quo modo* that became French *comment*.

German *wie* and English *how* are the same question-word, lightly reshaped.

Grammar Lens: German counts names as a matter of “how”

Like French, German asks a name with “**how**,” not “what”: *wie heißen Sie?* is literally “*how* are you called?” — about the *manner* of your being called. Don’t translate word for word; learn the logic: the name-question runs on **wie**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wie” (*vee* — *w* is *v*, *ie* is *ee*)
- the English *wh*-cousins — how, what, who, why
- “how are you called?” is the German for “what’s your name?”

Before you move on

How is **wie** pronounced, and what English question-words share its root? (*vee*; how / what / who / why.) English asks “what is your name?” — what does German literally ask? (“*How* are you called?”)

2.7 wie heißen Sie? — “what’s your name?”

Assemble it: “how” + “are you called” = the polite question that opens the introduction.

You'll want to know: wie heißen Sie?

- **wie** (how) + **heißen Sie** (“are you [formal] called”).
wie heißen Sie? = literally “how are you called?” = the polite “what’s your name?”

Grammar Lens: verb in second place

German likes the verb in the **second** slot of a sentence:

Wie (1) heißen (2) Sie?

The **informal** version swaps in *du* and its ending:

Wie heißt du?

So the one verb *heißen* runs the whole exchange: *ich heiße...* to give your name, *wie heißen Sie?* to ask for someone else’s. (Reply to *wie heißen Sie?* with *Ich heiße....*)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wie heißen Sie?” (formal)
- the informal — “wie heißt du?”
- the pair — ask, then answer: “wie heißen Sie?” / “ich heiße...”

Before you move on

What does **wie heißen Sie?** literally say? (“How are you called?”)
 What’s the informal version, and where does German put the verb?
 (*Wie heißt du?*; the verb goes second.)

2.8 mich — “me,” the same word as *ich*, doing a different job

English does not say “gladdens I.” It says “gladdens **me**.” German makes the same move, and the next phrase you learn needs it.

You'll want to know: **mich**

mich — “me,” the object form of *ich*.

Said *mikh*: the final **ch** is the soft ich-sound you already met in *ich*, not the throat-scrape of *Nacht*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

mich (“me,” the object form) ← Proto-Germanic ***mek**, from PIE ***me-** — the *same* first-person root as English **me**, **my**, **mine** (and the French *me* in *je m'appelle*). So German *mich*, English *me*, and French *me* are three cousins of one ancient word for “me.” And just as English shifts **I** (subject) → **me** (object), German shifts **ich** → **mich**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich” then “mich” — subject, then object
- the three cousins — *mich* / *me* / *me*
- “mich” (*mikh*, soft *ch* — not the *Nacht* scrape)

Before you move on

What is *mich*, and what is its subject form? (“Me”; *ich*.) Which English pair does *ich* → *mich* match? (*I* → *me*.) Which *ch* does *mich* use? (The soft ich-sound.)

2.9 freut mich — “pleased to meet you,” i.e. “it gladdens me”

The warm close to an introduction — and it literally says the meeting makes you glad.

Sounds you'll need

- **freut mich** = *froyt mikh*. **eu** is the vowel of English *boy*; the final **ch** is the soft ich-sound again (from *ich*).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

freut mich is short for **es freut mich (Sie kennenzulernen)** — “it gladdens me (to get to know you).” The verb **freuen** (“to gladden”) sits on **froh** (“glad, joyful”):

- the same **froh** in **Frohe Weihnachten** (“Merry Christmas”), and a cousin of English **frolic** (via Dutch *vrolijk*, “merry”).

So *freut mich* says, warmly, “this makes me glad.”

Grammar Lens: “it gladdens *me*”

German literally says “[it] gladdens **me**” — the *meeting* is what does the gladdening, and you (**mich**) are on the receiving end. Two common variants: **sehr erfreut** (“much pleased”) and the plain **angenehm** (“pleasant / agreeable”), both usable as “pleased to meet you.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “freut mich” (*froyt mikh*)
- the root — *froh* (“glad”), as in *Frohe Weihnachten*
- a variant — “sehr erfreut” or “angenehm”

Before you move on

What does **freut mich** literally mean, and on what word is *freuen* built? (“It gladdens me”; *froh*, “glad.”) What does *mich* mean in it? (“Me” — the meeting gladdens *me*.)

2.10 Chapter 2 — the introduction, whole

Every piece is built. Here’s the exchange it was all for.

The exchange

German	English
<i>Ich heie Mira.</i>	My name is Mira.
<i>Wie heien Sie?</i>	What’s your name?
<i>Ich heie Arun.</i>	My name is Arun.
<i>Freut mich.</i>	Pleased to meet you.

Every piece a Germanic cousin of English:

- **ich** ← **ik* (English *I*, Latin *ego*)
- **mich** ← **mek* (English *me*, *my*, *mine*)
- **heien** ← **haitanq* (English *hight*, *behest*)
- **wie** ← **hwī* (English *how*, *what*, *who*)
- **freuen** ← *froh* (glad; English *frolic*)

And two habits of German to keep: it names with a **plain verb of being called** (“I am called,” no “myself”), and it is polite by the **third person** (*Sie* = “they”).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole exchange, both voices
- your own introduction — “ich heie ..., freut mich”
- ask it back — “wie heien Sie?”

Before you move on

Give your name in German, ask someone else’s, and say you’re pleased to meet them. (*Ich heie... / Wie heien Sie? / Freut mich.*) What two German habits does this show? (Naming with a plain “to be called” verb; politeness by the third person, *Sie*.) Next chapter: *Wie geht’s?* (“how’s it going?”) and answering with *gut* again — the responding cycle.

Chapter 3

How Are You?

Modes: 🗣️ voice (17) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 5 of 18 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask how someone is in German, answer naturally, and return the question.

German asks after someone with a verb of motion — Wie geht es dir?, “how goes it to you?” — so this chapter builds that question one word at a time and then answers it across a full ladder, from Sehr gut! down through Es geht and So lala to Nicht so gut. Around it sit the two courtesies that hold every German conversation together, danke and bitte, each an English word in disguise. GE-C03-formal-practice runs the finished exchange in the formal register, where only the listener word changes.

3.1 danke — “thank you,” which is really “I think of you”

You can introduce yourself in German. Next comes *how are you?* — and every answer to it leans on one word. It hides a secret that English shares and hides too: **to thank is to think.**

You’ll want to know: danke

danke — “thank you.”

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-a-german** — *DAH-N-kuh*: a pure open *ah*, the vowel of English *father*, and a final *-e* that sinks to a soft *uh* rather than disappearing. Stress the front: *DAH-N-kuh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

danke comes from **denken**, “to think.” The old idea: to thank someone is to **keep them in mind** — “I think of you,” “you are in my thoughts.” German *Dank* (“thanks”) and *Gedanke* (“a thought”) are the same root wearing two coats.

And here is the payoff for an English speaker: **English “thank” and “think” are the same word too.** Old English *þancian* (“thank”) and *þencan* (“think”) split from one root — to thank was to *hold in thought*. So *danke* is not foreign at all; it is English **thank** with the **think** still visible inside it.

Three different pictures of gratitude, worth holding side by side:

Language	“Thanks”	Literal idea
German	<i>danke</i>	“I think of you”
French	<i>merci</i>	a reward , a mercy
Spanish	<i>gracias</i>	grace , favour

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “danke” — *DAH-N-kuh*, stress the front
- “danke” then “denken” — thanks, and the thinking inside it
- English “thank” then “think” — one root, two coats

Before you move on

What everyday verb is *danke* built from? (*Denken*, “to think.”)

What two English words share that same split? (*Thank* and *think*.)

Where does the stress fall? (On the front: *DAH-N-kuh*.)

3.2 schön — “beautiful,” and your first umlaut with rounded lips

Danke on its own is complete and polite. But German has a one-word upgrade, and the upgrading word is worth having on its own — it is one of the commonest adjectives in the language.

You’ll want to know: schön

schön — “beautiful, lovely, nice.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **umlaut-oe** — **ö** is made by saying **ay** and then *rounding your lips* as if to whistle, without moving your tongue. English has no such vowel, so build it from two things you can already do: hold the *e* of *bed*, then push your lips forward into an *o* shape. That is **ö**.
- **sch-sh** — **sch** is simply English **sh**. So *schön* is *shurn* — with no *r* actually sounded, the way a Southern English speaker says *fern*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

schön is English **sheen**. Both come from a Germanic root meaning *bright, shining* — so the oldest sense of *schön* is not “pretty” but “gleaming,” and English kept the shine while German took the beauty. Now snap it onto the word you already have:

danke schön — “thank you nicely” → “thank you very much.”

Literally you are thanking someone *beautifully*. English has no equivalent move; the nearest is the tone of voice in “thanks *so* much.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ay” then round your lips — “ö”
- “schön” (*shurn*)
- “danke schön” — thank you very much

Before you move on

What does *schön* mean, and which English word is it? (“Beautiful”; *sheen*.) How do you make *ö*? (Say *ay*, then round the lips.) Upgrade a thank-you. (*Danke schön*.)

3.3 vielen Dank — “many thanks,” with the noun stepping forward

Danke is a verb form — “I thank.” But English also has a *noun*, **thanks**, and so does German. Meet it, and a second upgrade opens up.

You’ll want to know: der Dank

der Dank — “the thanks, the gratitude” (masculine).

Capital **D**, because every German noun is capitalised — the rule from *Tag*. Said *dahnk*, with the final **k** crisp.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

viel means “much,” and it is English **full** — a full measure of something. Put it in front of *Dank* and you get the phrase Germans reach for when *danke* alone feels too thin:

vielen Dank — “many thanks.”

The **-en** on *vielen* is the same kind of adjective ending you met on *guten Tag*: German adjectives dress to match their noun. You do not have to build it yet — learn *vielen Dank* whole, the way you learned *guten Tag* whole.

So the family now reads: *danke* (I thank) · *der Dank* (the thanks) · *Gedanke* (a thought) — all from *denken*, “to think.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Dank” — the noun, capital D

- “vielen Dank” — many thanks
- the family — “danke”, “Dank”, “denken”

Before you move on

What is the noun behind *danke*? (*Der Dank*.) What English word is *viel*? (*Full* — a full measure.) Say “many thanks.” (*Vielen Dank*.)

3.4 bitte — the Swiss-army word: “please” *and* “you’re welcome”

Every *danke* wants an answer. German’s answer is a word that also means “please” — and three other things besides, all from one idea.

You’ll want to know: bitte

bitte — “please,” and “you’re welcome.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **i-short** — *BIT-tuh*: a short crisp *i* as in English *bit*, a clearly doubled *t*, and the soft *-uh* ending you already met on *danke*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bitte is the asking-form of **bitten**, “to ask, to request, to pray.” When you say *bitte* you are, at root, **making a request** — “I ask this of you.”

That verb is a close cousin of two English words:

- **bid** — as in “I *bid* you welcome,” “do as you are *bidden*”: to ask or command.
- **bead** — astonishingly, yes. A *bead* was originally a **prayer**. People counted their prayers (Old English *gebed*) on a string, and the name of the prayer slid onto the little ball it was counted on. A rosary **bead** is a frozen request — exactly what *bitte* still is.

That single idea, *I ask*, is what lets one word cover so much ground:

You say <i>bitte</i> when...	It means	Why it is all “I ask”
making a request	please	“I ask you...”
answering <i>danke</i>	you’re welcome	“I ask nothing back”
handing something over	here you go	“I offer, at your request”
you did not hear	pardon?	“I ask you to repeat”
Tone does the sorting. The word never changes.		

Why it’s said this way

The courtesy loop closes every small favour in German: **Danke.** — **Bitte.** It is the twin of Spanish *de nada* and French *de rien*, and leaving off the *bitte* sounds curt in a way English “no problem” does not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bitte” — *BIT-tuh*, doubled *t*
- the loop — “danke” ... “bitte”
- “bitte” as *please*, then as *you’re welcome* — same word, new tone

Before you move on

What verb is *bitte* from? (*Bitten*, “to ask, to pray.”) What two English words are its cousins? (*Bid*, and *bead* — a bead was a prayer.) Name two jobs *bitte* does. (Please; you’re welcome; here you go; pardon?) What answers *danke*? (*Bitte.*)

3.5 gehen — “to go,” and it is just English *go*

German asks “how are you?” with a verb of **motion**. You already own that verb without having studied it, because it *is* English *go*.

You'll want to know: **gehen**

gehen — “to go.” The form you will need most is **geht**, “goes.”

That **-t** is the ending you already met on *heißt*: third person, one person, one *t*.

Sounds you'll need

- **h-silent-lengthening** — in *gehen* the **h** is **not** breathed. It is a silent letter whose whole job is to **stretch the vowel before it**: *GAY-en*, not *ge-HEN*. So **geht** is simply *gayt*.

This is worth banking now, because German uses the trick everywhere — *sehr*, *Ihnen*, *Jahr* all hide a lengthening *h*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

gehen and English **go** descend from the *same* Germanic verb — no Latin detour, no false friend, a straight cognate. When you say *geht*, you are saying *goes*.

And that is the whole idea behind German's “how are you?”: wellbeing is not something you *are*, it is something that **goes**.

Language	The verb it asks with	The picture
German	<i>gehen</i> , “to go”	how does it go ?
French	<i>aller</i> , “to go”	how does it go ?
Spanish	<i>estar</i> , “to stand”	how are you standing ?

Two of the three put wellbeing in motion; Spanish puts it on its feet.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “gehen” (*GAY-en*) — the *h* only stretches
- “geht” (*gayt*) — “goes”
- German *gehen* and English *go* — the same word

Before you move on

What English word is *gehen*? (*Go* — a straight cognate.) What does the *h* do in *gehen*? (Nothing but lengthen the vowel.) Which two of the three languages ask “how are you?” with “to go”? (German and French; Spanish uses “to stand.”)

3.6 es — “it,” the small word German leans on

You have the verb: *geht*, “goes.” But goes *what*? German needs a subject, and for a state — the weather, your day — it reaches for one tiny word.

You’ll want to know: es

es — “it.”

Said *ess*: a short clean *e*, the vowel of English *bet*, and a crisp *s*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

es is English **it**. The two look unlike only because of the same swap you already met in *das* / *that*: where English keeps a **t**, German often shows an **s**. Line them up and the pattern is one column wide:

English	German
that	das
it	es
what	was

Same word, one consonant apart — and *das*, the neuter “the,” is *es*’s close relative, which is why both point at things rather than people.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “es” (*ess*) — “it”
- “it” then “es”; “that” then “das” — the same t/s swap, twice
- “es geht” — “it goes”

Before you move on

What is *es*? (“It.”) Which English consonant turns up as *s* in German? (*T* — *it/es*, *that/das*, *what/was*.) Say “it goes.” (*Es geht*.)

3.7 mir — “to me,” the third coat that *ich* wears

You have *ich* (“I,” the doer) and *mich* (“me,” the done-to). German keeps a **third** form for a different job — and English keeps the same job without a special word for it.

You’ll want to know: mir

mir — “to me, for me.”

Said *meer*: a long *ee*, and a soft German **r** at the end that is barely more than a vowel — closer to *mee-uh* than to an English *meer*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

German marks *the person something happens to* with a form of its own. It is called the **dative** — the “to-whom” form.

Job	German	English
the doer	<i>ich</i>	I
the done-to	<i>mich</i>	me
the to-whom	<i>mir</i>	to me

English merged the last two into one word, *me*, and now signals the difference by **word order** instead: “she gave **me** the book” — *me* is the to-whom there, even though it looks identical to the done-to *me* in “she saw me.” German never merged them, so it can put the to-whom anywhere and still be clear.

That is why wellbeing works the way it does: something *goes*, and it goes **to a person**. The person is in the dative.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three coats — “ich”, “mich”, “mir”

- “mir” (*meer*) — “to me”
- “es geht mir” — “it goes to me”

Before you move on

What does *mir* mean? (“To me, for me.”) Which of *ich* / *mich* / *mir* is the to-whom form? (*Mir*.) How does English show that job instead? (By word order — “gave *me* the book.”)

3.8 dir — “to you,” and English used to have it too

Mir is “to me.” To ask how someone else is doing, you need the same form pointed the other way.

You’ll want to know: dir

dir — “to you,” the to-whom form of *du*.

Said *deer*, with the same soft trailing **r** as *mir*. The two rhyme, which is the easiest way to remember they are a pair.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

dir is English **thee** — the old to-you form, from the same Germanic root, with the *th* hardened to *d* exactly as *das* answers *that*. English has not lost it entirely. It is fossilised in old phrases: “I give **thee** thanks,” “woe is **thee**.” Those are datives — *thee* was never the doer, always the to-whom, which is precisely *dir*’s job. So the pattern completes itself:

doer	to-whom
<i>ich</i>	<i>mir</i>
<i>du</i>	<i>dir</i>

Remember: *dir* belongs to *du*, so it is for friends and family. A stranger gets a different word, and that is the next lesson.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mir” then “dir” — they rhyme
- “du” then “dir” — doer, then to-whom
- “dir” and English “thee” — the same word

Before you move on

What does *dir* mean? (“To you.”) Which English word is it? (*Thee*.) Whom do you say *dir* to? (Someone you call *du* — a friend or family.)

3.9 Wie geht es dir? — “how are you?”

Nothing new is coming. You have all four words — *wie*, *geht*, *es*, *dir*. This lesson only puts them in order.

You’ll want to know: Wie geht es dir?

Wie geht es dir? — “How are you?”

Word for word: “How goes it to you?”

German	English
<i>wie</i>	how
<i>geht</i>	goes
<i>es</i>	it
<i>dir</i>	to you

Said *vee gayt es deer* — remember German **w** says *v*, and *ie* is a long *ee*.

Every piece has been earned: *wie* from asking someone’s name, *geht* from *gehen*, *es* and *dir* from the last two lessons. This is what the book has been building toward — a real question assembled from parts, not memorised whole.

You’ll want to know: Wie geht’s?

In speech, *geht es* crushes together into **geht’s**:

Wie geht’s? — the form you will actually hear.

It drops the *dir* entirely, which makes it neutral: no need to decide between friend and stranger. When in doubt, this is the safe one.

And you can already answer it:

Wie geht's? — Danke, gut!

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Wie geht es dir?” — *vee gayt es deer*
- the four pieces — “wie”, “geht”, “es”, “dir”
- the short form — “Wie geht's?”
- the whole exchange — “Wie geht's?” ... “Danke, gut!”

Before you move on

What does *Wie geht es dir?* say word for word? (“How goes it to you?”) What contracts into *geht's?* (*Geht es.*) Why is *Wie geht's?* the safe form? (It drops *dir*, so it needs no friend-or-stranger choice.)

3.10 Ihnen — “to you,” said at a respectful distance

Dir is for a friend. But you already know German splits its “you” in two, and the polite half needs its own to-whom form.

You'll want to know: Ihnen

Ihnen — “to you,” formal.

Said *EE-nen*: the **h** is silent and merely stretches the *i* into a long *ee*, the same trick as in *gehen*. Stress the front.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Ihnen is, underneath, “to **them**.” German’s polite “you” is the third-person plural borrowed wholesale: rather than address you directly, the language speaks of you as though you were a group —

distance as respect. *Sie* is “they” used as “you”; *Ihnen* is “to them” used as “to you.”

The capital letter is doing real work. Written small, *ihnen* means “to them” about actual other people. Written **Ihnen**, it is aimed at the person you are speaking to. Same sound, and only the page can tell them apart.

to whom	informal	formal
you	<i>dir</i>	<i>Ihnen</i>

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ihnen” (*EE-nen*) — long *ee*, silent *h*
- “dir” then “Ihnen” — friend, then stranger
- “Sie” and “Ihnen” — the polite pair

Before you move on

What does *Ihnen* mean? (“To you,” formally.) What does it literally say? (“To them.”) What does the capital **I** tell you? (It is aimed at the listener, not at other people.)

3.11 Wie geht es Ihnen? — the same question, at a distance

You have the question for a friend, and you have the formal to-whom word. Putting them together needs no new grammar at all — just a swap.

You’ll want to know: **Wie geht es Ihnen?**

Wie geht es Ihnen? — “How are you?”, to a stranger or an elder.

Listener	Question
friend, family	<i>Wie geht es dir?</i>
stranger, elder	<i>Wie geht es Ihnen?</i>

Three of the four words never move. Only the last one changes.

Grammar Lens: politeness lives in the pronoun

This is a rule worth generalising: **German carries politeness in the pronoun, not in the sentence.** English reaches for extra words to be polite — “I was wondering whether you might...” — and stacks them in front. German usually leaves the sentence exactly as it is and changes *who you are calling the person*.

You saw the same move with *du* and *Sie*. Here it reaches the dative: *dir* becomes *Ihnen*, and the politeness is done.

And when you would rather not choose at all, the contraction sidesteps it: **Wie geht's?** names no listener, so it commits to nothing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- to a friend — “Wie geht es dir?”
- to a stranger — “Wie geht es Ihnen?”
- the pair back to back, hearing only the last word change
- the neutral escape — “Wie geht's?”

Before you move on

What is the formal “how are you?” (*Wie geht es Ihnen?*) How many words change from the informal? (One — *dir* to *Ihnen*.) Where does German keep its politeness? (In the pronoun, not in extra words.)

3.12 sehr — “very,” and it used to mean “sorely”

Gut answers “how are you?” perfectly well. One small word in front of it turns a polite answer into a warm one.

You'll want to know: sehr

sehr — “very.”

Said *zair*: German **s** before a vowel buzzes like English **z**, the **h** is silent and stretches the vowel, and the **r** softens almost to *ah*.

Sehr gut! — “Very well!”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sehr is English **sore**. In Middle High German it meant *painfully*, *grievously* — and intensifiers very often start life as words for pain, then fade into pure degree. English did exactly the same thing and then half forgot: “**sorely** missed,” “**sore** afraid” both mean *very*, not *painful*.

So *sehr gut* is, at the root, “sorely good” — and English *very* went the same road from a different start, having once meant *truly* (French *vrai*).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sehr” (*zair*) — buzzing **z**, silent **h**
- “sehr gut” — very well
- “danke sehr” — thanks very much

Before you move on

What does *sehr* mean? (“Very.”) Which English word is it? (*Sore* — as in “sorely missed.”) Answer warmly. (*Sehr gut!*)

3.13 nicht — “not,” the same word as English *naught*

Not every day is a good one. To say so, you need the one word that turns any German sentence around.

You'll want to know: nicht

nicht — “not.”

Said *nikht*: the **ch** is the soft ich-sound from *ich* and *mich*, not the throat-scrape of *Nacht*. The vowel before it is short.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

nicht and English **not** are one word. Both come from a Germanic phrase meaning *no thing at all* — literally “not a whit.” English shows the longer form still: **naught** (and **nought**, the zero) is the undressed version, and *not* is what happens when centuries of fast speech wear it down.

So the pair lines up with the *ch* rule you already have:

English	German
naught	nicht
night	Nacht

That English *gh* is a fossil: it once *was* the German *ch* sound, and English stopped pronouncing it while keeping the letters.

Now the answer ladder reaches downward:

Nicht so gut. — “Not so good.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nicht” (*nikht*) — soft *ch*
- “naught” then “nicht”; “night” then “Nacht”
- “nicht so gut” — not so good

Before you move on

What does *nicht* mean? (“Not.”) Which English word is it, undressed? (*Naught*.) What does English *gh* used to be? (The German *ch* sound.)

3.14 so lala — “so-so,” and the tune carries it

You can now say *gut* and *nicht so gut*. Between them sits the honest middle, and German fills it with a word that means nothing whatsoever.

You’ll want to know: so lala

so lala — “so-so, middling, could be worse.”

Said *zo LAH-lah*, with the voice rising and falling across the *lala* — a shrug set to music. Say it flat and it lands wrong; the tune is most of the meaning.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

There is nothing to take apart, and that is the point. **so** is English **so**. **lala** is not a word at all — it is the same *lalala* you hum when you do not know the lyrics, pressed into service as a meaning. This is not a German quirk. Reach for “so-so” in almost any language and you find a small repeated noise doing the work, because a shrug is easier to sing than to say.

Why it’s said this way

The shrug collection, four deep across the books in this series:

Language	The shrug	Literally
German	<i>so lala</i>	“so la-la”
French	<i>comme ci, comme ça</i>	“like this, like that”
Spanish	<i>más o menos</i>	“more or less”
Italian	<i>così così</i>	“so so”

Three of the four work by **repetition** — say a small thing twice and it comes out meaning *neither one nor the other*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “so lala” with the tune — up, then down
- the ladder — “sehr gut”, “gut”, “so lala”, “nicht so gut”

- the four shrugs — *so lala*, *comme ci comme ça*, *más o menos*, *così così*

Before you move on

What does *so lala* mean? (“So-so.”) What does *lala* mean on its own? (Nothing — it is pure sing-song.) What do three of the four shrugs have in common? (They repeat a small word.)

3.15 *es geht* — the German shrug: “it goes”

Someone asks *Wie geht's?* You are neither great nor terrible. German has an answer for exactly that, and it is made of two words you already own.

You'll want to know: *es geht*

es geht — “it goes.” → “So-so. I'm getting by.”

Nothing has been added. That is the whole trick.

Es geht mir gut says it goes **well**. Take the *gut* away and German does not become vague — it becomes *pointed*. The listener was waiting for a *gut* or a *schlecht*, and you gave neither. The **absence** is the meaning.

English does this too, with tone rather than deletion: “It's... going.”

Grammar Lens: the answer ladder

You now hold the whole range, top to bottom, with no word left unexplained:

Answer	Sense
<i>Sehr gut!</i>	very well
<i>Gut, danke.</i>	well, thanks
<i>Es geht.</i>	so-so, getting by
<i>So lala.</i>	so-so, sung with a shrug
<i>Nicht so gut.</i>	not so well

Es geht and *so lala* sit on the same rung and differ only in mood: *es geht* is dry and a little stoic, *so lala* is light and musical. Choose by the face you want to make.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “es geht” — flat, unhurried
- “es geht mir gut”, then just “es geht” — hear the *gut* go missing
- the ladder top to bottom — “Sehr gut”, “Gut danke”, “Es geht”, “So lala”, “Nicht so gut”

Before you move on

What does *es geht* mean literally, and in use? (“It goes”; “so-so.”)
 What makes it mean so-so? (The missing *gut* — the absence is the message.) Which answer sits at the top of the ladder? (*Sehr gut.*)
 At the bottom? (*Nicht so gut.*)

3.16 und — “and,” and how to hand the question back

Someone asks how you are; you answer. A conversation only starts when you ask back — and German returns the question in two words.

You’ll want to know: und

und — “and.”

It is English **and** with the vowel darkened, and it has barely changed in a thousand years — one of the oldest words either language still uses daily.

Sounds you’ll need

- **d-t-final** — say *oont*, not *oond*. German hardens a **d** at the end of a word into a **t**. It is the same rule that makes *Tag* come out as *tock* rather than *tahg*: whatever the spelling, a final consonant goes voiceless. So *und* rhymes with English *hunt*, not with *shunned*.

Grammar Lens: returning the question

Hand the question back by naming the other person — in the **to-whom** form, because it is short for “and how goes it *to you?*”

To a friend**To a stranger***und dir?**und Ihnen?*

Not *und du* — the dative is doing real work here, and using the doer-form is the giveaway of a beginner. The same shape appears across the series: Spanish *¿y tú?*, French *et toi?*

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “und” (*oont*, hard *t*)
- “und dir?” — and you, to a friend
- “und Ihnen?” — and you, to a stranger

Before you move on

How is *und* pronounced, and why? (*Oont* — a final *d* hardens to *t*.) Return the question to a friend. (*Und dir?*) To a stranger? (*Und Ihnen?*) Why not *und du*? (It is short for “how goes it *to you*” — the to-whom form.)

3.17 Practice — *Wie geht's?*, casually

No new words. Everything below has had its own lesson; this is the first time they run together at speed.

The exchange**German****English***Hallo! Wie geht's?*

Hi! How are you?

Gut, danke, und dir?

Well, thanks — and you?

Es geht.

So-so.

Danke! — Bitte.

Thanks! — You're welcome.

Four moves: greet, ask, answer-and-return, close the courtesy loop.

Grammar Lens: why *dir*, and not *du*

Und dir? keeps the dative because it is short for the full question — “and how goes it **to you**?” Saying *und du* would be the one wrong note in the whole exchange, and it is the commonest beginner slip there is.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole exchange, both voices
- “Wie geht’s? — Gut, danke.”
- “Und dir? — Es geht.”

Twice through: “Wie geht’s? — Gut, danke, und dir?”

Before you move on

Run the casual exchange without looking. Which answer is the so-so one? (*Es geht.*) Which word answers *danke*? (*Bitte.*) Why *dir* and not *du*? (The question means “how goes it *to you*” — the to-whom form.)

3.18 Formal practice — *Wie geht es Ihnen?*

Same exchange, same order, same verb. One word changes throughout — and that is the chapter’s whole argument about German politeness.

The exchange

German	English
<i>Guten Tag. Wie geht es Ihnen?</i>	Good day. How are you?
<i>Danke, gut. Und Ihnen?</i>	Well, thanks. And you?
<i>Es geht.</i>	So-so.
<i>Danke! — Bitte.</i>	Thanks! — You’re welcome.

Set it beside the casual version and the difference is two words, both of them the listener:

	Casual	Formal
the question	<i>Wie geht's?</i>	<i>Wie geht es Ihnen?</i>
the return	<i>und dir?</i>	<i>und Ihnen?</i>

Danke, gut, es geht and *bitte* do not shift at all. German courtesy words are register-neutral; the politeness is carried entirely by the pronoun.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the formal exchange, both voices
- “Wie geht es Ihnen? — Danke, gut.”
- “Und Ihnen? — Es geht.”

Twice through: “Wie geht es Ihnen? — Danke, gut. Und Ihnen?”

Before you move on

Which greeting opens the formal exchange? (*Guten Tag.*) Which dative pronoun appears twice? (*Ihnen.*) What changes from the casual version? (*Dir* becomes *Ihnen* — nothing else.) Where does German keep its politeness? (In the pronoun.)

Chapter 4

Farewells

Modes: 🗣️ voice (12) 👁️ eyes (1) ✍️ pen (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 7 of 16 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can end a German conversation politely, choose a farewell that fits the situation, and write German’s three distinctive marks — the eszett, the umlaut, and a capital on every noun.

German parts formally with a promise to see each other again, casually with a word that travelled from French through Walloon and Low German before it got here, and softly with bis — “until” — plus a word for time. This chapter takes auf Wiedersehen apart into the three words it is made of, then teaches bis as a recipe and fills its slot three times: bald, später, morgen. GE-C04-practice closes the arc with the first conversation that runs from hello to goodbye.

4.1 sehen — “to see,” and it is English see

The German goodbye is a promise to *see* each other again. Before you can say it, you need the verb — and you have met its spelling trick already.

You’ll want to know: sehen

sehen — “to see.”

The **-en** on the end is the infinitive ending you know from *gehen* and *heißen*: the dictionary form of every German verb wears it.

Sounds you'll need

- **h-silent-lengthening** — the same silent *h* as in *gehen*: it is not breathed, it only stretches the vowel. *ZAY-en*.
- **s-voiced** — a German *s* before a vowel buzzes like English **z**. So *sehen* opens with a *z*, not an *s*.

Put together: *ZAY-en*. Compare *gehen*, *GAY-en* — the two verbs rhyme, and they will keep rhyming through every form.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sehen and English **see** are the same word, both from Germanic ***sehwan**. There is no Latin in this line at all — unlike Spanish *ver* and French *voir*, which both come from Latin *vidēre* (the *vid-* you can still see in English **video** and **evident**).

So the two families split the sense of sight between them:

Family	“To see”	Still visible in English
Germanic	German <i>sehen</i> , English <i>see</i>	<i>see</i> , <i>sight</i>
Latin	Spanish <i>ver</i> , French <i>voir</i>	<i>video</i> , <i>vision</i> , <i>evident</i>

English, as usual, ended up owning both halves.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sehen” (*ZAY-en*) — buzzing *z*, silent *h*
- “gehen” then “sehen” — they rhyme
- “sehen” and English “see” — the same word

Before you move on

What does *sehen* mean, and which English word is it? (“To see”; *see*.) What does the *h* do? (Only lengthens the vowel.) Where does Spanish *ver* come from instead? (Latin *vidēre* — English *video*,

evident.)

4.2 wieder — “again,” and the *with* that means *back*

You have *sehen*, “to see.” The goodbye promises to see each other **again** — so the next piece is that “again.”

You’ll want to know: wieder

wieder — “again.”

Said *VEE-der*: the **w** says *v* and **ie** is a long *ee*, both rules you already met in *wie*. The final **-er** softens almost to *-uh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The obvious guess is that *wieder* is English **with**er. It is not. Its real cousin is the **with-** of **withdraw**, **withstand** and **withhold** — and that *with-* is not the ordinary English *with* meaning “alongside.” It is an older word meaning **back** or **against**:

- to **with**draw is to draw **back**
- to **with**stand is to stand **against**
- to **with**hold is to hold **back**

That older sense is exactly what *wieder* still carries: **back, again**. So when a German says *wieder*, they are saying the *with-* of *withdraw*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wieder” (*VEE-der*) — *v*, then a long *ee*
- “withdraw”, “withstand” — the *with-* that means *back*
- “wieder sehen” — to see again

Before you move on

What does *wieder* mean? (“Again.”) Which English word is it hiding in? (The *with-* of *withdraw*.) What does that *with-* mean there? (“Back” or “against” — not “alongside.”)

4.3 auf — “on, upon,” and it is English *up*

Two pieces down, one to go. The formal goodbye opens with a three-letter word that turns out to be one you say constantly in English.

You’ll want to know: auf

auf — “on, upon.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **au-diphthong** — German **au** is the *ow* of English *house*, never the *aw* of *caught*. So *auf* rhymes with English **owf**, not with *oaf*.
- **f-final** — the **f** is crisp and unvoiced at the end.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

auf is English **up**. The vowel drifted — German widened it to *au*, English kept it short — but it is one word, and the meanings still overlap almost exactly:

German	English
<i>auf</i>	up, upon, on
<i>aufstehen</i>	to stand up
<i>aufmachen</i>	to make up , to open

English **upon** is literally *up* + *on*, which is the same doubling German gets from *auf* alone. That is why *auf* translates sometimes as “up” and sometimes as “on”: English split the job into two words and German never did.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “auf” (*owf*) — the *ow* of *house*
- “auf” and English “up” — the same word
- “auf wieder sehen” — on the seeing-again

Before you move on

What does *auf* mean? (“On, upon.”) Which English word is it? (*Up*.) How is **au** pronounced? (Like the *ow* in *house*.)

4.4 auf Wiedersehen — “goodbye,” i.e. “till we see again”

Three lessons, three words. Now snap them together — nothing here is new.

You’ll want to know: auf Wiedersehen

auf Wiedersehen — “goodbye,” to a stranger, an elder, or on the telephone.

Said *owf VEE-der-zay-en*. Piece by piece:

German	English
<i>auf</i>	on, upon
<i>wieder</i>	again
<i>sehen</i>	to see

So it reads “**on the seeing-again**” → “until we see each other again.” Note the capital **W**: welded together the three words became a *noun*, and German capitalises every noun. *Ein Wiedersehen* on its own is “a reunion.”

Why it’s said this way

Set the three goodbyes side by side and each language shows what it thinks parting is:

Language	Goodbye	The metaphor
German	<i>auf Wiedersehen</i>	“till we see again”
French	<i>au revoir</i>	“till the re-seeing ”
Spanish	<i>adiós</i>	“to God ”

German and French shake hands on a re-seeing; Spanish commends you to God. The German and the French are not merely similar — they are the same sentence built from each language’s own parts.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “auf Wiedersehen” — *owf VEE-der-zay-en*
- pull it apart — “auf”, “wieder”, “sehen”
- “auf Wiedersehen” then “au revoir” — the same sentence, twice

Before you move on

What does *auf Wiedersehen* literally say? (“On the seeing-again.”)
 What are its three pieces? (*Auf, wieder, sehen.*) Why the capital **W**? (The welded word is a noun, and German capitalises nouns.)

4.5 tschüss — the casual “bye” that used to say “to God”

Between friends, Germans almost never say the full *auf Wiedersehen*. They say one clipped syllable — which hides the best secret in this chapter.

You’ll want to know: tschüss

tschüss — “bye.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **tsch-ch** — **tsch** is the *ch* of English **church**. So the word starts *chü-*, not *tsh-oo*.
- **umlaut-ue** — **ü** is made the way you made **ö**, but starting from *ee* instead of *ay*: say **ee**, then round your lips without moving your tongue.

Together: *chüss*, short and clipped, rhyming roughly with a rounded

chuess.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

tschüss looks purely German. Trace it back and it leaves the country entirely:

Step	Form	Language
1	<i>adieu</i> — “to God”	French
2	<i>adjûs</i>	Walloon (southern Belgium)
3	<i>atschüs</i>	Low German
4	<i>tschüss</i>	modern German

And since French *adieu* is à *Dieu*, “to God,” the breeziest German goodbye is a far-travelled cousin of French **adieu** and Spanish **adiós** — all three the same small blessing, just worn down further at each step. The friendliest, most throwaway German goodbye is secretly the most solemn one.

Grammar Lens: which goodbye, to whom

This is **register** — the same split you have drilled since *du* and *Sie*. Pick the parting to match the relationship:

Say	To
<i>tschüss</i>	friends, family, peers, casual shops
<i>auf Wiedersehen</i>	strangers, elders, officials, the telephone

If you would say *Sie* to them, say *auf Wiedersehen*.

Why it’s said this way

You will also hear **tschau**. That one is Italian *ciao*, borrowed straight and respect to German spelling rules — so German ended up with two casual goodbyes imported from two different Romance languages.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ee” then round your lips — “ü”

- “tschüss” — *chüss*, short and clipped
- the chain — “adieu”, “adjûs”, “atschüs”, “tschüss”

Before you move on

What does *tschüss* secretly mean? (“To God” — it is *adieu*.) Which Spanish word is its cousin? (*Adiós*.) Whom do you say it to? (Anyone you would call *du*.)

4.6 bis — “until,” and the shape of every soft goodbye

You have the formal goodbye and the casual one. Between them sits a whole family of softer partings, and every one of them starts with the same small word.

You’ll want to know: bis

bis — “until, up to.”

Said *biss*: a short *i* as in English *bit*, and a crisp unvoiced *s* at the end — this one does *not* buzz, because the buzzing rule only applies before a vowel.

Grammar Lens: bis plus a time word

bis is a **recipe**, not a phrase. Put a word for time after it and you have a goodbye:

bis + *a time* → “see you *then*”

The other two languages in this book build their soft goodbyes exactly the same way, which means once you own the recipe you own three languages’ worth of it:

Language	The preposition	Example
German	<i>bis</i>	<i>bis ...</i>
Spanish	<i>hasta</i>	<i>hasta ...</i>
French	<i>à</i>	<i>à ...</i>

The next three lessons each supply one time word to pour into the slot.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bis” (*biss*) — short *i*, crisp *s*
- the three prepositions — “bis”, “hasta”, “à”
- “bis ...” and leave the slot open

Before you move on

What does *bis* mean? (“Until, up to.”) What has to follow it to make a goodbye? (A word for time.) Which Spanish and French words do the same job? (*Hasta* and *à*.)

4.7 bald — “soon,” which is English *bold*

Bis is waiting for a time word. Here is the first one — and it is an English word you would never have guessed.

You’ll want to know: bald

bald — “soon.”

Said *balt*, not *bald*: the final **d** hardens to **t** by **final devoicing**, the rule you met on *und* and on *Tag*. It has nothing to do with English *bald* (hairless) — that is a pure coincidence of spelling.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bald is English **bold**.

Old High German *bald* meant “bold, brave, quick.” Then the sense drifted along a line that is easy to walk: what is done **boldly** is done **without hesitating** → done **quickly** → happening **soon**.

German followed the speed. English followed the courage. One word, two destinations — and English still keeps a trace of the German path in the archaic “**full boldly**” meaning *promptly*, and in the way *bold* can still mean *sudden* in older writing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bald” (*balt*, hard *t*)
- “bald” and English “bold” — one word, two senses
- “bis bald” — until soon

Before you move on

What does *bald* mean? (“Soon.”) Which English word is it? (*Bold* — not *bald*.) How did “brave” become “soon”? (What is done boldly is done quickly.)

4.8 bis bald — “see you soon”

The recipe and the first ingredient are both yours. Pour one into the other.

You’ll want to know: bis bald

bis bald — “until soon” → “see you soon.”

Said *biss BALT*, with the stress on the second word and that final **d** hardening to **t**.

Use it when you genuinely expect to see the person before long — it carries a small promise the way English “see you soon” does, and it sounds odd to someone you are unlikely to meet again.

Its twins: Spanish *hasta pronto*, French *à bientôt*. All three are the same two-word recipe — preposition plus “soon.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bis bald” — *biss BALT*
- the three twins — “bis bald”, “hasta pronto”, “à bientôt”
- “Tschüss, bis bald!”

Before you move on

What does *bis bald* mean, word for word? (“Until soon.”) When would you not use it? (When you do not expect to see the person before long.) What is the recipe? (*Bis* plus a time word.)

4.9 spät — “late,” and *später*, your first comparative

Bis bald is for soon. For a vaguer “see you around,” German needs “later” — and it builds that from “late” exactly the way English does.

You’ll want to know: spät

spät — “late.”

The **ä** is the vowel you met in *Nächte*: roughly the *e* of English *bed*, held a little longer.

Sounds you’ll need

- **st-initial-scht** — a German **st** at the *start* of a word is said **sht**. So *spät* opens like English *shp*, not *sp*: **shpayt**.

The same rule gives *Stadt* as *shtat* and *Straße* as *shtrahsse*. It is one of the fastest ways to stop sounding like a beginner, and it costs one rule.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Add **-er** and you have the comparative:

German	English
<i>spät</i>	late
<i>später</i>	later

That **-er** is not a coincidence and not a borrowing — English and German inherited the same comparative ending from the same ancestor. *Late/later*, *spät/später*: one pattern, two languages. So the second goodbye in the family is **bis später**, “until later” — the twin of Spanish *hasta luego* and French *à plus tard*, and the one to reach for when you have no idea when you will actually meet again.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “spät” (*shpayt*) — *sht*, not *st*
- “spät” then “später” — late, then later
- “bis später” — until later

Before you move on

What does *spät* mean, and *später*? (“Late”; “later.”) How is an initial **st** pronounced? (*Sht* — *shpayt*.) Which ending makes the comparative, in both languages? (**-er**.)

4.10 bis später — “see you later”

Second ingredient into the same slot — and this one commits to nothing at all, which is exactly why it is the most used.

You’ll want to know: bis später

bis später — “until later” → “see you later.”

Said *biss SHPAY-ter* — remember the initial **st** is *sht*.

Where *bis bald* promises “before long,” *bis später* promises nothing: it is the German equivalent of a wave. That vagueness makes it the safe default when you have no idea when you will meet again.

German	Spanish	French
<i>bis später</i>	<i>hasta luego</i>	<i>à plus tard</i>

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bis später” — *biss SHPAY-ter*
- “bis bald” then “bis später” — soon, then vaguely
- the twins — “hasta luego”, “à plus tard”

Before you move on

What does *bis später* mean? (“Until later.”) How does it differ from *bis bald*? (*Bald* promises soon; *später* promises nothing.) How do you say the initial **st**? (*Sht.*)

4.11 morgen — “tomorrow,” the same word doing a second job

No new word this time — a word you have had since chapter one, doing something you have not seen it do.

You’ll want to know: morgen

morgen — “tomorrow.”

Same spelling as the *Morgen* of *Guten Morgen*, same sound: *MOR-gen*, with the German **r** made at the back of the throat.

Grammar Lens: the capital letter splits the sense

German capitalises every noun. That rule usually just makes text look busy — here it does real work:

Written	Part of speech	Means
<i>der Morgen</i>	noun	the morning
morgen	adverb	tomorrow

Guten Morgen! is “good **morning**.” *Bis morgen* is “until **tomorrow**.” The capital is the only thing telling them apart on the page — and once you know that, German’s noun-capitalisation stops being decoration and starts being punctuation you can read.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

This morning-becomes-tomorrow move is not a German quirk. All three languages make “tomorrow” out of “morning”:

Language	Morning	Tomorrow
German	<i>Morgen</i>	<i>morgen</i>
Spanish	<i>mañana</i>	<i>mañana</i>
French	<i>matin</i>	<i>demain</i>

And English did it too, then half forgot: **morrow** meant *morning*, and **tomorrow** is literally *to (the) morrow*. So *bis morgen* is “see you on the morrow,” almost word for word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Guten Morgen” — good morning, capital M
- “bis morgen” — until tomorrow, small m
- “morrow” then “morgen” — the same old word

Before you move on

What are the two meanings of *morgen*? (“Morning” and “tomorrow.”) What tells them apart in writing? (The capital letter — nouns take one.) Which English word is the old “morning”? (*Morrow*, still inside *tomorrow*.)

4.12 bis morgen — “see you tomorrow”

Third ingredient, and the most definite of the three: a goodbye with an actual date on it.

You’ll want to know: bis morgen

bis morgen — “until tomorrow” → “see you tomorrow.”

Said *biss MOR-gen*. Small **m**: here *morgen* is the adverb “tomorrow,” not the noun *der Morgen*, “the morning.”

This is the one you say leaving work, or leaving a class you both attend again the next day. Unlike *bis bald* and *bis später*, it makes a claim that can be checked.

Grammar Lens: the bis... family, complete

One preposition, three time words, three goodbyes — and the same three in Spanish and French, built the same way:

German	Means	Spanish / French twin
<i>bis bald</i>	soon	<i>hasta pronto / à bientôt</i>
<i>bis später</i>	later	<i>hasta luego / à plus tard</i>
<i>bis morgen</i>	tomorrow	<i>hasta mañana / à demain</i>

You now hold German's whole farewell set: the formal *auf Wiedersehen*, the casual *tschüss*, and these three soft partings.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bis morgen” — *biss MOR-gen*, small *m*
- all three — “bis bald”, “bis später”, “bis morgen”
- “Tschüss, bis morgen!”

Before you move on

What does *bis morgen* mean? (“Until tomorrow.”) Why the small **m**? (It is the adverb “tomorrow,” not the noun “morning.”) Name all three *bis...* goodbyes. (*Bald*, *später*, *morgen*.)

4.13 ß — the letter that is two s's in a coat

German has one letter no other Latin alphabet uses. You have already written it without being told what it was: *heißen*.

You'll want to know: ß

ß — the *eszett*, or *scharfes S*, “sharp S.”

It is not a capital *B*, and it is not exotic. It is **ss** wearing a single character, and it always sounds like a plain sharp *s* — never a *z*, never a *b*.

It is a **ligature**: two letters fused into one shape. Its name says which two. *Es-zett* is literally “s-z” — in the old German hand the **long s** (a tall *s* drawn like an *f* without its crossbar) was joined to a following *s* or *z*, and the join hardened into **ß**.

Grammar Lens: ß after long, ss after short

Modern spelling gives it one clean job, and it is a genuinely useful one — the letter tells you how long to hold the vowel *before* it.

ß — long vowel	ss — short vowel
<i>Straße</i> (long <i>a</i>)	<i>Fluss</i> (short <i>u</i>)
<i>Fuß</i> (long <i>u</i>)	<i>muss</i> (short <i>u</i>)
<i>weiß</i> (diphthong <i>ei</i>)	<i>Kuss</i> (short <i>u</i>)
<i>groß</i> (long <i>o</i>)	<i>Schloss</i> (short <i>o</i>)

So seeing **ß** means “the vowel before me is long.” *Straße* stretches its *a*; *Fluss* clips its *u*. One letter, two pieces of information.

Writing — drawing the eszett

Draw it as a tall loop joined to a descending tail — the long-s curve, then the s/z finish. Copy **weiß** once with the model in view, then **Straße**.

Say each word as you finish it, and stretch the vowel the **ß** is telling you to stretch.

Why it’s said this way

Two things worth knowing about where you will and will not see it:

- **It has no everyday capital.** No German word begins with *ß*, so in ALL-CAPS you traditionally write **SS**: *STRASSE*. A capital eszett was finally made official in 2017, but *SS* is still what you will see.
- **Switzerland dropped it entirely.** Swiss German always writes *ss* — *Strasse*. So *ß* on a sign is a Germany-and-Austria marker.

Before you move on

What two letters is **ß** made of, and what does its name say? (*s* and *z* — *es-zett*.) What does it tell you about the vowel before it? (That it is long.) How is it written in all-caps, and where is it not used at all? (*SS*; Switzerland.)

4.14 ä ö ü — the two dots that used to be an *e*

You have already made two of these sounds — the **ö** of *schön* and the **ü** of *tschüss*. Now meet the mark itself, and what it is doing there.

You'll want to know: the umlaut

Umlaut — the two dots on **ä ö ü**, which shift the vowel *forward* in the mouth.

Um-laut is “around-sound” (*um*, around + *Laut*, sound). Say the plain vowel, then brighten it toward *ee*:

Plain	Umlauted	How
a → ä	<i>Mann</i> → <i>Männer</i>	<i>ah</i> becomes the <i>e</i> of <i>bed</i>
o → ö	<i>schon</i> → <i>schön</i>	<i>oh</i> becomes a rounded <i>eh</i>
u → ü	<i>Mutter</i> → <i>Mütter</i>	<i>oo</i> becomes <i>ee</i> with rounded lips

They look like the French tréma and do the opposite job: a tréma **splits** two vowels, an umlaut **changes** one.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The dots are a fossil. The fronting was originally caused by an **e** in the *next* syllable, and scribes marked it by writing a tiny **e above the vowel**. In the old German hand that *e* was two little vertical strokes — which, shrunk and simplified, became two dots.

So an umlaut is a **flattened e sitting on top of the vowel**, and that is exactly why the ASCII fallbacks put it back on the line:

With dots	Ghost <i>e</i> restored
<i>Müller</i>	Mueller
<i>schön</i>	schoen
<i>Bär</i>	Baer

Grammar Lens: the umlaut does real work

Umlauts are not decoration. Fronting a vowel is how German marks whole grammatical changes, so learn to *expect* it:

Base	Umlauted	What changed
<i>Mann</i> (man)	<i>Männer</i>	plural
<i>Buch</i> (book)	<i>Bücher</i>	plural
<i>groß</i> (big)	<i>größer</i>	comparative
<i>Hund</i> (dog)	<i>Hündchen</i>	diminutive

When a German word brightens its vowel, something grammatical happened to it — usually *more than one*, *more*, or *smaller*.

Writing — the two dots

Two dots, side by side, sitting squarely **above** the vowel — not slanted, and not joined. Copy **schön** once with the model in view, then **Mütter**.

Say each word as you finish it, and let the vowel brighten as you write the dots.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Mann” then “Männer” — hear the vowel brighten for the plural
- “Mutter” then “Mütter” — *ee* with rounded lips
- “schön” then “schoen” — put the ghost *e* back down

Before you move on

What does *Umlaut* literally mean? (“Around-sound.”) What are the dots, historically? (A shrunk *e* that migrated on top.) What is the fallback spelling for *ü*? (*ue*.) Name one grammar job the umlaut

does. (Plural, comparative, or diminutive.)

4.15 Großschreibung — why German capitalises every noun

You met this rule with *der Tag*, and you used it to tell *Morgen* from *morgen*. Now here it is in full — and it turns out to be doing more work than it looks.

You'll want to know: Großschreibung

Großschreibung — “capital-writing.” Every noun takes a capital, anywhere in the sentence.

Not just names or sentence starts — *every* noun:

Der Hund frisst das Essen in der Küche. — “The dog eats the food in the kitchen.”

Three nouns, three capitals, two of them mid-sentence. Also capitalised: the polite *Sie*, and any word *used as a noun* (*das Gute*, “the good”).

(The word itself shows off two things you now know: the **ß**, and the initial **st** said *sht* — *GROHSS-shry-boong*.)

Grammar Lens: the capital is a part-of-speech signal

The capital carries **meaning**. It separates words spelt alike that do different jobs:

Lower-case	Capital, so a noun
<i>essen</i> — to eat	<i>das Essen</i> — the food
<i>jung</i> — young	<i>der Junge</i> — the boy
<i>laut</i> — loud	<i>der Laut</i> — the sound

This is the same machinery that split *morgen* from *Morgen*. With *der/die/das* in front as well, German flags its nouns **twice** — which is why long German sentences are easier to parse, not harder.

Why it's said this way

English used to do this too: read a page of 1700s English and the Nouns are Capitalised. English dropped the habit in the eighteenth century; German kept it and wrote it into the rules. It is a living fossil of older European printing.

Writing — applying the rule

Capitalise the first letter of every noun, wherever it sits. Two tests if you are unsure: is there a *der/die/das* in front, or does it end in *-ung*, *-heit* or *-schaft*? Those are noun factories — *Zeitung*, *Freiheit*, *Freundschaft*.

Copy **Der Hund frisst das Essen** once, then write *Guten Morgen* and *bis morgen* one under the other and check every capital.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Der Hund frisst das Essen” — every noun capitalised
- “essen” then “das Essen” — the capital flips it from doing to thing
- “Guten Morgen” then “bis morgen” — the same flip, in a word you own

Before you move on

Which words does German capitalise? (Every noun, anywhere — plus *Sie*.) What does the capital tell you? (That the word is a noun: *essen* versus *das Essen*.) Which language used to do this and stopped? (English, in the 1700s.)

4.16 Practice — hello to goodbye, in one conversation

No new words. This is the first conversation you can run from the first word to the last — everything in it has had its own lesson.

Grammar Lens: which farewell, when

You are...	Say
formal, to a stranger	<i>Auf Wiedersehen.</i>
casual, to a friend	<i>Tschüss.</i>
meeting again soon	<i>Bis bald.</i>
making no promises	<i>Bis später.</i>
leaving for the day	<i>Bis morgen.</i>

The exchange

Everything from your first greeting to here, in one conversation:

German	English
<i>Hallo! Ich heie Anna. Wie heien Sie?</i>	Hello! My name is Anna. What is your name?
<i>Ich heie Peter. Freut mich.</i>	My name is Peter. Pleased to meet you.
<i>Wie geht es Ihnen?</i>	How are you?
<i>Danke, gut. Und Ihnen?</i>	Well, thanks. And you?
<i>Sehr gut. Bis morgen, Peter.</i>	Very well. See you tomorrow, Peter.
<i>Bis morgen, Anna. Auf Wiedersehen!</i>	See you tomorrow, Anna. Goodbye!

Between friends, that last line becomes *Tschüss, bis morgen!* — and note that the whole exchange stayed formal because it opened formally with *Sie*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole exchange, both voices
- the closing pair — “Bis morgen.” ... “Auf Wiedersehen!”
- the casual version of that close — “Tschüss, bis morgen!”

Twice through: “Wie geht es Ihnen? — Danke, gut. Und Ihnen?”

Before you move on

Run the whole conversation without looking. Which goodbye promises a re-seeing? (*Auf Wiedersehen.*) Which one is secretly “to God”? (*Tschüss.*) Which would you use leaving a class you both attend tomorrow? (*Bis morgen.*)

Chapter 5

The First Verbs

Modes: ⇄ voice (15) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 15 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can conjugate any regular German verb, ask where someone lives and what they are doing, and build my own present-tense sentences instead of reciting them.

Until now the book handed over fixed phrases. This chapter hands over the machine: take the -en off a German verb and the stem that is left accepts six endings, learned once and applied to thousands of words. Three verbs run through it — wohnen, machen, lernen — along with the pronouns the paradigm needs and the question words wo and was. It ends with Ich lerne Deutsch, the first sentence in the book assembled from parts nobody handed over whole, and with the reason German keeps its pronoun when Spanish drops it.

5.1 wohnen — “to live,” and your first regular verb

Until now you have assembled fixed phrases. This chapter hands you the machine itself — and the first verb to run through it.

You’ll want to know: wohnen

wohnen — “to live, to dwell.”

Not *to be alive* — that is a different verb. *Wohnen* is where your bed is.

Sounds you'll need

- **w-as-v** — the **w** is an English *v*.
- **h-silent-lengthening** — the **h** only stretches the *o*, exactly as in *gehen* and *sehen*.

So: *VOH-nen*, with a long open *oh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

wohnen comes from Old High German *wonēn*, “to dwell, to be accustomed, to be content” — because dwelling somewhere and *being used to* it were the same idea.

That root survives in English, just barely, in **wont**: “as is his *wont*” means “as he is accustomed.” It is also kin to **win** and **wish** — all from one root about striving for something, or being content with it. So *wohnen* is not a stranger. It is the word behind *wont*, still doing the older job.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wohnen” (*VOH-nen*) — *v*, then a long *oh*
- “wohnen” and English “wont” — accustomed, at home
- “wohnen”, “gehen”, “sehen” — three verbs, one silent *h*

Before you move on

What does *wohnen* mean? (“To live, to dwell.”) Which English word is it? (*Wont* — accustomed.) What does the *h* do? (Only lengthens the *o*.)

5.2 der Stamm — drop the *-en*, and you have the machine

You met the ending-swap on *heißen*. Here is the piece underneath it, and it is the reason the swap works on every verb.

You'll want to know: the stem

The **stem** is what is left when you take **-en** off the dictionary form.

wohnen minus *-en* leaves **wohn-**. That is the part that never changes. The endings attach to it, and the dictionary form you look up is simply the stem already wearing one of them.

Grammar Lens: the three singular endings

Take *wohn-* and add:

Person	Ending	Form
<i>ich</i>	-e	<i>ich wohne</i>
<i>du</i>	-st	<i>du wohnst</i>

You saw *-e* on *ich heie*. The *-st* was hiding: *heien* ends in ****, and **** + *st* collapses to *heit*, so *du heit* never showed you the *s*. On a normal stem it is plain — *du wohnst*.

This is not special to *wohnen*. Every regular verb in German runs exactly this, which is why learning one is learning thousands.

Grammars call these **weak** verbs — “weak” because they take their endings meekly instead of changing their vowel the way *strong* verbs do. You will meet a strong one soon enough.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wohnen” then the stem — “wohn-”
- “ich wohne”, “du wohnst”
- the endings alone — *-e*, *-st*

Before you move on

How do you get the stem? (Drop *-en*.) What is the stem of *wohnen*? (*Wohn-*.) Which endings go with *ich* and *du*? (*-e* and *-st*.) Why did *du heit* not show the *s*? (**** and *st* collapse together.)

5.3 er · sie · es — “he,” “she,” “it,” and one ending for all three

You can talk about yourself and to one other person. To talk *about* someone you need three more pronouns — and you already own one of them.

You’ll want to know: er, sie, es

er — “he.” Said *air*, with the soft German *r*.

It pairs with the article you already know: **der** things are *er* things.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sie — “she.” Said *zee*.

Yes: the same sound and spelling as the polite *Sie*, and as the *sie* meaning “they.” German really does run three jobs through one word, and only the capital and the verb ending tell them apart. You will meet that properly later; for now, small **sie** with a *-t* ending means **she**. The three pronouns line up with the three articles, which is the whole reason German bothers with genders:

Article	Pronoun	English
<i>der</i>	<i>er</i>	he
<i>die</i>	<i>sie</i>	she
<i>das</i>	<i>es</i>	it

Grammar Lens: all three take -t

One ending covers all three — attach **-t** to the stem:

er wohnt · sie wohnt · es wohnt

English does the same thing with *-s* (*he lives, she lives, it lives*) and nowhere else in the paradigm. German’s *-t* is that same odd little marker.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “er”, “sie”, “es” — he, she, it
- “der/er”, “die/sie”, “das/es” — article, then pronoun
- “er wohnt”, “sie wohnt”, “es wohnt” — one ending, three people

Before you move on

Which pronoun goes with *der*? (*Er.*) With *die*? (*Sie.*) What ending do all three take? (*-t* — *er wohnt.*) Which English ending does the same job? (*-s*, as in *he lives.*)

5.4 wir — “we,” and an ending you have already been saying

Three singular people down. Now the plural — and the first one is nearly free.

You’ll want to know: wir

wir — “we.” Said *veer*, with the **w** as a *v* and the soft trailing *r*, so it rhymes with *mir* and *dir*.

It is English **we**, wearing German pronunciation. Nothing else to learn.

Grammar Lens: wir takes -en

Attach **-en** to the stem:

wir wohnen

Which is the dictionary form, unchanged. German’s infinitive and its *wir* form are identical, for every regular verb — so half of this ending was already in your head before you met it.

You have seen this once: *Sie heißen*, the polite form, is the same *-en*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wir” (*veer*) — it rhymes with “mir” and “dir”

- “wohnen” then “wir wohnen” — the same word twice
- “ich wohne”, “du wohnst”, “er wohnt”, “wir wohnen”

Before you move on

What does *wir* mean, and what does it rhyme with? (“We”; *mir* and *dir*.) Which ending does it take? (*-en*.) What else looks exactly like *wir wohnen*? (The dictionary form, *wohnen*.)

5.5 ihr — “you all,” the plural English threw away

Du is one friend. What if there are several? English has no clean answer any more. German does.

You’ll want to know: ihr

ihr — “you all,” the plural of *du*.

Said *eer*: the **h** is silent and lengthens the *i*, the same trick as in *Ihnen*.

Use it for a group you would each call *du* — friends, family, a team. For a group of strangers you still use *Sie*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English used to have this exact system and lost half of it. *Thou* was the singular and *ye/you* the plural — then *thou* faded, *you* took over both jobs, and English was left unable to say “you all” without inventing something: *y’all*, *you guys*, *yous*, *you lot*.

German never lost the distinction, so it needs no invention:

	Informal	Formal
one person	<i>du</i>	<i>Sie</i>
several people	<i>ihr</i>	<i>Sie</i>

Grammar Lens: ihr takes -t

Attach **-t** to the stem:

ihr wohnt

The same *-t* as *er wohnt*. Two different people, one ending — so context, not the verb, tells you which is meant. That is the only place the German present tense is ever ambiguous, and the pronoun clears it up instantly.

The paradigm is now complete: **-e · -st · -t · -en · -t · -en.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ihr” (*eer*) — you all
- “du wohnst” then “ihr wohnt” — one friend, then several
- the whole six — *wohne, wohnst, wohnt, wohnen, wohnt, wohnen*

Before you move on

What does *ihr* mean? (“You all.”) Which English word did the same job before it was lost? (*Ye* — leaving *y’all* to fill the gap.) Which ending does *ihr* share, and with whom? (*-t*, with *er/sie/es*.)

5.6 The endings you can actually hear

You have all six endings. Before moving on, one fact about them that makes German easier than it looks.

Grammar Lens: German endings are audible

Say them aloud and they genuinely differ:

wohne · wohnst · wohnt · wohnen

French writes just as many endings and pronounces almost none of them — *parle, parles, parlent* are three spellings of one sound. A French listener gets the person from the pronoun alone, because the verb tells them nothing.

German is the opposite. The verb carries real information, and you could very nearly tell who is speaking from the ending by itself.

That is worth knowing for two reasons. It makes listening easier than reading at first, and it makes the *next* question interesting: if German

endings say who the subject is, why does German still insist on the pronoun? That is the end of this chapter.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*wohne*”, “*ohnst*”, “*ohnt*” — three different sounds
- them again with your eyes closed, and hear the person change
- the full six in order

Before you move on

Are German verb endings audible? (Yes — *wohne*, *ohnst*, *ohnt* all differ.) And French ones? (Largely silent.) What does that let a German listener do? (Hear the person from the verb, not only the pronoun.)

5.7 in — the word that did not change

Ich wohne — I live. Live *where*? One more word and you have said something true about yourself.

You'll want to know: in

in — “in.”

Same spelling, same meaning, near enough the same sound: a short *i* as in English *bit*. This is one of the small handful of words German and English never bothered to change.

You have already met its neighbour *auf* (“on”). Between them they cover most of what English does with *in* and *on*.

You'll want to know: Ich wohne in ...

Put a place after it and the sentence is finished:

Ich wohne in Berlin. — “I live in Berlin.”

Swap the city for your own and the sentence is yours. This is the first thing in this book you can say about your actual life without being handed the whole line.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “in” — short *i*, exactly as in English
- “Ich wohne in Berlin.”
- the same sentence with the town you actually live in

Before you move on

What does *in* mean? (“In” — unchanged.) Say where you live. (*Ich wohne in ...*) Which word covers “on”? (*Auf*.)

5.8 wo — “where,” and the German w-questions

You can say where you live. To *ask* it, you need the question word — and it belongs to a family you have already started.

You’ll want to know: wo

wo — “where.” Said *voh*, a long *oh*.

Wo wohnst du? — “Where do you live?”

Note there is no extra “do” in German. English needs *do* to ask a question; German simply puts the question word first and the verb straight after it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

wo is English **where** with the *-re* worn away. And it is not alone — German’s question words are the English ones with **wh-** flattened to **w-**:

German	English
<i>wo</i>	where
<i>wie</i>	how
<i>wer</i>	who
<i>wann</i>	when
English spells them <i>wh</i> - and mostly says them <i>w</i> -; German just spells what it says. Once you spot the family, each new one costs almost nothing.	

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wo” (*voh*) — where
- “Wo wohnst du?” — no “do” needed
- the family — “wo”, “wie”, “wer”, “wann”

Before you move on

What does *wo* mean? (“Where.”) Ask someone where they live. (*Wo wohnst du?*) What happened to English *wh*- in German? (It flattened to *w*-.)

5.9 machen — “to make,” and it is exactly English *make*

Second verb — and it needs no new grammar at all. The stem-plus-ending machine you built on *wohnen* runs it unchanged.

You’ll want to know: machen

machen — “to make,” and also “to do.” German uses one verb for both.

Stem: **mach-**. So *ich mache*, *du machst*, *er macht*, *wir machen*, *ihr macht*, *sie machen*. Nothing new — that is the payoff of a regular pattern.

Sounds you'll need

- **ch-ach** — the **ch** after *a* is the raspy throat sound you met in *Nacht*, the *ch* of Scottish *loch*. Not the soft *ich* sound.

So: *MAKH-en*, with a clean open *ah*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

machen is English **make**, from Germanic *makōn*, “to shape, to fit together.” The *k* became the *ch* rasp on the way, by the same High German consonant shift that gave you *gut* from *good*:

English	German
make	machen
ik (old <i>I</i>)	ich
book	Buch

So *machen* is *make*, wearing German pronunciation.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “machen” (*MAKH-en*) — the *loch* rasp
- “make” then “machen”; “book” then “Buch”
- “ich mache”, “du machst”, “er macht”

Before you move on

What does *machen* mean? (“To make,” and “to do.”) Which English word is it? (*Make*.) Which *ch* does it use? (The raspy *ach*, not the soft *ich*.)

5.10 was — “what,” and the t-to-s swap one last time

You have *wo*. Here is its most useful sibling, and you can already predict how it is spelt.

You'll want to know: was

was — “what.” Said *vass*, short *a*, crisp *s*.

You met the rule that makes it: where English keeps a final **t**, German shows an **s**.

English	German
what	was
that	das
it	es

Third time you have seen this pair, and the last new word it gives you.

You'll want to know: Was machst du?

Was machst du? — “What are you doing?”

Question word first, verb second, subject third — the same shape as *Wo wohnst du?*. And note again that German needs no “do”: *machst* carries the whole question.

There is also no separate “am ...-ing” form in German. *Was machst du?* covers both “what do you do?” and “what are you doing?” — context decides.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “was” (*vass*) — what
- “what/was”, “that/das”, “it/es” — the swap three times
- “Was machst du?” then “Wo wohnst du?” — the same shape

Before you move on

What does *was* mean? (“What.”) Which swap explains its spelling? (English *t* shows up as German *s*.) Ask what someone is doing. (*Was machst du?*)

5.11 lernen — “to learn,” and its noun is *lore*

Third verb, same machine — and this is the one you are going to need to describe what you are doing right now.

You'll want to know: lernen

lernen — “to learn.”

Stem **lern-**: *ich lerne, du lernst, er lernt*. Three verbs now, one pattern.

Sounds you'll need

- **r-uvular-german** — the German **r** is a soft scrape at the back of the throat, nothing like the English *r* made with the tongue tip.

So: *LER-nen*, with a short *e* as in English *bed*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

lernen is English **learn** — the same Germanic root, barely disguised. Its relatives are the good part. The German noun is **die Lehre**, “the teaching, the body of what is taught” — and that word is English **lore**. Folklore is the *Lehre* of a folk; the lore of a craft is what its learners have accumulated.

So German kept the verb and the noun in the same family, and English kept both too — it just stopped noticing that *learn* and *lore* were relatives.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “lernen” (*LER-nen*) — scrape the *r* at the back
- “lernen” and English “learn”
- “die Lehre” and English “lore” — folklore

Before you move on

What does *lernen* mean? (“To learn.”) What is its noun, and which English word is that? (*Die Lehre*; *lore*.) Give the *ich* form. (*Ich lerne*.)

5.12 Deutsch — the language, and it means “of the people”

One noun stands between you and a sentence about what you are doing right now — the name of the language itself.

You’ll want to know: Deutsch

Deutsch — “German,” the language.

Capital **D**, because a language name is a noun and German capitalises every noun.

Sounds you’ll need

- **eu-diphthong** — German **eu** is the *oy* of English *boy*.
- **tsch-ch** — **tsch** is the *tch* of English *match*, the same cluster that opens *tschüss*.

So: *DOYTCH*, one syllable.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Deutsch comes from Old High German **diutisc**, “of the people, of the folk.” The Germanic tribes simply called their own tongue *the people’s language* — as opposed to Latin, the language of church and administration.

That root travelled a long way:

Word	Language	Route
<i>Deutsch</i>	German	<i>diutisc</i> , “of the people”
Dutch	English	the same word, later narrowed to the Netherlands
Teutonic	English	via Latin <i>Teutonicus</i>
<i>Tedesco</i>	Italian	its own echo of <i>diutisc</i>

So English **Dutch** and German **Deutsch** are not lookalikes — they are one word that drifted apart, and English simply pointed it at a smaller country.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Deutsch” (*DOYTCH*) — one syllable
- “Deutsch” then “Dutch” — the same old word
- what it meant — “of the people”

Before you move on

What does *Deutsch* literally mean? (“Of the people.”) Which English word is the same word? (*Dutch*.) Why the capital **D**? (It is a noun.)

5.13 Ich lerne Deutsch — your first real sentence

Nothing new is coming. Every piece of the next line has had its own lesson — and that is exactly the point.

You’ll want to know: Ich lerne Deutsch

Ich lerne Deutsch. — “I am learning German.”

Piece	Where it came from
<i>ich</i>	the introductions chapter
<i>lern-</i>	the stem of <i>lernen</i>
<i>-e</i>	the <i>ich</i> ending
<i>Deutsch</i>	the last lesson

This is the first sentence in the book that was **not handed to you**. You built it: a pronoun, a stem, an ending, a noun. Change any piece and it still works.

Remember there is no separate “am ...-ing” in German. *Ich lerne* covers both “I learn” and “I am learning,” so this one line does the work of two English tenses.

Grammar Lens: swap the pieces

The same slots take other words, and you already have all of them:

Ich wohne in Berlin. · *Was machst du?* · *Ich lerne*

Deutsch.

Three sentences, one machine. From here the language is combinations, not memorised lines.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich lerne Deutsch.” — *ikh LER-neh DOYTCH*
- it in pieces — “ich”, “lern-”, “-e”, “Deutsch”
- all three sentences in a row

Before you move on

Say “I am learning German.” (*Ich lerne Deutsch.*) Which four pieces is it made of? (*Ich*, the stem *lern-*, the ending *-e*, and *Deutsch.*) How does German say “I am learning” as opposed to “I learn”? (It does not — *ich lerne* is both.)

5.14 Why German keeps the pronoun

Here is the puzzle left open earlier. German endings *do* say who the subject is. So why say *ich* at all?

Grammar Lens: three languages, three reasons

Spanish, French and German each decide differently, and for different reasons:

Language	The pronoun	Why
Spanish	dropped	<i>hablo</i> already says “I”
French	kept	its endings are silent, so the pronoun is the only clue
German	kept	its grammar demands an overt subject

The German reason is the interesting one, because it is *not* about sound. German endings are perfectly audible — you proved that a few

lessons ago. The pronoun stays because a German sentence is built around the **verb in second position**, with something standing in front of it. Drop *ich* and there is nothing to hold that first slot. So German keeps the pronoun for **structure**, French for **sound**, and Spanish keeps neither because it needs neither. Three answers, and only one of them is about being understood.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich lerne Deutsch.” — with the pronoun, always
- the three reasons — Spanish drops, French keeps for sound, German keeps for structure
- “ich wohne”, “ich mache”, “ich lerne” — never without the *ich*

Before you move on

Why does German keep the pronoun? (Its grammar needs an overt subject — the verb sits second, so something must come first.) Why does French? (Its endings are silent.) Why does Spanish not need to? (*Hablo* already says “I.”)

5.15 Practice — building sentences, not reciting them

For the first time you are *building* German rather than repeating it. Run each verb through the three singular persons.

Grammar Lens: three verbs, one pattern

Verb	<i>ich · du · er</i>
<i>wohnen</i>	<i>wohne · wohnst · wohnt</i>
<i>machen</i>	<i>mache · machst · macht</i>
<i>lernen</i>	<i>lerne · lernst · lernt</i>

The same endings every time — **-e**, **-st**, **-t** — and, unlike French, you can hear all three. You still keep the pronoun, because German needs

an overt subject.

The exchange

German	English
<i>Wo wohnst du?</i>	Where do you live?
<i>Ich wohne in Berlin. Und du?</i>	I live in Berlin. And you?
<i>Ich wohne in Wien. Was machst du?</i>	I live in Vienna. What are you doing?
<i>Ich lerne Deutsch!</i>	I'm learning German!
<i>Sehr gut!</i>	Very good!
<i>Danke! — Bitte.</i>	Thanks! — You're welcome.

Every line is assembled from pieces you own. Nothing here was memorised whole.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole exchange, both voices
- each verb through *ich* / *du* / *er*
- the exchange again with your own city

Twice through: “Wo wohnst du? — Ich wohne in ...”

Before you move on

What are the three singular endings, and can you hear them? (-e, -st, -t; yes — unlike French.) Give the *ich* form of all three verbs. (*Ich wohne, ich mache, ich lerne.*) Why keep the pronoun? (German needs an overt subject.)

Chapter 6

One, Two, Three

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count one, two, three in German and say why each is the English number's twin rather than a Latin borrowing.

The first three numbers, one per lesson, and then the sound law that explains every difference between them and their English twins.

German's numbers were never borrowed from Latin; this chapter is where that stops being a claim and becomes something the reader can hear.

6.1 eins — “one,” and the German *ei*

Here is where German is closer to English than any Romance language gets. Its numbers are not borrowed from Latin — they are German's own, and they are the near-twins of the English ones. Start with the first.

You'll want to know: eins

eins — “one,” the number you say when you are counting.

Sounds you'll need

- diphthong-**ei** — German **ei** is the English word **eye**. Always, in every word, with no exceptions to remember.

So *eins* is *eyns*. You already own this one: *heißen* is *HY-ssen*, and

Wiedersehen has an *ie*, which is the other way round and says *ee*. **ei** says *eye*; **ie** says *ee*. The second letter tells you which.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

eins is English **one**. Not borrowed from it, not similar to it — the same inherited word, which is why it needs no story to make it stick. English hides the relationship in its spelling. *One* is written as though it rhymed with *bone*, and it did once; the *w*-sound at the front (*wun*) crept in later. Strip that off and *one* and *ein* are the same shape. The same word is also sitting inside English **a** and **an** — *an apple* is *one apple*, worn down. German does exactly the same thing with *eins*, and once the first five are learned there is a lesson on it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “eins” — *eyns*, with the English word *eye* inside it
- “eins” then “one” — the same old word
- “ei” as *eye*, “ie” as *ee* — the second letter decides

Before you move on

What is “one” in German? (*Eins*.) How is **ei** said? (Like the English word *eye*.) And **ie**? (*Ee*.) Which English word is *eins*? (*One* — and *a/an* underneath it.)

6.2 **zwei** — “two,” and the *z* that is a *ts*

One down. The second number has the same *ei* you met a moment ago, and one letter that does not say what an English reader expects.

You’ll want to know: **zwei**

zwei — “two.”

Said *tsvy*. The **z** is the *ts* of English *cats* — never the buzz of English *zoo*. That is the whole of the German **z**: it has one job and it never does anything else.

The other two letters you already own. The **w** is a *v*, as in *wohnen*, and the **ei** is *eye*, as in *eins*. So *zwei* is three rules you have and one that is new.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

zwei is English **two**, with the *tw*- opening turned into *zw*-.

English still says the *tw*- out loud in the words *two* grew from — **twin** (two born together), **between** (in the space of two), **twice**, **twenty**.

It only lost the *w* in the number itself, which is why *two* is spelt with a letter nobody pronounces. German kept the pair and shifted the *t* to *ts*:

tw- → *zw*:- **two** / *zwei*, **twin** / *Zwilling*, **twelve** / *zwölf*

So the silent *w* in English **two** is not a spelling accident. It is the *w* that German still says.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “zwei” — *tsvy*, the *z* like the end of *cats*
- “eins, zwei”
- “two”, “twin”, “between” — then “zwei”, and hear the *w* come back

Before you move on

What is “two”? (*Zwei*.) How is German **z** said? (*Ts*, as in *cats*.)

Which English words still say the *w* that *two* dropped? (*Twin*, *between*, *twice*.)

6.3 drei — “three,” and German’s missing *th*

Third number, third *ei*. And it shows you something that will keep paying: German has no **th** sound at all, and you can predict what it uses instead.

You'll want to know: drei

drei — “three.”

Said *dry*: the scraped *r* you met in *lernen*, and the *ei* saying *eye*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

drei is English **three**. German has no *th* at all, and where English says one, German says **d**. That is not a fact about numbers — it is a fact about the whole language, and you have been using it since your first *danke*:

English	German
three	drei
the	der, die, das
thank	danke
that	das

Five words, one swap. Whenever an English word starts with *th*, try a *d* and you will often land on the German.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “drei” — *dry*, scrape the *r*
- “eins, zwei, drei”
- the swap — “three/drei”, “the/der”, “thank/danke”

Before you move on

What is “three”? (*Drei*.) What does German use where English has **th**? (**D**.) Give three pairs. (*Three/drei, the/der, thank/danke*.)

6.4 Siblings, not borrowings

Drei, *three*, and Latin *tres* all mean three and all start with a different sound. Before the next seven numbers, it is worth knowing why — because the answer makes each of them cheaper to learn.

Grammar Lens: siblings and cousins

German and English are **siblings**. Latin is a **cousin**.

That is not a figure of speech. All three grew out of one older language, and Germanic — the parent of English and German — split off from the rest first. So *drei* did not come **from** *tres*, and English *three* did not either. All three are what one prehistoric word became along three different roads.

Which is why the German numbers are the easy ones and the Romance numbers are the hard ones, for an English speaker: *three* and *drei* are the same word two doors apart, while *tres* is the same word across the street.

Why it's said this way

The differences are not random. A **sound law** is a change that happened to *every* word in a language at once, so once you know one you can predict the rest.

You have already met one of these. *Gut* is *good* with the **d** turned to a **t**, and *machen* is *make* with the **k** turned to a **ch** — one shift, two words, and it caught every word in German that had those sounds. The shift that separates Germanic from Latin is older and works the same way. The two turns worth carrying into the next lessons are:

Older sound	Germanic sound	Seen in
t	th , and German d	Latin <i>tres</i> , English <i>three</i> , German <i>drei</i>
p	f	Latin <i>pes</i> “foot”, English <i>foot</i>

So when a Latin word and a German one sound nothing alike, try the first consonant before deciding they are unrelated. Often they are the same word, one law apart.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “tres”, “three”, “drei” — one word, three roads
- the two turns — “t becomes th”, “p becomes f”
- “good/gut”, “make/machen” — the shift you already knew

Before you move on

Is *drei* borrowed from Latin *tres*? (No — they are cousins, both from one older word.) What is a sound law? (A change that hit every word in the language at once, so it is predictable.) Which two turns should you carry forward? (Old **t** to **th/d**, old **p** to **f**.)

Chapter 7

Four, Five, and the Article Hiding in Eins

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count to five in German, run the whole five as one motion, and use ein and eine for “a”.

Four and five complete the first run, which is then said as one motion rather than five remembered words. The chapter closes on ein / eine: the counting form eins with its -s taken off, exactly as English a and an are one worn down.

7.1 vier — “four,” written with a *v* and said with an *f*

The fourth number is the easiest one yet — as long as you do not trust the first letter.

You’ll want to know: vier

vier — “four.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **v-as-f** — German **v** is said as an **f**. It is not a *v* sound; that job belongs to **w**.
- **ie-long-ee** — **ie** is a long *ee*, the mirror of **ei**.

So *vier* is *feer*. Put the two vowel rules side by side and the pair is settled for good:

Spelling	Sound	Example
ei	<i>eye</i>	<i>eins, zwei, drei</i>
ie	<i>ee</i>	<i>vier, wieder</i>

Both times, **the second letter is the one you say**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

vier is English **four**, and once you know the *v* is an *f* you can hear it: *feer, four*. Latin's cousin is *quattuor*, which is where Spanish *cuatro* and French *quatre* come from — so this is a number where English sides with German and not with the Romance languages at all.

The *v*-said-as-*f* is not special to this word. German writes **v** in a handful of its oldest words — *vier, Vater, von, voll* — and says every one of them with an *f*, which is exactly the letter English uses in *four, father, from, full*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vier” — *feer*, the *v* said as an *f*
- “eins, zwei, drei, vier”
- the vowel pair — “ei” as *eye*, “ie” as *ee*

Before you move on

What is “four”? (*Vier*, said *feer*.) How is German **v** said? (As an *f*.) Which letter carries the *v* sound instead? (**W**.) And how do you tell **ei** from **ie**? (Say the second letter.)

7.2 fünf — “five,” and the law you can hear

The fifth number closes the first hand — and it is the clearest example of a sound law anywhere in the language.

You'll want to know: fünf

fünf — “five.”

Sounds you'll need

- **umlaut-ue** — **ü** is an *ee* said with your lips rounded for an *oo*. Say *ee*, hold the tongue exactly where it is, and push your lips forward.

So *fünf* is roughly *fewnf*, in one syllable. This is the umlaut doing what you learned it does: it takes the back vowel **u** and drags it to the front of the mouth.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

fünf is English **five**, and the two of them are the sound law from the last lesson caught in the act.

The older word for five began with a **p**. Latin kept it — *quinque* still has one in the middle — and Germanic turned every one of those **ps** into an **f**. So English got *five* and German got *fünf*, both starting with the letter that was once a *p*:

old **p** → Germanic **f**: five / fünf, against Latin's *quinque*

Say *fünf* and *five* one after the other. They are the same word, and the whole distance between them and the Latin one is that single turn.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “fünf” — say *ee*, then round your lips without moving your tongue
- “fünf” then “five” — one word, one law apart
- “eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf”

Before you move on

What is “five”? (*Fünf*.) How do you make **ü**? (Say *ee* and round your lips.) Which sound turned into the **f** of *five* and *fünf*? (An older **p** — the one Latin kept.)

7.3 eins bis fünf — counting to five

Five words, one at a time. Counting is something else: it is the five of them running together without a pause to think. That is what this lesson is for, and nothing in it is new.

You'll want to know: the run

eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf

Said straight through: *eyns, tsvy, dry, feer, fewnf*.

Every one is the English number with a German coat on:

German	English	What changed
<i>eins</i>	one	nothing — English hid it in the spelling
<i>zwei</i>	two	the <i>tw</i> - German still says
<i>drei</i>	three	th flattened to d
<i>vier</i>	four	the v is said as an f
<i>fünf</i>	five	an older p , now an f in both

Not one of them is borrowed from Latin. All five are what an English speaker already half knows.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf” — straight through, no gaps
- it again, faster
- it backwards — “fünf, vier, drei, zwei, eins”

Twice through: “eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf”

Before you move on

Count to five. (*Eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf*.) Now backwards. (*Fünf, vier, drei, zwei, eins*.) Which of the five is borrowed from Latin? (None of them.)

7.4 ein und eine — when “one” becomes “a”

Eins is what you say while counting. Put it in front of a naming word and it changes shape — and English does the very same trick, so this costs almost nothing.

You’ll want to know: ein / eine

ein / eine — “a,” “an,” and also “one” when it sits in front of a naming word.

Which of the two you use follows the same three-way split you already know from *der*, *die*, *das*:

The word takes	So “a” is
<i>der</i>	ein
<i>das</i>	ein
<i>die</i>	eine

Two of the three groups share one form, so there is really only one thing to remember: **die** words take the extra **-e**. On the two nouns inside *guten Tag* and *gute Nacht*:

der Tag → **ein Tag**, “a day” · *die Nacht* → **eine Nacht**, “a night”

Grammar Lens: the counting -s drops

Counting form: *eins*. In front of a naming word: *ein* / *eine*.

The -s belongs to counting and to nothing else.

English does the identical thing, and hides it every bit as well. *One* in front of a naming word wore down to **a** and **an** — *an apple* really is *one apple*, said quickly for a thousand years. So both languages have a special worn-down shape of “one”, and both use it as the word for “a”. The other numbers do not do this. *Zwei*, *drei*, *vier* and *fünf* look exactly the same whether you are counting or putting them in front of something. Only the first number has two shapes, in German as in English.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “eins” — then “ein”, dropping the *s*
- “der Tag / ein Tag”, “die Nacht / eine Nacht”
- “one apple”, then “an apple” — English doing the same thing

Before you move on

What happens to *eins* in front of a naming word? (It drops the *-s*: *ein*.) Which group takes *eine*? (The *die* group.) Which English words are the same worn-down “one”? (*A* and *an*.) Do the other numbers change? (No — only the first.)

Chapter 8

Six, Seven, Eight

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count six, seven and eight in German, and hear the three sounds that make them hard to guess from the spelling.

*Three more numbers, each with the sound that makes it unguessable from the page: the **chs** of *sechs*, the buzzing *s* of *sieben*, and the throat sound in *acht* that English spells *gh*.*

8.1 sechs — “six,” where *chs* is a plain *x*

The second hand starts here. And the sixth number quietly settles the last thing German **ch** can do.

You’ll want to know: sechs

sechs — “six.”

Sounds you’ll need

- **ch-none** — in **chs**, the *ch* makes no throat sound at all. The pair is a plain **ks**, exactly the English letter *x*.

So *sechs* is *zeks*, and it rhymes with English *sex* — which is also, as it happens, the Latin word for six.

That completes the **ch**: raspy after *a* as in *machen*, and silent-into-*ks* when an *s* follows. Nothing else to learn about it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sechs is English **six**, and here the two languages have barely moved apart at all — *zeks* against *siks*. Even the Latin cousin *sex* is close enough to hear, because this is one of the few numbers no sound law rearranged much.

Which makes it the cheapest number in the chapter: if you can say *x*, you can say *sechs*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sechs” — *zeks*, no throat rasp
- “machen” then “sechs” — the two jobs of *ch*
- “sechs” then “six” — barely a step apart

Before you move on

What is “six”? (*Sechs*, said *zeks*.) What does **ch** do in front of an *s*? (Nothing — the pair is a plain *ks*.) And after an *a*? (The raspy throat sound, as in *machen*.)

8.2 sieben — “seven,” and the buzzing *s*

You have been saying *sechs* as *zeks* without being told why. Here is the rule, on the number that needs it most.

You’ll want to know: sieben

sieben — “seven.” Two syllables: *ZEE-ben*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **s-voiced** — a German *s* in front of a vowel **buzzes**, like the English letter *z*. At the end of a word it goes back to a plain hiss.
- **ie-long-ee** — the long *ee* again, as in *vier*.

So *sieben* is *ZEE-ben*, not *SEE-ben*. And it explains the two numbers before it: *sechs* is *zeks* and not *seks* for the same reason.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sieben is English **seven**, with the middle consonant softened from a *v* to a *b* — a swap those two letters make in each other’s direction constantly, because they are made with the same lips.

This is the one number where the Latin cousin is also unmistakable: *septem*, which English still uses in *September* and in *septet*. Seven is the number almost nobody’s language disguised.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sieben” — *ZEE-ben*, buzz the *s*
- “sechs, sieben” — both start with the buzz
- “sieben” then “seven”

Before you move on

What is “seven”? (*Sieben*, said *ZEE-ben*.) What does a German **s** do in front of a vowel? (It buzzes, like *z*.) And at the end of a word? (It hisses.) Which English word is *sieben*? (*Seven* — the *v* softened to a *b*.)

8.3 acht — “eight,” on a rasp you already have

Nothing new in the mouth for this one. You met its sound on the very first *Gute Nacht*.

You’ll want to know: acht

acht — “eight.” Said *akht*.

The **ch** is the raspy back-of-the-throat sound from *Nacht* and *machen*: a clean open *ah*, then the scrape. One syllable, no vowel after it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

acht is English **eight** — and the pairing is easier to believe once you notice that English still *writes* the missing sound.

Eight has a **gh** in it that nobody says. It is not decoration. English used to make a real throat scrape there, exactly the one German still makes, and the spelling is the fossil left behind after the sound fell out. So German **-cht-** answers English **-ght-**, and it does it every single time:

German	English
acht	eight
Nacht	night
Licht	light
recht	right

Nacht and *night* you already own. The pattern is worth more than the number: whenever you see a German word with **cht**, try the English one with **ght**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “acht” — *akht*, open *ah* then the scrape
- “Nacht” then “acht” — the same ending twice
- the pairs — “acht/eight”, “Nacht/night”, “Licht/light”

Before you move on

What is “eight”? (*Acht*.) What does German **-cht-** answer in English? (**-ght-**.) Why does *eight* have a silent **gh**? (English used to say the same scrape German still says.) Give another pair. (*Nacht/night*.)

Chapter 9

Nine, Ten, and the Months That Are Numbers

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count all the way to ten in German, and say which words a language keeps and which it buys.

Nine and ten finish the count, and the chapter closes on the seam the whole sequence has been building toward: the numbers are homegrown and the month names are Latin imports, so one calendar carries both answers to the same question.

9.1 neun — “nine,” in the vowel of *Deutsch*

Ninth number, and again nothing new to learn in the mouth — you got this vowel from the name of the language itself.

You’ll want to know: neun

neun — “nine.” Said *noyn*.

The **eu** is the *oy* of English *boy*, which is exactly what it does in *Deutsch*. So *neun* rhymes with English *coin*, and it is one syllable with an *n* at each end.

Do not let the spelling talk you into *new-n*. German **eu** is never two separate vowels.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

neun is English **nine**, and the two have kept the same skeleton: *n*, a vowel, *n*. Only the vowel wandered — German to *oy*, English to *eye*. The Latin cousin is the odd one out here. *Novem* has a *v* where the Germanic words have nothing, which is why Spanish *nueve* and French *neuf* look like a different word. Between *neun* and *nine* there is nothing to explain.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “neun” — *noyn*, rhyming with *coin*
- “Deutsch” then “neun” — the same *eu*
- “sieben, acht, neun”

Before you move on

What is “nine”? (*Neun*, said *noyn*.) How is **eu** said? (Like the *oy* of *boy*, as in *Deutsch*.) What do *neun* and *nine* share? (*N*, a vowel, *n* — only the vowel moved.)

9.2 zehn — “ten,” and one consonant in three photographs

The last one. And it is the number that shows both of German’s sound laws working, one after the other, on the same letter.

You’ll want to know: zehn

zehn — “ten.” Said *tsayn*.

The **z** is the *ts* you met in *zwei*, and the **h** does what it did in *wohnen* and *gehen*: it says nothing and stretches the vowel in front of it. So: *ts*, a long *ay*, and an *n*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Latin *decem*, English **ten**, German **zehn**. One word, photographed at three moments of the same consonant walking:

Stage	Word	The sound
what Latin kept	<i>decem</i>	d
the first law	ten	d became t
the second law	<i>zehn</i>	t became ts

The first step is the law from the *drei* lesson, the one that separated Germanic from Latin. The second is the *later* shift you already know from *gut* and *machen* — the one that only German went through, which is why English stopped at *ten* and German carried on to *zehn*. So the distance between *ten* and *zehn* is not a different word. It is one extra step down a road English stopped walking.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “zehn” — *tsayn*, long vowel, silent *h*
- “decem, ten, zehn” — the same consonant, three times
- “acht, neun, zehn”

Before you move on

What is “ten”? (*Zehn*, said *tsayn*.) What does the **h** do? (Nothing — it lengthens the vowel.) Walk *decem* to *zehn*. (*D* became *t*, and German took the *t* on to *ts*.)

9.3 sechs bis zehn — finishing the count

Five more words learned one at a time. Same job as before: make them one run, then join the two runs together.

You’ll want to know: the second run

sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn

Said straight through: *zeks, ZEE-ben, akht, noyn, tsayn*.

And the second five are the same story as the first — English twins, Latin only a cousin:

German	English	What changed
<i>sechs</i>	six	almost nothing; <i>chs</i> is <i>x</i>
<i>sieben</i>	seven	the <i>v</i> softened to a <i>b</i>
<i>acht</i>	eight	German still says the scrape English writes as gh
<i>neun</i>	nine	only the vowel moved
<i>zehn</i>	ten	an old d to t , then t to ts

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn” — straight through
- all ten from the start, in one breath if you can
- the ten backwards, from “zehn” down to “eins”

Twice through: “eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn”

Before you move on

Count from six to ten. (*Sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn*.) Now all ten. Which of the ten is borrowed from Latin? (None — every one is the English number’s twin.)

9.4 Homegrown numbers, imported months

You have ten numbers and not one of them came from Latin. That is worth holding onto, because the very next thing German counts with **did** come from Latin — and you can hear the join.

Grammar Lens: a language keeps some words and buys others

A language does not import evenly. The words people use every hour of every day are the hardest to displace, and the words that arrive with an institution come in whole.

Numbers are the first kind. German counts with its own inherited words, and so does English. Month names are the second kind: they arrived with the Roman calendar, and both languages took them whole.

Why it's said this way

The Roman year began in **March**. Count from there and the last four months of the year land on the Latin words for seven, eight, nine and ten — which is why those four month names are numbers wearing a disguise, in German exactly as in English.

Say each Latin number and then the German one that means the same thing:

The Latin number inside	German counts it
<i>septem</i> — seven	<i>sieben</i>
<i>octo</i> — eight	<i>acht</i>
<i>novem</i> — nine	<i>neun</i>
<i>decem</i> — ten	<i>zehn</i>

Not one pair sounds like a pair. The month names came from one language and the counting words from another, and German never reconciled them — because there was never any reason to.

You will meet the German month names themselves in a later chapter.

What matters now is that when you get there, they will look Latin, and the numbers you have already learned will still be German.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sieben, acht, neun, zehn” — the German four
- “septem, octo, novem, decem” — the Latin four
- which kind of word a language keeps, and which it buys

Before you move on

Did German borrow its numbers? (No — they are its own.) Did it borrow its month names? (Yes, from Latin, with the calendar.) Why do four of them carry the wrong number? (The Roman year began in March, so *septem* was the seventh month.)

9.5 Practice — counting, and asking for one

Ten numbers, one article, and one fact about which words a language keeps. Put them to work.

Grammar Lens: the ten, and what each one cost

German	Said	English twin
<i>eins</i>	<i>eyns</i>	one
<i>zwei</i>	<i>tsvy</i>	two
<i>drei</i>	<i>dry</i>	three
<i>vier</i>	<i>feer</i>	four
<i>fünf</i>	<i>fewnf</i>	five
<i>sechs</i>	<i>zeks</i>	six
<i>sieben</i>	<i>ZEE-ben</i>	seven
<i>acht</i>	<i>akht</i>	eight
<i>neun</i>	<i>noyn</i>	nine
<i>zehn</i>	<i>tsayn</i>	ten

Ten numbers and not one of them borrowed. Every one is the English word with a predictable coat on, which is the whole reason this chapter was cheap.

The exchange

German	English
<i>Eins, zwei, drei ...</i>	One, two, three...
<i>Und?</i>	And?
<i>... vier, fünf, sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn!</i>	...four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten!
<i>Sehr gut!</i>	Very good!
<i>Danke! — Bitte.</i>	Thanks! — You're welcome.

Every word in that exchange is one you already own, and seven of them you learned this chapter.

Then the article, on the two nouns *guten Tag* and *gute Nacht* are built from:

der Tag → **ein Tag** · *die Nacht* → **eine Nacht**

Eins on its own keeps its **-s**, because nothing follows it. The moment a naming word arrives, the *-s* comes off.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all ten, straight through
- the exchange, both voices
- “eins” as a count, then “ein” as an article — the *-s* comes off

Twice through: “eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn”

Before you move on

Count to ten. When does *eins* become *ein*? (In front of a naming word.) Are the German numbers borrowed from Latin? (No — they are the English numbers’ twins.) Which German words *were* borrowed from Latin? (The month names.)

Chapter 10

The Gods of the Week

Modes: 🗣️ voice (9) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 9 lessons.

***By the end of this chapter:** I can name the five German weekdays, say which god is in each, and explain why one of them has no god at all.*

The Romans named their weekdays for planet-gods and the Germanic peoples swapped in their own, one for one, which is why German and English line up here and Romance does not. Five days are a god's name plus Tag; this chapter meets them one at a time, with the nouns Mond and Donner taught before the days built on them, and ends on Mittwoch — the day the medieval Church took Wodan out of.

10.1 Gott plus Tag

You have now seen a language keep its numbers and buy its months. The weekdays are the same question asked again, and German answers it a third way.

Grammar Lens: a god, then Tag

A German weekday is a **god's name** with *Tag* on the end.

Tag you already own. What sits in front of it is the part worth knowing: the Romans named their weekdays for planet-gods — Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus — and when those names reached the Germanic peoples, they did not translate them and they did not borrow them. They **swapped in their own gods**, one for one. That is why German and English line up here and Romance does not.

Both inherited the same substitutions, made once, long before either language was written down.
 Five of the seven days keep that shape. Two do not, and both were edited later for reasons you can name — which is the more interesting half of the chapter.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the shape — “a god, then Tag”
- what the Romans used — “planet-gods”
- what Germanic did — “swapped in its own, one for one”

Twice through: “Gott plus Tag.”

Before you move on

What shape does a German weekday have? (**A god’s name plus Tag.**) Whose gods did the Romans use? (**Their planet-gods.**) Did Germanic borrow those names or replace them? (**Replaced them,** one for one.) How many of the seven keep the shape? (**Five.**) Next: the first of them.

10.2 der Mond — “the moon”

Before the first weekday, the thing it is named after.

You’ll want to know: der Mond

der Mond — “the moon.”

A *der*-word, and the same inherited word as English **moon**. German rounded the vowel and added a *d* on the end; nothing else happened to it.

The moon was the first Germanic god-slot in the week, which is why it comes first here.

Sounds you'll need

- **long-o** — a long, round *o*, the vowel of English *moan*, not the *oo* of *moon*.
- **d-t-final** — the final *d* hardens to a *t* at the end of the word, the same hardening you met in *und*. So it comes out *mohnt*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Mond” — *mohnt*, with a hard ending
- the pair — “Mond, moon”
- the vowel warning — “not *moon*; *moan*”

Twice through: “der Mond.”

Before you move on

Say “the moon.” (**Der Mond.**) Which English word is it? (***Moon.***) How does the final *d* sound? (**Like a t.**) Next: the day named after it.

10.3 Montag — “Monday”

You have the moon and you have the day. Put them together before reading on.

You'll want to know: Montag

Montag — “Monday.”

Mon- is *Mond* with its hard ending worn off inside the compound, and *-tag* is the day. The pattern’s first instance, and the easiest: English says the same two words in the same order — *moon* and *day*.

That is what an **inherited** name looks like. Nobody translated this; both languages were already saying it before they were separate languages.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Montag”
- its two pieces — “Mond, Tag”
- the English beside it — “Montag, Monday”

Twice through: “Montag — Monday.”

Before you move on

Say “Monday.” (**Montag**.) What are its two pieces? (**Mond** and **Tag**.) Is the English name a translation of it? (**No** — both inherited it.) Next: a day named for a god you have never heard of.

10.4 Dienstag — “Tuesday”

The second day, and the first god in the week whose name you will not recognise — though you say it every Tuesday.

You’ll want to know: Dienstag

Dienstag — “Tuesday.”

Diens- plus *-tag*, and the *ie* is the long *ee* you met in *vier*: *DEENS-tahk*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The god is **Tiw**, or **Ziu** in the older German — the Germanic war-god, put in where the Romans had **Mars**. English kept his name almost bare: **Tuesday** is *Tiw’s day*.

And his name is the oldest thing in this chapter. It comes from the Proto-Indo-European word for the **bright sky**, and the same word became Latin *deus* (“god”), Greek **Zeus**, and the *Ju-* of *Jupiter*. So the god in *Tuesday* and the god in *Jupiter* are the same ancient word, which the Germanic peoples had already demoted from sky-king to war-god long before the Romans arrived to be swapped out.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Dienstag” — *DEENS-tahk*
- the god — “Tiw, Ziu”
- the family — “Tiw, deus, Zeus”

Twice through: “Dienstag — Tuesday.”

Before you move on

Say “Tuesday.” (**Dienstag.**) Which god is in it? (**Tiw**, or *Ziu*.) Which Roman god did he replace? (**Mars.**) Which Greek god shares his name’s root? (**Zeus.**) Next: the noun behind the loudest day of the week.

10.5 der Donner — “thunder”

Run the sound law backwards on this one before you read it. German has no *th*; what would English *thunder* look like in German?

You’ll want to know: der Donner

der Donner — “thunder.”

Th- becomes *d-*, exactly as it did in *drei*. Take the *th* off *thunder*, put a *d* there, and you have most of the German word already.

This is the second time that rule has paid, and it will keep paying: German *d* answers English *th* right across the vocabulary.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vowel-o** — short and open, the *o* of English *on*.
- **r-uvular-german** — the *-er* at the end is barely a consonant; it colours the vowel and stops. *DON-ah*, not *DON-err*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Donner”
- the rule that predicts it — “th becomes d: three, drei; thunder, Donner”
- the soft ending — “DON-ah”

Twice through: “der Donner — thunder.”

Before you move on

Say “thunder.” (**Der Donner.**) Which English sound does German *d* answer? (**Th.**) Name the other word you have that shows it. (**Drei** / *three*.) Next: the day this noun names, and the god who is both.

10.6 Donnerstag — “Thursday”

You have the thunder and you have the pattern. This one you can build.

You’ll want to know: Donnerstag

Donnerstag — “Thursday.”

Donner plus *-s-* plus *Tag*. The little *s* in the middle is a joining sound German drops between the halves of a long compound; it carries no meaning of its own.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The thunder-god was **Donar** in the German-speaking south and **Thor** in the Norse north — one god, two names, and *Donner* is his name still doing duty as an ordinary weather word.

English named the day for the Norse form: **Thursday** is *Thor’s day*. He stood in for **Jupiter**, who was the Roman sky-and-thunder king. So this one slot has been filled three times over — Jupiter, Donar, Thor — and every version of it is the god who throws the lightning.

Say *Donnerstag* and *Thursday* back to back and the shift you already own does the rest: German *d* where English has *th*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Donnerstag”
- its pieces — “Donner, s, Tag”
- the three names for one god — “Donar, Thor, Jupiter”

Twice through: “Donnerstag — Thursday.”

Before you move on

Say “Thursday.” (**Donnerstag**.) Which god is in it? (**Donar** — **Thor** in the north.) Which Roman god did he replace? (**Jupiter**.) What is the *s* in the middle doing? (**Joining the two halves**; it means nothing.) Next: the last of the weekdays, and a goddess.

10.7 Freitag — “Friday”

The last weekday, and the *ei* rule you learned with *eins* is all you need for the sound.

You’ll want to know: Freitag

Freitag — “Friday.”

Ei is the English word *eye*, always — so the first syllable rhymes with *fry*, never with *free*. *FRY-tahk*.

That one rule has now told you how to say *eins*, *zwei*, *drei* and this. It does not have exceptions to remember.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The goddess is **Frija** — **Frigg** in the Norse — and she stood in for **Venus**. English named the day for her too: **Friday**.
This is the one day of the week named for a **goddess**, and it is a

goddess in both systems. The Germanic swap did not merely fill the slot; it matched the god in it. Whoever made these substitutions was paying attention to who the Roman deity was, not only to which day was which.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Freitag” — *FRY-tahk*
- the goddess — “Frija, Frigg”
- who she replaced — “Venus”
- the four you own — “Montag, Dienstag, Donnerstag, Freitag”

Twice through: “Freitag — Friday.”

Before you move on

Say “Friday.” (**Freitag**.) How does *ei* sound? (**Like English *eye*.**) Which goddess is in it? (**Frija**, or *Frigg*.) Which Roman goddess did she replace? (**Venus**.) Next: the day that broke the pattern.

10.8 Mittwoch — the day with no god

Four days in and the shape has held every time. Here is the first one that breaks it, and you can hear the break before you know the reason: this word does not end in *Tag* at all.

You’ll want to know: Mittwoch

Mittwoch — “Wednesday,” and literally “**mid-week**.”

No god, no *Tag*. *Mitt-* is the middle, *Woche* is the week, and the day is named for its position rather than for anybody.

English did **not** do this. *Wednesday* is **Woden’s day** — the chief god, sitting exactly where the pattern says he should. So English kept the Germanic name and German threw it away, which is the opposite of what the rest of this chapter would lead you to expect.

Sounds you'll need

- **ch-ach** — the ending is the raspy back-of-the-throat sound you first met in *Nacht*. Same sound, same spelling, and it closes this word too: *MIT-vokh*.

The *w* in the middle is a German *w*, so it is a *v*.

Why it's said this way

The medieval Church disliked naming a day of its week for the chief pagan god. So German dropped Wodan and put a plain description in his place, and the replacement stuck.

That is a decision you can date and attribute, sitting inside an everyday word. Most of the etymology in this book is drift — sounds wearing down over centuries with nobody deciding anything. This one is somebody choosing, and the choice is still in the language a thousand years later.

English, further from that authority, kept its god.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Mittwoch” — *MIT-vokh*, with the *Nacht* sound at the end
- what it means — “mid-week”
- the contrast — “Mittwoch, Wednesday: German dropped the god, English kept him”

Twice through: “Mittwoch — mid-week.”

Before you move on

Say “Wednesday.” (**Mittwoch**.) What does it literally mean? (**Mid-week**.) Does it end in *Tag*? (**No** — the only weekday that does not.) Which god does English keep there? (**Woden**.) Why did German drop him? (**The Church declined to name a day for the chief pagan god**.) Next: the five weekdays run together.

10.9 Practice — the working week

No new words. Five days, four gods, and one day where the god was taken out.

Grammar Lens: the five, assembled

German	who is in it
<i>Montag</i>	the moon
<i>Dienstag</i>	Tiw, the war-god
<i>Mittwoch</i>	nobody — “mid-week”
<i>Donnerstag</i>	Donar, the thunder-god
<i>Freitag</i>	Frija, the goddess
Four of the five carry a god and end in <i>Tag</i> . The one that does neither is the one the Church rewrote.	

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the five in order — “Montag, Dienstag, Mittwoch, Donnerstag, Freitag”
- them against the English — “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday”
- the gods — “the moon, Tiw, nobody, Donar, Frija”
- the two nouns you own underneath — “der Mond, der Donner”

Twice through: “Montag, Dienstag, Mittwoch, Donnerstag, Freitag.”

Before you move on

Run the five without prompting. Which one has no god in it? (*Mittwoch*.) Which has a goddess? (*Freitag* — Frija.) Which two are built on nouns you can say on their own? (*Montag* from *Mond*, *Donnerstag* from *Donner*.) Next: the weekend, where the pattern breaks a second time.

Chapter 11

The German Weekend

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name both German words for Saturday and the word for Sunday, and say which of them German inherited and which it bought.

The weekend is where the weekday pattern breaks a second time. Samstag is not Saturn's day but the Sabbath — Hebrew shabbāt by way of Greek — while Sonntag is the sun's, a day the Church renamed in Romance and left alone here. It closes on Sonnabend, the northern Saturday, which is transparent the moment Sonne and Abend are both owned.

11.1 die Sonne — “the sun”

You have *der Mond*. Its opposite number comes with a surprise attached, and the surprise is the article.

You'll want to know: die Sonne

die Sonne — “the sun.”

Same word as English **sun**, with the German ending. But notice the pair you now own: **der Mond** and **die Sonne**. The moon is masculine and the sun is feminine.

Why it's said this way

That is the **reverse** of what the Romance languages do, where the sun is masculine and the moon feminine — French *le soleil* and *la lune*, Spanish *el sol* and *la luna*.

Neither is a statement about the sun. Grammatical gender is a filing system, not a description, and the two families filed the same two objects in opposite drawers. It is worth meeting early, because it is the clearest possible proof that a German noun's gender is not something you can reason out from the thing itself.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Sonne”
- the pair with their articles — “der Mond, die Sonne”
- the other way round — “le soleil, la lune”

Twice through: “der Mond, die Sonne.”

Before you move on

Say “the sun.” (**Die Sonne.**) Which article does the moon take? (**Der.**) Which way round is French? (**The opposite** — *le soleil, la lune.*) Can you work a German noun's gender out from the thing? (**No.**) Next: the day named for it.

11.2 Sonntag — “Sunday”

The pattern again, on the noun from a moment ago.

You'll want to know: Sonntag

Sonntag — “Sunday.”

Sonne plus *Tag*, with the *e* dropped in the compound. English says the same two words: *sun* and *day*.

Why it's said this way

Mittwoch showed the Church taking a god out of the week. This day shows where it did **not**.

Romance renamed Sunday completely, for the **Lord**: Spanish *domingo*, French *dimanche*, both from Latin *dies dominicus*. The sun was pushed out entirely. German and English kept the sun.

So the same institution rewrote one German day and left another alone, and the week records both decisions side by side. *Mittwoch* is where it intervened; *Sonntag* is where it did not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Sonntag”
- its pieces — “Sonne, Tag”
- what Romance did instead — “domingo, dimanche”
- the two decisions — “Mittwoch rewritten, Sonntag left alone”

Twice through: “Sonntag — Sunday.”

Before you move on

Say “Sunday.” (**Sonntag**.) What are its two pieces? (**Sonne and Tag**.) What did Spanish name the day for instead? (**The Lord** — *domingo*.) Which German day did the Church rewrite? (**Mittwoch**.) Next: a word that is not German at all.

11.3 der Sabbat — “the Sabbath”

Every word in this week so far has been Germanic. Here is the one that is not — and it did not come from Latin either.

You'll want to know: der Sabbat

der Sabbat — “the Sabbath,” the day of rest.

Hebrew *shabbāt* means “to rest.” Greek-speaking Christians took it as *sábbaton* and carried it north, and German has it as *Sabbat*.

Hold the word on its own for a moment before the next lesson does anything with it. Its road is the point: **Hebrew to Greek to German**, with no Germanic ancestor and no Latin one either. It is the only word in the German week that came from outside Europe.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Sabbat”
- the road — “shabbāt, sábbaton, Sabbat”
- what it means — “rest”

Twice through: “der Sabbat — the Sabbath.”

Before you move on

Say “the Sabbath.” (**Der Sabbat.**) What does the Hebrew root mean? (**To rest.**) Which language carried it north? (**Greek.**) Is it Germanic or Latin? (**Neither.**) Next: the day it became.

11.4 Samstag — the day that is not Saturn’s

The second break in the pattern, and a bigger one than *Mittwoch*. That day lost its god. This one was never Germanic at all.

You’ll want to know: Samstag

Samstag — “Saturday.”

It ends in *Tag*, so the shape looks intact. What sits in front of it is not a god: it is *Sabbat*, worn down. **Sam(s)- + Tag** — “the Sabbath day.”

English kept the Roman planet here. *Saturday* is **Saturn’s day**, the one Roman name the Germanic swap never replaced. German did replace it, but not with a god of its own.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The road this word travelled is longer than any other in the chapter: Hebrew *shabbāt*, “to rest,” became Greek *sábbaton*, and Greek-speaking Christians carried it north into German as *Sabbat*. From there it wore down to the *Sams*- you say now.

So **German *Samstag* and Spanish *sábado* are the same word** — both are the Sabbath. And English, which usually stands beside German in this chapter, is the odd one out: it alone still points at a Roman planet.

Why it’s said this way

This is the distinction you were given with the months, arriving again on a different word.

The weekday names are the first kind of word: everyday, inherited, hard to displace — which is why six of them are still Germanic after fifteen hundred years. *Samstag* is the second kind. It came with an institution, and it came in whole, exactly as the month names did.

So one week contains both answers to the same question. Six days a language kept, and one it bought.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Samstag”
- the road — “shabbāt, sábbaton, Sabbat, Samstag”
- the pair — “Samstag, sábado: the same Sabbath”
- the odd one — “Saturday still points at Saturn”

Twice through: “Samstag — the Sabbath, not Saturn.”

Before you move on

Say “Saturday.” (**Samstag**.) Is it Saturn’s day? (**No** — the Sabbath’s.) Which language did it reach German through? (**Greek**, from Hebrew.) Which Spanish day is the same word? (**Sábado**.) Which kind of word is it — kept or bought? (**Bought**, like the

month names.) Next: the day the Church left alone.

11.5 Sonnabend — Saturday, in the north

One more Saturday. This one you can read before you are told what it means, because both halves are already yours.

You'll want to know: Sonnabend

Sonnabend — “Saturday,” in northern Germany.

Sonn- is the sun and *-abend* is the evening, both of which you own. It is “**Sun-eve**”: the evening before Sunday, standing in for the whole day.

That is the same reckoning English keeps in *Christmas Eve* and *New Year's Eve* — the day taking its name from the night that runs up to it.

Why it's said this way

Both words are correct German and a speaker will use one or the other by where they are from: **Sonnabend** in the north, **Samstag** in the south and west, with *Samstag* the more widely used of the two. So Saturday has two names in German and neither is a mistake — which is worth knowing before you hear the one you did not learn and assume you misheard it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Sonnabend”
- its two halves — “Sonne, Abend”
- both Saturdays — “Samstag, Sonnabend”

Twice through: “Sonnabend — Sun-eve.”

Before you move on

Say the northern word for Saturday. (**Sonnabend**.) What are its two halves? (***Sonne** and **Abend***.) What does it literally mean?

(**Sun-eve.**) Which word is used more widely? (***Samstag.***) Next: the whole week, said through.

11.6 Practice — all seven

No new words. Seven days, five gods, and two places where something else got in.

Grammar Lens: the whole week

German	what is in it
<i>Montag</i>	the moon
<i>Dienstag</i>	Tiw
<i>Mittwoch</i>	mid-week — the Church took the god out
<i>Donnerstag</i>	Donar
<i>Freitag</i>	Frija
<i>Samstag</i>	the Sabbath — bought, not inherited
<i>Sonntag</i>	the sun

Five gods, one edit, one import. Run them in order until the list is one motion rather than seven remembered words.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all seven in order, from *Montag* to *Sonntag*
- the two Saturdays — “Samstag, Sonnabend”
- the two breaks — “Mittwoch: no god. Samstag: not Germanic.”
- the shape that holds for the other five — “a god, then Tag”

Twice through: “Montag, Dienstag, Mittwoch, Donnerstag, Freitag, Samstag, Sonntag.”

Before you move on

Run all seven without prompting. Which day has no god? (*Mittwoch*.) Which is not a Germanic word at all? (*Samstag* — the Sabbath.) Which day did the Church rename in Romance but leave alone here? (*Sonntag*.) Which day has two names? (**Saturday** — *Samstag* and *Sonnabend*.)

Chapter 12

Telling the Time

Modes: 🗣️ voice (10) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 10 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask for and tell the time in German.

The chapter's thesis is a division of labour. Uhr came from Latin hora with the clocks that needed it, and German already had Stunde for the span, so the loan took the clock-reading job and the native word kept the other. Mittag and Mitternacht are German's own compounds, Mitte with Tag and Nacht, the same thought French assembled out of Latin as midi. It closes on the two frames together: a number with Uhr, or a pivot standing alone.

12.1 die Uhr — “the clock”

Something changes here. The numbers were German's own and the weekdays were German's gods — this word is neither.

You'll want to know: die Uhr

die Uhr — “the clock,” and also “o'clock.”

A *die*-word, and one syllable. It does two jobs: the object on the wall, and the word you say when telling the time.

Sounds you'll need

- **u-long** — a long *u*, the vowel of English *moor*.
- **r-final** — and then a soft *r* that barely closes: German's final *r*

colours the vowel and stops rather than rolling.

Together: *oor*. One syllable, nothing more.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Uhr” — *oor*, long and soft
- its two jobs — “the clock; o’clock”
- it beside a word you own — “der Tag, die Uhr”

Twice through: “die Uhr.”

Before you move on

Say “the clock.” (**Die Uhr**.) Which article? (**Die**.) How many syllables? (**One** — *oor*.) What else does the word mean? (**O’clock**.) Next: where it came from, which is not where the rest of this book’s words come from.

12.2 Uhr, taken apart

You have twice met a language keeping some words and buying others. Here is the third time, and it completes a picture.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Uhr comes from Latin *hōra*, “hour” — the same word that became French *heure*, Italian *ora* and English **hour**. It reached German through medieval Latin and Low German *ūr(e)*.

Timekeeping arrived with Roman and monastic clocks, and the word rode in with the machinery.

Why it’s said this way

Three layers of the German day, three different origins:

what	German	where it came from
the numbers	<i>eins, zwei, drei</i>	native Germanic
the weekdays	<i>Montag, Donnerstag</i>	Germanic gods
the clock	<i>Uhr</i>	Latin, from <i>hōra</i>

German kept its own counting and its own gods. For the **machine that measures hours** it reached for Rome. That is the same rule you were given with the months and again with *Samstag*: the words used every hour of every day are the hardest to displace, and the words that arrive with an institution come in whole. A clock is an institution arriving.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the family — “Uhr, hōra, heure, ora, hour”
- the three layers — “numbers native, weekdays gods, clock Latin”
- the reason — “the clock came in, and its word came with it”

Twice through: “Uhr — from hōra.”

Before you move on

Which Latin word is *Uhr*? (**Hōra.**) Which English word is its cousin? (**Hour.**) Which two layers of the German day are **not** borrowed? (**The numbers and the weekdays.**) Why did this one come in? (**It arrived with the clocks.**) Next: the German word that was there already.

12.3 die Stunde — “an hour”

A borrowed word usually arrives because a language needs one. This time German already had a perfectly good word, and took the Latin one anyway.

You'll want to know: die Stunde

die Stunde — “an hour,” in the sense of a **span of sixty minutes**.

Native Germanic, and older in the language than *Uhr*. It is the word for a duration: a lesson lasts *eine Stunde*.

Sounds you'll need

- **st-initial-scht** — a German *st-* at the start of a word is *sht-*, not *st-*. So this opens *SHTOON-*, which is the single most useful spelling rule in German after *ei* and *ie*.
- **u-long** — the same long *u* you met in *Uhr*.

Why it's said this way

The loan did **not** push the native word out. The two divided the work instead:

for	German uses
reading a clock — “o'clock”	<i>Uhr</i>
a length of time — “an hour”	<i>Stunde</i>

English has the same split and hides it: *hour* covers both, and *o'clock* is a worn-down phrase (*of the clock*) doing the first job.

This is worth holding on to, because it is what borrowing usually looks like. The loan rarely kills the native word; it takes a slice of the meaning and the two settle into different rooms.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Stunde” — *SHTOON-duh*
- the pair and their jobs — “Uhr for the clock, Stunde for the span”
- the spelling rule — “st- at the front is sht-”

Twice through: “die Uhr, die Stunde.”

Before you move on

Say “an hour,” meaning a span. (**Eine Stunde.**) Which word do you use to read a clock? (**Uhr.**) Which of the two is native German? (**Stunde.**) How is *st-* pronounced at the start of a word? (**Sht-**.) Next: putting *Uhr* into a sentence.

12.4 Es ist zwei Uhr — telling the time

You have the numbers and you have the word. The frame that joins them needs nothing new.

Grammar Lens: es ist, a number, Uhr

es ist + the number + **Uhr**

*Es ist **ein** Uhr.* — “It is one o’clock.” *Es ist **zwei** Uhr.* — “It is two o’clock.” *Es ist **zehn** Uhr.* — “It is ten o’clock.”

Word for word that is the English sentence with *o’clock* moved: *it is two o’clock*. Nothing about the order has to be relearned.

One thing to notice: at one o’clock it is **ein** Uhr, not *eins* — the counting form drops its *-s* here exactly as it does before a noun, which you met with *ein* and *eine*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the frame — “es ist ... Uhr”
- “Es ist zwei Uhr.” “Es ist zehn Uhr.”
- the odd one — “Es ist ein Uhr”, not *eins*
- the hour it is now, wherever you are

Twice through: “Es ist zwei Uhr.”

Before you move on

Say “it is ten o’clock.” (**Es ist zehn Uhr.**) What are the three pieces? (***Es ist*, the number, Uhr.**) What happens to *eins* at one o’clock? (**It drops the -s: ein Uhr.**) Next: the plural German does not use here.

12.5 zwei Uhr, not zwei Uhren

Every German noun you have met takes a plural. This one refuses — but only in one of its two jobs.

Grammar Lens: the clock-reading Uhr does not count

Telling the time, *Uhr* stays **singular** however many hours you name.

Zwei Uhr is “two o’clock.” Not *zwei Uhren* — that would be **two clocks**, the objects on the wall.

German	English
<i>zwei Uhr</i>	two o’clock
<i>zwei Uhren</i>	two clocks

English does the identical thing and hides it behind an apostrophe. You would never say “two o’clocks” either, because *o’clock* is not a noun being counted — it is a fossilised phrase, *of the clock*. German’s *Uhr* is doing that job with no apostrophe to warn you. So what you are watching is not really about *Uhr*. It is about a word that has stopped being a countable thing and become a **unit of time**, a job nouns take on in every language and mark differently in each.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the time — “zwei Uhr”
- the objects — “zwei Uhren”
- the English that hides it — “two o’clock, two clocks”

Twice through: “zwei Uhr; zwei Uhren.”

Before you move on

Say “two o’clock.” (**Zwei Uhr.**) Say “two clocks.” (**Zwei Uhren.**) Which of the two is the plural? (**Uhren.**) Why does the time not take one? (**It is a unit of time, not a thing being counted.**) Next: the two pivots of the day, and they are German’s own.

12.6 die Mitte — “the middle”

The clock-word was Latin. The two pivots of the German day swing straight back to German’s own vocabulary, and they share a piece.

You’ll want to know: die Mitte

die Mitte — “the middle.”

Two syllables, short *i*, and a crisp doubled *t*: *MIT-tuh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Mitte is English **mid** and **middle** — the same inherited word, and you can hear it without being told.

Its Latin cousin is *medius*, “middle,” which English borrowed several times over: **medium**, **median**, **mediocre** (literally “middling”), and the *medi-* of *Mediterranean*, the sea in the middle of the land.

So the everyday Germanic word and the learned Latin one sit side by side in English, and German has the first of them. That is the pattern you have been watching all book: two doors into one root, one worn smooth by daily use and one carried in by scholars.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Mitte” — *MIT-tuh*
- the Germanic side — “Mitte, mid, middle”
- the Latin side — “medius, medium, median”

Twice through: “die Mitte — the middle.”

Before you move on

Say “the middle.” (**Die Mitte.**) Which two English words is it? (**Mid** and **middle.**) Which Latin word is its cousin? (**Medius.**) Name an English word from that side. (**Medium, median** or **mediocre.**) Next: the middle of the day.

12.7 der Mittag — “noon”

You have the middle and you have the day. Put them together before reading on — you will be right.

You’ll want to know: der Mittag

der Mittag — “noon,” and literally “**mid-day.**”

Mitt- from *Mitte*, *-tag* from *Tag*. Nothing is hidden and nothing had to be learned: this is the third compound in two chapters you could read on sight, after *Montag* and *Sonnabend*.

English has the identical compound — **midday** — built from the identical two inherited words. Neither language got it from the other; each still had the pieces and used them.

To say it is noon: *Es ist Mittag*. No number and no *Uhr*, because noon is not an hour you count to.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Mittag”
- its two pieces — “Mitte, Tag”
- the English twin — “Mittag, midday”
- “Es ist Mittag.”

Twice through: “der Mittag — midday.”

Before you move on

Say “noon.” (**Der Mittag.**) What are its two pieces? (***Mitte* and *Tag*.**) Say “it is noon.” (**Es ist Mittag.**) Does it need a number? (**No.**) Next: what French does with the same idea, and why German did not.

12.8 Mittag and midi

French says *midi* for noon, and it means exactly what *Mittag* means. That is not a borrowing in either direction.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

French *midi* comes from Latin ***medius diēs*** — “middle day.” German *Mittag* is *Mitte* plus *Tag* — “middle day.”

The **same thought**, assembled **twice**, out of different material:

language	built from	result
Latin, then French	<i>medius</i> + <i>diēs</i>	<i>midi</i>
German	<i>Mitte</i> + <i>Tag</i>	<i>Mittag</i>

Both families looked at the sun overhead and named the moment for the middle of the day. Neither copied the other; the idea is obvious enough that two languages reached it independently, and each used the words it had.

Why it’s said this way

This is the counterweight to *Uhr*, and the two are worth holding together.

For the **clock** — a machine that arrived from outside — German took the foreign word whole. For **noon** — something anyone with a sky already has — German built its own out of pieces it owned.

A language borrows what arrives and builds what was always there. One chapter, both halves of that.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “Mittag, midi”

- what each is made of — “Mitte plus Tag; medius plus diēs”
- the chapter in one line — “borrow the clock, build the noon”

Twice through: “Mittag, midi — the same thought, built twice.”

Before you move on

What is French *midi* made of? (**Medius** + **diēs**, “middle day”.)
 And *Mittag*? (**Mitte** + **Tag**.) Did German borrow it? (**No** — it
 built its own.) Which word in this chapter **was** borrowed? (**Uhr**.)
 Next: the other pivot.

12.9 die Mitternacht — “midnight”

The day’s other pivot, and the second compound in this chapter
 you can assemble from words you already have.

You’ll want to know: die Mitternacht

die Mitternacht — “midnight,” literally “**mid-night**.”

Mitter- is *Mitte* with the linking form it takes inside a compound, and
-nacht is the night. English **midnight** is the same two words again.

To say it: *Es ist Mitternacht*. Like *Mittag*, no number and no *Uhr*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ch-ach** — the raspy back-of-the-throat sound from *Nacht* itself,
 unchanged inside the longer word.

And that *-cht* is the correspondence you were given with the numbers:
 German *-cht*- answers English *-ght*- every time.

German	English
<i>acht</i>	eight
<i>Nacht</i>	night
<i>Licht</i>	light

You met the first pair counting to ten. Here it is again on a word you
 now need, which is what a sound correspondence is for — you learn it
 once and it keeps paying.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Mitternacht”
- its pieces — “Mitte, Nacht”
- the correspondence — “acht/eight, Nacht/night, Licht/light”
- “Es ist Mitternacht.”

Twice through: “Mittag, Mitternacht.”

Before you move on

Say “midnight.” (**Die Mitternacht.**) What are its pieces? (**Mitte and Nacht.**) What does German *-cht-* answer in English? (**-ght-**.) Give the pair you met with the numbers. (**Acht / eight.**) Next: the whole chapter, said through.

12.10 Practice — the clock and the two pivots

No new words. One borrowed word and two built ones, and the difference between them is the chapter. Start by saying the borrowed one, one long syllable — *Uhr* — and then the piece both pivots begin with, *Mitte*.

Grammar Lens: three ways to say when

when	German
one o'clock	<i>Es ist ein Uhr.</i>
ten o'clock	<i>Es ist zehn Uhr.</i>
noon	<i>Es ist Mittag.</i>
midnight	<i>Es ist Mitternacht.</i>

One frame, *es ist*, and then either a number with *Uhr* or a pivot on its own. The pivots take no number because they are not hours you count to.

Why it's said this way

Hold the two halves of the chapter side by side:

- ***Uhr*** came from Latin *hōra*, with the clocks. German had *Stunde* already, so the loan took the clock-reading job and the native word kept the span.
- ***Mittag*** and ***Mitternacht*** are German's own, built from *Mitte* with *Tag* and *Nacht* — the same thought French assembled out of Latin as *midi*.

A language borrows what arrives and builds what was always there. The sky was always there; the clock was delivered.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four sentences above, in order
- the two hour-words and their jobs — “Uhr for the clock, Stunde for the span”
- the counted and the uncounted — “zwei Uhr; Mittag”
- the chapter in one line — “borrow the clock, build the noon”

Twice through: “Es ist zwei Uhr. Es ist Mittag. Es ist Mitternacht.”

Before you move on

Say “it is two o’clock.” (**Es ist zwei Uhr.**) Say “it is midnight.” (**Es ist Mitternacht.**) Which word here is Latin? (***Uhr***, from *hōra*.) Which two did German build itself? (***Mittag*** and ***Mitternacht***.) Why does *zwei Uhr* have no plural? (**It is a unit of time, not a thing being counted.**)

Chapter 13

The Roman Calendar

Modes: 🗣️ voice (9) 🗋️ Hands-free start: all 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the first six German months and say why every one of the twelve came from Latin.

The unit is German's own – der Monat IS der Mond, one turn of it, exactly as English month is moon. The twelve names inside it are Latin, taken whole with the calendar that ordered them. The chapter walks the first six and stops on the one that arrived twice: Maerz is Mars by name, and Dienstag is the same god by translation, because German already had a week to map onto and no twelve-month calendar at all.

13.1 der Monat — “the month”

Twelve names are coming, and every one of them is Latin. The word that holds them is not.

You'll want to know: der Monat

der Monat — “the month.”

Say *Mond* and then *Monat* and you have heard the whole etymology. They are the same word: a month is a **moon**, one turn of it. English does this too — *moon* and *month* — and neither language got the idea from the other, because both inherited it.

The plural is *die Monate*, “the months,” and it is the form the chapter title uses.

Why it's said this way

Here is the shape of the next two chapters, in one sentence.

The **unit** is German's own, inherited, older than any calendar: a moon. The **names** for the twelve are borrowed whole from Rome, along with the calendar that ordered them.

You met that division in the numbers chapter, where the counting words stayed home and the month names came in. This is where you meet the month names.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “der Mond, der Monat”
- the English pair — “moon, month”
- singular and plural — “der Monat, die Monate”

Twice through: “der Mond, der Monat.”

Before you move on

Say “the month.” (**Der Monat.**) What German word is hiding in it? (**Mond**, the moon.) Is *Monat* borrowed? (**No** — it is inherited.) And the twelve names about to arrive? (**Latin**, all of them.) Next: the first one.

13.2 der Januar — “January”

The first of the twelve borrowed names, and it is a doorway.

You'll want to know: der Januar

der Januar — “January.”

Latin *Januarius*, the month of **Janus** — the Roman god of doors, gateways and beginnings, shown with two faces because a doorway looks both ways at once.

A first month is exactly that: the year behind you and the year ahead, seen from the same spot.

Sounds you'll need

- **j-as-y** — German *j* is English *y*. *Januar* begins **ya-**, not **ja-**.
- **vowel-a-long** — and the *a* that follows is long and open.

YA-nu-ar, with the weight on the first syllable.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Januar” — YA-nu-ar
- the god in it — “Janus”
- what a first month is — “a door that looks both ways”

Twice through: “der Januar.”

Before you move on

Say “January.” (**Der Januar.**) How does the *j* sound? (**Like an English *y*.**) Which god? (**Janus**, of doorways.) Why two faces? (**A doorway looks both ways.**) Next: a month named for a washing.

13.3 der Februar — “February”

The second month, and the odd one out among the twelve.

You'll want to know: der Februar

der Februar — “February.”

Latin *Februarius*, from the ***Februa*** — a purification festival the Romans held at that point in the year, a washing-clean before the new season.

Every other month you will meet is named for a **god**, an **emperor**, or a **number**. This one is named for something people *did*.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-e-german** — the *e* of *Fe-* is a clear short *e*, not the English *feb*'s flat vowel.
- **r-final** — and the ending is the same soft closing *r* you met on *Uhr*.

FAY-bru-ar, four beats, weight on the first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Februar” — *FAY-bru-ar*
- the first two in order — “Januar, Februar”
- what it is named for — “a washing-clean”

Twice through: “Januar, Februar.”

Before you move on

Say “February.” (**Der Februar.**) Is it named for a god? (**No** — for a **festival**, the *Februa*.) Say the first two months together. (**Januar, Februar.**) Next: a god you have already met, arriving a second time.

13.4 der März — “March”

You already know something about this month from the numbers chapter, though not its name.

You'll want to know: der März

der März — “March.”

Latin *Martius*, the month of **Mars**, the war-god. Campaigning weather began here, and so did the Roman year.

That second fact is the one you have already been given: the Roman year opened here. Four of the twelve names still count from this month, and you will meet them in the next chapter.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-ae** — *ä* is a bright open *e*, close to English *bed*. Not the *ar* of English *March*.
- **tz-affricate** — and *-rz* ends on a **ts**, so the word closes *merts*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der März” — merts
- the god — “Mars”
- three in order — “Januar, Februar, März”

Twice through: “der März.”

Before you move on

Say “March.” (**Der März.**) How does *-rz* end? (**On a ts.**) Which god? (**Mars.**) Where did the Roman year begin? (**Here, in March.**) Next: the same god, under a name you already own.

13.5 März and Dienstag

Two German words you now own. They come from the same god, and neither of them looks like the other.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Mars entered German **twice**, and by two different routes.

the route	what German got	result
his name , borrowed whole	Latin <i>Martius</i>	<i>März</i>
his job , given to Tiw	Germanic <i>Tiwaz</i>	<i>Dienstag</i>

When the Romans met the Germanic gods, they matched them up by what they did: the war-god here answers the war-god there. Tuesday was Mars’s day, so it became Tiw’s day, and it still is — in German *Dienstag*, in English **Tuesday**.

The month got no such treatment. Nobody translated *Martius*; German took it as it stood.

Why it's said this way

The difference is worth holding onto, because it is the whole chapter in one example.

The **week** was a thing Germanic speakers already had, so when the Roman scheme arrived they mapped it onto their own gods and kept their own words. The **calendar of twelve months** was not; it came in as an administrative object, name-plates and all, and German took the name-plates.

Same god, same century, two outcomes — decided by whether German already had something to put in the slot.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “März, Dienstag”
- what each did with the god — “took his name; took his job”
- the reason — “German had a week already; it had no twelve months”

Twice through: “März and Dienstag — one god, two doors.”

Before you move on

Which two German words carry Mars? (***März** and **Dienstag***.) Which took his name? (***März***.) Which took his job? (***Dienstag***, through **Tiw**.) Why did the week get translated and the calendar not? (***German already had a week***.) Next: a month that may be named for an opening.

13.6 der April — “April”

Three months in and every name has had an owner. This one does not.

You'll want to know: der April

der April — “April.”

Latin *Aprilis*. Where that came from is genuinely unsettled — the Romans of the classical period were already guessing. The oldest and best guess is *aperire*, “to open,” for the month when things do.

Say it aloud and notice where the weight sits: German puts it on the **second** syllable, *a-PRIL*, where English puts it on the first.

Sounds you'll need

- **r-uvular** — the *r* in *-pril* is made at the back of the throat, closer to a soft scrape than an English roll.
- **i-short** — and the *i* is short and bright: *pril*, not *preel*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der April” — a-PRIL, weight at the back
- the guess — “aperire, to open”
- four in order — “Januar, Februar, März, April”

Twice through: “der April.”

Before you move on

Say “April.” (**Der April**.) Which syllable carries the weight? (**The second** — a-PRIL.) Who is it named for? (**Nobody knows** — perhaps *aperire*, “to open”.) Next: a goddess of growing things.

13.7 der Mai — “May”

One syllable, and its vowel is one you were given for a number.

You'll want to know: der Mai

der Mai — “May.”

Latin *Maius*, the month of **Maia** — a goddess of growth and increase, which is a reasonable thing to call the month when everything is putting on size.

Sounds you'll need

- **ai-as-eye** — *ai* is the vowel of English **eye**.

You already have that vowel under its commoner German spelling, *ei*, from the numbers. German writes the same sound two ways, and *Mai* is the rarer one: *ei* and *ai* both say **eye**. So *Mai* rhymes with English *my*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Mai” — rhymes with “my”
- the goddess — “Maia, of growing things”
- five in order — “Januar, Februar, März, April, Mai”

Twice through: “der Mai.”

Before you move on

Say “May.” (**Der Mai.**) What does *ai* sound like? (**English eye.**) Which other spelling gives that sound? (**Ei.**) Which goddess? (**Maia.**) Next: the queen of the gods.

13.8 der Juni — “June”

Its first letter behaves exactly as the first month's did.

You'll want to know: der Juni

der Juni — “June.”

Latin *Junius*, the month of **Juno** — Jupiter's queen, and the goddess Romans married under, which is why June weddings are a Roman habit that never stopped.

Sounds you'll need

- **j-as-y** — the same *j* as *Januar*: English *y*. *YOO-ni*, never *joon*.
- **ie-long-ee** — and the final *i* is a long *ee*.

Spoken German often lengthens this one to *Juno* when a date has to be clear over the phone, because the month after it sounds far too close. That is a real habit, not something you have to learn now.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Juni” — YOO-nee
- the goddess — “Juno”
- six in order — “Januar, Februar, März, April, Mai, Juni”

Twice through: “der Juni.”

Before you move on

Say “June.” (**Der Juni.**) How does the *j* sound? (**Like English y.**) Which other month opens the same way? (**Januar.**) Which goddess? (**Juno.**) Next: all six, said through.

13.9 Practice — half a Roman year

No new words. Six names and the container they sit in.

Grammar Lens: what German owns and what it bought

what	German	where from
the unit	<i>der Monat</i>	inherited — it is <i>der Mond</i>
the names	<i>Januar ... Juni</i>	Latin, taken whole

One line, and it is the chapter. German had a moon and needed no help naming the span. It had no twelve-month calendar, so when one arrived it took the labels that came with it.

Why it's said this way

Notice what the six names are *for*, because they are not one kind of thing:

Januar — a god, **Janus** of doorways. **Februar** — not a god at all, but a **festival**, the *Februa*. **März** — a god, **Mars**, who is also in *Dienstag* under another name. **April** — unknown, and unknown already in Rome. **Mai** — a goddess, **Maia** of growth. **Juni** — a goddess, **Juno**, queen of the gods.

Four deities, one ritual, one shrug. A calendar is not a designed object; it is a pile of things people happened to call months, kept because nobody stopped.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all six in order — “Januar, Februar, März, April, Mai, Juni”
- the two that begin with an English y — “Januar, Juni”
- the one that ends on a ts — “März”
- the unit and its cousin — “der Monat, der Mond”

Twice through: “Januar, Februar, März, April, Mai, Juni.”

Before you move on

Say the first six months. (**Januar, Februar, März, April, Mai, Juni.**) Which word for the span is German's own? (**Der Monat**, from *Mond*.) Which month shares a god with *Dienstag*? (**März.**)

Which one is named for a festival? (***Februar***.) Which one nobody can explain? (***April***.)

Chapter 14

When the Calendar Stopped Naming

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the last six German months and say which of them are numbers rather than names.

Two months named for men who could order it – Julius Caesar, who rebuilt the calendar, and Augustus, who took the next one – and then the naming stops. September through Dezember are septem, octo, novem and decem, counted from Maerz where the Roman year began. German’s own seven, eight, nine and ten sound like none of them, and never had to.

14.1 der Juli — “July”

Six months named for gods, festivals and guesses. From here the calendar changes what it is doing.

You’ll want to know: der Juli

der Juli — “July.”

Latin *Julius*, and not a god: **Julius Caesar**. He rebuilt the Roman calendar into something that tracked the sun, and the month of his birth was renamed for him while he was alive to see it.

Juni and *Juli* differ by one letter and one sound. Take them slowly as a pair: YOO-nee, YOO-lee.

Sounds you'll need

- **j-as-y** — English *y* again, as in *Januar* and *Juni*.
- **ie-long-ee** — and a long *ee* at the end.

Because the two are so close, German speakers arranging a date will often say *Julei* for July, stretching it away from *Juni*. You will hear it; you do not have to say it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Juli” — YOO-lee
- the pair, slowly — “Juni, Juli”
- who it is — “Julius Caesar, not a god”

Twice through: “Juni, Juli.”

Before you move on

Say “July.” (**Der Juli.**) And “June”? (**Der Juni.**) Which one is a god? (***Juni* — *Juno.***) Which one is a man? (***Juli* — *Caesar.***)
Next: the man who took the hint.

14.2 der August — “August”

Caesar took a month. His heir noticed.

You'll want to know: der August

der August — “August.”

The emperor **Augustus**, Caesar’s adopted son, who had the next month renamed for himself. Two men in a row, side by side in the year, and then it stops: **no month after this one is named for anybody at all.**

The weight falls on the second syllable in German — *au-GUST* — where English puts it on the first.

Sounds you'll need

- **au-diphthong** — *au* is one gliding vowel, the *ow* of English *how*.
- **st-initial-scht** — the *st* here is **inside** the word, not at the start, so it stays a plain *st*. German's *sht* happens at the beginning of a word, and this is the contrast that shows you where the boundary is.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der August” — au-GUST
- the two men, in order — “Juli, August”
- what happens next — “the naming stops”

Twice through: “Juli, August.”

Before you move on

Say “August.” (**Der August.**) Which syllable is stressed? (**The second** — au-GUST.) Who is it? (**The emperor Augustus.**) How many months are named for men? (**Two** — and they are next to each other.) Next: what the calendar does once it runs out of names.

14.3 der September — “September”

You have the Latin number for seven from a chapter about counting. Here it is again, wearing a month.

You'll want to know: der September

der September — “September.”

Latin *september*, from *septem* — **seven**. Count from *März*, where the Roman year started, and September lands seventh.

The year was later moved to start in January. The name was not moved with it, so a word meaning “seventh” now sits in the ninth slot, in German exactly as in English, and has done for two thousand years.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vowel-e-german** — three clear short *es*: *sep-TEM-ber*.
- **r-final** — closing on the soft *r*.

The stress is on the middle syllable, as in English.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der September” — sep-TEM-ber
- the Latin number inside it — “septem, seven”
- the German seven beside it — “sieben”
- where the count starts — “März”

Twice through: “September — septem — sieben.”

Before you move on

Say “September.” (**Der September.**) What number is inside it? (**Septem** — **seven.**) Which position does it actually hold now? (**Ninth.**) Why the mismatch? (**The year used to start in März.**) What is German’s own seven? (**Sieben.**) Next: eight.

14.4 der Oktober — “October”

The same trick as September, one number along.

You’ll want to know: der Oktober

der Oktober — “October.”

Latin *october*, from **octo** — **eight**. Eighth from *März*, tenth on the calendar you use.

Notice the spelling. English writes *Oc*-, keeping the Latin *c*. German writes *Ok*-, because German spells that sound with a **k** and applies its own rule to a borrowed word. Same word, same origin, one letter of local habit.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-o-german** — a clean rounded *o*, held steady rather than gliding as English *oh* does.
- **r-final** — and the soft closing *r*.

ok-TOH-ber, weight in the middle.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Oktober” — ok-TOH-ber
- the Latin number — “octo, eight”
- the German eight — “acht”
- the pair so far — “September, Oktober”

Twice through: “Oktober — octo — acht.”

Before you move on

Say “October.” (**Der Oktober.**) Which letter does German use where English keeps a *c*? (**A k.**) What number is inside? (**Octo** — **eight.**) German’s own eight? (**Acht.**) Next: nine.

14.5 der November — “November”

Spelled exactly as in English. Said differently, on one letter.

You'll want to know: der November

der November — “November.”

Latin *november*, from **novem** — **nine**. Ninth from *März*, eleventh now.

German and English write this month with the same eleven letters. That is rarer than it looks, and it happens here because both took the word from Latin without touching it.

Sounds you'll need

- **v-as-f** — German *v* is an **f**. The month is *no-FEM-ber*.
- **r-final** — soft closing *r*, as on the two before it.

This is the one letter where the identical spelling stops being identical. A German reading *November* aloud produces something an English ear does not expect, and nothing about the page warns you.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der November” — no-FEM-ber
- the Latin number — “novem, nine”
- the German nine — “neun”
- three in order — “September, Oktober, November”

Twice through: “November — no-FEM-ber.”

Before you move on

Say “November.” (**Der November** — no-FEM-ber.) How is German *v* said? (**As an f.**) What number is inside? (**Novem** — **nine**.) German’s own nine? (**Neun**.) Next: ten, and the end of the year.

14.6 der Dezember — “December”

The last month, and a letter whose sound you were given with a number.

You'll want to know: der Dezember

der Dezember — “December.”

Latin *december*, from **decem** — **ten**. Tenth from *März*, twelfth now, and the last of the four months that are nothing but numbers.

Where English writes *De-c-*, German writes *De-z-*.

Sounds you'll need

- **z-ts** — German *z* is **ts**, the sound you were given on *zehn*. So the month opens *de-TSEM-*, not *de-SEM-*.
- **r-final** — and it closes on the same soft *r* as the other three.

That is the whole difference between the German and English versions of one Latin word: *c* became *z*, because German already had a letter for that sound.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Dezember” — de-TSEM-ber
- the German ten, same opening sound — “zehn”
- the Latin number — “decem, ten”
- the four in order — “September, Oktober, November, Dezember”

Twice through: “Dezember — de-TSEM-ber.”

Before you move on

Say “December.” (**Der Dezember.**) How does German *z* sound? (**Ts.**) Which number gave you that? (**Zehn.**) What number is inside the month? (**Decem** — **ten.**) Next: the four of them together.

14.7 Practice — the second half of the year

No new words. Six names, of which four are not really names.

Grammar Lens: the four that count in Latin

the month	the Latin inside	German's own word
<i>September</i>	<i>septem</i>	<i>sieben</i>
<i>Oktober</i>	<i>octo</i>	<i>acht</i>
<i>November</i>	<i>novem</i>	<i>neun</i>
<i>Dezember</i>	<i>decem</i>	<i>zehn</i>

Read across each row and hear that nothing rhymes. German counts in one language and dates in another, and never reconciled the two — because there was never any occasion to.

Why it's said this way

The second half of the year is a record of a calendar running out of ideas.

Juli — *Julius Caesar*, who rebuilt the calendar and took a month.

August — *Augustus*, who took the next one. **September** to **Dezember** — *nobody at all. Seven, eight, nine, ten, counted from März, where the year used to begin.*

Two men who could order a month renamed did so, one after the other, and then the practice stopped. What was left was arithmetic, and the arithmetic stopped being true the moment the year moved to January — which nobody thought worth fixing, and so it stands.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all six — “Juli, August, September, Oktober, November, Dezember”
- the two men — “Caesar, Augustus”
- each Latin number with its German twin — “septem, sieben; octo, acht; novem, neun; decem, zehn”
- the one that begins with a ts — “Dezember”
- the one whose v is an f — “November”

Twice through: “September, Oktober, November, Dezember.”

Before you move on

Say the last four months. (**September, Oktober, November, Dezember.**) What are they named for? (**Numbers — seven, eight, nine, ten.**) Counted from where? (**März.**) Which two are named for men? (**Juli and August.**) Do German's own numbers sound like the Latin ones inside the months? (**No — and they never had to.**)

Chapter 15

The Seasons Go Native

Modes: ⇄ voice (11) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 11 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the four German seasons and say which of them German built and which it inherited.

The months were bought; the year, the time and the seasons were not. Jahr is English year, Zeit is English tide, and Jahreszeit is the two of them stuck together – year-time – where English borrowed season from French. Frühling was built inside German out of früh, and Herbst is English harvest: one inherited word that English narrowed to the act of gathering before buying Latin autumn for the season German never stopped naming with it.

15.1 das Jahr — “the year”

Januar to Dezember. Twelve months. There is a word for the whole of that, and it is not from Latin.

You’ll want to know: das Jahr

das Jahr — “the year.”

Germanic *jēra*, the twin of English **year**.

Every one of the twelve names inside it was bought from Rome. The container was not, any more than *Monat* was. German bought the labels and kept the measurements.

Sounds you'll need

- **j-as-y** — the *j* is English *y*, as in *Januar* and *Juni*: *jaar*.
- **h-silent-lengthening** — the *h* is not pronounced. It **stretches** the *a* in front of it, which is the job that *h* does inside a German word.

So *Jahr* is two letters of sound and two letters of instruction. Written, it looks nothing like *year*; said, it is the same word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “das Jahr” — *jaar*, long
- the English twin — “Jahr, year”
- what the *h* is doing — “stretching the *a*”

Twice through: “das Jahr.”

Before you move on

Say “the year.” (**Das Jahr**.) Is the *h* pronounced? (**No** — it lengthens the *a*.) What is its English twin? (**Year**.) Borrowed or inherited? (**Inherited** — like *Monat*, unlike every month name.) Next: the second half of a compound you are about to build.

15.2 die Zeit — “time”

You have a clock and you have an hour. This is the thing they measure.

You'll want to know: die Zeit

die Zeit — “time.”

Germanic, through and through, and the twin of an English word you would not guess: **tide**.

Tide once meant a stretch of time, and it still does in the leftovers — *Yuletide*, *eventide*, *in good time*. Then the sea took the word, and English had to borrow *time*’s job out to a different root. German never had that problem and kept *Zeit* for the whole idea.

Sounds you’ll need

- **z-ts** — German *z* is **ts**, as it was at the front of *Dezember*.
- **diphthong-ei** — and *ei* is the vowel of English **eye**.

Put them together: *tsite*, rhyming with English *sight*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Zeit” — *tsite*
- the English leftover — “Yuletide”
- the three together — “die Uhr, die Stunde, die Zeit”

Twice through: “die Zeit.”

Before you move on

Say “time.” (**Die Zeit**.) How does *z* sound? (**Ts**.) What is its English twin? (**Tide**.) Where does English still use it that way? (**Yuletide**.) Now hold *Jahr* and *Zeit* together — the next word is both of them.

15.3 die Jahreszeit — “season”

Year. Time. Put them together and say what you think it means before reading on.

You’ll want to know: die Jahreszeit

die Jahreszeit — “season,” and literally “**year-time**.”

Jahres- is *Jahr* with the linking *-es-* German puts between the halves of a compound, and *-zeit* is *Zeit*. Nothing is hidden. The plural is *die Jahreszeiten*, and it is the title of this chapter.

Why it's said this way

English does not do this. English has **season**, from French *saison*, from Latin *satio* — “the sowing.” A borrowed word, opaque unless somebody explains it, which is what the previous sentence had to do. German assembled its word out of two it already owned, and the result explains itself to anyone who has the halves. You had the halves two lessons ago.

That is the difference between the two halves of this chapter and the last one. The months arrived as labels. The year, the time and the seasons were already here, and German named them out of stock.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Jahreszeit”
- its two halves — “Jahr, Zeit”
- what it says — “year-time”
- the plural — “die Jahreszeiten”

Twice through: “Jahr, Zeit, Jahreszeit.”

Before you move on

Say “season.” (**Die Jahreszeit.**) What are its halves? (**Jahr and Zeit.**) What does it literally say? (**Year-time.**) Is English *season* built the same way? (**No** — it is borrowed from French.) Next: the first of the four.

15.4 früh — “early”

One small word first, because the first season is built out of it.

You'll want to know: früh

früh — “early.”

Not a noun and not capitalised: an adjective, and one you will meet constantly — *früh aufstehen*, to get up early.

Sounds you'll need

- **umlaut-ue** — *ü* is a sound English does not have. Say **ee**. Hold it. Now round your lips as if for **oo**, and do not let your tongue move. That is *ü*.
- **h-silent-lengthening** — and the *h* is silent again, stretching the vowel, as it did in *Jahr*.

fr-ü-h: one syllable, the middle held long.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the vowel alone — “ee, then round the lips”
- “früh”
- what the *h* is doing — “stretching, not sounding”
- it beside a word with the same trick — “Jahr, früh”

Twice through: “früh.”

Before you move on

Say “early.” (**Früh**.) How do you make *ü*? (**Say ee, then round the lips.**) Is the *h* sounded? (**No** — it lengthens.) Next: what German calls the early season.

15.5 der Frühling — “spring”

You have *früh*. Add three letters.

You'll want to know: der Frühling

der Frühling — “spring,” and literally “**the early one.**”

The ending **-ling** takes a quality and makes a thing that has it. *Früh* is early; a *Frühling* is the early one — the year's first *Jahreszeit*.

You will meet *-ling* again elsewhere, and it does the same job every time.

Sounds you'll need

- **umlaut-ue** — the same *ü* as in *früh*, unchanged by the ending.
- **ng-cluster** — and *-ling* ends on the *ng* of English *sing*, with no hard *g* after it.

Two syllables, and the weight sits on *früh*, the half that carries the meaning.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the small word — “früh”
- the season — “der Frühling”
- what it says — “the early one”
- it with its category — “der Frühling ist eine Jahreszeit”

Twice through: “früh, Frühling.”

Before you move on

Say “spring.” (**Der Frühling.**) What is it built from? (***Früh* plus *-ling*.**) What does *-ling* do? (**Makes “the one that is like that.”**) Borrowed or built? (**Built.**) Next: two seasons that need no explaining at all.

15.6 der Sommer — “summer”

After the built one, an inherited one. This is the easiest word in the chapter.

You'll want to know: der Sommer

der Sommer — “summer.”

One Germanic word, kept whole by both languages: *Sommer*, **summer**. The difference between them is the vowel letter and nothing else.

Words survive like this when nobody ever has a reason to replace them, and a hot season is one of those things every generation needs to talk about.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-o-german** — a short, rounded *o*, steadier than the English vowel.
- **r-final** — and the ending is the soft *r* you have on *Uhr* and *November*.

SOM-mer, weight on the first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Sommer”
- the pair — “Sommer, summer”
- two seasons in order — “der Frühling, der Sommer”

Twice through: “der Frühling, der Sommer.”

Before you move on

Say “summer.” (**Der Sommer.**) Is it borrowed? (**No** — **inherited**, like English *summer*.) Say the first two seasons. (**Der Frühling, der Sommer.**) Next: the one with a surprise in it.

15.7 der Herbst — “autumn”

The third season, and the only one whose name you will not recognise at first hearing.

You'll want to know: der Herbst

der Herbst — “autumn,” or “fall.”

It is the **reaping** season: the stretch of the year when the crop comes in. That meaning is the whole of the word, and the next lesson is about where else you already have it.

Sounds you'll need

- **herz-short-e** — a short, open *e*, the vowel of English *bed*, with the German *r* colouring it from behind.
- **st-initial-scht** — the *-st* here is at the **end**, so it stays a plain *st*, exactly as it did inside *August*.

hairpst, one syllable, no vowel between the *b* and the *st*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Herbst” — one syllable
- what it means — “the reaping season”
- three in order — “der Frühling, der Sommer, der Herbst”

Twice through: “der Herbst.”

Before you move on

Say “autumn.” (**Der Herbst.**) How many syllables? (**One.**) What does the word mean underneath? (**The reaping season.**) Next: the English word that is the same word.

15.8 Herbst and harvest

Say *Herbst* once more and then say the English word **harvest**. Those are the same word.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Germanic *harbistaz*, “the reaping season,” went into both languages and then each did something different with it.

language	what it kept	what it did next
German	<i>Herbst</i> , the season	nothing — it was enough
English	<i>harvest</i> , the act	borrowed Latin <i>autumn</i> for the season

English narrowed the inherited word to the *gathering itself* — you harvest a field — and then found it had no word left for the time of year, so it took one from Latin. German never split the meaning and never needed the loan.

Why it’s said this way

This is the clearest example in the book of something worth knowing: two languages can inherit **the same word** and end up looking unrelated, without either of them doing anything strange.

Nobody replaced *harvest*. Its meaning drifted a little, a gap opened where the season used to be, and a Latin word was standing nearby. That is how most borrowing happens — not because a language lacks a word, but because one of its words moved.

And it is the last turn of this chapter’s argument. The months were bought outright. The seasons were not, and *Herbst* is the one place you can watch the English side buy what German kept.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “Herbst, harvest”
- what each language kept — “the season; the work”
- what English had to buy — “autumn, from Latin”

Twice through: “Herbst, harvest — one word, two jobs.”

Before you move on

What English word is *Herbst*? (**Harvest.**) What does English use it for now? (**The act of gathering.**) So what did English borrow, and from where? (**Autumn, from Latin.**) Did German need a loan? (**No.**) Next: the coldest one, and then a word most Germans never say.

15.9 der Winter — “winter”

The fourth season, spelled exactly as you would expect, and said exactly as you would not.

You’ll want to know: der Winter

der Winter — “winter.”

Same six letters as English, same inherited Germanic word, and like *Sommer* it was never worth replacing.

Sounds you’ll need

- **w-as-v** — German *w* is an English **v**. The season is *VIN-ter*.
- **i-short** — and the *i* is short and bright.

November had the mirror of this: a *v* that is said as an *f*. German’s *v* and *w* have swapped the jobs an English reader expects of them, and these two words put both halves of the swap on one page.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Winter” — VIN-ter
- the rule you will need again — “German *w* is an English **v**”
- the swap — “*w* is **v**, **v** is *f*”
- all four — “der Frühling, der Sommer, der Herbst, der Winter”

Twice through: “der Winter.”

Before you move on

Say “winter.” (**Der Winter** — VIN-ter.) How is German *w* said? (**As a v, every time.**) And German *v*? (**As an f.**) How many *Jahreszeiten* have you now? (**Four.**) Next: a fifth name for a season you already have.

15.10 der Lenz — “spring,” the old word

German has a second word for spring. You will read it far more often than you will hear it.

You’ll want to know: der Lenz

der Lenz — “spring,” in poetry and in set phrases.

Frühling is the word you use. *Lenz* is the word that turns up in songs, in older writing, and in the odd fixed expression. Recognise it; reach for *Frühling*.

It is older than *Frühling*, and it is the twin of English **Lent** — which was the *spring* season before the Church attached a fast to it. Both go back to a root about the **lengthening** of the days, which is the one thing a northern spring reliably does.

Sounds you’ll need

- **z-ts** — the *z* is **ts**, as in *Zeit* and *Dezember*: *lents*.
- **herz-short-e** — with the short open *e* of *Herbst*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Lenz” — lents
- the everyday word beside it — “der Frühling”
- the English twin — “Lent”
- which one you use — “Frühling”

Twice through: “Frühling, Lenz.”

Before you move on

What does *Lenz* mean? (**Spring**.) Which word do you use in speech? (**Frühling**.) What is *Lenz*'s English twin? (**Lent**.) What did the root mean? (**The lengthening of the days**.) Next: the whole year, said through.

15.11 Practice — the four, and the seam

No new words. A year, a time, and the four things they make between them.

Grammar Lens: the four seasons

German	built from	English
<i>der Frühling</i>	<i>früh + -ling</i>	spring
<i>der Sommer</i>	inherited whole	summer
<i>der Herbst</i>	inherited whole	autumn
<i>der Winter</i>	inherited whole	winter

Three of the four are the plain twins of their English words. The fourth was built inside German out of a word you learned one lesson earlier. Not one of them was borrowed.

Why it's said this way

Hold the last three chapters together and the seam is exact.

The **months** came from Rome, all twelve, names and calendar together. The **year**, the **time**, and the **seasons** did not. *Jahr*, *Zeit*, *Jahreszeit*, and the four seasons are German's own, and *Frühling* was still being built out of German parts long after the month names had arrived.

Herbst is the sharpest place to see it, because there English went the other way: it kept the inherited word for the **work** and bought *autumn* for the **season**. Two languages, one starting word, opposite outcomes — and the German one is the one that needed no purchase.

And German kept a spare. *Lenz* is still there for spring, older than *Frühling*, unneeded and unretired.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all four — “der Frühling, der Sommer, der Herbst, der Winter”
- the category — “die Jahreszeiten”
- the built one and its part — “Frühling, from früh”
- the compound and its halves — “Jahreszeit: Jahr, Zeit”
- the pair that split — “Herbst, harvest”

Twice through: “Frühling, Sommer, Herbst, Winter.”

Before you move on

Name the four seasons. (**Der Frühling, der Sommer, der Herbst, der Winter.**) Which one was built rather than inherited? (**Frühling**, from *früh*.) Which one is English *harvest*? (**Herbst.**) How many of the four did German borrow? (**None.**) And how many of the twelve month names? (**All of them.**)

Chapter 16

The Pair That Proves Grimm's Law

Modes: 🗣️ voice (13) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 13 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can identify close family members in German and say who someone is.

Four people and two words for groups of them, and a sound law legible across all four. Vater against pater is p becoming f; Mutter against mater is t becoming th and then moving again inside German; Bruder against frater is a breathy b flattening one way in Germanic and turning to f in Latin, so the swap runs the opposite way; and Schwester against soror is the one that did not move at all, because the law touches stops and leaves an s alone. Every word in the chapter is inherited, where every month name was bought.

16.1 der Vater — “father”

The months were bought from Rome. Nothing in this chapter was.

You'll want to know: der Vater

der Vater — “father.”

A *der*-word, two syllables, and the first letter is a trap for an English eye.

Sounds you'll need

- **v-as-f** — German *v* is an **f**. You were given this on *vier*, “four,” and it has not changed: *Vater* opens **FAH**-, never **VAH**-.
- **vowel-a-long** — the *a* is long and open, the *ah* of English *father*.
- **r-final** — and it closes on the soft *r* you have been ending words with since *Uhr*.

FAH-ter. Say it beside English **father** and the only real difference is the middle consonant.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Vater” — FAH-ter
- the letter and the sound — “V on the page, f in the mouth”
- it beside its English twin — “Vater, father”

Twice through: “der Vater.”

Before you move on

Say “father.” (**Der Vater**.) Which article? (**Der**.) How is the *V* said? (**As an f**.) Which number gave you that? (**Vier**.) Next: why that *f* is there at all.

16.2 Vater and pater

You were given a sound law once, on *Donner* and *thunder*. Here it is again, on the oldest word in the language.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

One ancient word, reconstructed as **ph₂tér*, went into every branch of the family. Then the Germanic branch did something the others did not.

branch	what it did to the first sound	result
Latin, and Romance after it	kept the p	<i>pater</i> , French <i>père</i>
Germanic	turned it into an f	father, V ater
The German <i>V</i> is an old spelling of that <i>f</i> . Take the letter away and the two Germanic words are the same word.		

Why it's said this way

That $p \rightarrow f$ is one line of Grimm's law, the shift that separated the Germanic languages from the rest. It ran through the whole vocabulary at once, which is why it is a law and not an anecdote. And it is why German and English **agree** here while French sits on the other side. They agree because they are on the same side of one ancient change — not because either borrowed from the other. The month names came from Rome. This word never went anywhere.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two Germanic ones — “Vater, father”
- the Latin one — “pater”
- the change — “p became f”

Twice through: “pater, Vater — p to f.”

Before you move on

What did Latin keep? (**The** *p* — *pater*.) What did Germanic do with it? (**Turned it into an** *f*.) What is that shift called? (**Grimm's law**.) So why do German and English match? (**Same side of the change**.) Next: the mother, and the second leg of the same law.

16.3 die Mutter — “mother”

The father's first sound changed. This one held.

You'll want to know: die Mutter

die Mutter — “mother.”

A *die*-word beside *der Vater*, and the pair is how the two articles are usually first met in a sentence about people.

Sounds you'll need

- **mund-short-u** — the *u* is **short**, the vowel of English *put*, not the *uh* of English *mother*.
- **d-t-final** — and the *-tt-* is a crisp double *t*.

MOO-ter, with the *oo* clipped short. Weight on the first syllable, as it is on *Vater*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Mutter” — MOO-ter, short
- the pair with their articles — “der Vater, die Mutter”
- the English pair — “father, mother”

Twice through: “der Vater, die Mutter.”

Before you move on

Say “mother.” (**Die Mutter.**) Which article? (**Die.**) Is the *u* long or short? (**Short.**) Say both parents together. (**Der Vater, die Mutter.**) Next: the consonant in the middle, which did move.

16.4 Mutter and mater

The father moved at the front. The mother moves in the middle.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The first sound of this word never changed anywhere: *m* in Latin, *m* in English, *m* in German. The **middle** one did, twice.

stage	the middle sound	word
Latin, untouched	t	<i>mater</i> , French <i>mère</i>
Germanic, first shift	th	<i>mother</i>
German, its own later shift	tt	<i>Mutter</i>

English stopped after one change. German kept going and ran a second shift of its own, which is why *mother* and *Mutter* differ where *father* and *Vater* barely do.

Why it's said this way

Two shifts, one after the other, both of them laws rather than accidents. The first separated Germanic from Latin; the second separated German from English.

So the distance between any two of these words is a count of how many shifts have run between them. *Mater* to *mother* is one. *Mother* to *Mutter* is one more. That is the whole reason the family looks scattered from the outside and is perfectly orderly from the inside.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three in order — “mater, mother, Mutter”
- the middle sound each time — “t, th, tt”
- what never changed — “the m”

Twice through: “mater, mother, Mutter.”

Before you move on

What is the Latin? (**Mater.**) What did the first shift make of the middle *t*? (**Th.**) And the second? (**The tt of Mutter.**) How many shifts separate *mater* from *Mutter*? (**Two.**) Next: the word for both of them at once.

16.5 die Eltern — “parents”

You have a father and a mother. German has one word for the two of them, and it only comes in the plural.

You’ll want to know: die Eltern

die Eltern — “parents.”

It takes *die*, like every plural you have met, and there is no singular form of it. You cannot say “one *Eltern*”; a single one is *der Vater* or *die Mutter*.

Underneath, it is a **comparative** that hardened into a noun: it means “the **older** ones.” English had the same formation and kept it as **elders**, narrowed to people of standing rather than to the two who raised you.

Why it’s said this way

Every word in this chapter is inherited. Not one of them was bought. That is not an accident of this list. The words a language uses every hour of every day are the ones an incoming language cannot displace, and there is nothing more everyday than the people in a house. Rome ran the calendar, so German took the calendar’s words. Rome did not run anybody’s family.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Eltern”
- the two it stands for — “der Vater, die Mutter”
- what it literally means — “the older ones”
- the English word from the same formation — “elders”

Twice through: “die Eltern.”

Before you move on

Say “parents.” (**Die Eltern.**) What is the singular? (**There is none** — use *der Vater* or *die Mutter*.) What does it mean underneath? (**The older ones.**) Was any word in this chapter

borrowed? (**No** — all inherited.) Next: the brother.

16.6 der Bruder — “brother”

Out of the parents and into their children. This one you can almost read already.

You’ll want to know: der Bruder

der Bruder — “brother.”

A *der*-word. Set it beside English **brother** and one vowel is the whole distance: *oo* where English has *uh*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vowel-u-long** — a long *oo*, as in English *food*.
- **r-uvular** — the *r* after *B* is made at the back of the throat, a light scrape rather than a roll.
- **r-final** — and the ending is the soft closing *r* again.

BROO-der, weight on the first, exactly the rhythm of *Vater* and *Mutter*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Bruder” — BROO-der
- the English twin — “Bruder, brother”
- three of the family so far — “der Vater, die Mutter, der Bruder”

Twice through: “der Bruder.”

Before you move on

Say “brother.” (**Der Bruder.**) Which article? (**Der.**) Long or short *u*? (**Long** — *BROO.*) Next: what Latin did to the front of it.

16.7 Bruder and frater

On the father, Latin had the *p* and Germanic had the *f*. Here it is the other way round, and that is not a contradiction.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The ancient word is reconstructed as **b^hréh₂tēr* — it begins with a **breathy b**, a sound neither language kept.

branch	what it did with the breathy b	result
Latin	turned it into an f	<i>frater</i> , French <i>frère</i>
Germanic	flattened it to a plain b	brother , Bruder

So *Bruder* and *frater* really are one word, and the *b* against the *f* is the mark of which branch you are standing in.

Why it's said this way

It looks reversed against *Vater* and *pater*, where Germanic held the *f*. It is not. The two words started from **different ancient sounds**: a plain *p* in one, a breathy *b* in the other. Grimm's law moved each of them once, in its own direction, and the results cross over.

That is what makes it a law worth the name. It does not say “Germanic prefers *f*.” It says each old sound goes to one particular new one, every time — and you can run it forwards on a word you have never seen.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “frater, Bruder”
- which branch has which — “Latin f, Germanic b”
- the father pair beside it — “pater, Vater”

Twice through: “frater, Bruder.”

Before you move on

What is the Latin for *Bruder*? (**Frater**.) Which branch has the *b*? (**Germanic**.) Does that contradict *pater* and *Vater*? (**No** — they started from different old sounds.) Next: a cluster of three letters that says two sounds.

16.8 schw- — three letters, two sounds

One sound cluster before the next word, because the word is unreadable without it.

Sounds you'll need

- **sch-sh** — **sch** is **one** sound, and it is the *sh* of English *ship*. Not *s-k-h*, not *sk*. Three letters, one consonant.
- **w-as-v** — and German *w* is a **v**, the rule you were given on *Winter*.
- **schw-cluster** — put them together and *schw-* comes out **shv-**.

English can say *sh* and English can say *v*, but it never puts them side by side at the start of a word. Say *shhh*, hold it, then let it fall straight into *v* without a vowel between: *shv*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the first sound alone — “sh”
- the second alone — “v”
- the two joined, no vowel — “shv”
- it again, slower — “shv”

Twice through: “shv.”

Before you move on

How many sounds is *sch*? (**One** — English *sh*.) How is German *w* said? (**As a v**.) So what does *schw*- sound like? (**Shv**-.) Is there a vowel between them? (**No**.) Next: the word that starts with it.

16.9 die Schwester — “sister”

You have the cluster. Here is the word it was for.

You’ll want to know: die Schwester

die Schwester — “sister.”

SHVES-ter. A *die*-word, and the counterpart of *der Bruder*.

On the page it looks unrelated to **sister**. In the mouth it is not: take the *shv* back to a plain *s* and what is left — *s-e-s-t-e-r* — is the English word with one vowel moved.

Sounds you’ll need

- **schw-cluster** — *shv*-, straight into the vowel.
- **herz-short-e** — a short open *e*, the vowel of English *bed*.
- **r-final** — and the same soft ending as *Vater*, *Mutter* and *Bruder*.

Four family words now, and all four end the same way.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Schwester” — *SHVES-ter*
- the pair — “der Bruder, die Schwester”
- all four — “der Vater, die Mutter, der Bruder, die Schwester”

Twice through: “die Schwester.”

Before you move on

Say “sister.” (**Die Schwester.**) How does it start? (**Shv-**.) Which article? (**Die.**) Say the brother beside it. (**Der Bruder.**) Next: what Latin did with the same word.

16.10 Schwester and soror

The brother’s first sound split the two branches. The sister’s did not split anything.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The ancient word is reconstructed as **swésōr*, and all three descendants keep its **s**:

language	the word	the first sound
German	<i>Schwester</i>	<i>sch</i> is a later German dressing on an s
English	<i>sister</i>	plain s
Latin	<i>soror</i>	plain s

Grimm’s law had nothing to do to an *s*. It moved the stops — the *ps*, *ts* and *bs* — and left this one where it stood, which is why the sister is the one family word whose front sound matches across the whole family.

Why it’s said this way

Latin *soror* is behind French *sœur*, and behind English **sorority** — which English borrowed back from Latin centuries after it already had *sister* from the same root. The two came in by different doors and nobody noticed they were relatives.

That is the ordinary condition of a big vocabulary: the same ancient word arriving twice, once inherited and once bought, sitting in the dictionary without recognising each other.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three — “Schwester, sister, soror”

- what they share — “the s”
- the English word borrowed back from Latin — “sorority”

Twice through: “Schwester, sister, soror.”

Before you move on

What is the Latin? (**Soror.**) What do all three share? (**The s.**) Why did Grimm’s law leave it? (**It moved stops, not s.**) What is the *sch* then? (**Later German dressing on the same s.**) Next: the word English does not have.

16.11 die Geschwister — “siblings”

German has one word for the brother and the sister together.
English has *siblings*, which almost nobody says at a kitchen table.

You’ll want to know: die Geschwister

die Geschwister — “siblings,” brothers and sisters as a set.

Consider what is inside it. Take off the *Ge-* at the front and *-schwister* is *Schwester*, which you own — the same *shv*, the same ending. A plural, so *die*, and like *Eltern* it has no singular.

Why it’s said this way

The odd part is that a word built on *Schwester* covers the **brothers** too. Two boys and no girls in a house are still *die Geschwister*. German built the collective on the word that happened to be there, and the collective then outranked the piece it was made from. English never built one at all: it says *brothers and sisters* and reaches for the Latin-derived *siblings* when it needs a single term.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Geschwister”
- the word inside it — “Schwester”

- the two it covers — “der Bruder, die Schwester”
- what English says instead — “brothers and sisters”

Twice through: “die Geschwister.”

Before you move on

Say “siblings.” (**Die Geschwister.**) Which word is inside it? (**Schwester.**) Does it cover brothers? (**Yes** — all of them.) Is there a singular? (**No.**) Next: what that *Ge-* on the front is doing.

16.12 The gathering Ge-

One prefix, one job, and the last word showed you it working.

Grammar Lens: one member in, a whole set out

Put **Ge-** on the front of a word for one member of something, and you get a word for **the whole set of them**.

in

out

Schwester, one member

Geschwister, the set

That is the machine. It is old, it is Germanic, and German still runs it: a mountain becomes a mountain range, a piece of luggage becomes the luggage, a vegetable becomes the vegetables — each one a bare noun with *Ge-* welded on.

English had this prefix and wore it away to nothing. What is left of it in English are fossils nobody parses any more.

Why it's said this way

Both plural-only family words in this chapter are made rather than borrowed, and each is made a different way.

Eltern takes an adjective and freezes it: **the older ones**. *Geschwister* takes a noun and gathers it: **the set of them**.

Neither has a singular, because neither was ever about one person. They name a group directly, and German got both of them out of parts it already had.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- what the prefix does — “one member in, the set out”
- the pair it made — “Schwester, Geschwister”
- the two plural-only words — “die Eltern, die Geschwister”

Twice through: “Schwester, Geschwister.”

Before you move on

What does the gathering *Ge-* do? (**Makes a set out of one member.**) Which word in this chapter was built with it? (***Geschwister*.**) And how was *Eltern* built instead? (**From a comparative — the older ones.**) Do either of them have a singular? (**No.**)

16.13 Practice — the household, and the law that runs through it

No new words. Four people, two words for groups of them, and one sound law with three lines.

Grammar Lens: the four, and their two collectives

one person

der Vater

die Mutter

der Bruder

die Schwester

the set they belong to

die Eltern

die Eltern

die Geschwister

die Geschwister

Both collectives take *die* and neither has a singular. One was frozen out of a comparative, the other gathered with a prefix.

Why it's said this way

Set the four against their Latin cousins and the law is legible in a line:

- ***Vater*** against *pater* — the **p** became an **f**.

- **Mutter** against *mater* — the **t** became **th**, and then German moved it again.
- **Bruder** against *frater* — a breathy **b** flattened one way in Germanic and turned to **f** in Latin, so the swap runs the opposite way.
- **Schwester** against *soror* — nothing moved. The law does not touch an **s**.

Three moved and one did not, and which is which was decided by the sound, not by the word. That is what makes it predictable.

Why it's said this way

And every word here is **inherited**. Not one was bought, where every month name was.

The pattern holds across the whole book: the words a language uses every hour resist replacement, and the words that arrive with an institution come in whole. A calendar is an institution. A household is not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four with their articles — “der Vater, die Mutter, der Bruder, die Schwester”
- the two collectives — “die Eltern, die Geschwister”
- the one that starts shv — “die Schwester”
- each pair against its Latin — “Vater, pater; Mutter, mater; Bruder, frater; Schwester, soror”
- the one Latin word that did not move — “soror”

Twice through: “der Vater, die Mutter, der Bruder, die Schwester.”

Before you move on

Name the four. (**Der Vater, die Mutter, der Bruder, die Schwester.**) The word for the two older ones? (**Die Eltern.**) For the two younger? (**Die Geschwister.**) Which of the four is unchanged from Latin at the front? (**Schwester** — the *s* never moved.) And how many of these words did German borrow? (**None.**)

Chapter 17

Bread, Water, Wine

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name and request bread, water, and wine in German.

Three things you could put on one table and two histories between them. Brot is Germanic braudam, English bread, where French took Latin panis and German did not. Wasser is Germanic watar with German's own later shift turning the t into ss, the same shift that put the tt into Mutter. Wein is Latin vinum, borrowed whole with the grapevine the legions carried north – and you can tell it is borrowed without being told, because the inherited pair have drifted from their English twins and the loan has not.

17.1 das Brot — “bread”

Der Vater. Die Mutter. You were given a third article in the first chapter and have had no noun for it. Here it is.

You'll want to know: das Brot

das Brot — “bread.”

A **das**-word. That completes the set on real nouns: *der Vater, die Mutter, das Brot* — one of each, and now you have met all three doing their job rather than sitting in a list.

Sounds you'll need

- **long-o** — a long *o*, the vowel of English *boat*, held steady.
- **r-uvular** — the *r* is made far back in the throat.
- **d-t-final** — and the final *t* is crisp.

broht. One syllable, and capitalised on the page like every German noun, whether it names a person or a loaf.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “das Brot” — broht
- one noun of each gender — “der Vater, die Mutter, das Brot”
- the three articles alone — “der, die, das”
- why it has a capital — “every German noun does”

Twice through: “das Brot.”

Before you move on

Say “bread.” (**Das Brot.**) Which article? (*Das* — the neuter.) Say all three with a noun each. (**Der Vater, die Mutter, das Brot.**) Why the capital *B*? (**German capitalises every noun.**) Next: where the word comes from, and where it does not.

17.2 Brot and bread

A word can be interesting for what happened to it. This one is interesting for what did not.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Brot comes from Germanic **braudam*, and English **bread** comes from the same word. No Latin anywhere in it.
Now the other side of the line. Latin *pānis* went into every Romance language and stayed there:

language	the word	from
German	<i>Brot</i>	Germanic <i>*braudam</i>
French	<i>pain</i>	Latin <i>pānis</i>
Italian	<i>pane</i>	Latin <i>pānis</i>

Why it's said this way

Rome sold German a calendar and a clock. It did not sell German bread.

The pattern is the one you have been given four times now and it holds again here: a thing people handle every single day already has a word, and an incoming language does not get to replace it. Months were an administrative object and arrived with their labels. A loaf on a table was not waiting for a name.

That is why *Brot* sits with *Vater* and *Mutter* rather than with *Januar*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the Germanic pair — “Brot, bread”
- the Romance word it is not — “pain”
- which kind of word this is — “inherited, not bought”

Twice through: “Brot, bread.”

Before you move on

What is the English twin of *Brot*? (***Bread.***) What does French say? (***Pain***, from Latin *pānis*.) Did German borrow that? (**No.**) Why not? (**A daily thing already had a word.**) Next: the second of the three.

17.3 das Wasser — “water”

Bread, and then something to drink beside it. Its first letter you have met twice already.

You'll want to know: das Wasser

das Wasser — “water.”

Another *das*-word, so it takes the same article as *Brot*. Two neuters in a row is a useful accident: it lets you say *das Brot und das Wasser* without having to decide anything.

Sounds you'll need

- **w-as-v** — German *w* is an English **v**. *Wasser* opens *VAH*-.
 • **vowel-a-german** — a clean open *a*.
- **r-final** — and the soft closing *r*.

VAH-ser. You have had that *w* on *Winter*, and inside the *shv*- of *Schwester*; this is the third time and the first where it sits on its own at the front of a word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “das Wasser” — *VAH-ser*
- the letter and the sound — “W on the page, v in the mouth”
- the two together — “das Brot und das Wasser”

Twice through: “das Wasser.”

Before you move on

Say “water.” (**Das Wasser**.) Which article? (**Das**, like *Brot*.) How is the *W* said? (**As a v**.) Where did you meet that before? (**On Winter, and inside Schwester**.) Next: its English twin.

17.4 Wasser and water

Say *Wasser* and then **water**. The difference is one consonant, and you have met it before.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Both come from Germanic **watar*. English kept the **t**. German turned it into **ss**.

That is German's own later shift — the second of the two you met on *Mutter*, where English stopped at *mother* and German kept going. It ran through the vocabulary the same way, so once you have it you can predict it:

English	German
water	Wasser
mother	Mutter

Why it's said this way

Two chapters, four inherited words, and the same two shifts explaining every difference between the German and the English.

That is the payoff of a sound law: you stop memorising pairs. *Wasser* is not a word to be learned beside *water* — it **is** *water*, with one predictable change applied, and the change is one you can now run yourself.

And like *Brot*, nothing here was bought. Water is as everyday as a word gets.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “Wasser, water”
- what changed — “t became ss”
- the other pair with the same shift — “Mutter, mother”

Twice through: “Wasser, water.”

Before you move on

What is the English twin? (**Water**.) What did German do to the *t*? (**Made it ss**.) Which other word did the same shift? (**Mutter**.) Inherited or borrowed? (**Inherited**.) Next: the one on this table that was borrowed.

17.5 der Wein — “wine”

Two *das*-words so far. The third drink takes a different article, and that is the smaller of the two things different about it.

You’ll want to know: der Wein

der Wein — “wine.”

A **der**-word, where *Brot* and *Wasser* are both *das*. So the three now run one of each: *das Brot*, *das Wasser*, *der Wein*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **w-as-v** — the *W* is a **v** again, as in *Wasser*.
- **diphthong-ei** — and *ei* is the vowel of English **eye**, which you were given on *eins*.

Put the two together and *Wein* comes out sounding like English **vine**. Hold on to that, because the next lesson is about why.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Wein” — like English “vine”
- the two vowels you know — “ei is eye, as in eins”
- all three with their articles — “das Brot, das Wasser, der Wein”

Twice through: “der Wein.”

Before you move on

Say “wine.” (**Der Wein**.) Which article? (**Der** — not *das*, like the other two.) What does *ei* sound like? (**English eye**.) So what English word does it sound like? (**Vine**.) Next: why it does.

17.6 Wein and vinum

Wasser and *water* differ by a consonant. *Wein* and **wine** differ by nothing you can hear. That difference is the lesson.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Wein is **not** an inherited Germanic word. It was **borrowed from Latin *vīnum*** in Roman times, when the legions brought the grapevine north of the Alps.

Here is how you can tell without being told. Inherited words drift apart, because a sound law runs through them:

pair	how far apart
<i>Wasser</i> / water	a whole consonant — <i>ss</i> against <i>t</i>
<i>Mutter</i> / mother	two shifts of distance
<i>Wein</i> / wine / <i>vīnum</i>	no distance at all

Three words that match this closely are not three cousins who happen to look alike. They are **one word, borrowed**, arriving too late for the law to touch it.

Why it's said this way

The vine did not grow north of the Alps until Rome carried it there. A people who have never had a thing have no word for it, and when the thing arrives the word arrives with it — which is the same reason *Uhr* is Latin and the twelve months are Latin.

So one table holds both halves of the rule. *Brot* and *Wasser* were always here and are German's own. *Wein* came on a cart, and its name was in the same load.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three that match — “Wein, wine, vinum”
- what that closeness means — “one loan, not three cousins”
- what came with the word — “the vine itself”
- the two that were always here — “das Brot, das Wasser”

Twice through: “Wein, wine, vinum — one loan.”

Before you move on

Is *Wein* inherited? (**No** — **borrowed from Latin** *vīnum*.) How can you tell? (**It is too close** — a law would have moved it.) What arrived with the word? (**The grapevine**.) And *Wasser*? (**Always here**.)

17.7 Practice — one table, two histories

No new words. Three things you could put on a table, and one of them is a different kind of word from the other two.

Grammar Lens: three nouns, three articles

German	English
<i>das Brot</i>	the bread
<i>das Wasser</i>	the water
<i>der Wein</i>	the wine
Two neuters and a masculine, every one of them capitalised. There is no rule behind which is which — the article comes with the noun and is learned with it, which is why every word in this book arrives wearing one.	

Why it's said this way

Now the histories, which do have a rule behind them:

- ***Brot*** — Germanic **braudam*, English **bread**. French took Latin *pānis* and German did not.
- ***Wasser*** — Germanic **watar*, English **water**, with German's own later shift turning the *t* into *ss*.
- ***Wein*** — Latin *vīnum*, borrowed whole, matching English **wine** and the Latin too closely to be anything else.

Two were always here; one came north on a cart with the plant it names. You can read that off the words themselves without knowing any history: the inherited pair have **drifted** from their English twins, and the borrowed one has not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all three with their articles — “das Brot, das Wasser, der Wein”
- the two with a v sound — “Wasser, Wein”
- which two are German’s own — “Brot, Wasser”
- which one Rome supplied — “Wein”
- how you can tell — “it did not drift”

Twice through: “das Brot, das Wasser, der Wein.”

Before you move on

Say the three with their articles. (**Das Brot, das Wasser, der Wein.**) Which is masculine? (**Der Wein.**) Which two did German inherit? (**Brot and Wasser.**) Which came from Latin? (**Wein, from *vīnum*.**) And what arrived with it? (**The vine.**)

Chapter 18

One Left Over

Modes:  voice (4)  Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say eleven and twelve in German and explain why neither of them follows the counting pattern.

elf and zwei are not irregular numbers, they are a different rule, and it is a rule about hands. ainlif is one-left and twalif is two-left: left over from ten, because ten is where your fingers stop. English inherited both words unchanged, which is why eleven and twelve are odd there in exactly the same way – when two languages share an irregularity this precisely they did not agree on it, they were one language when it was made. The rule covers two numbers and then stops.

18.1 elf — “eleven”

You can count to ten. Both languages then do something odd for two numbers, and they do the same odd thing.

You’ll want to know: elf

elf — “eleven.”

Not *einszehn*. Not “oneteen” in English either. Eleven is the first of two numbers that refuse the pattern, in German and in English alike.

Sounds you'll need

- **herz-short-e** — a short open *e*, the vowel of English *bed*.
- **f-final** — and a clean *f* to close.

elf, one syllable, said as it looks. This is the rare German word an English reader can pronounce on sight.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “elf”
- the two in order — “zehn, elf”
- what it is not — “not einszehn”

Twice through: “zehn, elf.”

Before you move on

Say “eleven.” (***Elf***.) Does it end in *-zehn*? (**No**.) Does English say “oneteen”? (**No** — *eleven*.) Next: the second of the two.

18.2 zwölf — “twelve”

Short on the page, and three rules deep in the mouth. You own all three already.

You'll want to know: zwölf

zwölf — “twelve.”

The second number to refuse the pattern, and the last. After this one German turns regular and stays regular.

You can hear *zwei* inside it if you listen for the opening: *zw-* is the same start.

Sounds you'll need

- **z-ts** — German *z* is **ts**.
- **w-as-v** — German *w* is a **v**, as on *Winter* and *Wasser*.
- **umlaut-oe** — and *ö* is the rounded vowel from *schön*: shape your lips for *oh* and say *eh*.

So the word opens *tsv-* and runs *tsvölf*. Three rules, one syllable, nothing new.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the opening alone — “tsv”
- the vowel alone — lips for “oh”, say “eh”
- “zwölf”
- the pair — “elf, zwölf”

Twice through: “elf, zwölf.”

Before you move on

Say “twelve.” (*Zwölf*.) How does it open? (*Tsv-*.) Why? (*z* is *ts*, *w* is *v*.) Which number is hiding at the front? (*Zwei*.) Next: what both of them actually mean.

18.3 -lif — “left over”

Two words that look like exceptions. They are not exceptions. They are an older rule, and it is a rule about hands.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Both words are compounds, and both end in the same piece:

word	older form	the pieces
<i>elf</i>	<i>ainlif</i>	<i>ain</i> “one” + <i>lif</i>
<i>zwölf</i>	<i>twalif</i>	<i>twa</i> “two” + <i>lif</i>

And **-lif** means “to leave, to remain.” So *elf* is “one left over” and *zwölf* is “two left over.”

Why it’s said this way

Left over from **what**? From **ten** — from your ten fingers.

You count along them, you reach *zehn*, you run out of hand, and there is one left. That is eleven. Not a number in a sequence but a **remainder**, named by people counting on the only calculator they had.

And English says the identical thing. *Eleven* is *ain-lif*; *twelve* is *twa-lif*. Not similar words — **the same two words**, inherited side by side, the way *Vater* and *father* are. The Germanic twinning you have been tracking through the household and the meal reaches all the way into the counting.

It also explains why the trick stops at two. Ten fingers leave room for one and two before the hands are hopeless, and after that a language needs a real rule.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two pieces of eleven — “ain, lif”
- what the ending means — “left over”
- the whole idea — “one left over from ten”
- the English pair that says the same — “eleven, twelve”

Twice through: “elf, zwölf — one left, two left.”

Before you move on

What does *-lif* mean? (**Left over.**) Left over from what? (**Ten** — **your fingers.**) So what is *elf*? (**One left over.**) Are *eleven* and *twelve* the same words? (**Yes** — inherited, not borrowed.) Next:

both of them together.

18.4 Practice — one left, two left

No new words. Two numbers, and the reason they look strange in both languages at once.

Grammar Lens: what the two are made of

German	is	and means
<i>elf</i>	<i>ain + lif</i>	one left over
<i>zwölf</i>	<i>twa + lif</i>	two left over

Two words, one ending, and the ending is a verb: to leave, to remain. Neither number was ever irregular — they were built by a rule that only had room to run twice.

Why it's said this way

Left over from *zehn*, from ten fingers. A counting system built on hands has to say something when the hands run out, and what Germanic said was *and one is left*.

English inherited both words unchanged, which is why *eleven* and *twelve* are equally odd there, and odd in exactly the same way. When two languages share an irregularity this precisely, they did not agree on it — they were one language when it was made.

From the next number on, both of them turn regular and never break again.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- count the last three — “zehn, elf, zwölf”
- the opening of the second — “tsv”
- what each one means — “one left over, two left over”
- the English pair — “eleven, twelve”

Twice through: “zehn, elf, zwölf.”

Before you move on

Say eleven and twelve. (*Elf, zwölf.*) What does the ending mean? (**Left over.**) Left over from what? (*Zehn* — **ten fingers.**) Why are the English words odd in the same way? (**They are the same two words.**) How many numbers does this rule cover? (**Two — and then it stops.**)

Chapter 19

The Pattern That Never Breaks

Modes: 🗣️ voice (12) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 12 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count from thirteen to twenty in German and build every one of those numbers from a digit I already know.

One rule run eight times: a digit you already own with zehn welded on the end, which is what English -teen is too, because -teen IS ten. Two digits are trimmed at the join – sechs loses its s and sieben loses its -en – and that is the mouth economising, not the rule breaking, exactly as English wore three down to thir- and five to fif-. Twenty stops using zehn and uses -zig, which is the same word worn further, and so is English -ty. The Romance sisters all break partway through the teens; German does not break at all.

19.1 Ziffer plus zehn — the rule

The leftover trick covered two numbers and stopped. From here German uses one rule, and it does not break once.

Grammar Lens: a digit, then zehn

Take a digit you already own. Put **zehn** on the end. That is the number.

take a digit	weld on	and say it
--------------	---------	------------

drei	zehn	—
------	------	---

No space, no linking piece, no change to either half. Say that row out loud and you have made the number yourself; the next lesson only

confirms it.

You are not learning eight new words in this chapter — you are running one machine eight times.

English does the identical thing and hides it slightly: **-teen is *ten***.

Thir-teen is “three-ten,” which is why it rhymes with nothing and means exactly what German means.

Sounds you’ll need

- **z-ts** — every one of these ends in *zehn*, and German *z* is **ts**, so every one ends *-TSAYN*.

Say *zehn* on its own until the *ts* is automatic. It is about to appear eight times in a row.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the ending alone — “zehn”
- the rule — “a digit, then zehn”
- run it once — “drei”, then “zehn”, then the two joined
- what English hides — “-teen is ten”

Twice through: “Ziffer plus zehn.”

Before you move on

What is the rule? (**A digit, then *zehn***.) Does anything go between them? (**No.**) Run it on *drei* and say what comes out. How does every one of them end? (***-tsayn***.) And what is English *-teen*? (***Ten***.) Next: the rule’s first run.

19.2 dreizehn — “thirteen”

You have the rule and you have the digit. Say the number before you read it.

You'll want to know: dreizehn

dreizehn — “thirteen.” *drei* + *zehn*.

Nothing added, nothing changed. If you predicted it, that is the point of the chapter working.

English wore its digit down — *three* became *thir-* — and German did not touch its own.

Sounds you'll need

- **diphthong-ei** — *ei* is the vowel of English **eye**, unchanged from *drei*.
- **z-ts** — and the second half is *-TSAYN*.

DREI-tsayn, with the weight on the digit, not the ending. That stress pattern holds for every number in this chapter.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the parts — “drei, zehn”
- joined — “dreizehn”
- the English one and its worn-down digit — “thirteen, from three”

Twice through: “drei, zehn, dreizehn.”

Before you move on

Say “thirteen.” (***Dreizehn***.) What are its halves? (***Drei*** and ***zehn***.) Did either change? (**No.**) Which syllable is stressed? (**The first** — the digit.) Next: fourteen, the same way.

19.3 vierzehn — “fourteen”

Same rule, next digit — and its first letter is one you have been warned about twice.

You'll want to know: vierzehn

vierzehn — “fourteen.” *vier* + *zehn*.

Sounds you'll need

- **v-as-f** — the *V* is an **f**, exactly as in *vier* and *Vater*.
- **z-ts** — and *-TSAYN* again.

FEER-tsayn. Third time for that *v*: a number, a father, and now a teen.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the parts — “vier, zehn”
- joined — “vierzehn”
- the two so far — “dreizehn, vierzehn”

Twice through: “dreizehn, vierzehn.”

Before you move on

Say “fourteen.” (***Vierzehn.***) How is the *V* said? (**As an *f*.**) What are its halves? (***Vier* and *zehn.***) Next: fifteen.

19.4 fünfzehn — “fifteen”

Third run of the rule, and the first place English is the messier of the two languages.

You'll want to know: fünfzehn

fünfzehn — “fifteen.” *fünf* + *zehn*.

The digit is whole. English is not: **five** became *fif*-, so *fifteen* no longer shows its own number. German keeps *fünf* visible and audible.

Sounds you'll need

- **umlaut-ue** — the *ü* from *fünf*, unchanged: say *ee*, then round the lips.
- **z-ts** — and *-TSAYN*.

Two syllables, the weight on *fünf* and the ending unstressed.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the parts — “fünf, zehn”
- joined — “fünfzehn”
- three in a row — “dreizehn, vierzehn, fünfzehn”
- what English lost — “five became fif-”

Twice through: “dreizehn, vierzehn, fünfzehn.”

Before you move on

Say “fifteen.” (***Fünfzehn.***) Is the digit whole? (**Yes.**) Is English’s? (**No** — *five became fif-*.) Say the three you have. (**Dreizehn, vierzehn, fünfzehn.**) Next: where German clips too.

19.5 The two clipped digits

The rule holds for every number in this chapter. Two of them shorten the digit first, and it is worth knowing which before you meet them.

Grammar Lens: two digits get shortened

the digit	before <i>zehn</i> it becomes	why
<i>sechs</i>	<i>sech-</i>	the <i>s</i> would collide with the <i>ts</i> of <i>zehn</i>
<i>sieben</i>	<i>sieb-</i>	the <i>-en</i> is an unstressed syllable too many

Both are the mouth economising, not the grammar changing. It is still a digit with *zehn* on the end; the digit has been worn smooth at the join and nothing more.

Why it's said this way

English did the same thing and did more of it. *Three* became *thir-* and *five* became *fif-*, and nobody thinks of *thirteen* as irregular — it is a worn compound, exactly like these two.

So the honest scoreboard is: **English clips two digits, German clips two digits, and they are not the same two.** German keeps *fünf* whole where English does not; English keeps *six* and *seven* whole where German does not. Neither language is tidier. Both are old, and old words get worn.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the full digits — “sechs, sieben”
- their clipped forms — “sech-, sieb-”
- what English clipped instead — “three to thir-, five to fif-”
- what has not changed — “still a digit, then zehn”

Twice through: “sechs to sech-, sieben to sieb-.”

Before you move on

Which two German digits shorten? (***Sechs** and **sieben.***) What do they become? (***Sech-** and **sieb-***.) Is the rule broken? (**No** — the digit is worn, the rule holds.) Which two did English clip? (***Three** and **five.***) Next: the first of the two.

19.6 sechzehn — “sixteen”

First of the two clipped ones. You already know what it drops.

You’ll want to know: sechzehn

sechzehn — “sixteen.” *sech-* + *zehn*, with the *s* of *sechs* gone.

Try it with the *s* left in and you will hear the problem: *sechs-zehn* puts an *s* immediately before a *ts*, and the two will not sit next to each other.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ch-ach** — the *ch* is the raspy one from *acht* and *Nacht*, made at the back.
- **z-ts** — and then straight into *-TSAYN*.

ZECH-tsayn, where the first sound is the buzzed German *s*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole digit — “sechs”
- the clipped one — “sech-”
- the number — “sechzehn”
- four in a row — “dreizehn, vierzehn, fünfzehn, sechzehn”

Twice through: “sechs, sechzehn.”

Before you move on

Say “sixteen.” (**Sechzehn.**) What did the digit lose? (**Its s.**) Why? (**It would collide with the ts.**) Is the rule still digit + *zehn*? (**Yes.**) Next: the other clipped one.

19.7 siebzehn — “seventeen”

Second and last of the clipped ones. After this the rule runs clean to twenty.

You’ll want to know: siebzehn

siebzehn — “seventeen.” *sieb-* + *zehn*, with the *-en* of *sieben* gone.

Sieben-zehn would be four syllables for one number, three of them unstressed. German trimmed the middle and kept the meaning.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ie-long-ee** — *ie* is a long **ee**, as in *sieben*.
- **consonant-b-final** — the *b* stays a *b* here, because it is not really at the end of a word: *zehn* is welded on behind it.
- **z-ts** — and *-TSAYN*.

ZEEB-tsayn.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole digit — “sieben”
- the clipped one — “sieb-”
- the number — “siebzehn”
- the two clipped ones together — “sechzehn, siebzehn”

Twice through: “sieben, siebzehn.”

Before you move on

Say “seventeen.” (***Sieb**zehn.*) What did the digit lose? (**Its** *-en.*) Name both clipped numbers. (***Sech**zehn, **sieb**zehn.*) How many are left to clip? (**None.**) Next: eighteen, whole again.

19.8 achtzehn — “eighteen”

The clipping is over. From here the digits go in whole.

You’ll want to know: achtzehn

achtzehn — “eighteen.” *acht* + *zehn*, both whole.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ch-ach** — the raspy *ch* of *acht*, unchanged.
- **z-ts** — and *-TSAYN*.

That *-cht* is the one you were given twice: *acht* against English **eight**, *Nacht* against **night**. Where German rasps, English writes *-ght* and says nothing at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the parts — “acht, zehn”
- joined — “achtzehn”
- the pair that shares the rasp — “acht, Nacht”
- their silent English twins — “eight, night”

Twice through: “acht, achtzehn.”

Before you move on

Say “eighteen.” (***Acht**zehn.*) Was the digit clipped? (**No** — whole.) What does English write where German rasps? (***-ght.***) Next:

nineteen.

19.9 neunzehn — “nineteen”

Eighth and last run of the rule. You should be able to say it before reading on.

You’ll want to know: neunzehn

neunzehn — “nineteen.” *neun* + *zehn*, both whole.

Seven numbers built from one rule and not one of them broke it. Two shortened a digit at the join and kept the rule intact.

Sounds you’ll need

- **diphthong-eu** — *eu* is the *oy* of English *boy*, unchanged from *neun*.
- **z-ts** — and *-TSAYN* for the last time.

NOYN-tsayn.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the parts — “neun, zehn”
- joined — “neunzehn”
- the last four — “sechzehn, siebzehn, achtzehn, neunzehn”

Twice through: “achtzehn, neunzehn.”

Before you move on

Say “nineteen.” (***Neunzehn***.) Its halves? (***Neun*** and ***zehn***.) How many numbers has the rule built? (**Seven**.) How many times did it break? (**None**.) Next: twenty, which stops using *zehn*.

19.10 zwanzig — “twenty”

Eight numbers ended in *zehn*. This one does not, and the ending it takes instead is worth a lesson of its own.

You’ll want to know: zwanzig

zwanzig — “twenty.”

It opens like *zwei* and *zwölf* — *tsv-* — and then closes on **-zig** where every number before it closed on *-zehn*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **z-ts** — twice: *tsv-* at the front, *-ts-* in the middle.
- **w-as-v** — the *w* is a **v**, as always.
- **ich-laut** — and the final *-ig* is said as the soft *ich*-sound from the very first chapters: *-ikh*, not *-ig*.

TSVAHN-tsikh. That final *-ig* rule holds for every German word ending the same way, so it is worth more than this one number.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the ending alone — “-ikh”
- “zwanzig” — *TSVAHN-tsikh*
- the last two — “neunzehn, zwanzig”
- the three that open the same way — “zwei, zwölf, zwanzig”

Twice through: “neunzehn, zwanzig.”

Before you move on

Say “twenty.” (***Zwanzig***.) How does the ending sound? (***-ikh*** — the soft *ich*-sound.) Does it end in *zehn*? (**No** — *-zig*.) Which number is at the front? (***Zwei***.) Next: what *-zig* actually is.

19.11 -zig and -ty

The ending changed at twenty. It did not change subject.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Older Germanic *twaintig*, which is *twain* — “two” — plus *tig*, and ***tig* is ten.**

word	is	and means
<i>zwanzig</i>	<i>zwei</i> + <i>-zig</i>	two tens
twenty	twain + <i>-ty</i>	two tens

So *-zig* and *-ty* are the **same ending**, both of them *ten* worn down by being said a great many times. German’s *zehn* stayed whole because it kept being used on its own; the version welded onto twenty wore out instead.

Why it’s said this way

Stand back and the whole span from eleven to twenty is three ideas, and you have all three.

- **Eleven and twelve** count what is *left over* after ten fingers.
- **Thirteen to nineteen** are a digit with *ten* on the end.
- **Twenty** is *two tens*, with the same *ten* worn to *-zig*.

Every one of those is a compound. Not one number in this chapter is a word you had to be given — they are all built, and the parts were yours before the chapter started.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- what twenty is — “two tens”
- the German pair — “zwei, zwanzig”
- the English pair — “twain, twenty”
- the two endings that are one word — “-zig, -ty, both ten”

Twice through: “zwanzig — two tens.”

Before you move on

What does *zwanzig* mean underneath? (**Two tens.**) What is *-zig*? (**Ten, worn down.**) And English *-ty*? (**The same word.**) So how many of this chapter’s numbers are compounds? (**All of them.**)

19.12 Practice — thirteen to twenty

No new words. One rule, run eight times, and two small wearings-down along the way.

Grammar Lens: the rule and its two exceptions that are not exceptions

number	digit	joined
13	<i>drei</i>	<i>dreizehn</i>
14	<i>vier</i>	<i>vierzehn</i>
15	<i>fünf</i>	<i>fünfzehn</i>
16	<i>sech-</i>	<i>sechzehn</i>
17	<i>sieb-</i>	<i>siebzehn</i>
18	<i>acht</i>	<i>achtzehn</i>
19	<i>neun</i>	<i>neunzehn</i>

Six digits go in whole and two are trimmed at the join. The rule never changes.

Why it’s said this way

Eleven to twenty is three ideas and you now hold all three: two **leftovers**, seven **digit-plus-ten** compounds, and one **two-tens**. Here is the contrast worth carrying. The Romance sisters all **break** partway through the teens and switch to a different construction — Portuguese at sixteen, French and Italian at seventeen. German does not break at all. Two leftovers, then one clean rule to twenty, and English marches beside it the whole distance because it is doing the same thing with the same worn-down words.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- count from thirteen — “dreizehn, vierzehn, fünfzehn, sechzehn, siebzehn, achtzehn, neunzehn, zwanzig”
- the two trimmed digits — “sech-, sieb-”
- the one that stops using zehn — “zwanzig”
- count the whole span — “elf, zwölf, dreizehn ... zwanzig”

Twice through: “dreizehn, vierzehn, fünfzehn, sechzehn.”

Before you move on

What is the rule from thirteen up? (**A digit, then *zehn*.**) Which two digits are trimmed? (***Sechs* and *sieben*.**) Does the rule ever break? (**No.**) What is *zwanzig* underneath? (**Two tens.**) And where do the Romance languages break? (**Partway through the teens** — sixteen or seventeen.)

Chapter 20

The Colour German Lent Away

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say black and white in German, and name the German word Romance borrowed for white.

German's colour words are home-grown, with no Latin borrowed in – and one of them emigrated. schwarz is Germanic swartaz, which English kept only in the dusty corner of swarthy; weiss is hwitaz, which English kept whole as white. Then blank, a German word for shining, went the other way: it became the word for WHITE in French, Italian and Portuguese, pushing Latin albus out of everyday use. After nineteen chapters of German buying words from Rome, this is the chapter where Rome's daughters buy from German.

20.1 schwarz — “black”

Four colours are coming, and not one of them was borrowed.
That is rarer than it sounds.

You'll want to know: schwarz

schwarz — “black.”

One word, two consonant clusters, and no Latin in sight. German's colour vocabulary is **home-grown**: where the months came in wholesale from Latin, the colours stayed Germanic.

Sounds you'll need

- **schw-cluster** — *sch* is English *sh*, and the *w* after it is a *v*. So the word opens *shv-*, which English never does at the start of a word. Take it slowly: *sh ... v ...* and then run them together.
- **z-ts** — a German *z* is always *ts*, never English *z*. The word ends *-arts*.

Put together: *SHVARTS*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the opening cluster alone — “shv, shv”
- “schwarz” — *SHVARTS*
- the two clusters apart, then together — “shv ... arts ... schwarz”

Twice through: “schwarz, schwarz.”

Before you move on

Say “black.” (**Schwarz**.) How does the word open? (**Shv-** — *sch* plus a *w* that is a *v*.) How is a German *z* sounded? (**Ts**.) Was it borrowed from Latin? (**No** — the colours are inherited.) Next: the English cousin it left behind.

20.2 schwarz, taken apart

English has this word too. It has been reduced to one dusty corner of the dictionary.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Schwarz comes from Germanic **swartaz*. English inherited the same word — and then *black* took over the everyday job, leaving the old one alive in exactly one place:

swarthy — “dark-complexioned”

That is *schwarz*, worn down and pushed to the edge. Say the pair aloud and the family shows: *schwarz* · *swarthy*. Further back there is a Latin relative, and it is not flattering. The root behind **swartaz* also gave Latin *sordēs*, “**dirt**” — which English took as **sordid**. Black and grubby turn out to be one idea seen twice: the colour of soot, and the state of being covered in it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “schwarz, swarthy”
- the Latin relative — “sordēs, sordid”
- the idea they share — “the colour, and being covered in it”

Twice through: “schwarz, swarthy.”

Before you move on

Which English word is *schwarz*’s cousin? (***Swarthy***.) What does it mean? (**Dark-complexioned**.) Which English word comes from the Latin relative? (***Sordid***, from *sordēs* “dirt”.) Next: the second colour, and the letter that only German has.

20.3 weiß — “white”

Black’s opposite, and the first ordinary word in this book that needs the letter you were shown back in the writing chapter.

You’ll want to know: weiß

weiß — “white.”

Three letters and every one of them is a trap for an English eye. It is pronounced, near enough, like English **vice**.

Sounds you'll need

- **w-is-v** — German *w* is English *v*. The word opens *v*-.
- **diphthong-ei** — German *ei* is the vowel of English *eye*. Never “ee”.
- **ss-eszett-long** — and here is the **ß**, doing exactly what you were told it does: marking a sharp *s* after a **long** vowel. You met that in the writing chapter with nothing to spend it on. *Ei* is long, so the *s* is written **ß** and sounded sharp. This is the word that spends it.

So *weiß* rhymes with **vice** — not with the second half of *vice versa*, where the *s* is soft.

You already know what Switzerland does with that letter, and *weiß* is the word where you will see it: Swiss German writes **weiss**, with the **ß** spelled out.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “weiß” — like English *vice*
- the pair — “schwarz, weiß”
- the rule out loud — “long vowel, sharp s, written ß”

Twice through: “schwarz, weiß.”

Before you move on

Say “white.” (**Weiß**.) Which English word does it rhyme with? (**Vice**.) Why is the *s* written **ß**? (**The vowel before it is long**.) How does Switzerland write it? (**Weiss**.) Next: the English word it is, under the spelling.

20.4 weiß, taken apart

Schwarz needed a fossil to show its English cousin. This one needs nothing.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Weiß comes from Germanic **hwītaz*, and so does English **white**. Not a cousin, not a borrowing — the **same word**, and neither language moved its meaning by a hair.

What separates them is spelling and nothing else:

	German	English
the vowel	<i>ei</i>	<i>i</i>
the sharp <i>s</i>	ß	<i>t</i> plus a silent <i>e</i>

That is the whole distance. *Weiß* and *white* look unrelated on the page and are identical underneath, which is a useful warning about judging these pairs by eye: **schwarz**/*swarthy* looked close and had drifted in meaning, while *weiß*/*white* looks distant and has not drifted at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “weiß, white”
- the ancestor — “hwītaz”
- both colours and both cousins — “schwarz swarthy, weiß white”

Twice through: “weiß, white — one word.”

Before you move on

Which English word is *weiß*? (**White** — the same word.) Did its meaning drift? (**No**.) Which of this chapter’s two pairs drifted in meaning? (**Schwarz**/*swarthy*.) Next: a German colour word the Romance languages took.

20.5 blank — “shiny”

A word that looks English, is German, and means neither of the things you would guess.

You'll want to know: blank

blank — “shiny,” “polished,” “bare.”

Not “blank” in the English sense of empty-of-writing, and **not** a colour. A polished shoe is *blank*; a bare sword is *blank*. The idea underneath is **shining**.

Hold on to that meaning exactly as it is, because the next lesson is about what happened when the neighbours borrowed it and let it drift.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-a** — short and clipped, the *a* of English *hat*.
- **ng-cluster** — the *-nk* closes with the back-of-the-mouth *n* that English puts in *bank*, and then a real *k*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “blank” — shiny, not empty
- what it is not — “not a colour”
- the three colours so far and the odd one out — “schwarz, weiß ... blank”

Twice through: “blank — shiny.”

Before you move on

What does *blank* mean in German? (**Shiny, polished, bare.**) Is it a colour? (**No.**) Does it mean English “blank”? (**No.**) Next: what the Romance languages did with it.

20.6 The word that emigrated

Blank means shining. In three languages next door, it means **white**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

In its Frankish form *blank*, “shining,” this word was **borrowed into Romance**. Once there it stopped meaning shiny and started meaning white — and it displaced Latin’s own word for white, *albus*, almost entirely:

language	“white”
French	blanc
Italian	bianco
Portuguese	branco
German	<i>blank</i> — still only “ shiny ”

Latin’s *albus* survives in English only in learned scraps: *albino*, *album* (originally a white tablet), *albumen*. The everyday Romance word for the commonest colour there is came **from Germanic**.

Why it’s said this way

This runs **against the usual current**. Almost everywhere else in this book the lending goes the other way: Latin hands words to Germanic, and German takes them. *Wein* came from Latin *vīnum*; the month names came over wholesale and are still Latin under a German spelling. Here, once, Germanic did the lending — and the two sides then went different ways with it. German kept the original sense and never made it a colour; the borrowers made it a colour and let the shine fall away. A word does not carry its meaning with it when it crosses a border. It carries only its sound, and the new language decides the rest.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three borrowers — “blanc, bianco, branco”
- the German original — “blank, and it still means shiny”
- the direction — “Germanic lent this one; usually Latin lends”

Twice through: “blank, blanc — one word, two meanings.”

Before you move on

Which three Romance words came from *blank*? (**Blanc, bianco, branco.**) Which Latin word did they push out? (***Albus*.**) Does German *blank* mean white? (**No** — still shiny.) Which way does the lending usually run? (**Latin to Germanic** — as with *Wein* and the month names.) Next: the two colours together.

20.7 Practice — black, white, and the one that left

No new words. Two colours, three words, and two families that behaved in opposite ways.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

German	where it came from	what English or Romance did with it
<i>schwarz</i>	Germanic * <i>swartaz</i>	English kept it only in <i>swarthy</i>
<i>weiß</i>	Germanic * <i>hwītaz</i>	English kept it whole, as <i>white</i>
<i>blank</i>	Frankish <i>blank</i>	Romance took it and made it <i>white</i>

Three words, three fates: one nearly lost, one perfectly preserved, one emigrated and changed job.

You cannot put these into a sentence yet — German needs a verb for that and it is still several chapters away. Bank the words; the sentence comes later.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two colours — “schwarz, weiß”
- them with their English cousins — “schwarz swarthy, weiß white”
- the emigrant and its children — “blank; blanc, bianco, branco”

- the three fates — “kept, lost, emigrated”

Twice through: “schwarz, weiß, blank.”

Before you move on

Say both colours. (**Schwarz, weiß.**) Which one is the same word as its English cousin? (**Weiβ/white.**) Which survives in English only as *swarthy*? (**Schwarz.**) Which German word became “white” abroad? (**Blank.**) Why is *weiß* written with **ß**? (**Long vowel before a sharp s.**) Next: the other two colours, and a cousin that is not a borrowing.

Chapter 21

An Ancient Cousin and a Second Emigrant

Modes: 🔄 voice (5) 🔄 Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say red and blue in German, and say which of them Romance borrowed.

The second half of the same argument, with a twist in each colour. rot is Germanic raudaz and goes back to one of the oldest reconstructable colour words – and Latin ruber is its COUSIN rather than its source, so the resemblance is inheritance from far enough back that neither borrowed. blau is the second emigrant: Germanic blewaz went into French as bleu, and English then borrowed its own blue back from French rather than keeping the word it had inherited.

21.1 rot — “red”

You have black and white. The next colour is not a matter of taste — languages the world over reach for the same one third.

You’ll want to know: rot

rot — “red.”

Three letters, one syllable, and very close to the English word underneath the spelling.

Sounds you'll need

- **long-o** — the *o* is **long**, the vowel of English *road*, not the short *o* of *rot*. The German word does not rhyme with the English word spelled the same way.
- **d-t-final** — the closing *t* is crisp and fully released: *roht*.

Why it's said this way

If a language has only two colour words, they are dark and light. If it has a third, it is **red** — before green, before blue, before yellow. That holds across unrelated families on every continent, which is why *schwarz*, *weiß* and *rot* are the three this chapter and the last one reach for first.

Blood and fire are the guess most people make, and it may be right; what is certain is the order, not the reason.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “rot” — long *o*, as in *road*
- the three in order — “schwarz, weiß, rot”
- the warning — “rot does not rhyme with English *rot*”

Twice through: “rot, rot — roht.”

Before you move on

Say “red.” (**Rot**.) Is the *o* long or short? (**Long** — as in *road*.) Which colour do languages name third? (**Red**.) And the first two? (**Dark and light** — black and white.) Next: the cousin it has in French, and why it is not a borrowing.

21.2 rot, taken apart

The last lesson had a German word the Romance languages borrowed. This one has a German word they did **not** borrow — and they have it anyway.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Rot comes from Germanic **raudaz*, and behind that from Proto-Indo-European **h₁rewdʰ*- — one of the oldest colour words that can be reconstructed at all. It went everywhere:

language	what it became
German	rot
English	red , and <i>rust</i> , <i>ruddy</i>
Latin	<i>ruber</i> , <i>rubeus</i> — and so French rouge , plus <i>ruby</i> , <i>rubric</i>

So *rot* and *rouge* are **cousins, not borrowings**. They did not pass from one language to the other; they split apart thousands of years before either language existed, and each walked its own road to a word for red.

That is a different relationship from the one *blank* has with *blanc*. There, a word crossed a border within recorded history. Here, two words inherited the same ancestor and never met again.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the family — “rot, red, rouge”
- the English extras — “rust, ruddy”
- the two relationships — “blank and blanc: borrowed. Rot and rouge: cousins.”

Twice through: “rot, red, rouge.”

Before you move on

Which French word is *rot*’s relative? (***Rouge***.) Did French borrow it from German? (**No** — they are cousins.) Which Latin word is in the line? (***Ruber***.) Name two English words from the same root besides *red*. (***Rust*, *ruddy***.) Next: the fourth colour, which **was** borrowed.

21.3 blau — “blue”

The fourth and last colour of the set — and the second one German lent abroad.

You’ll want to know: blau

blau — “blue.”

Four letters, one syllable, and the vowel is the trap.

Sounds you’ll need

- **diphthong-au** — German *au* is the vowel of English *house* or *cow*. It is **not** the *aw* of *law* and not the *oo* of *blue*.

So *blau* rhymes with English **cow**: *blow* as in *plough*, never *blow* as in *blew*.

That one vowel is what stops an English speaker recognising the word by ear even though it is the same word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “blau” — rhyming with *cow*
- the wrong one, then the right one — “not *bloo* ... *blau*”
- all four — “schwarz, weiß, rot, blau”

Twice through: “blau, blau — rhymes with *cow*.”

Before you move on

Say “blue.” (**Blau.**) Which English word does it rhyme with? (**Cow.**) Does it rhyme with *blue*? (**No.**) Say all four colours. (**Schwarz, weiß, rot, blau.**) Next: the journey this word took, and the odd route English used to get it back.

21.4 blau, taken apart

Blank emigrated. So did this one — and then English did something strange to get it back.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Blau comes from Germanic **blēwaz*, and like *blank* before it, this word was **borrowed into Romance**:

language	“blue”
German	blau
French	bleu
Italian	blu
English	blue — taken from French , not from Germanic

Read that last row twice. English is Germanic. It had inherited **blēwaz* itself — the word was already sitting in Old English — and it borrowed the French form anyway.

So the word went **Germanic** → **French** → **English**, and arrived home wearing Romance clothes. English *blue* is a German word that took the long way round and is no longer recognisable as one — which is exactly why *blau* does not sound like *blue*.

Why it’s said this way

Portuguese went somewhere else entirely: its blue is **azul**, from **Arabic**. One colour, and within a few hundred miles you can find a Germanic word, a Germanic word laundered through French, and an Arabic one.

Colour words travel more than almost any other kind, because they are easy to borrow: you can point at the thing. Verbs and grammar stay home; the names of shades move with cloth, dye and trade.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the family — “blau, bleu, blu”
- the long way round — “Germanic, French, English”

- the outlier — “azul, from Arabic”

Twice through: “blau, bleu, blue — one word, three stops.”

Before you move on

Which two German colour words did Romance borrow? (**Blank and blau.**) Where did English get *blue* from? (**French** — not directly from Germanic.) Which language’s blue is Arabic? (**Portuguese** — *azul*.) Next: all four colours, and what each of them did.

21.5 Practice — four colours, four histories

No new words. Four colours, and no two of them got where they are the same way.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

German	source	did Romance take it?
<i>schwarz</i>	Germanic * <i>swartaz</i>	no
<i>weiß</i>	Germanic * <i>hwītaz</i>	no — but <i>blank</i> went instead
<i>rot</i>	Germanic * <i>raudaz</i>	no — Latin had its own cousin
<i>blau</i>	Germanic * <i>blēwaz</i>	yes — <i>bleu</i> , <i>blu</i>

Four native Germanic words and not a Latin borrowing among them, which is worth saying plainly: German did not get its colours from Rome. Two of them went the other way.

And the “no” in row three is a different kind of no from the ones above it. *Schwarz* and *weiß* stayed home. *Rot* has a Romance relative anyway — because Latin inherited the same ancient word rather than borrowing the German one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all four — “schwarz, weiß, rot, blau”

- the two traps — “rot as *road*, blau as *cow*”
- the cousins that prove the family — “rot · red · rouge”
- the two that emigrated — “blank, blau”

Twice through: “schwarz, weiß, rot, blau.”

Before you move on

Run the four colours. How many were borrowed from Latin? (**None.**) Which two did Romance take from German? (***Blank* and *blau*.**) Is *rouge* a borrowing from *rot*? (**No** — a cousin.) Which English colour word came home through French? (***Blue*.**)

Chapter 22

To Have

Modes: 🗣️ voice (8) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can use every present form of German’s verb for “to have”, building the four the ending machine already gives me and knowing the two it gets wrong.

haben is the weak ending machine on the stem hab-, and the chapter is organised around where that machine fails: it predicts four of the six forms correctly, so those get one lesson that makes the reader build them rather than read them, and du hast and er hat get a lesson each because nothing generates them. The b-drop, the einen that Ich habe einen Bruder needs, and the habere false cognate follow; the grid is printed only in the practice lesson.

22.1 haben — “to have”

German’s workhorse verb, and the twin of a word you have said every day of your life.

You’ll want to know: haben

haben — “to have.”

Same word as English *have*, worn differently. Chop the *-en* the way you did with *machen* and the stem is *hab-*, which is where every form in this chapter starts.

Two syllables, and the first one carries the weight: *HAH-ben*.

Sounds you'll need

- **long-a** — the *a* of *haben* is long and open, the vowel of English *father*, not the clipped *a* of *hat*.
- **d-t-final** — that long *a* does **not** survive into every form. Two of them coming up are short and clipped, and both end in a crisp, fully released *t*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “haben” — long *a*, soft second syllable
- the stem on its own — “hab-”
- the twins — “haben, have”

Twice through: “haben, haben — to have.”

Before you move on

Say “to have.” (**Haben.**) What is its stem? (**Hab-.**) Is the *a* long or short? (**Long** — as in *father*.) Which English verb is it? (**Have.**) Next: the stem through the ending machine you already own.

22.2 hab- through the machine

You own an ending machine: a stem, and *-e*, *-st*, *-t*, *-en*. Run *hab-* through it before reading on, and keep what you get.

Grammar Lens: four forms you already knew

On *hab-*, the machine is **right four times out of six**.

Ich takes *-e*, so *ich habe*. *Wir* takes *-en*, so *wir haben* — which is the infinitive over again, the way the *wir* form goes throughout German. *Ihr* takes *-t*, so *ihr habt*. And *sie* takes *-en* like *wir*, so *sie haben*. Nothing there is new. Those four are the rule from your first verbs applied to one more stem — so do not read them off the page. Take each ending, put it on *hab-*, and hear that you already knew the answer.

The chapter is about the other two.

Your turn

Build each one before you say it — take the ending first, then put it on *hab-*.

Say these aloud:

- the ending *ich* takes, then the form — “-e ... ich habe”
- the ending *wir* takes, then the form — “-en ... wir haben”
- the ending *ihr* takes, then the form — “-t ... ihr habt”
- *sie* borrows *wir*’s ending — “sie haben”
- now prove the machine is not about this verb — run *wohn-* through it: “ich wohne, wir wohnen, ihr wohnt”

Twice through: “ich habe, wir haben, ihr habt, sie haben.”

Before you move on

Build “we have” without being given it. (**Wir haben.**) Build “you all have.” (**Ihr habt.**) Which other form does *wir haben* match? (**The infinitive.**) Did you have to learn any of those four, or work them out? (**Work them out** — the endings were already yours.) How many of the six does the rule get right? (**Four.**) Next: the first one it gets wrong.

22.3 du hast — “you have”

The machine says *du* plus *-st* on the stem *hab-*. Say what that would give, and then hear what German actually says.

You’ll want to know: du hast

du hast — “you have,” to one person you are on familiar terms with.

The rule predicts *hab-st*. German says **hast**. The *b* is simply gone, and the long *a* goes with it: the vowel is short and clipped now, and the *-st* lands crisply on the end.

This is not a spelling convenience. It is one of exactly two places in the whole verb where the machine fails, and it is worth meeting on its own so that it is a form you know rather than a form you derive wrongly.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-a** — short and clipped, the *a* of English *hat*, not the long *a* of *haben*. The form is one syllable: *hast*, rhyming with English *mast*.
- **d-t-final** — the *-st* is fully released; German does not soften it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “du hast”
- the long against the short — “ich habe, du hast”
- what the rule wanted, then what German says — “hab-st ... hast”

Twice through: “du hast, du hast.”

Before you move on

Say “you have,” informally. (**Du hast.**) Which letter went missing? (**The b.**) What happened to the vowel? (**It shortened.**) What would the rule have predicted? (**Hab-st.**) Next: the second place the machine fails, and it fails the same way.

22.4 er hat — “he has”

One more break, and then the verb behaves for good. The machine says *-t* on *hab-*.

You'll want to know: er hat

er hat — “he has.” Also *sie hat*, “she has,” and *es hat*, “it has.”

The rule predicts *hab-t*. German says **hat**: the same *b* gone, the same vowel shortened. One syllable, rhyming with English *hut* rather than *hat* — the German *a* sits further back than the English one.

One form covers *er*, *sie* and *es*, exactly as the third-person *-t* always does. So the two breaks in this verb are neighbours: *du hast*, *er hat*, and every other form is the machine.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “er hat, sie hat, es hat”
- the two breaks together — “du hast, er hat”
- the whole shape — “habe ... hast ... hat ... haben”

Twice through: “du hast, er hat.”

Before you move on

Say “he has.” (**Er hat.**) Say “she has.” (**Sie hat.**) Which two forms of this verb break the rule? (**Hast and hat.**) What do both of them drop? (**The b.**) Next: why they drop it, and the English verb that does the identical thing.

22.5 The b that fell out

Hast and *hat* both lost a *b*. That is not two accidents.

Grammar Lens: one shortcut, in exactly two cells

Haben keeps its **b** everywhere except before a *-st* or a *-t* ending, where the *b* drops and the vowel shortens with it.

Say *hab-st* and *hab-t* at speed and you can feel why: a *b* squeezed between a vowel and a hard *t* is work, and centuries of speakers declined to do it. The consonant wore away and the two shortest forms are what is left.

Now listen to English, which is the same verb:

person	English	German
infinitive	<i>have</i>	<i>haben</i>
second person, older	<i>thou hast</i>	<i>du hast</i>
third person	<i>he has</i>	<i>er hat</i>

English lost the same consonant, in the same two cells, of the same verb — and kept the archaic *hast* long enough for us to see it. Two languages, one shortcut, inherited together rather than invented twice.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- where the *b* survives — “habe, haben, habt”
- where it does not — “hast, hat”
- the English echo — “thou hast, du hast; he has, er hat”

Twice through: “hast, hat — no *b*.”

Before you move on

In which two forms does the *b* drop? (***Hast* and *hat***.) What else changes with it? (**The vowel shortens.**) Which English form still shows the same loss? (***He has*** — or archaic ***thou hast***.) Next: something to actually have.

22.6 *einen* — “a,” when it is the thing you have

Ich habe ... wants something after it. The commonest thing to put there is “a something,” and German asks one small question first.

You’ll want to know: *einen*

einen — “a,” for a **der**-word that is the thing you have.

Ein is the number *one* doing a second job, which is exactly what English *a* is — a worn-down *one*. German keeps the resemblance visible: *ein*, *eins*.

The *-en* on the end is the part English threw away. German marks a *der*-word differently when it is the thing being had rather than the thing doing the having, and *einen* is that marked form:

Ich habe einen Bruder. — “I have a brother.”

Der Bruder is a *der*-word, and he is what you have, so *ein* becomes *einen*. Nothing else in the sentence moves.

Take this one as a word for now, not as a system. The system behind it — German’s cases — gets a chapter of its own later; this is the first place the book cannot avoid it, because a sentence with *haben* in it needs something to have.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “einen”
- “Ich habe einen Bruder.”
- it with the two broken forms — “du hast einen Bruder; er hat einen Bruder”

Twice through: “Ich habe einen Bruder.”

Before you move on

Say “I have a brother.” (**Ich habe einen Bruder.**) Which word did *ein* become? (**Einen.**) Why? (**Because *der Bruder* is the thing being had.**) Which English word is *ein* underneath? (**One.**) Next: the trap this verb is famous for.

22.7 haben is not habēre

German *haben*, Latin *habēre*. Same consonants, same meaning, and the best false cognate in the business.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Two verbs that look like one word:

language	verb	meaning
German	haben	to have
Latin	habēre	to have

They are not related. It is a coincidence, and one of the most famous in linguistics. Follow each one back and they go in opposite directions.

Haben comes from Germanic **habjaną*, from Proto-Indo-European **kap-*, “**to seize**.” That root’s Latin child is *capere* — which is where English gets **capture**, **captive**, **capable** and **accept**.

Habēre comes from a different root entirely, **g^hab^h-*, and its English descendant is ... **give**.

So German *haben* is a cousin of *capture*, and Latin *habēre* — the source of French *avoir* and Italian *avere* — is a cousin of *give*. Seizing and giving, which is about as far apart as two verbs get.

Why it’s said this way

This is worth carrying beyond one verb. Resemblance is not evidence. Two words can match in sound and sense and still have nothing to do with each other, and the only way to tell is to follow both back rather than to compare them where they stand.

Most of this book’s cousin pairs are real. This one is the control that proves the others were checked.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair that is not a pair — “haben, habēre”
- where German’s goes — “haben, kap-, capture”
- where Latin’s goes — “habēre, g^hab^h-, give”

Twice through: “haben is not habēre.”

Before you move on

Are *haben* and *habēre* related? (**No** — a coincidence.) Which English word is *haben*’s cousin? (**Capture**, from *capere*.) And *habēre*’s? (**Give**.) What did *haben*’s root originally mean? (“**To seize**.”) Next: the whole verb, said through.

22.8 Practice — the whole of haben

No new words. Four of the six forms below cost you nothing, and the other two have each had a lesson, so this is the first place

it is safe to set them out together.

Grammar Lens: the six, assembled

singular

ich **habe**

du **hast**

er/sie/es **hat**

plural

wir **haben**

ihr **habt**

sie/Sie **haben**

Run it aloud and hear where the *b* goes missing: *habe ... hast ... hat ... haben*. Four forms carry it, two do not, and the two that do not are the two shortest.

The exchange

German

Hast du einen Bruder?

Und du?

Ich habe eine Schwester.

Wir haben Brot und Wein.

Gut! Dann haben wir alles.

English

Do you have a brother?

And you?

I have a sister.

We have bread and wine.

Good! Then we have everything.

Two things slip in without lessons of their own, because the translation carries them: **eine**, which is what *ein* becomes for a *die*-word, and **alles** (“everything”). And notice *Hast du ...?* — a question puts the verb first, which is the one move German makes that English needs *do* for.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the six in order — “habe, hast, hat, haben, habt, haben”
- the two breaks alone — “hast, hat”
- “Ich habe einen Bruder.” “Wir haben Brot und Wein.”
- the whole exchange, both voices

Twice through: “habe, hast, hat, haben, habt, haben.”

Before you move on

Run the six without looking. Which two drop the *b*? (***Hast* and *hat***.) Say “I have a brother.” (***Ich habe einen Bruder***.) Is *haben* related to Latin *habēre*? (**No.**) Which English word is it related to? (***Capture***.) Next: the one everyday sentence where German refuses this verb altogether.

Chapter 23

The Wrapped Participle

Modes: ⇄ voice (8) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can turn any regular German verb I know into its past participle, and hear that the marking arrives at both ends of the word at once.

The weak participle is a circumfix, so it is met as one concrete word first — gesagt — and only then as the recipe behind it. Three more verbs run through that recipe one at a time, the ge- gets its own lesson because it is the half English threw away, and the infinitive-to-participle table appears only at the end, where it recaps six lessons instead of introducing four words.

23.1 sagen — “to say”

One more weak verb before the past tense starts, and it is the verb the whole chapter will be built on.

You’ll want to know: sagen

sagen — “to say.”

Two syllables, *ZAH-gen*. It behaves like *machen* and *lernen* in every respect: chop the *-en* and you have the stem *sag-*, and onto that stem go the endings you already own — *ich sage*, *du sagst*.

Nothing new is happening in those endings. *Sagen* is here so that when the past tense arrives in the next lesson, the only unfamiliar thing in it is the past.

Sounds you'll need

- **long-a** — the *a* of *sagen* is long and open, the vowel of English *father*, not the clipped *a* of *hat*.
- **ge-prefix** — the *-gen* at the end is unstressed and swallowed, a soft *gn* more than a full syllable. The same mumble will open every participle in this chapter, so it is worth getting comfortable now.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Sagen and English *say* are the same word. Germanic **sagjaną* went to both, and then English quietly dropped the *g* out of the middle:

German	English
sagen	say
Tag	day
Weg	way

Three pairs, one habit. Whenever a German *g* sits between vowels or at the end of a short word, English is likely to have thinned it to a *y* sound — so a German *g* you cannot place is often an English *y* in disguise.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sagen” — long *a*, soft ending
- “ich sage, du sagst, wir sagen”
- the three pairs — “sagen–say, Tag–day, Weg–way”

Twice through: “sagen, sagen — to say.”

Before you move on

Say “to say.” (**Sagen.**) Say “I say.” (**Ich sage.**) Is the *a* long or short? (**Long** — as in *father*.) Which English word is *sagen*? (**Say.**) Next: what happens to this verb when the saying is already over.

23.2 gesagt — “said”

You have *sagen*. Now the form German uses when the saying is already finished — and it is longer at **both** ends than the word it came from.

You’ll want to know: gesagt

gesagt — “said.”

Hear where it grew. *Sag-* is still sitting in the middle, untouched. In front of it a *ge-* has appeared; behind it the *-en* has gone and a *-t* has taken its place:

sagen — **ge-sag-t**

That is the word English calls a **past participle**: the form that goes with *have* in *I have said*. German’s has a hat on as well as boots.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ge-prefix** — unstressed, almost swallowed: *guh*, never *gay*. The stress stays on *sagt*, exactly where it was in *sagen*.
- **final-t** — the closing *t* is crisp and fully released. The *g* in front of it hardens to a *k* on the way out, the same hardening you met when *und* came out as *unt*: say *guh-ZAHKT*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “gesagt” — soft opening, hard ending
- the pair — “sagen, gesagt”
- the three pieces — “ge, sag, t”

Twice through: “sagen, gesagt. Sagen, gesagt.”

Before you move on

Say “said.” (**Gesagt**.) Which part of *sagen* survives inside it? (**Sag-**, the stem.) What appeared in front? (**Ge-**.) What replaced the *-en*? (**-t**.) Next: the same two additions, on any weak verb you like.

23.3 ge...-t — the wrap that makes a participle

Sagen, gesagt. One verb did that; the recipe behind it works on every regular verb you own.

Grammar Lens: ge- in front, -t behind

Take a regular verb. Strip the *-en*. Put **ge-** in front of what is left and **-t** on the end.

That is the whole operation for the regular verbs — the ones grammarians call **weak**, because they build their past out of endings rather than by changing the vowel inside.

The thing worth noticing is that the ending has a beginning. English marks its participle in one place: *walk* becomes *walk-ed*, and the front of the word sits untouched. German marks it in two, one piece of grammar arriving at both ends of the stem at once.

Grammar has a name for a piece that wraps like that: a **circumfix**. It is not a prefix plus a suffix that happen to co-occur — neither half means anything without the other. **Gesag* is not a word, and **sagt* on its own is “he says.” Only both together make “said.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the recipe — “ge in front, t behind”
- the wrap on its own — “ge ... t”
- “sagen, gesagt” and hear both ends move

Twice through: “ge- in front, -t behind.”

Before you move on

Which two pieces make a weak participle? (**Ge-** in front, **-t** behind.)
 What is a piece of grammar that wraps a word called? (A **circumfix**.) Where does English put its own participle marker? (**Only at the end** — *walked*.) Build the participle of *sagen*. (**Gesagt**.) Next: the same wrap on a verb you met long before this one.

23.4 gemacht — “made,” “done”

You know the recipe. Run it on *machen* before reading on: strip the *-en*, wrap what is left.

You’ll want to know: gemacht

gemacht — “made,” and also “done.”

Machen gives up its *-en*, leaving *mach-*. The wrap goes round it and out comes *gemacht*. No stem was harmed: the *a* is the same *a*, and the *ch* is the same *ch*.

German uses this one participle where English chooses between two different words. *Ich habe das gemacht* is “I made that” and “I did that” alike; German never had to pick.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ch-ach** — after *a*, *o* or *u*, German *ch* is the scrape at the back of the throat, the sound in *Bach* and in *Nacht*. It sits in the middle of *gemacht* untouched.
- **final-t** — and the *t* on the end is crisp: *guh-MAHKHT*, three consonants landing together at the finish.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “machen, gemacht”
- both participles together — “gesagt, gemacht”

- one word for two English ones — “made, done — gemacht”

Twice through: “machen, gemacht.”

Before you move on

Build the participle of *machen*. (**Gemacht**.) Which two English words does it cover? (**Made** and **done**.) What happened to the *ch* on the way? (**Nothing** — the wrap only touches the edges.) Next: the verb you have been doing to German itself.

23.5 gelernt — “learned”

Third time through the recipe, and this one describes what you have been doing since page one.

You’ll want to know: gelernt

gelernt — “learned.”

Lernen loses its *-en*, leaving *lern-*; the wrap closes round it. The English cousin is doing the very same job with the very same stem — *learn*, *learned* — and differs only in where the marking sits. German puts a piece at each end; English puts both pieces at the back.

Sounds you’ll need

- **r-uvular-german** — the *r* inside *gelernt* is made at the back of the mouth and, before a consonant, is barely a consonant at all: it colours the vowel more than it rolls. *Guh-LEHRNT*, with the *r* almost swallowed.
- **final-t** — *-nt* at the end, both consonants sounded, the *t* released.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “lernen, gelernt”
- the English twin — “learn, learned; lernen, gelernt”

- all three so far — “gesagt, gemacht, gelernt”

Twice through: “lernen, gelernt.”

Before you move on

Build the participle of *lernen*. (**Gelernt.**) Which English verb is its twin? (**Learn.**) Where does English put its marking? (**All of it at the end.**) Next: the fourth verb, and the last one before the recipe is yours.

23.6 gewohnt — “lived”

Fourth and last of the four. Run the recipe on *wohnen* yourself first.

You’ll want to know: gewohnt

gewohnt — “lived,” in the sense of dwelt somewhere.

Wohn- takes the wrap and nothing else changes. Four verbs, four participles, one recipe: it has not bent once.

Sounds you’ll need

- **w-is-v** — the *w* buried in the middle is a German *w*, which is English *v*. *Guh-VOHNT*.
- **final-t** — *-nt* to close, exactly as in *gelernt*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Wohnen began by meaning something closer to “to be accustomed” than “to reside,” and *gewohnt* still carries that older sense alongside the newer one: in modern German it is also the ordinary word for *used to something*.

English kept the same word and only the old meaning:

word	meaning
German gewohnt	lived; accustomed
English wont	accustomed, as in <i>he was wont to sing</i>

Two languages split one word between them — Germany took the address and England took the habit.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wohnen, gewohnt” — with a *v* in the middle
- the fossil — “gewohnt, wont”
- the whole set — “gesagt, gemacht, gelernt, gewohnt”

Twice through: “wohnen, gewohnt.”

Before you move on

Build the participle of *wohnen*. (**Gewohnt.**) How is the *w* sounded? (**Like English v.**) Which English word preserves its older sense? (**Wont** — accustomed.) Next: where that *ge-* came from, and the English word still hiding it.

23.7 The ge- that English lost

Four participles, four *ge-*s. That syllable is not decoration, and English used to have it too.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

German *ge-* comes from Germanic **ga-*, a prefix meaning “**together, completely.**” Its job was to mark an action as **finished** — what grammarians call *perfective* — which is exactly the work a past participle does. A finished saying is *gesagt*.

English inherited the same prefix and spelled it *y-*. Chaucer still wrote it. Then English let it go, and two fossils were left behind with the prefix welded on:

English word	what is hiding inside
enough	Old English <i>genōg</i> — “completely sufficient”
<i>yclept</i> (archaic, “named”)	<i>gecleopod</i> — “called,” finished and done

Say the German wrap out loud — *ge-sag-t* — and then the English fossil: *en-ough*, from *genōg*. It is the same syllable, worn down to a vowel and carried inside a word nobody thinks of as a participle at all. So English once wrapped its participles the same way German still does. German simply never stopped.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- what it meant — “together, completely”
- the fossil — “enough, from *genōg*”
- four finished actions — “gesagt, gemacht, gelernt, gewohnt”

Twice through: “ge- means completely.”

Before you move on

What did *ge-* originally mean? (“**Completely**,” marking an action finished.) How did English spell the same prefix? (**Y-**.) Which everyday English word still carries it? (**Enough**, from *genōg*.) And the archaic one? (**Yclept**.) Next: the four participles side by side, and then the verb that puts them to work.

23.8 Practice — four verbs, one wrap

No new words. Every participle here has had its own lesson, so this is the first place they are safe to put side by side — as a recap of work already done, not as a list to swallow.

Grammar Lens: the four, assembled

infinitive

sagen
machen
lernen
wohnen

participle

gesagt
gemacht
gelernt
gewohnt

Cover the right-hand side and rebuild it from the left. Then cover the left and work backwards: given *gemacht*, what was the infinitive? The recipe runs both ways, which is what makes it worth having.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four in order — “gesagt, gemacht, gelernt, gewohnt”
- the four infinitives back — “sagen, machen, lernen, wohnen”
- the recipe out loud — “ge in front, t behind”
- the fossil — “enough, from genōg”

Twice through: “gesagt, gemacht, gelernt, gewohnt.”

Before you move on

Run the four participles without prompting. Which infinitive gives *gemacht*? (***Machen.***) What are the two pieces of the wrap? (**Ge-** and **-t.**) What did the front piece originally mean? (**“Completely.”**) Next: the verb that carries all four of these into a sentence.

Chapter 24

The Past Built From Have

Modes: 🗣️ voice (9) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I did in German — haben in second place, the participle waiting at the end of the clause — and read it as a plain past rather than as “have done”.

The Perfekt is haben plus a participle, and its cost is the four person slots rather than the recipe: ich habe, du hast, er hat, wir haben each get their own lesson before any of them share a page. The bracket that leaves the participle stranded at the end of the clause gets one of its own too, then gestern to fill the gap it opens, and finally the translation trap — ich habe gesagt is “I said”.

24.1 haben plus a participle — the everyday past

A participle on its own says nothing about who or when. It needs a partner, and German picks the same partner English does.

Grammar Lens: the recipe

haben, conjugated for whoever did it, plus the **participle**.

That two-part past has a name in German: the **Perfekt**. *Haben* carries everything that changes — the person, and the fact that this is a finished action — while the participle sits there in one shape for everybody. Only one of the two words has to agree with anything, which is why the *Perfekt* costs far less to learn than its size suggests. English assembled the identical machine out of the identical parts: a verb meaning “have,” plus a finished-action participle. *I have said* and

ich habe gesagt line up word for word. The next few lessons take *haben*'s forms one at a time and hang a participle off each.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the recipe — “haben, conjugated, plus the participle”
- the name — “das Perfekt”
- which half moves — “haben changes, the participle does not”

Twice through: “haben plus participle.”

Before you move on

Which two pieces make the *Perfekt*? (**Haben** plus the **participle**.)
 Which of the two changes for the person? (**Haben**.) Which English tense is built the same way? (**I have said** — *have* plus a participle.)
 Next: the first person, and the first whole sentence about the past.

24.2 ich habe gesagt — “I said”

The recipe, filled in for the person you talk about most.

You'll want to know: ich habe gesagt

ich habe gesagt — “I said.”

Three words, three jobs. *Ich* is who; *habe* is the form of *haben* that goes with *ich*; *gesagt* is what happened. Nothing here is new except the way the last two sit together.

Say it as one run rather than three separate words. The stress lands on *gesagt*, and *habe* shrinks in ordinary speech to something close to *hab*: *ich HAB gezahkt*. That contraction is not sloppy — it is how the sentence sounds when a German says it at speed.

Sounds you'll need

- **ich-laut** — *ich* still ends in the soft breathy sound from the very first chapter, not a *k*.
- **ge-prefix** — and the *ge-* that follows two words later is just as soft. The sentence has two unstressed mumbles in it and one loud syllable.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich habe gesagt”
- it at speed — “ich hab gesagt”
- the English beside it — “I said; ich habe gesagt”

Twice through: “ich habe gesagt, ich habe gesagt.”

Before you move on

Say “I said.” (**Ich habe gesagt.**) Which word carries the person? (**Habe.**) Which syllable is stressed? (**Sagt.**) Next: the same sentence, aimed at the person in front of you.

24.3 du hast gesagt — “you said”

Same sentence, different person — and *haben* loses a letter on the way.

You'll want to know: du hast gesagt

du hast gesagt — “you said,” to one person you are on familiar terms with.

The *b* of *haben* has gone. Not worn away here and kept elsewhere — this is one of the two forms where German drops it, and you met both when you learned the verb.

English does exactly the same thing to exactly the same verb: *I have*, but *thou hast*, and still today *he has*. Two languages, one shortcut, inherited together rather than invented twice.

The participle has not moved. *Gesagt* is *gesagt* whoever did the saying, so half of every sentence in this chapter is already yours.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “du hast gesagt”
- the pair — “ich habe gesagt, du hast gesagt”
- the English echo — “du hast, thou hast”

Twice through: “du hast gesagt.”

Before you move on

Say “you said,” informally. (**Du hast gesagt.**) Which letter of *haben* disappeared? (**The b.**) Which English form does the same? (**Thou hast**, and *he has*.) Did the participle change? (**No.**) Next: the same sentence about somebody else.

24.4 er hat das gemacht — “he did that”

Third person, and the first sentence in this chapter with a word standing between *haben* and the participle.

You’ll want to know: er hat das gemacht

er hat das gemacht — “he did that.”

Hat is the second of *haben*’s two *b*-less forms, the twin of English *has*. And *das*, the little word you met as an article, doubles as “that” — the thing he did.

Notice where it went. *Das* did not follow *gemacht*; it slipped in **before** it. The participle stayed at the far end of the sentence and let the rest of the words file in ahead of it. That is not a quirk of this one sentence, and the next lesson but one is about it.

Sounds you'll need

- **ch-ach** — the throat scrape is back, in the middle of *gemacht*.
- **final-t** — three of the four words in this sentence end in a *t*. Release each one; German does not let a final *t* go soft.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “er hat das gemacht”
- the b-less pair — “du hast, er hat”
- with the other participle — “er hat das gesagt”

Twice through: “er hat das gemacht.”

Before you move on

Say “he did that.” (**Er hat das gemacht.**) Which two forms of *haben* have no *b*? (**Hast** and **hat.**) Where did *das* land — before or after the participle? (**Before.**) Next: the same past, said about a group.

24.5 wir haben gesagt — “we said”

The fourth person, and the easiest of the four, because its form is one you have been saying since the verb was introduced.

You'll want to know: wir haben gesagt

wir haben gesagt — “we said.”

The helper here is *haben* itself, unchanged from the dictionary form. German does that everywhere: the *wir* form of any verb is the infinitive over again, which is one of the few completely free pieces of the ending system.

So the sentence has *haben* in it twice over in a sense — as the recipe’s helper and as its own plain shape — and the participle at the back is still *gesagt*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wir haben gesagt”
- the four helpers in order — “habe, hast, hat, haben”
- “wir haben das gemacht”

Twice through: “wir haben gesagt.”

Before you move on

Say “we said.” (**Wir haben gesagt.**) Which other form of the verb does *wir haben* match exactly? (**The infinitive, haben.**) Say “we did that.” (**Wir haben das gemacht.**) Next: why the participle keeps ending up at the back.

24.6 The participle waits at the back

Er hat das gemacht. Something happened in that sentence that has not been named yet, and it is the one thing about the *Perfekt* English cannot copy.

Grammar Lens: where the participle goes

The participle goes to the **end of the clause**, not next to *haben*.

You already know that the working verb takes the second position in a German sentence. The *Perfekt* splits the verb in two and puts the halves at opposite ends: *haben* in its usual second slot, the participle at the very back. Between them sits everything else the sentence has to say.

Grammarians call that shape a **bracket**, and once you hear it you cannot unhear it — a German sentence opens a verb and does not close it until the last word. It is also why German listeners wait: until the bracket shuts, you do not yet know what was done.

English refuses this outright. *I have German learned* is not a sentence, and no amount of context rescues it, because English keeps its two verb pieces welded together and pushes everything else behind them.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the shape — “haben second, participle last”
- “er hat das gemacht” and hear the bracket close
- “wir haben das gesagt”

Twice through: “The participle waits at the back.”

Before you move on

Where does the participle sit? (**At the end of the clause.**) Where does *haben* sit? (**Second**, as any working verb does.) What is between them? (**Everything else.**) Can English do this? (**No.**) Next: a word to put in that middle space.

24.7 gestern — “yesterday”

The bracket leaves a gap in the middle of every past sentence. Here is the first word worth putting in it.

You’ll want to know: gestern

gestern — “yesterday.”

It pairs with *morgen*, which you already have for “tomorrow.” One word each side of today, and both of them slide into the middle of a sentence rather than onto its end.

Now put it to work with a participle you own:

Ich habe gestern Deutsch gelernt. (*word for word: I have yesterday German learned.*)

Three things stacked between *habe* and *gelernt*, and the participle still waiting at the back. Read the English gloss aloud and hear how badly it fails as an English sentence; that failure is the shape of German.

Sounds you'll need

- **ge-prefix** — the opening *ge-* is the same unstressed mumble as in a participle, though here it is simply part of the word: *GES-tern*, stress on the first syllable.
- **r-uvular-german** — the *r* before *n* barely sounds; it colours the vowel and gets out of the way.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Gestern and *yesterday* are the same word. Germanic **gestra-* meant “the day before”; German kept it as it was, and English glued *day* onto the end of it, which is why the English word is two syllables longer for no extra meaning.

Latin took the same ancient root to *heri*, which is where French *hier* and Spanish *ayer* come from — so the word for yesterday is one of the oldest things in the room.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “gestern” — stress on the front
- the pair — “gestern, morgen”
- “Ich habe gestern Deutsch gelernt.”

Twice through: “Ich habe gestern Deutsch gelernt.”

Before you move on

Say “yesterday.” (**Gestern.**) Say “I learned German yesterday.” (**Ich habe gestern Deutsch gelernt.**) Which word comes last? (**Gelernt.**) Which English word is *gestern*? (**Yesterday.**) Next: what that sentence actually means in English, which is not what it looks like.

24.8 It means “I said,” not only “I have said”

The last thing about this tense is a translation trap, and it is the one that trips up English speakers hardest.

Grammar Lens: one German past for two English ones

Ich habe gesagt covers both “I said” and “I have said.”

English keeps those apart and makes the difference do work: *I said it yesterday* against *I have said it already*. Pick the wrong one and an English speaker hears something slightly off.

Spoken German mostly does not bother. The *Perfekt* took over the whole territory and answers both questions, so *ich habe gestern Deutsch gelernt* is “I learned German yesterday” — plain past, no “have” anywhere in the English.

That is the trap: the German sentence has a word that looks like *have* in it, and the English translation usually does not. Read the German for its meaning rather than its parts, and the sentence stops sounding stilted.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich habe gesagt — I said”
- it the other way too — “ich habe gesagt — I have said”
- “Ich habe gestern Deutsch gelernt — I learned German yesterday”

Twice through: “ich habe gesagt — I said.”

Before you move on

Translate *ich habe gesagt* into plain English. (“**I said.**”) Does the English need the word “have”? (**Usually not.**) Which language keeps *I said* and *I have said* apart? (**English.**) Next: the whole chapter, said through.

24.9 Practice — the Perfekt, all four persons

No new words. Each of the four slots below has had a lesson of its own, so this is the first place it is safe to set them out together.

Grammar Lens: the four slots, assembled

German	English
ich habe gesagt	I said
du hast gesagt	you said
er hat gesagt	he said
wir haben gesagt	we said
One half of the sentence moves and the other does not. Run the four aloud and hear that <i>gesagt</i> never budes.	

The exchange

German	English
<i>Was hast du gestern gemacht?</i>	What did you do yesterday?
<i>Ich habe Deutsch gelernt.</i>	I learned German.
<i>Und du?</i>	And you?
<i>Wir haben das auch gemacht.</i>	We did that too.
<i>Gut gemacht!</i>	Well done!

Two joining words slip in without lessons of their own, because the translation carries them: **was** (“what”) and **auch** (“too”). And the last line is already an idiom — *gut gemacht* is exactly English *well done*, participle and all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four in order — “ich habe, du hast, er hat, wir haben — gesagt”
- the same four with the other participle — “...gemacht”
- “Ich habe gestern Deutsch gelernt.”
- the whole exchange, both voices

Twice through: “ich habe, du hast, er hat, wir haben.”

Before you move on

Run the four helpers without prompting. Say “we did that.” (**Wir haben das gemacht.**) Where is the participle in every one of those sentences? (**Last.**) Translate *ich habe gesagt* into plain English. (“**I said.**”) Next: the other past tense German has, and why you meet it mostly in books.

Chapter 25

The Simple Past

Modes: ⇄ voice (10) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 10 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can recognise the one-word past German uses in writing, produce the handful of its forms that people actually say out loud, and explain why the rest of it retreated.

German's second past means exactly what the first one means, so this chapter separates the two by register rather than by tense: produce the Perfekt, recognise the Präteritum, and learn the short list of forms that ignore the rule. It ends with the reason the tense retreated at all — the same change ran through French and Italian over the same centuries, because their speakers are neighbours.

25.1 -te — the one-word past

German has a second past tense. It needs no helper verb and no participle — just a stem and an ending.

Grammar Lens: add -te to the stem

Take a regular verb's stem and put **-te** on it.

The tense that ending builds is called the **Präteritum**. Where the *Perfekt* spends two words and a bracket, this one spends a single word: *sag-* plus *-te* and the sentence is done.

The two tenses report the same events. That is worth saying plainly, because a learner reasonably expects a language with two pasts to be drawing a distinction with them, the way English draws one between *I said* and *I have said*. German draws none. What separates its two

pasts is something else entirely, and it takes a few more lessons to arrive at.

The *-te* itself has a history reaching well beyond German, and that comes first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the recipe — “stem plus *te*”
- the name — “das *Präteritum*”
- how many words it takes — “one”

Twice through: “stem plus *-te*.”

Before you move on

Which ending builds the *Präteritum* on a regular verb? (**-te**.) How many words does it need? (**One**.) How many does the *Perfekt* need? (**Two**.) Do the two tenses mean different things? (**No**.) Next: the first verb through the new ending.

25.2 *ich sagte* — “I said,” in one word

Run the new ending on the verb this chapter started from.

You’ll want to know: *ich sagte*

ich sagte — “I said.”

Stem *sag-*, ending *-te*. Two syllables and it is finished, where the *Perfekt* took three words to say the same thing:

ich sagte · *ich habe gesagt*

Both are “I said.” Neither is more past than the other, neither is more polite, and neither is wrong. Hold that in mind while the differences that do exist arrive.

Sounds you'll need

- **long-a** — the stem vowel is the same long *a* as in *sagen*; the new ending does not shorten it.
- **final-te** — the *-te* is a full unstressed syllable, *tuh*, not a bare *t*. Hear the difference against the participle: *ge-SAHKT* has one syllable at the end, *SAHK-tuh* has two.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich sagte”
- the pair back to back — “ich sagte ... ich habe gesagt”
- the two endings apart — “gesagt, sagte”

Twice through: “ich sagte, ich habe gesagt.”

Before you move on

Say “I said” in one word. (**Ich sagte.**) And in three. (**Ich habe gesagt.**) Which of them is further in the past? (**Neither.**) How many syllables does *sagte* have? (**Two.**) Next: the same ending on the verb for doing.

25.3 ich machte — “I made,” “I did”

You have *gemacht*. Build the other past of the same verb before reading on.

You'll want to know: ich machte

ich machte — “I made,” “I did.”

Mach- plus *-te*. Notice what the two pasts of this verb have in common: the stem. *Gemacht* wrapped it and *machte* suffixed it, and neither touched a letter inside it.

That is the whole promise of a weak verb. Whatever German asks of it, the middle stays put — which is why the four participles of the last chapter

and the *-te* forms of this one can be built from any regular verb you meet, on the spot, without a list.

er machte das · er hat das gemacht

Same person, same event, two tenses.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich machte”
- the pair — “er machte das ... er hat das gemacht”
- both new forms — “sagte, machte”

Twice through: “ich sagte, ich machte.”

Before you move on

Say “I did” in one word. (**Ich machte.**) What do *machte* and *gemacht* share? (**The stem mach-**) Does either change the stem? (**No.**) Say “he did that” both ways. (**Er machte das; er hat das gemacht.**) Next: where that *-te* came from, and the English ending that is the same thing.

25.4 The dental preterite — a Germanic invention

Say *sagte*, then say *walked*. Both endings are made with the tongue against the teeth, and that is not a coincidence.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The German *-te* is what linguists call the **dental preterite**: a past tense made by bolting a *t* or *d* sound onto a stem. Dental, because those sounds are made at the teeth.

language	present	past
German	<i>sag-</i>	sagte
English	<i>walk</i>	walked
Dutch	<i>werk-</i>	werkte

Three languages, one device, inherited rather than borrowed — this is a **Germanic invention**, and it is one of the features that identifies the family. Everything with a *-t* or *-d* past in Germanic comes from the same ancestor.

Latin built nothing of the kind. Its past came from inherited perfect endings and from reduplication, and its descendants carried that on: French *parla*, Spanish *habló*. So *sagte* and *walked* are one machine, and *parla* and *habló* are a different one — which is why an English speaker recognises the German ending on sight and a Spanish speaker does not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three together — “sagte, walked, werkte”
- the name — “the dental preterite”
- the two machines — “sagte and walked; parla and habló”

Twice through: “sagte, walked — the same ending.”

Before you move on

What is the *-te* called? (**The dental preterite.**) Why *dental*? (**It is made at the teeth.**) Which English ending is the same thing? (**-ed.**) Did Latin have it? (**No** — Romance builds its past another way.) Next: the one verb whose *-te* form you will hear constantly.

25.5 ich hatte — “I had”

The dental ending on the verb you have been leaning on for two chapters.

You'll want to know: ich hatte

ich hatte — “I had.”

Haben drops its *b* — the same *b* that goes missing in *du hast* and *er hat* — and the dental ending lands on what is left, doubling the *t* in the spelling: *hat-te*. Two syllables, both short.

English did the identical thing to the identical verb and then wore the result down further: *have* lost its consonant and took a *-d*, giving *had*. So *hatte* and *had* are the same word doing the same job.

Haben has a *Perfekt* of its own as well — *ich habe gehabt*, “I have had” — built by the ordinary recipe, since *haben* is a perfectly ordinary verb when it is not busy helping another one.

Sounds you'll need

- **d-t-final** — the doubled *tt* is one sharp *t*, and the vowel in front of it is short and clipped. *HAT-tuh*, never *HAH-tuh*.
- **final-te** — the ending is still a full unstressed syllable.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich hatte”
- the pair — “ich hatte ... ich habe gehabt”
- the English twin — “hatte, had”

Twice through: “ich hatte, ich hatte.”

Before you move on

Say “I had.” (**Ich hatte.**) Which letter of *haben* is missing? (**The b.**) Say the same thing in the *Perfekt*. (**Ich habe gehabt.**) Which English word is *hatte*? (**Had.**) Next: which of the two pasts a German actually reaches for, and where.

25.6 Which past, and where

Two tenses, one meaning. Time to answer the question that has been waiting since the *-te* arrived: when does a German say which?

Grammar Lens: speech takes one, writing takes the other

The *Perfekt* belongs to **speech**. The *Präteritum* belongs to **narrative writing**.

tense	where it lives
<i>Perfekt</i>	everyday conversation, and dominant there
<i>Präteritum</i>	novels, reports, anything told on the page

Open a German novel and the story runs in *Präteritum* from the first page to the last. Stand in a German kitchen and you will barely hear it. Neither audience thinks it is choosing a tense; each is simply doing what that setting does.

So the practical instruction for a speaker is lopsided and easy:

produce the *Perfekt*, **recognise** the *Präteritum*. You will read far more of it than you will ever need to say.

Why it's said this way

There is a second axis, and it is geographic. Spoken *Präteritum* has largely vanished from conversation in southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland; further north it survives noticeably better. A Hamburg speaker will use forms in conversation that a Munich speaker would find bookish.

That map is not decoration — the next lessons turn out to explain it — and it means the honest answer to “do Germans say *ich sagte?*” is: some of them, some of the time, and it depends where you are standing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the split — “Perfekt for speech, Präteritum for writing”

- your own instruction — “produce the Perfekt, recognise the Präteritum”
- the map — “weaker in the south, stronger in the north”

Twice through: “Perfekt spoken, Präteritum written.”

Before you move on

Which past does a novel use? (**The Präteritum.**) Which does a conversation use? (**The Perfekt.**) Which should you produce? (**The Perfekt.**) Where is spoken *Präteritum* weakest? (**The south.**) Next: the forms that ignore all of this and stay spoken everywhere.

25.7 ich konnte — “I could”

The last new form of the chapter, and a *Präteritum* nobody thinks twice about saying out loud.

You’ll want to know: ich konnte

ich konnte — “I could,” “I was able to.”

The dental ending again, doubled in the spelling as it was in *hatte: konnte*. It belongs to a small family of verbs German calls *modal* — the ones that lean on another verb, the way English *can*, *must* and *may* do.

Those verbs are the *Präteritum*’s stronghold in ordinary speech. Nobody in Munich says *ich habe gekonnt* over dinner; they say *ich konnte*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Konnte and English *could* descend from one Germanic verb, **kunnana*, which meant “**to know how**” rather than “to be physically able.” Ability arrived later, out of knowledge.

That older sense is still visible in the English relatives: *know*, *cunning* (originally “knowing”), and *uncouth*, which began as “unknown.” The *l* that English wrote into *could* is pure accident — it was copied from *would* and *should* centuries after anyone stopped pronouncing it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich konnte”
- the two doubled forms — “hatte, konnte”
- the old meaning — “konnte, could — knew how”

Twice through: “ich konnte, ich hatte.”

Before you move on

Say “I could.” (**Ich konnte.**) What did the verb behind it originally mean? (“**To know how.**”) Name an English cousin. (**Know**, *cunning*, or *uncouth*.) Is *konnte* bookish? (**No** — it is said out loud everywhere.) Next: why a handful of forms get that exemption.

25.8 The forms that stayed spoken

Hatte. Konnte. Both are *Präteritum*, and both come out of a German mouth without a second thought. So the writing-only rule has holes in it.

Grammar Lens: a short list of survivors

A handful of very common verbs keep their one-word past **in speech**, everywhere in the German-speaking world.

Three groups make up almost the whole list:

- **hatte** — the past of *haben*;
- **konnte** and its modal siblings — *musste*, *wollte*, *durfte*;
- the past of the verb for “to be,” which arrives two chapters from now and is the most-said of them all.

Everything else in the *Präteritum* obeys the split you learned last: written, not spoken.

Why these? Because they are the verbs said most often, and frequency protects a form the way it protects an irregularity. A shape you

produce fifty times a day is never up for replacement; a shape you produce once a month quietly gets swapped for the compound version and nobody notices the swap happening. So the practical list is genuinely short, and it is worth having by heart rather than by rule.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the survivors you own — “hatte, konnte”
- the modal siblings — “musste, wollte, durfte”
- the reason — “frequency protects a form”

Twice through: “hatte, konnte — spoken everywhere.”

Before you move on

Name two *Präteritum* forms a German says out loud. (***Hatte***, ***konnte***.) Which family does *konnte* belong to? (**The modals.**) Why did these survive? (**They are said most often.**) Next: why the rest of the tense retreated, and where the retreat came from.

25.9 The same retreat, three times over

German is not the only language that let a two-word past crowd out a one-word one. Two of its neighbours did the identical thing at the identical time.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

language	one-word past	what took it over in speech
German	<i>Präteritum</i>	<i>Perfekt</i>
French	<i>passé simple</i>	<i>passé composé</i>
Italian	<i>passato remoto</i>	<i>passato prossimo</i>

Two Romance languages and one Germanic one, doing the same thing over the same centuries — and not by coincidence. The dental *-te* and

the Romance endings came from completely different ancestors, so nothing inherited can account for three languages arriving at the same answer.

Geography can. Southern Germany, France and northern Italy are one connected block of territory, and the change spread through it by **contact**: speakers who live near each other borrow habits, and a habit of speech travels across a language boundary as easily as across a dialect one. Linguists call a change that spreads that way an *areal* change.

Why it's said this way

Two pieces of evidence make the contact story stick rather than merely sound good.

The first is what did **not** happen at the western edge. Spanish and Portuguese kept their one-word past far more fully in speech, and they are the two languages furthest from that connected block.

The second is the map inside German itself, which you already met: the *Präteritum* is weakest in the **south**, nearest the centre of the change, and strongest in the **north**, furthest from it. A change spreading outward from a region should thin as it goes, and that is exactly what German shows.

Geography did not dictate any single sentence. But it explains why a Germanic language and two Romance ones moved in step, and why one end of Germany sounds older than the other.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three languages — “German, French, Italian: the same retreat”
- the name — “an areal change, spread by contact”
- the inside map — “south more Perfekt, north more Präteritum”

Twice through: “areal change — it spread by contact.”

Before you move on

Which two neighbours made the same change? (**French** and **Italian**.) Did German inherit it from Latin? (**No** — the two families build their pasts from different material.) What is a change that spreads by contact called? (An *areal* change.) Which two languages at the western edge kept their one-word past? (**Spanish** and **Portuguese**.) Next: the chapter run through end to end.

25.10 Practice — the two pasts, side by side

No new words. The point of this one is to hear, in your own voice, that two different-sounding sentences report the same event.

Grammar Lens: one meaning, two shapes

meaning	Präteritum	Perfekt
I said	<i>ich sagte</i>	<i>ich habe gesagt</i>
I made	<i>ich machte</i>	<i>ich habe gemacht</i>
I had	<i>ich hatte</i>	<i>ich habe gehabt</i>
Say each pair back to back — <i>ich sagte ... ich habe gesagt</i> — and then <i>er machte das ... er hat das gemacht</i> . Nothing about the meaning has moved. All that has changed is which room you are standing in.		

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “*ich sagte ... ich habe gesagt*”
- the other pair — “*er machte das ... er hat das gemacht*”
- the survivors — “*ich hatte, ich konnte*”
- your own instruction — “produce the Perfekt, recognise the Präteritum”

Twice through: “*ich sagte, ich habe gesagt.*”

Before you move on

Say “I made” both ways. (**Ich machte; ich habe gemacht.**) Which of the two would a novel use? (**The Präteritum.**) Which would you say out loud? (**The Perfekt** — except for the survivors.) What is the *-te* called? (**The dental preterite.**) What kind of change pushed the tense out of speech? (An *areal* one.) Next: the verb every one of these sentences has been waiting for.

Chapter 26

I Am, You Are

Modes:  voice (8)  eyes (1)  Hands-free start: first 8 of 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what someone is in German, using any of the six present forms of the verb for “to be” — and say that I am tired.

sein is the one German verb whose forms cannot be guessed from its infinitive, so this chapter meets them one at a time — bin, bist, ist, sind, seid, sind — and only assembles the grid once every cell has had its own lesson. It closes with müde, the adjective that finishes ich bin, and a short exchange that runs on nothing but this verb.

26.1 sein — “to be”

You have met the German verb for *to have*. Here is its partner — the most irregular verb in German, and the one verb whose forms you will not be able to guess.

You’ll want to know: sein

sein — “to be.”

The **-en** on the end is the infinitive ending you already own from *gehen* and *sehen*: the dictionary form of a German verb wears it, and *sein* wears it too.

That is where the resemblance stops. *Gehen* and *sehen* keep their stem in every form — *ich gehe*, *ich sehe*. *Sein* keeps nothing. Not one of its present forms contains the letters *s-e-i-n* in that order.

This is the only verb in the book that has to be met one form at a time, and the next several lessons do exactly that: one form each, said until it is automatic, before any of them are ever seen side by side.

Sounds you'll need

- **s-voiced** — a German **s** before a vowel buzzes like English **z**, exactly as it does in *sehen*. So *sein* opens with a **z**.
- **diphthong-ei** — German **ei** is the vowel of English *eye*, never “ee”.
- **final-t** — worth having ready now, because two of the forms coming up end in a crisp, fully released **t**.

Put together, *sein* sounds like English **zine**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sein” (*zine*) — buzzing **z**, *ei* as in *eye*
- “gehen, sehen, sein” — three infinitives, one ending
- “sein — to be”

Twice through: “sein, sein — *zine*.”

Before you move on

What does *sein* mean? (“**To be**.”) Which ending does it share with *gehen* and *sehen*? (**-en**, the infinitive.) How does the *s* sound? (Like English **z**.) And the *ei*? (Like English **eye**.) Next: the first form, and it looks nothing like the word you just learned.

26.2 ich bin — “I am”

You have *ich*, and you have the infinitive *sein*. Put them together and you get a form that shares no letters with either half of that sentence except the *i*.

You'll want to know: *ich bin*

ich bin — “I am.”

One syllable, short *i*, ordinary *b*, ordinary *n*. There is no rule behind it and nothing to derive it from: *bin* is simply the form that goes with *ich*, and it is learned the way you learned *hallo*.

It rhymes with English *bin*, and that rhyme is not an accident — see below.

Sounds you'll need

- **ich-laut** — *ich* still ends in the soft breathy sound you met when you first said “I”: tongue where it sits for *ee*, air pushed past it, no scrape.
- **i-short** — the *i* of *bin* is short and clipped, the vowel of English *bin*, not the long *ee* of *ihm*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Bin rhymes with English *be* for a reason, even though the vowels have drifted apart. Both come from Proto-Indo-European ***b^huH-** — “to grow, to become.”

So German kept that ancient root in the **present tense** and English kept it as the **infinitive**: *be* and *bin* are the same old word wearing different jobs. Hold on to that; two lessons from now it explains something about the whole verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich bin” — short *i*, soft ending on *ich*
- “ich bin Anna.” “ich bin Peter.”
- “bin — be” — the same old root

Twice through: “ich bin, ich bin.”

Before you move on

Say “I am.” (**Ich bin.**) Is the *i* of *bin* long or short? (**Short** — English *bin.*) Which English word comes from the same root as *bin*? (**Be.**) Next: the same verb for the person you are talking to.

26.3 du bist — “you are”

Du is the familiar “you” — the one for a friend. Its verb ending is **-st**, and for once *sein* uses it.

You’ll want to know: du bist

du bist — “you are.”

Take *bin*, drop the *n*, add the familiar **-st**: *bi-* plus *-st* is *bist*. That is the same ending as *du gehst*, *du heißt*, *du siehst*.

Of the six present forms of *sein*, this is the only one that can be derived from another one. Enjoy it; it does not happen again.

Sounds you’ll need

- **u-long** — *du* has a long, rounded **oo**, the vowel of English *do*, held.
- **final-t** — German releases a final **t** fully and audibly. *Bist* ends with a small puff of air; English tends to swallow it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “du bist” — long *u*, crisp final *t*
- “ich bin ... du bist” — the pair
- “du bist Peter.”

Twice through: “ich bin, du bist.”

Before you move on

Say “you are,” to a friend. (**Du bist.**) Which ending is that? (**-st**, the familiar one.) Which form is *bist* built on? (***Bin.***) Is the final *t* released or swallowed? (**Released.**) Next: the form for everybody else.

26.4 er ist — “he is”

Bin and *bist* both start with *b*. The third form does not, and it is the one you will hear most.

You’ll want to know: er ist

er ist — “he is.”

er is “he.” The same **ist** serves three more subjects without changing at all: **sie ist** (“she is”), **es ist** (“it is”), and **das ist** (“that is”) — *es* and *das* both already yours.

So one two-letter word covers everything that is not *ich* and not *du*, in the singular. It is the workhorse of the whole verb.

Sounds you’ll need

- **r-final** — the *r* at the end of *er* is not a full English *r*. It softens towards a vowel, close to *air* said without the tongue curling.
- **final-t** — *ist* ends in the same released **t** as *bist*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Ist is the one form of *sein* whose relatives you can name on sight:

language	“is”
German	ist
English	is
Latin	<i>est</i>
French	<i>est</i>

All from Proto-Indo-European ***h₁es-**, “to be” — and the infinitive **sein** is built on that root too. So *sein* and *ist* really do belong to each

other; it is *bin* and *bist* that came from somewhere else.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “er ist, sie ist, es ist”
- “Das ist gut.” — “that is good”
- “ich bin, du bist, er ist”

Twice through: “Das ist gut.”

Before you move on

Say “he is.” (**Er ist.**) Which other subjects take the same form? (**Sie, es, das.**) Say “that is good.” (**Das ist gut.**) Which Latin word is *ist*? (**Est.**) Next: the form for more than one.

26.5 wir sind — “we are”

Three singular forms down. The plural starts here, and after *bin*, *bist*, *ist*, this one will finally look like the verb it belongs to.

You’ll want to know: wir sind

wir sind — “we are.”

wir is “we.” And **sind** shares its first two letters with the infinitive *sein*, which is the first visible family resemblance in this verb.

Its Latin twin is *sunt*, “they are” — same **s**, same **n**, same closing stop, the same root wearing a different vowel.

Sounds you’ll need

- **w-as-v** — German **w** is English **v**. *Wir* begins like *veer*.
- **ie-long-ee** — **ie** is a long **ee**. *Wir* is *veer*, not *wire*.
- **d-t-final** — the **d** at the end of *sind* is spoken as a **t**, the same final devoicing you met on *und*. Say *zint*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wir sind” — *veer zint*, final *d* as *t*
- “wir sind gut.”
- “sein ... sind” — the family resemblance

Twice through: “wir sind, wir sind.”

Before you move on

Say “we are.” (**Wir sind.**) How is the final *d* pronounced? (As a **t**.) How does *wir* begin? (Like English **v**.) Which Latin word is *sind*? (**Sunt.**) Next: the plural “you.”

26.6 ihr seid — “you are,” to several people

Du is one friend. For two or more friends German has a separate word, and English used to have one as well.

You’ll want to know: ihr seid

ihr seid — “you are,” said to more than one person you would each call *du*.

ihr is the familiar plural “you” — a crowd of friends, a group of children, your own family. English once had *ye* here and let it go, which is why one English *you* now does the work of four German words.

seid opens exactly like the infinitive: *sei-* is *sein* without its *n*. Both the *s* and the *ei* behave as they did there.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ie-long-ee** — *ihr* is *eer*, one long vowel; the *h* only stretches it.
- **s-voiced** — *seid* opens with the buzzing **z** of *sein*.
- **diphthong-ei** — and carries the *eye* vowel through. Say *zite*.

Wir sind and *ihr seid* are the two plural forms, and they sound nothing alike, which makes them easy to keep apart.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ihr seid” — *eer zite*
- “wir sind ... ihr seid”
- “sein ... seid” — the same opening

Twice through: “ihr seid, ihr seid.”

Before you move on

Say “you are” to a group of friends. (**Ihr seid.**) Which English word did that job before English dropped it? (**Ye.**) Which part of *seid* comes straight out of *sein*? (**sei-**.) Next: the last form, and the one that does double duty.

26.7 sie sind / Sie sind — “they are,” and “you are,” politely

The polite **Sie** is literally the word for “they,” worn as a courtesy. Its verb form follows from that, and costs you nothing new.

You’ll want to know: sie sind and Sie sind

sie sind — “they are.” **Sie sind** — “you are,” to someone you would address formally.

The form is **sind**, the very same word you learned for *wir*. Nothing changes in the mouth at all: *wir sind*, *sie sind*, *Sie sind* are three subjects and one verb form.

Grammar Lens: the capital carries the politeness

On the page, *sie* and *Sie* differ by exactly one capital letter — and German already spends capitals on grammar rather than decoration. In speech there is no difference at all; the context tells you which one is meant.

written	means
<i>sie sind</i>	they are
<i>Sie sind</i>	you are, formally
That is the whole of it. Six subjects, and you have now met every present form of the verb.	

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sie sind” — “they are”
- “Sie sind Herr Peter Schmidt?” — politely
- “wir sind, sie sind, Sie sind” — one form, three subjects

Twice through: “sie sind, Sie sind.”

Before you move on

Say “they are.” (**Sie sind.**) Say “you are” to a stranger. (**Sie sind** — same sound.) What separates the two on paper? (**The capital S.**) How many different present forms of this verb have you now met? (**Five** — *bin, bist, ist, sind, seid.*) Next: one adjective, so you can finally say something about yourself.

26.8 müde — “tired”

Ich bin is a sentence waiting for one more word. Here is the word that finishes it most often.

You’ll want to know: müde

müde — “tired.”

Ich bin müde. — “I am tired.”

Two syllables, stress on the first: *mü-duh*. It is an adjective, and after *sein* an adjective takes **no ending at all** — the same bare form serves every subject. *Ich bin müde, du bist müde, wir sind müde.*

That is worth noticing, because German adjectives are famous for their endings. They only take them in front of a noun. Standing after *sein*, they stand still.

Sounds you'll need

- **umlaut-ue** — **ü** is the vowel you make by rounding your lips for *oo* and then saying *ee* without moving them. The dots are the fronting mark you already know: the mouth shifts forward, the lips stay round.

The final **-e** is a soft *uh*, never silent. *mü-duh*, two beats, the weight on the first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “müde” — round the lips, say *ee*
- “Ich bin müde.”
- “Er ist müde. Wir sind müde.” — the adjective never changes

Twice through: “Ich bin müde.”

Before you move on

Say “I am tired.” (**Ich bin müde.**) How do you make the **ü**? (**Round for oo, say ee.**) Does *müde* change after *sein*? (**No** — no ending.) Say “we are tired.” (**Wir sind müde.**) Next: everything at once, on purpose.

26.9 Practice — the whole present of sein

No new words. Every form below has had its own lesson, so this is the first time it is safe to put them all on one page — as a recap, not as something to memorise from cold.

Grammar Lens: the six forms, assembled

singular

ich **bin**
 du **bist**
 er/sie/es **ist**

plural

wir **sind**
 ihr **seid**
 sie/Sie **sind**

Six subjects, five different forms — *sind* does double duty. Look at that with fresh eyes now that you can say all of it: *bin* and *ist* do not look like forms of the same word, and the next chapter explains why they aren't.

The exchange

German

Hallo! Wie geht es dir?
Danke, ich bin müde.
Du bist müde? Ich auch.
Dann sind wir müde. Aber das ist gut.
Bis morgen!

English

Hello! How are you?
 Thanks — I am tired.
 You are tired? Me too.
 Then we are tired. But that is good.
 See you tomorrow!

Three small joining words slip in there without needing lessons of their own, because each can be read straight off the translation: **auch** (“too”), **dann** (“then”) and **aber** (“but”).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the six in order — “ich bin, du bist, er ist, wir sind, ihr seid, sie sind”
- the same six backwards
- “Ich bin müde.” “Du bist müde.” “Wir sind müde.”
- the whole exchange, both voices

Twice through: “ich bin, du bist, er ist, wir sind, ihr seid, sie sind.”

Before you move on

Run the six forms without looking. Which one form covers *wir*, *sie* and *Sie*? (***Sind***.) Which is the only form built out of another one? (***Bist***, from *bin*.) Say “that is good.” (***Das ist gut***.) Say “you are tired” to a group. (***Ihr seid müde***.) Next: where these forms came from — three different verbs, none of them each other.

Chapter 27

Being Your Years

Modes: ⇄ voice (7) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask how old somebody is and say my own age in German, using the verb German insists on for it.

This material was the second half of the hand-written haben chapter, and it could not stay there: ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt needs ich bin, and Wie alt bist du? needs du bist — both of which the chapter on sein teaches. It sits here instead, immediately after that chapter, where every word it needs is already owned, and it closes the haben chapter's open question by showing the one everyday sentence where German refuses that verb.

27.1 alt — “old”

You can say *ich bin müde*. Here is a second adjective to put in the same slot, and it opens a sentence you will be asked for constantly.

You'll want to know: alt

alt — “old.”

One syllable. It behaves exactly as *müde* did: after *sein* an adjective takes no ending at all, so *ich bin alt* needs nothing added.

It is the same word as English **old**, and you can nearly hear it — German kept the *a* where English rounded it.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-a** — short and clipped, the *a* of English *hat*.
- **d-t-final** — the *-lt* closes crisply, both consonants sounded.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “alt”
- the pair — “alt, old”
- with the verb — “ich bin alt”, “ich bin müde”

Twice through: “alt, alt — old.”

Before you move on

Say “old.” (**Alt.**) Does it take an ending after *bin*? (**No.**) Which English word is it? (**Old.**) Next: the noun that goes with it.

27.2 die Jahre — the form the age sentence uses

A noun you were given ten chapters ago. The age sentence wants it in a shape you have not used yet.

You'll want to know: die Jahre

die Jahre — the plural of *das Jahr*.

The plural adds *-e* and takes *die*, as plurals do, and it stays capitalised because German capitalises every noun in every number.

Here is why it matters. The age sentence counts, and a count takes a plural: you are so many *Jahre* old, never so many *Jahr*. From here on it is *Jahre* that does the work, and *das Jahr* that sits behind it.

Sounds you'll need

- **j-as-y** — German *j* is the *y* of English *yes*. So *Jahr* opens like *year*, not like *jar*.

- **h-silent-lengthening** — that *h* is not pronounced. It is the silent lengthening *h* you met inside *gehen*, and *Jahr* was named there as one of the three words that hide it, beside *sehr* and *Ihnen*. Here it is.
- **long-a** — so the vowel runs long: *YAAR*. Say it beside English *year* and the two are almost the same noise.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- singular and plural — “das Jahr, die Jahre”
- the plural alone, which is the one you need — “die Jahre”
- the two words the sentence will need — “Jahre, alt”

Twice through: “das Jahr, die Jahre.”

Before you move on

Say “the year.” (**Das Jahr.**) And the plural. (**Die Jahre.**) Which of the two does an age sentence use? (**The plural** — you are counted.) What does the plural add? (**An -e, and die.**) Next: where *Jahr* and *alt* both come from.

27.3 Jahr and alt, taken apart

Two words, both inherited rather than borrowed, and one of them has a Latin cousin you would never guess.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

German	from	English
Jahr	Germanic <i>*jēra</i>	year
alt	Germanic <i>*aldaz</i>	old

Neither line passes through Latin, which is worth noticing in a chapter about age: German borrowed its **month** names wholesale from Latin, and kept its own words for the year and for being old.

Now the cousin. The root behind **aldaz* also went into Latin, as *alere* — “to **nourish**, to grow.” From *alere* English took **adult**, which is literally “grown up.”

So *alt* and *adult* are the same idea taken down two roads: something that has been fed and has grown. Ageing as growth rather than as decay, which is a kinder picture than English usually admits to.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two twins — “Jahr, year; alt, old”
- the Latin cousin — “alt, alere, adult”
- what the root meant — “to nourish, to grow”

Twice through: “Jahr, year. Alt, old.”

Before you move on

Which English word is *Jahr*? (**Year.**) And *alt*? (**Old.**) Which English word comes from *alt*’s Latin cousin? (**Adult.**) What did that cousin mean? (“**To nourish, to grow.**”) Next: the question you will be asked with these two words.

27.4 Wie alt bist du?

You have *wie*, you have *alt*, and you have *du bist*. That is the whole question.

You’ll want to know: Wie alt bist du?

Wie alt bist du? — “How old are you?”

Four words, and every one of them is already yours. Read it against the English and nothing has moved: *how* — *old* — *are* — *you*.

That is not a coincidence to be grateful for; it is inheritance. Neither language borrowed this question from the other. They have been asking it the same way since before either was called German or English.

The verb sits second, as it does in every German statement and question with a question word in front — *Wie* first, *bist* second, and the rest behind.

To someone you would address formally, it is *Wie alt sind Sie?* — the same question with the polite form of the verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Wie alt bist du?”
- it against the English — “how old are you; wie alt bist du”
- the formal one — “Wie alt sind Sie?”

Twice through: “Wie alt bist du?”

Before you move on

Ask how old someone is, informally. (**Wie alt bist du?**) And formally. (**Wie alt sind Sie?**) Which word sits second? (**Bist.**) How many of the four words were new? (**None.**) Next: how to answer it.

27.5 ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt

The answer, and it is as English as the question was.

You’ll want to know: ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt

Ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt. — “I am twenty years old.”

Word for word, that is the English sentence: *I — am — twenty — years — old.* Put any number you own in the middle and the sentence is yours.

And German shortens it the same way English does. *Ich bin zwanzig* is complete and ordinary, exactly as “I’m twenty” is — the *Jahre alt* can go, and in speech usually does.

Notice which verb is doing the work: *bin*. Not *habe*. Hold on to that, because it is the whole point of the next lesson.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt.”
- the short form — “Ich bin zwanzig.”
- your own age, in both lengths
- the question and the answer together

Twice through: “Ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt.”

Before you move on

Say “I am twenty years old.” (**Ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt.**)
 Shorten it. (**Ich bin zwanzig.**) Which verb does it use? (**Bin.**)
 Which does it **not** use? (**Habe.**) Next: why that choice puts
 German and English on one side and every Romance language on
 the other.

27.6 sein, not haben

You spent a whole chapter on *haben*. Here is the everyday sentence where German refuses to let you use it.

Grammar Lens: you ARE your years

German states age with **sein**, never with *haben*.

**Ich habe zwanzig Jahre* is not German. It is not a clumsy way of putting it; it is not a sentence.

Look what happens when you line the languages up:

language	how age works	literally
German	<i>ich bin ... Jahre alt</i>	I am ...
English	<i>I am twenty</i>	I am ...
French	<i>j'ai vingt ans</i>	I have ...
Spanish	<i>tengo veinte años</i>	I have ...
Italian	<i>ho venti anni</i>	I have ...
Portuguese	<i>tenho vinte anos</i>	I have ...

Two on one side, four on the other, and the line falls exactly where the

families do.

Why it's said this way

Romance has its years; Germanic is its years. Age as something you carry against age as something you are — two pictures of the same fact, and each family committed to one of them long ago.

What makes German's choice worth pointing at is that German did *not* hold the Latin line out generally. Its month names are Latin borrowings wholesale; *Januar*, *Februar* and the rest came in and stayed. But on this sentence, said several times a week for a lifetime, German kept its own logic.

The words a language uses most are the ones it is least willing to trade — which is the same force that keeps its commonest verbs irregular.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the rule — “age takes sein, not haben”
- the two sides — “ich bin zwanzig; j'ai vingt ans”
- the picture — “Romance has its years, Germanic is its years”

Twice through: “Ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt — bin, not habe.”

Before you move on

Which verb does German use for age? (***Sein***.) Which does French use? (***Avoir*** — “to have”.) Which two languages sit together here? (**German and English**.) Did German borrow its month names from Latin? (**Yes** — which is what makes keeping this sentence its own worth noticing.) Next: the chapter said through.

27.7 Practice — asking and answering an age

No new words. One question, one answer, and one thing to keep hearing: which verb carries it.

The exchange

German	English
<i>Wie alt bist du?</i>	How old are you?
<i>Zwanzig Jahre alt. Und du?</i>	Twenty years old. And you?
<i>Ich bin achtzehn.</i>	I am eighteen.
<i>Und du bist müde.</i>	And you are tired.
<i>Aber nicht alt!</i>	But not old!

Every line runs on the same verb, and two of them drop it the way speech does — *zwanzig Jahre alt* answers the question on its own. Nothing here needs *haben*, and the last two lines put *müde* and *alt* side by side in the slot they share.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the question, then your own answer
- the answer short, then long
- the two sides — “ich bin zwanzig; j’ai vingt ans”
- the twins — “Jahr, year; alt, old; alt, adult”
- the whole exchange, both voices

Twice through: “Wie alt bist du? Ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt.”

Before you move on

Ask someone’s age. (**Wie alt bist du?**) Answer with your own, both long and short. Which verb does German use, and which does it refuse? (**Sein**; **not haben**.) Which English word shares a root with *alt*? (**Adult**.) Which four languages say “I have twenty years”? (**French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese**.)

Chapter 28

Three Verbs Under One Roof

Modes: ⇄ voice (8) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can put the German verb for “to be” into the past, and say why its forms look like three unrelated words — because they are.

The past of sein is the tidy half of the verb: one stem war-, ordinary endings, and ich war identical to er war. The chapter teaches those four cells one at a time and then answers the question the present tense raised — bin, ist and war come from three different Proto-Indo-European verbs, which is called suppletion, and it survives because the words you never have to guess at are the words analogy never reaches.

28.1 ich war — “I was”

You know the simple past is mostly a written tense in German, and that a handful of very common verbs keep it in speech. This is the most common of them.

You’ll want to know: ich war

ich war — “I was.”

Nobody says *ich bin gewesen* in ordinary speech when *ich war* will do. This is the past-tense form Germans actually use, in every region, out loud.

And hear the shape of it. *Bin* has a *b*. *Ist* has an *s* and a *t*. *War* has a *w* and an *r*, and no sound in common with either. That is now three completely unlike stems inside one verb.

Sounds you'll need

- **w-as-v** — German **w** is English **v**, so *war* begins like *var*.
- **vowel-a-long** — the **a** is long and open, the *a* of English *father*.
- **r-final** — the final **r** softens towards a vowel rather than curling.

The result sounds close to English *var*, and nothing like English *war*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich war” — *var*, long open *a*
- “ich bin ... ich war” — now and then
- “Ich war müde.”

Twice through: “ich bin, ich war.”

Before you move on

Say “I was.” (**Ich war.**) How does the *w* sound? (Like English **v**.) Is this form used in speech or only in writing? (**In speech, everywhere** — it is one of the survivors.) How many unlike stems does this verb now have? (**Three.**) Next: the same form for *du*.

28.2 du warst — “you were”

You have *ich war*. The familiar “you” wants the ending it always wants.

You'll want to know: du warst

du warst — “you were.”

War plus **-st**, with nothing else moved. The same ending that made *bist* out of *bin*, and *gehst* out of *gehen*.

So the past tense of this verb is better behaved than its present: you take one stem, *war-*, and add ordinary endings to it. Everything difficult about *sein* happens in the present.

Sounds you'll need

- **u-long** — *du* keeps its long rounded **oo**.
- **final-t** — and *warst* ends on the fully released **t** German always gives you, after the *s*. Say the *s* and the *t* both: *varst*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “du warst” — *varst*, both consonants released
- “ich war ... du warst”
- “du bist ... du warst” — now and then

Twice through: “ich war, du warst.”

Before you move on

Say “you were,” to a friend. (**Du warst.**) Which ending is that? (**-st.**) Which stem is it added to? (**War-**) Is the past of this verb regular or irregular in its endings? (**Regular** — one stem, ordinary endings.) Next: the form for everyone else, and a surprise.

28.3 er war — “he was”

In the present, *ich* and *er* took different words — *bin* against *ist*.
In the past they take the same one.

You'll want to know: er war

er war — “he was.”

Not a new form. It is *war*, unchanged, the very word you learned for *ich*. And as with *ist*, it covers **sie war** (“she was”), **es war** (“it was”) and **das war** (“that was”) as well.

This is a habit of the German simple past, not a quirk of this verb: the I-form and the he-form are always identical there. *Ich sagte* and *er sagte*. *Ich hatte* and *er hatte*. The present tense never does this; the past always does.

Sounds you'll need

- **r-final** — two softening *r* sounds in a row now, one closing *er* and one closing *war*. Neither curls.
- **vowel-a-long** — and the long open **a** between them carries the phrase.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “er war, sie war, es war”
- “Das war gut.”
- “ich war ... er war” — the same word twice

Twice through: “Das war gut.”

Before you move on

Say “he was.” (**Er war.**) How is it different from *ich war*? (**It isn't** — same word.) Does the present do that? (**No** — *bin* against *ist*.) Say “that was good.” (**Das war gut.**) Next: the plural.

28.4 wir waren — “we were”

One more form, and the verb is finished — present and past, all of it.

You'll want to know: wir waren

wir waren — “we were.”

War plus the plural ending **-en**, the one *wir* takes on every verb. And just as *sind* served three subjects at once, *waren* covers **sie waren** (“they were”) and **Sie waren** (“you were,” politely) with no change.

The one plural form left over is **ihr wart**, for a group of friends. It takes the plural-*you* **-t**, and it is the rarest form in the whole verb.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English does the identical thing and nobody notices:

	German	English
singular	<i>war</i>	was
plural	<i>waren</i>	were

An **s** in the singular, an **r** in the plural, in both languages, inherited from the same ancestor. English *was/were* and German *war/waren* are the same pair of words.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wir waren, sie waren, Sie waren”
- “ich war, du warst, er war, wir waren”
- “war — was; waren — were”

Twice through: “ich war, wir waren.”

Before you move on

Say “we were.” (**Wir waren.**) Which English pair matches *war/waren*? (**Was/were.**) What is the plural ending on it? (**-en.**) Say “they were.” (**Sie waren.**) Next: why one verb needed three different stems.

28.5 bin, ist, war — three verbs under one roof

Say *bin*, *ist*, *war* one after another. They do not look like forms of the same word — and they aren’t.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Three separate Proto-Indo-European verbs each handed German a slice of this paradigm, and each of them left cousins in languages you

can check:

forms	from	which also gave
ist, sind, seid, sein	* <i>h₁es-</i> — “to be”	Latin <i>est, sunt</i> ; French <i>est, sont</i>
bin, bist	* <i>b^huH-</i> — “to grow, become”	English be ; Latin <i>fuī</i>
war, waren	* <i>wes-</i> — “to dwell, remain”	English was, were

Read the middle row again. **b^huH-* did not mean “to be” at all. It meant “to grow” — and the reason English says *be* and German says *bin* is that a verb about growing got promoted into a verb about existing, in both languages, before either of them existed.

The bottom row is the same story with a different verb: **wes-* meant “to dwell, to remain.” Staying somewhere became having been.

Why it’s said this way

Bin has a cousin further afield than English. Latin *fuī*, “I was,” is from the same **b^huH-* — and *fuī* is the direct source of Spanish **fui**, “I was / I went.”

So German *bin* and Spanish *fui* are the same ancient word. One landed in the present tense, the other in the past, and the two languages now use it to mean opposite ends of time.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three roots — “ist from **h₁es-*, bin from **b^huH-*, war from **wes-*”
- “ist — est — is”
- “war — was; waren — were”
- the cousin abroad — “German bin, Spanish fui, one root”

Before you move on

How many ancient roots is *sein* built from? (**Three.**) Which one gives *ist* — and which Latin word proves it? (**h₁es-*; Latin *est*.)

What did the root behind *bin* originally mean? (“**To grow, to become.**”) Which Spanish word shares it? (***Fui.***) Which root gives English *was* and *were*? (****wes-***, the same one as *war.*) Next: the name for what this verb is doing.

28.6 Suppletion — filling a verb in from another verb

Three roots, one verb. There is a name for that, and once you have it you will find the same thing in English.

Grammar Lens: what suppletion is

When one verb’s forms are filled in from a **different** verb, that is **suppletion**.

Sein has no forms of its own for “I am” or “I was.” It borrowed them, long ago, from two other verbs, and then all three grew together into a single paradigm that native speakers use without ever noticing the seam.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English does the identical thing with its own commonest verbs, and you have never thought twice about it:

present	past	where the past came from
go	went	<i>wend</i> , a different verb entirely
am	was	the same * <i>wes-</i> that gave German <i>war</i>
good	better	a different word again

Went belonged to *wend* — “to make one’s way,” still alive in *wend your way*. English took it, gave it to *go*, and left *wend* with a regular past of its own. That is precisely what German did to build *sein*. Suppletion is not a German oddity, and it is not rare. It is simply what languages do to the words they use most — and every language you have looked at in this book has done it to its verb for “to be.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the definition — “one verb’s forms, filled in from another verb”
- “go, went” — English doing it
- “bin, war” — German doing it

Before you move on

What is suppletion? (**One verb’s forms filled in from another verb.**) Name the English example. (*Go / went.*) Which verb did *went* actually belong to? (*Wend.*) How many verbs are hiding inside *sein*? (**Three.**) Next: why this always happens to the commonest words.

28.7 Why “to be” is the messiest word in every language

Every language you have ever met has a broken verb for “to be.” That is too consistent to be an accident, and it isn’t one.

Grammar Lens: frequency protects irregularity

The most-used words are the most irregular.

Regularity spreads by **analogy**. You meet an unfamiliar verb, you do not know its forms, so you guess them from the pattern — the *-e*, *-st*, *-t*, *-en* machine you learned early. Guess often enough and the guess becomes the form: the odd old shape is sanded down and the verb joins the regular crowd.

But you never have to guess at “to be.” You hear it a hundred times a day, from the day you start speaking. Every one of those hearings reinforces the strange shape faster than analogy can wear it away. Rare words get regularised. Common words are protected fossils.

Why it's said this way

This also tells you where the irregularity will sit inside a verb, and *sein* proves it. Its present tense — the part you say constantly — is the wreckage: three roots, five unlike forms. Its past tense, which you say far less often, has quietly become well-behaved: one stem *war-*, ordinary endings, *warst* built exactly like *bist* was not.

So the mess is not spread evenly. It clusters where the traffic is.

The practical consequence is a comfort. There is no long list of verbs this strange, because a verb has to be *this* common to survive being this strange — and there are only a handful of words in any language that common.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the rule — “the most-used words are the most irregular”
- why — “you never have to guess at them”
- “bin, bist, ist” against “war, warst, waren” — mess, then order

Before you move on

State the rule. (**The most-used words are the most irregular.**)

What spreads regularity? (**Analogy** — guessing from the pattern.)

Why does analogy never reach “to be”? (**You never have to guess at it.**) Which half of *sein* is the tidy half? (**The past** — one stem, ordinary endings.) Next: the chapter together.

28.8 Practice — was, were, and why

No new words. Present and past, side by side, and then the account of how one verb ended up like this.

Grammar Lens: the past, assembled

Six forms, one stem, four endings, no surprises. Said in order:

- **ich war, du warst, er war** — and the first and third are the same word, which the present tense would never allow;

- **wir waren, ihr wart, sie waren.**

Compare that with the present, where five different shapes came from three different verbs. The past of *sein* is the part of the paradigm that behaved.

The exchange

German	English
<i>Wo warst du?</i>	Where were you?
<i>Ich war in Berlin.</i>	I was in Berlin.
<i>Wie war es?</i>	How was it?
<i>Es war gut. Aber ich bin müde.</i>	It was good. But I am tired.

Wo (“where”) and *in* are read straight off the English here; neither is asked of you yet.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich war, du warst, er war, wir waren, ihr wart, sie waren”
- the pairs — “ich bin / ich war”, “wir sind / wir waren”
- the three roots — “ist, bin, war — three verbs”
- the whole exchange, both voices

Twice through: “Wie war es? Es war gut.”

Before you move on

Run the six past forms. Which two are identical? (*Ich war* and *er war*.) Name the three roots this verb is built from, by their German forms. (*Ist, bin, war*.) What is the technical name for that? (**Suppletion.**) Why has nothing tidied this verb up? (**It is too common — you never guess at it, so analogy never reaches it.**) Next: the past tense that is built on this verb rather than out of it.

Chapter 29

The Past That Takes To Be

Modes:  voice (8)  eyes (1)  Hands-free start: first 8 of 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can build the German past of verbs of motion and change with the verb for “to be” instead of the verb for “to have”, and say why the participle never changes.

Motion and change of state build their perfect on sein rather than haben — ich bin gegangen beside ich habe gelernt. The chapter teaches the rule, then the four verbs that follow it (kommen, fahren, werden, bleiben), then the short list that has to be learned outright, and finally the one place German is simpler than French: the participle in the perfect agrees with nothing at all.

29.1 ich bin gegangen — the perfect built on sein

You built the everyday past with *haben* — **ich habe gelernt**. A particular family of verbs refuses *haben* and takes this chapter’s verb instead.

Grammar Lens: which verbs take sein

Verbs of **motion** and **change of state** build their perfect with **sein**, not *haben*.

An action that leaves you somewhere else, or leaves you something else, takes *sein*. An ordinary activity that leaves you where you were keeps *haben*: *ich habe gearbeitet, ich habe getanzt*.

Gehen is the model, and because every present form of *sein* now belongs to you, the whole thing reads off without a single new word:

German	English
<i>ich bin gegangen</i>	I went / I have gone
<i>du bist gegangen</i>	you went
<i>er ist gegangen</i>	he went
<i>wir sind gegangen</i>	we went
The recipe is the one you already know, with the helper swapped: present form of sein + past participle, and the participle goes last	

Sounds you'll need

- **ge-prefix** — *gegangen* opens with the same unstressed **ge-** that wrapped *gelernt* and *gesagt*. It is never stressed; the weight falls on *-gang-*.
- **ich-laut** — and *ich* keeps its soft ending right before it, so the phrase runs *ich bin ge-GANG-en* without a break.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich bin gegangen; du bist gegangen; er ist gegangen; wir sind gegangen”
- the contrast — “ich habe gelernt ... ich bin gegangen”
- the rule — “motion and change take sein”

Twice through: “ich bin gegangen.”

Before you move on

Which family of verbs takes *sein*? (**Motion and change of state.**) Say “I went.” (**Ich bin gegangen.**) Where does the participle sit? (**At the end.**) Which helper does *arbeiten* take? (**Haben** — it is an activity, not a change.) Next: the first of the family, and it is the one you say most.

29.2 kommen — “to come”

Motion takes *sein*. Here is the motion verb you will use as often as *gehen*, and it is an English word you already own.

You’ll want to know: kommen

kommen — “to come.”

ich bin gekommen — “I came.”

The infinitive wears the **-en** you know. The participle is **gekommen**: the *ge-* wrap in front, and *-en* rather than *-t* at the back, because this is one of the old strong verbs rather than a regular one.

Coming is arriving somewhere you were not. That is motion with a result, so it takes *sein*, exactly as *gehen* does.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

kommen and English **come** are the same word, both from Germanic **kwemanq*. No Latin anywhere in the line — French *venir* and Spanish *venir* come from Latin *venīre* instead, which is where English gets *advent*, *convene* and *venue*.

So English, as usual, owns both halves: the everyday **come** from the Germanic side, the formal **convene** from the Latin.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vowel-o** — the **o** is short and open, the vowel of English *cot*, not the *uh* English puts in *come*.
- **ge-prefix** — *gekommen* keeps the unstressed **ge-**; the stress is on **-KOMM-**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “kommen” — short open *o*
- “ich bin gekommen”
- “ich bin gegangen ... ich bin gekommen”

Twice through: “ich bin gekommen.”

Before you move on

What does *kommen* mean? (“**To come.**”) Say “I came.” (**Ich bin gekommen.**) Which helper, and why? (***Sein*** — it is motion.) Which English word is it? (**Come.**) Next: the verb that covers everything with a vehicle under it.

29.3 fahren — “to travel, to drive”

Gehen is going on your feet. When there is a vehicle under you, German changes the verb.

You’ll want to know: fahren

fahren — “to travel, to go by vehicle, to drive.”

ich bin gefahren — “I travelled, I drove.”

German keeps two verbs where English makes do with *go*. You **gehen** on foot and you **fahren** in anything with wheels — a car, a bus, a train, a bicycle. Getting that pair right is one of the first things that makes a learner sound German rather than translated.

It is motion, so the helper is *sein*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **vowel-a-long** — the **a** is long and open, as in *war*.
- **h-silent-lengthening** — and the **h** after it is the silent stretcher you met in *gehen* and *sehen*: it is not breathed, it only holds the vowel. *FAH-ren* rhymes with the way *gehen* and *sehen* are built.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

fahren is English **fare** — the old verb meaning “to travel,” which English demoted to a noun and then almost forgot. It is still there in:

English word	what it is really saying
farewell	travel well
thoroughfare	a way you can travel through
seafaring	sea-travelling
the fare you pay	what the travelling costs
So <i>auf Wiedersehen</i> and <i>farewell</i> are built the same way: both are a wish handed over at the door, one about seeing again, one about travelling well.	

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “fahren” — long *a*, silent *h*
- “ich bin gefahren”
- the pair — “gehen on foot, fahren with wheels”
- “fahren — fare — farewell”

Twice through: “Ich bin gefahren.”

Before you move on

What does *fahren* mean? (“**To travel, to go by vehicle.**”) Which verb would you use walking to the shop? (***Gehen.***) Say “I drove.” (***Ich bin gefahren.***) Which English word is *fahren*? (**Fare** — as in *farewell*.) Next: the verb for becoming something else.

29.4 werden — “to become”

The rule has two halves. *Gehen, kommen* and *fahren* are the motion half. This one word is the whole of the other half.

You’ll want to know: werden

werden — “to become.”

ich bin geworden — “I became.”

Sein says what you are. *Werden* says what you turn into. Where *sein* sits still, *werden* moves — and that is exactly why it takes *sein* as its helper: becoming is change of state in its purest form.

Ich bin müde geworden. — “I got tired.”

Notice what that sentence does. The adjective you learned with *sein* now describes an arrival rather than a condition. German makes the difference with the verb; English does it with *be* against *get*.

Sounds you’ll need

- **w-as-v** — the **w** is English **v**, as in *war* and *wir*.
- **d-t-final** — and in **wird** (“he becomes”) the final **d** devoices to a **t**, the same rule that turned *sind* into *zint*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

werden is a lost English verb — *weorthan*, “to turn, to come to be” — and its bones are still in the language:

English	the buried meaning
toward	turning to
backward	turning back
worth	what a thing turns out to be

So *werden* means “to turn into,” and every time you say *toward* you are using the same root without knowing it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “werden” — *VAIR-den*
- “ich bin geworden”
- “Ich bin müde geworden.” — “I got tired”
- “werden — toward — worth”

Twice through: “Ich bin müde geworden.”

Before you move on

What does *werden* mean? (“**To become.**”) Why does it take *sein*? (**It is change of state** — the other half of the rule.) Say “I became.” (**Ich bin geworden.**) Which English words hide the same root? (***Toward, backward, worth.***) Next: the two verbs that break the rule by standing still.

29.5 bleiben — “to stay”

Werden takes *sein* because it is pure change. This verb takes *sein* too — and it means staying exactly where you are.

You’ll want to know: bleiben

bleiben — “to stay, to remain.”

ich bin geblieben — “I stayed.”

By the rule as stated, this verb should take *haben*. Staying is not motion and it is not change; it is the absence of both. It takes *sein* anyway, and every German learner meets it as a fact rather than a consequence.

The honest way to hold it: *bleiben* is on the *sein* list because it is about **where you are** rather than **what you do**, and that is the deeper thing the motion rule was pointing at all along.

Sounds you’ll need

- **diphthong-ei** — **ei** is the *eye* vowel again, exactly as in *sein*. So *bleiben* is *BLY-ben*, never *blee-ben*. The two verbs of this chapter that break the rule both carry that vowel.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

bleiben is **be-** plus an old Germanic verb *liba-*, “to remain.” English lost the verb and kept its leavings — literally: what **remains** after everything else has gone is what English calls the **leftovers**, and *leave* in the sense of *what is left* belongs to the same family.

German still uses the verb every day; English kept only the residue of it, which is a fitting fate for a word meaning “to be left over.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “bleiben” — *BLY-ben*, the *eye* vowel
- “ich bin geblieben”
- the odd pair — “ich bin geworden ... ich bin geblieben”

Twice through: “Ich bin geblieben.”

Before you move on

What does *bleiben* mean? (“**To stay.**”) Say “I stayed.” (**Ich bin geblieben.**) Does the motion rule predict its helper? (**No** — it has to be learned.) How is *ei* pronounced? (Like English **eye**.) Next: the rest of the verbs that have to be learned, including this chapter’s own verb.

29.6 ich bin gewesen — and the rest of the learned list

Bleiben was the first verb the rule failed to predict. Here is the whole of the rest of that list, and it is short.

Grammar Lens: the verbs you simply learn

Besides motion and change, a small fixed set of verbs takes *sein* and has to be **learned**.

verb	perfect	meaning
<i>sein</i>	<i>ich bin gewesen</i>	I have been
<i>bleiben</i>	<i>ich bin geblieben</i>	I stayed
<i>gelingen</i>	<i>es ist gelingen</i>	it succeeded
<i>geschehen</i>	<i>es ist geschehen</i>	it happened
<i>passieren</i>	<i>es ist passiert</i>	it happened
<i>begegnen</i>	<i>ich bin begegnet</i>	I met

Sein and *bleiben* head the list because they are the two that most clearly contradict the rule: one says a thing simply is, the other says it stays. The rest are events that arrive of their own accord —

succeeding, happening, running into somebody — and German treats an arrival as a change.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Look closely at **gewesen**. Strip the *ge-* wrap and the *-en* ending and what is left is **wes-** — the third of the three roots inside this verb, the one that gave *war* and English *was*.

So *sein* reaches for that root twice: once for its past tense, once for its participle. The infinitive comes from one root, the present from two, the past and participle from a third. There is no part of this verb that belongs to all of it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich bin gewesen; ich bin geblieben”
- “es ist passiert” — “it happened”
- “war ... gewesen” — the same root twice

Twice through: “ich bin gewesen.”

Before you move on

Name the two verbs at the head of the learned list. (***Sein*** and ***bleiben***.) Say “I have been.” (**Ich bin gewesen**.) Say “it happened.” (**Es ist passiert** — or *es ist geschehen*.) Which root is hiding inside *gewesen*? (***wes-**, the one behind *war*.) Next: the ending German does not put on any of these.

29.7 gegangen — the participle that never changes

French draws the same *have*-against-*be* line German does. Here is the place the two languages part company, and German comes out easier.

Grammar Lens: German agrees with nothing here

Inside the perfect, the German participle takes **no ending at all**. *Gegangen* is *gegangen* for every person, number and gender.

	French	German
he went	<i>il est allé</i>	<i>er ist gegangen</i>
she went	<i>elle est allée</i>	<i>sie ist gegangen</i>
they went	<i>ils sont allés</i>	<i>sie sind gegangen</i>

French makes the participle agree with its subject and spells the agreement out three different ways. German changes the helper — *ist*, *sind* — and leaves the participle exactly where it found it.

Old High German did inflect it here, at least some of the time. Modern German lost that, along with most of its other adjective-like endings in this position. So the simplicity is not a design; it is an erosion, and German happens to have come out ahead.

Why it's said this way

It would be easy to assume German copied this split from Latin, the way it borrowed so much else. It did not.

The *haben*-perfect and the *sein*-perfect are **native Germanic developments**. They grew up alongside the Romance ones rather than out of them: neighbouring languages drifting the same way over centuries of contact, the same areal spread that pushed the simple past out of everyday speech in French, German and Italian together.

Two things to carry forward, and they point in opposite directions:

- the **split** between the two helpers is shared with French;
- the **agreement** is not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “er ist gegangen; sie ist gegangen; sie sind gegangen”
- the participle, unchanged, three times — “gegangen, gegangen, gegangen”

- the comparison — “elle est allée ... sie ist gegangen”

Twice through: “sie ist gegangen; sie sind gegangen.”

Before you move on

Does the German participle agree with its subject in the perfect? (**No** — never.) What changes instead? (**The helper** — *ist, sind*.) Does French agree? (**Yes**.) Did German take this split from Latin? (**No** — it grew in parallel.) Next: the one place a German participle does take an ending.

29.8 der angekommene Zug — where the ending comes back

The participle takes no ending in the perfect. That is a fact about the perfect, not about participles — and the difference matters.

Grammar Lens: in front of a noun, it inflects

A German participle standing **in front of a noun** is working as an adjective, and it takes the endings adjectives take there.

German	English
<i>ein geschriebener Brief</i>	a written letter
<i>der angekommene Zug</i>	the arrived train
<i>die eingeschlafene Katze</i>	the fallen-asleep cat

Each noun keeps its capital, and each participle now carries a small ending chosen by the article in front of it. That is the ordinary German adjective machine, applied to a participle. (*Katze*, “cat”, gets a lesson of its own later; here it is only carrying the ending.) So German did not lose participle endings everywhere. It lost them in exactly one construction: the perfect.

Sounds you’ll need

- **ge-prefix** — all three participles above still carry their **ge-** wrap, and it is still unstressed. In *angekommen* it has slid into

the middle of the word, behind *an-*, which is where German puts it when a prefix comes first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der angekommene Zug”
- “die eingeschlafene Katze”
- the contrast — “sie ist gegangen” (no ending) ... “die eingeschlafene Katze” (ending)
- “die müde Mutter” — an ordinary adjective doing the same thing

Before you move on

Where does a German participle still take an ending? (**In front of a noun**, as an adjective.) Where does it never take one? (**In the perfect.**) Say “the arrived train.” (**Der angekommene Zug.**) What is the participle behaving as, in that phrase? (**An adjective.**) Next: choosing between the two helpers, on the spot.

29.9 Practice — haben or sein?

No new words. The only skill left in this chapter is picking the right helper without stopping to think, and that is drill.

Grammar Lens: the whole family in one place

verb	perfect	why
<i>gehen</i>	<i>ich bin gegangen</i>	motion
<i>kommen</i>	<i>ich bin gekommen</i>	motion
<i>fahren</i>	<i>ich bin gefahren</i>	motion
<i>werden</i>	<i>ich bin geworden</i>	change of state
<i>bleiben</i>	<i>ich bin geblieben</i>	learned
<i>sein</i>	<i>ich bin gewesen</i>	learned
<i>lernen</i>	<i>ich habe gelernt</i>	ordinary activity
<i>machen</i>	<i>ich habe gemacht</i>	ordinary activity

Read the right-hand column and you can see how much of the work the motion rule does on its own: only two rows have to be memorised outright.

The exchange

German	English
<i>Wo bist du gewesen?</i>	Where have you been?
<i>Ich bin nach Berlin gefahren.</i>	I travelled to Berlin.
<i>Und Anna? Ist sie gekommen?</i>	And Anna? Did she come?
<i>Anna ist zu Hause geblieben.</i>	Anna stayed at home.
<i>Ich habe viel gelernt. Jetzt bin ich müde.</i>	I learned a lot. Now I am tired.

Note the third and fourth lines: *ist sie gekommen*, *Anna ist geblieben* — a feminine subject both times, and not one letter added to either participle.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the contrast pair — “*ich habe gelernt ... ich bin gegangen*”
- the family — “*bin gekommen, bin gefahren, bin geworden, bin geblieben, bin gewesen*”
- the French comparison — “*elle est allée ... sie ist gegangen*”, no ending at all
- the one place the ending returns — “*der angekommene Zug*”

- the whole exchange, both voices

Twice through: “ich habe gelernt ... ich bin gegangen.”

What you’ve built — where this volume pauses

You have gone from *guten Tag* to two working past tenses, and the method has not changed once: take the word apart, find the English cousin sleeping inside it, and let the family tree do the memorising for you.

The next volume picks the thread back up with describing what you see.

Before you move on

Which helper for *tanzen*, “to dance”? (**Haben** — an activity.)

Which for *fahren*? (**Sein** — motion.) Which two verbs on the *sein* list mean the opposite of change? (**Sein** and **bleiben**.) Say “she stayed.” (**Sie ist geblieben** — no ending on the participle.)

Chapter 30

Head and Hand

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the head and the hand in German, devolve the final *d* of Hand, and say where the Germanic and Latin families stop matching.

Say die Hand with its final d spoken as t, bring the d back in die Hände, run the Germanic body set Hand/Arm/Finger/Fuß/Herz, and name the gap: main, mano, mão — but Hand.

30.1 Der Kopf — “the head”

Learn the first body part with its article and its characteristic final sound.

You’ll want to know: der Kopf

der Kopf — the head

It is masculine and capitalised because every German noun begins with a capital letter.

Sounds you’ll need

At the end of **Kopf**, close for *p* and release directly into *f*. English has no identical native ending, so practise it slowly:

Ko-p-f → **Kopf**

Grammar Lens: Kopf + Schmerzen

A useful phrase is:

Ich habe Kopfschmerzen. — I have a headache.

German compounds simply place nouns together: **Kopf** (head) + **Schmerzen** (pains).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Kopf originally meant a **cup or bowl**. It is related to English **cup**; both were early borrowings of Late Latin *cuppa*. A container word became slang for the skull and eventually took over the everyday job. German's older inherited head-word did not disappear completely. The next micro-lesson follows it into compounds and compares the same container metaphor in French.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Kopf” — release *p* into *f*
- “Ich habe Kopfschmerzen.”
- “Kopf — cup or bowl”

Twice through: “Der Kopf — masculine, capitalised.”

Before you move on

Say “the head.” (**Der Kopf**.) Give its gender. (**Masculine**.) Why the capital? (It is a **noun**.) What did *Kopf* first mean? (A **cup or bowl**.) Name the related English word. (**Cup**.) Next: find the inherited word *Haupt*.

30.2 Kopf / Haupt — two head-words

Kopf began as “cup.” German's inherited word for “head” is **Haupt**, a cousin of English *head* and Latin *caput*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

language	inherited form
Latin	<i>caput</i>
German	Haupt
English	head

The initial $k \rightarrow h$ relationship reflects Grimm's law, the same systematic Germanic sound shift seen in Latin *pater* beside English *father*. The later consonants have their own history; use the initial pair as the clear signal.

Haupt survives in compounds and formal vocabulary:

- **Hauptstadt** — capital, literally “head city”;
- **Hauptbahnhof** — main station;
- **Hauptsache** — main thing.

Why it's said this way

language	everyday word	older picture
German	Kopf	<i>cuppa</i> , cup
French	<i>tête</i>	<i>testa</i> , pot

Both languages independently promoted a vessel-word to “head,” while keeping the older head-root in words for chiefs, capitals, or main things. The vocabulary sources are both Latin loans, but the **metaphor** was applied separately: heads look like bowls in many languages.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Kopf — everyday cup-word”
- “Haupt — inherited head-word”
- “Hauptstadt, Hauptbahnhof”

Twice through: “Kopf took the job; Haupt stayed in compounds.”

Before you move on

Which word is everyday “head”? (**Kopf**.) Which inherited word survives in compounds? (**Haupt**.) Name two compounds. (**Hauptstadt, Hauptbahnhof**.) What parallel metaphor did French use? (**Tête**, originally a pot.) Next: the hand.

30.3 die Hand — “the hand”

After the tangle of *Kopf* and *Haupt*, here is the easiest word in the chapter — and a useful lesson about when languages **don’t** match.

You’ll want to know: die Hand

die Hand — the hand. **Feminine**, and spelled exactly like English.

Sounds you’ll need

One pronunciation note: the final **d** is said as a **t**. German devoices a consonant at the end of a word, so *Hand* **ends** like English *hunt* — but with the open *ah* of *Tag*, not *hunt*’s vowel. Add an ending and the *d* comes back: *die Hände* (“the hands”).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Hand is Germanic **handuz*, and English inherited it directly. Same word, same meaning, two thousand years apart. German and English are close relatives, and body parts are where you feel it most:

German	English
Hand	hand
Arm	arm
Finger	finger
Fuß	foot
Herz	heart

Why it's said this way

Now the interesting part. Every Romance language builds “hand” on Latin *manus*:

French	<i>la main</i>
Italian	<i>la mano</i>
Portuguese	<i>a mão</i>
Spanish	<i>la mano</i>

And Germanic — German, English — has **handuz*, which is **not related to *manus* at all**. The two families simply have different words here.

That is worth noticing, because these connections keep turning up, and it can start to feel as though everything must connect. It doesn't.

Indo-European languages share a great deal, and then diverge, and “hand” is one of the places where they diverged early and completely.

The Latin word did reach German — but only as **borrowed vocabulary**: *Manuskript*, *Maniküre*, *manuell*. Learned imports, sitting beside the native word without displacing it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Hand” — final **d** said as **t**
- the plural, and hear the *d* return — “die Hände”
- the Germanic set — “Hand, Arm, Finger, Fuß, Herz”
- the gap — “*main*, *mano*, *mão* ... but **Hand**”

Before you move on

Say “the hand.” (*Die Hand* — **feminine**.) How is the final **d** pronounced, and why? (As a **t** — German **devoices** final consonants; the *d* returns in *Hände*.) Is *Hand* related to French *main*? (**No** — Germanic **handuz* against Latin *manus*; the families differ here.) How did *manus* reach German anyway? (As **borrowed** learned words — *Manuskript*, *manuell*.) Next: the rest of the body.

Chapter 31

Yes and No

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can answer yes or no in German and take nein apart into ni + ein, the same 'not one' English froze into none.

*Say nein to rhyme with nine, split it into ni + ein and match it to English none, then run the PIE *ne chain — nōn, non, nein, nahīm.*

31.1 ja — yes

The easiest German word to say, and one English almost shares.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ja = **yes**. Said *yah* — remember German **j** is pronounced like English **y**, never the English “j.”

It's an ancient **Germanic** word, and English kept the very same root in the one word that still clearly shows it:

- **yea** — the old, formal “yes” (*the yeas and the nays* in a vote) — this is *ja*'s direct cousin, same Proto-Germanic root.
- **aye** — the sailor's and parliament's “yes” (*Aye, aye, captain*) — *sounds* like a cousin, but its origin is actually **uncertain**; it may come from a different word entirely, so don't bank on it.

So German *ja* and English *yea* are the same little word, split between two cousin languages. (English's everyday *yes* is a compound of that

same *yea* with an old “be it so.”)

Grammar Lens: A German habit to file away

German also has a **third** answer-word, **doch**, for one special job: contradicting a **negative** — exactly like French *si*. If someone says something *isn't* so and you insist it *is*, you say **doch**, not *ja*:

Du kommst nicht? (“You’re not coming?”) — **Doch!**
 (“Yes I am!”)

You’ll drill *doch* on its own later; for now, keep *ja* for a plain yes and know *doch* is waiting for the contradictions.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ja” — *yah*, the j like English y
- the English cousin — “yea... ja” (and maybe *aye*)
- the contradiction preview — “Du kommst nicht? — Doch!”

Before you move on

How do you say yes in German? (**ja**, *yah*.) How is the **j** pronounced? (Like English **y**.) Which English word is *ja*’s firm direct cousin? (**yea** — *aye* only looks like one; its origin is uncertain.) What German word answers *yes* specifically to contradict a **negative**? (**doch**.)

31.2 nein — no

German’s “no” is a tiny sentence with a number hidden inside it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

nein = **no**. Said to rhyme with English *nine* (the **ei** in German is always *eye*).

Take it apart and it's two words fused: **ni** + **ein** — literally “**not one**.” English did the *exact same trick*: **ne** + **one** → **none**. So German *nein* and English *none* are the same idea — “not a single one” — hardened into a bare “no.”

Why it's said this way

That **n-** at the front is not a coincidence. A single ancient sound — linguists write it **PIE *ne** — is the negator behind an astonishing sweep of languages you're learning:

from PIE **ne*

Latin	<i>nōn</i> → Spanish no , French non
German	nein (<i>ni</i> -ein)
Hindi	nahīm (from <i>na</i>)
English	no , not , none

Learn *nein* and you've really met the same “n-of-no” that will greet you again in Hindi, and that also sits inside Spanish and French. One negative, half the world.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nein” — rhymes with *nine*
- taken apart — “ni + ein = not one”, like English *none*
- the family — “nōn... non... nein... nahīm” — all the PIE *ne*

Before you move on

How do you say no in German? (**nein**, rhymes with *nine*.) What two words is it fused from, and what do they mean? (**ni** + **ein** — “not one.”) Which English word is built the same way? (**none** = *ne* + *one*.) What ancient sound links German *nein*, Latin *nōn* and Hindi *nahīm*? (**PIE *ne**, the negator.)

Chapter 32

Please

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

***By the end of this chapter:** I can ask politely for something in German by putting **bitte** after the thing I want — **Wasser, bitte**.*

*Assemble a complete polite request out of two words already learned — **Wasser, bitte** — and hear the request still living inside **bitte** via **bitten**, English **bid** and **bead**. The chapter's only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.*

32.1 **bitte** — turn a known word into a polite request

You already use **bitte** after **danke** to mean “you’re welcome.” Now give that same small word its other everyday job: **please**.

You’ll want to know: A complete small request

Wasser, bitte. — Water, please.

Nothing here is new except the job **bitte** is doing. You learned **Wasser** with the food. Put **bitte** after the thing you want and the two known words become a complete, polite small request. The comma marks the little pause you will naturally hear before **bitte**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Bitte is the request form of **bitten**, “to ask, request, pray.” Its English cousins are **bid**—as in “I bid you welcome”—and **bead**, whose oldest meaning was a prayer. A prayer bead was first the object used to count those requests.

So when you add **bitte**, the word itself is already doing the asking.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Wasser.” — water
- “Wasser, bitte.” — water, please
- the root family — “bitten, bitte, bid, bead”

Before you move on

Ask politely for water. (**Wasser, bitte.**) What older lesson supplied both words? (**Bitte** came from the courtesy loop; **Wasser** came from the food chapter.) Which verb is **bitte** built from? (**Bitten**, “to ask or request.”) Name its two English cousins. (**Bid** and **bead.**)

Chapter 33

Sorry

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can apologise or excuse myself in German with *Entschuldigung*, and reach for *es tut mir leid* when I mean it more.

Say Schuld, then Entschuldigung as the 'un-guiling' built on it, and switch to es tut mir leid for real regret rather than a bump in the hallway. The chapter's only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

33.1 Entschuldigung — “sorry” / “excuse me”

You already know **bitte** does triple duty for “please,” “you’re welcome,” and “here you go.” German’s word for **sorry** is just as hard-working: **Entschuldigung** covers both “**excuse me**” and “**I’m sorry**.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- **ent-** = a “removal / undoing” prefix — the same shape as in **entdecken** (“un-cover” → discover) or **entfernen** (“un-distance” → remove).
- **Schuld** = “**guilt, fault, blame**” (also, separately, “debt” — a *Schuld* can be money owed or wrong done).
- **-igung** = a noun-forming suffix, roughly “-ing/-ation.”

So **Entschuldigung** is literally “**an un-guiling**” — the act of

removing blame. Saying it hands the guilt back: *I release you from any fault* (when getting someone's attention or brushing past) or *I ask you to release me from mine* (when apologizing).

Schuld has a striking cousin: it traces to the same ancient Germanic root as English **shall** and **should** — a verb that originally meant “**to owe.**” *Schuld* (what is owed, guilt) and *shall* (what one is obliged to do) are, at root, the same idea of an obligation outstanding.

Why it's said this way

For **deeper regret** — real sorrow, not a bump in the hallway — German often reaches for **es tut mir leid**, literally “**it does to-me sorrow**”:

- **es** = “it,” **tut** = “does” (from **tun**, “to do”), **mir** = “to me,” **Leid** = “sorrow, suffering” (a cousin of English **loath**, both from a root meaning “hateful, painful”).

Use **Entschuldigung** for the everyday sorry/excuse-me (stepping on a foot, interrupting), and **es tut mir leid** when you mean it more — condolences, a real regret. The two overlap; native speakers move between them by feel.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Schuld” — guilt/fault — then “Entschuldigung,” sorry / excuse me
- the deeper phrase — “es tut mir leid,” it pains me / I’m so sorry

Before you move on

What does **Entschuldigung** literally mean, piece by piece? (“**Un-guiling**” — *ent-* “away” + *Schuld* “guilt/fault.”) What English word shares Schuld’s ancient root? (**Shall/should** — both from a root meaning “to owe.”) What’s the deeper phrase for real regret? (**Es tut mir leid**, “it does to me sorrow.”)

Chapter 34

Weather

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can talk about the weather in German — das Wetter, es ist heiß, es ist kalt, es regnet.

Say das Wetter as English weather's own cousin, build hot and cold with sein rather than a Romance 'make', and say es regnet on the same root as English rain. The chapter's only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

34.1 das Wetter, es regnet — German's own native words, English's own cousins

Every Romance language you've met so far shares the exact same Latin word for “weather” (*tempus*). German breaks completely from that family — with a word that's actually a much closer cousin of English.

The two words: das Wetter and weather

das Wetter = “**weather**” — from Proto-Germanic *wedraq* — the **exact same word** as English **weather** itself (both descend from the same Germanic ancestor, not one borrowed from the other). Unlike Spanish's *tiempo*, French's *temps*, or Latin's own *tempus*-family, German's weather word has **no connection to Latin at all** — it's a native Germanic inheritance, cousin to English rather than to Romance.

Grammar Lens: Es ist heiß / Es ist kalt

Es ist heiß. — “It’s hot.” — literally “it **is** hot.” **Es ist kalt.** — “It’s cold.” — literally “it **is** cold.”

German uses **sein** (“to be”) here — matching the same “**be**” pattern you already met in German’s own AGE lesson (*ich bin zwanzig*), not the Romance “make” periphrasis (*hacer/faire*).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Es regnet. — “It’s raining.” — from **regnen** ← Proto-Germanic *regnōnq* — the **same root** as English **rain**. Just like *Wetter*/ “weather,” this is a genuine Germanic cousin-pair, not a shared Latin borrowing the way Spanish’s *llueve* and French’s *pleut* are.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Wetter” — weather, the same word as English “weather”
- “Es ist heiß. Es ist kalt.” — it’s hot/cold
- “Es regnet” — it’s raining, same root as English “rain”

Before you move on

Does **Wetter** come from Latin, like the Romance languages’ weather words? (**No** — it’s native Germanic, the same word as English “weather.”) What verb does German use for “it’s hot/cold” — *sein* (“be”) or a *hacer*-style “make”? (***Sein***, “to be” — matching German’s own AGE pattern.) What English word is **regnet** related to? (**Rain** — same Proto-Germanic root, *regnōnq*.)

Chapter 35

Dog and Cat

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a dog and a cat in German and say which of the two words German inherited and which one it borrowed.

Say Hund beside English hound and the unexplained dog that displaced it, then say Katze and admit it is the borrowed Late Latin cattus — widespread, but not universal: Romanian pisică and Serbian mačka went their own way. The chapter's only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

35.1 Hund, Katze — one native word, one surprising loan

Here's a real surprise to end this comparison on: German's word for “dog” is native and expected — but its word for “cat” secretly isn't native at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Hund (“**dog**”) is native Germanic, from **Proto-Indo-European** **kwon-* — and it has a direct cousin sitting inside English itself: **hound**. Old English **hund** was the ordinary, everyday word for “dog” for centuries — until, for reasons nobody fully understands, **dog** (Old English *docga*) pushed it out by the 16th century, leaving *hound* to narrow down to just hunting dogs. English's *dog* is, honestly, its **own** unexplained mystery word, with no confirmed cognates in any other

language — the exact same *shape* of story as Spanish’s *perro* displacing *can*, just in a completely different language family.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Here’s the twist: **Katze** (“cat”) looks like it should be native Germanic too, sitting right next to native *Hund* — but it isn’t. **Katze** descends from Proto-Germanic ***kattuz**, which is itself a borrowing of the **same Late Latin cattus** you already met with French’s *chat* and Spanish’s *gato* — most likely ultimately **Afro-Asiatic**, traveling out of Egypt along Roman trade routes. Every Germanic language shows this **same** borrowing (Dutch *kat*, Swedish *katt*, Icelandic *köttur*) — so unlike “dog” words, which go their own separate ways in nearly every language, “cat” words are remarkably **widespread** across both Germanic and Romance, because the word traveled **with the animal itself**. Be honest that this isn’t a universal rule, though: **Romanian** (*pisică*) and much of **South Slavic** (Serbian/Croatian *mačka*) built their own onomatopoeic cat-words instead, imitating the sound of a cat’s call rather than inheriting *cattus* — so the spread is wide, but not without real exceptions.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Hund” — dog, native Germanic, cousin of English “hound”
- the parallel — English replaced “hound” with the still-mysterious “dog,” the same shape as Spanish’s *perro*/*can*
- “Katze” — cat, surprisingly a Latin loanword, not native at all

Before you move on

Is **Hund** native Germanic, and what’s its English cousin? (**Yes** — cousin of English **hound**.) What word did English replace *hound* with, and is that word’s origin known? (**Dog** — genuinely **unexplained**, no confirmed cognates anywhere.) Is **Katze** native Germanic? (**No** — surprisingly, it’s the same borrowed Late Latin *cattus* behind French’s *chat* and Spanish’s *gato*.)

Chapter 36

Green and Yellow

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can name green and yellow in German, and say why grün is English green’s own cousin while gelb’s link to French jaune is only probable.

Say grün as the direct cousin of English green from a root unrelated to Latin viridis, say gelb, and state the gelb / jaune cousinhood as probable rather than airtight. The chapter’s only lesson, so the payoff covers everything it introduces.

36.1 grün, gelb — English’s own cousin, and a secret cousin of French

German’s green word is a direct cousin of English’s own word. Its yellow word has a cousin too — but a much more surprising one, sitting inside French.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

grün (“green”) is native Germanic, from Proto-Germanic **grōniz*, ultimately from **Proto-Indo-European** **ǵʰreh₁-*, “to grow, to become green” — the **exact same root** as English’s own **green**. Be careful, though: this is a **completely different** root from Latin’s **viridis** (source of Spanish’s *verde*, French’s *vert*), which traces to its own, separate “to grow/flourish” root, **weis-*. Two unrelated language families each independently built a “green” word out of a verb meaning “to grow” — a real coincidence of logic, not a shared word.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

gelb (“yellow”) is native too, from Proto-Germanic **gelwaz* — and the same word as English’s **yellow**. Trace it back far enough, to **Proto-Indo-European** **ghel-* (“to shine,” with derivatives covering yellow, green, and gold), and it is usually said to land on the **same ancient root** behind Latin’s **galbus/galbinus** — the source of **French’s jaune**. Honesty check, though: that particular link is **less secure** than it looks — some modern Latin scholarship treats *galbus*’s origin as genuinely unknown rather than confirming the **ghel-* connection. So *gelb* and *jaune* are **probably** PIE-level cousins, despite belonging to completely different language families and reaching German and French by entirely separate paths — just don’t treat the link as airtight.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “grün” — green, direct cousin of English’s own “green”
- “gelb” — yellow, probable hidden cousin of French’s *jaune*
- the contrast — grün’s root is unrelated to Latin’s *viridis*, but *gelb*’s root is **PROBABLY** shared with French’s *jaune*

Before you move on

Is **grün** related to Latin’s *viridis*? (**No** — a completely different root, though both independently mean “grow” → “green”; *grün* IS a direct cousin of English’s own “green.”) What French word is **gelb**’s probable PIE cousin, and how solid is that link? (**Jaune** — both usually traced to PIE **ghel-*, “to shine,” though modern Latin scholarship treats *galbus*’s origin as genuinely unknown, so the connection is probable, not certain.)

Chapter 37

Verbs of the Mind

Modes:  voice (4)  Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I think, I understand, I read and I write in German, break a strong verb's vowel in the du and er forms, and say which of the four German borrowed rather than inherited.

The chapter closes on schreiben, the one loan among four inherited verbs: the reader produces all four ich forms and all four er forms, names liest as the only vowel-breaker, and takes Manuskript apart into the Latin hand German never inherited plus the Latin verb it did. It reaches back past its own chapter to reassess Chapter 17's Hand, the Hand/manus gap, and Grimm's law.

37.1 denken — the verb that was inside *danke* all along

You learned early on that **danke** is built on a verb meaning “to think.” Here is that verb, with its own forms at last.

Sounds you'll need

- **vowel-e-german** — a short, open *e*.
- **ng-cluster** — *n* before *k* is the *ng* of *sing*: **denken** = *DENG-ken*.

You'll want to know: denken

denken means “**to think**,” with the same audible endings you drilled on *wohnen*, *machen* and *lernen*:

- **ich denke** — I think · **wir denken** — we think
- **du denkst** — you think · **ihr denkt** — you all think
- **er denkt** — he thinks · **sie denken** — they think

Ich denke, also bin ich. — “I think, therefore I am.”

It also carries the weather straight into a new sentence:

Ich denke, es ist kalt. — “I think it is cold.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

denken is Proto-Germanic **þankijanaþ*. English **think** is that same inherited word — a loan in neither direction.

One consonant separates them, and you have been taught how to read it. With **Haupt** beside *head* you met **Grimm’s law**, which turned Proto-Indo-European **k* into Germanic *h*. The same law turned PIE **t* into Germanic **þ*, the *th* sound. English kept it and spells it **th**: *think*. German later softened it to **d**.

Germanic **þankō* meant both “a thought” and “gratitude” — hence German **Dank** and **Gedanke**, and English **thank** beside **think**. To thank was to hold someone in thought. German also kept a sibling verb, **dünken**, “to seem”; English had that one too and let it collapse into *think*.

Grammar Lens: also does not mean “also”

In *Ich denke, also bin ich*, the word **also** means “**therefore**.” English *also* is *eall swā*, “all so,” meaning *likewise*; German *also* is *al + so*, meaning *thus*. Same bricks, different building. A German saying **also** is drawing a conclusion, not adding to a list.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich denke, du denkst, er denkt”

- “wir denken, ihr denkt, sie denken”
- “Ich denke, also bin ich.”
- “Ich denke, es ist kalt. Das Wetter ist gut.”
- the family — “denken, danke, Dank, Gedanke”
- the shift — PIE *t*, Germanic *th*, German *d*: think, denken

Before you move on

Which chapter-3 word is built on **denken**? (**Danke**.) Is English *think* a borrowing? (**No** — both inherited **þankijaną*.) Which law turned PIE **t* into the Germanic *th* German made a *d*? (**Grimm’s law**, as in *Haupt* and *head*.) What does German **also** mean? (**Therefore**.)

37.2 verstehen — standing around a thing until you see it

You can say **ich denke**. Thinking happens in the **Kopf**; this is the verb for when it lands — and English built its own word from the same picture, separately.

Sounds you’ll need

- **v-as-f** — German **v** is said *f*, so *ver-* is *fair-*.
- **h-silent-lengthening** — the **h** is silent; it marks the vowel before it as long. **verstehen** = *fair-SHTAY-en*.

You’ll want to know: verstehen

verstehen means “to understand,” with the ordinary endings:

- **ich verstehe · wir verstehen**
- **du verstehst · ihr versteht**
- **er versteht · sie verstehen**

Ich verstehe. — said on its own, constantly. **Ich verstehe Deutsch**. — “I understand German.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Break it in two: **ver-** plus **stehen**, “to stand.” *Stehen* is English **stand**, the same inherited word, Proto-Germanic **standanq*. The prefix **ver-** is old and worn, and here it carries its ancient sense “around, about.” So *verstehen* is literally “**to stand around**” a thing. Now English. **Understand** is *under* + *stand* — and that *under* is not “underneath.” The usual explanation is that Old English *under* also carried the sense “among, between,” a cousin of Latin *inter*; so *understand* is “to stand **among**” a thing. That reading is standard but not certain, and no honest account will claim otherwise.

Either way the important fact holds: **each language welded a prefix onto its own inherited verb “to stand” and got a word for comprehension.** Neither borrowed the compound. The green-and-yellow lesson showed the same move with **grün**: Germanic and Latin each built “green” from a verb for “grow,” independently. This is that coincidence one family closer in.

The verb underneath is one of the family’s biggest roots, PIE **steh₂-*: German **der Verstand** (“reason”), English **stand, stead, stall**, and — from Latin’s *stāre* — **state, station, stable, constant.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich verstehe, du verstehst, er versteht”
- “Ich verstehe Deutsch.”
- both verbs — “Ich denke. Ich verstehe.”
- the pieces — “ver- + stehen” beside “under + stand”
- the parallel — like *grün* beside *viridis*, built, not shared
- where it happens — “der Kopf” — and what stands in it, “der Verstand”

Before you move on

What are the two pieces of **verstehen**? (**Ver-** + **stehen**.) Which English verb is *stehen*? (**Stand**.) Did English borrow *understand*

from German? (**No** — each built its own compound.) How solid is the “under = among” account? (**Standard, but not certain.**) Say “I think” and “I understand.” (*Ich denke. Ich verstehe.*)

37.3 lesen — gathering, and the first verb that changes its vowel

Every German verb so far has kept its vowel in every form. This one does not — and its older meaning is **gathering**.

Sounds you'll need

- long-e — a long *e*, English *ay* without the glide.
- s-voiced — a single *s* between vowels buzzes like *z*: *LAY-zen*.

You'll want to know: lesen

lesen means “to read.”

- **ich lese** — I read · **wir lesen** — we read
- **du liest** — you read · **ihr lest** — you all read
- **er liest** — he reads · **sie lesen** — they read

Ich lese Deutsch. — “I read German.”

Grammar Lens: the vowel that breaks in the middle

Four forms keep the *e* of *lesen*. Two swap it for a long *ie*: *du liest*, *er liest*.

That is the mark of a **strong verb**: the vowel changes inside the word, in exactly two present-tense forms — **du** and **er/sie/es**. Nothing else moves; the endings stay the familiar *-e* / *-st* / *-t*. It is a rule about a whole class of verbs, not about *lesen*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

lesen is Proto-Germanic **lesaną*, “to gather.” That sense still lives in **die Weinlese**, the grape harvest — the *wine-gathering*, built on the

Wein you already have. Reading came second: you pick the letters up, one after another.

Now the trap. Latin **legere** also meant “to gather,” also came to mean “to read,” and stands behind **legible**, **lecture**, **lesson** and **collect**. It looks like one shared word. It probably is **not**: the sounds do not correspond as they should, and the standard account ties *lesen* to a separate root, whose clearest cousin is Lithuanian *lèsti*, “to peck up grain.” Treat it as you treated **grün** beside *viridis*.

English **read** is a third story: Old English *rædan*, “to advise,” which is German **raten** and **das Rätsel** (“riddle”). *Lesen* and *read* are no relation.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich lese, du liest, er liest” — hear the vowel break
- “wir lesen, ihr lest, sie lesen” — and back
- “Ich lese Deutsch. Ich verstehe Deutsch.”
- the old meaning — “die Weinlese”
- the three so far — “denken, verstehen, lesen”
- why *lesen* is not *legere* — the reason *grün* is not *viridis*

Before you move on

Which two forms of a strong verb break their vowel, and what are they here? (**Du** and **er/sie/es** — **du liest, er liest**.) What did *lesen* mean first? (**To gather** — *die Weinlese*.) Is it Latin *legere*? (**Probably not** — the sounds do not correspond.) And English *read*? (**No relation** — it meant “to advise,” and is German *raten*.)

37.4 schreiben — the one borrowed verb

Three verbs in, all three English’s own blood relatives. The fourth breaks the run: **German borrowed it; English did not.**

Sounds you'll need

- sch-sh — **sch** is one sound, English *sh*.
- diphthong-ei — **ei** is said *eye*: **schreiben** = *SHRY-ben*.

You'll want to know: schreiben

schreiben means “to write.”

- **ich schreibe** — I write · **wir schreiben** — we write
- **du schreibst** — you write · **ihr schreibt** — you all write
- **er schreibt** — he writes · **sie schreiben** — they write

Ich schreibe Deutsch. · **Die Hand schreibt.**

Grammar Lens: strong, but not here

Lesen taught you to watch **du** and **er**. Here: *du schreibst*, *er schreibt* — **the vowel does not move**. *Schreiben* is strong (its past is *schrieb*), but its present is smooth. So the rule is exact: a strong verb may break its vowel there. Hold the pair: *du liest*, but *du schreibst*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

schreiben is Latin *scribere*, and before that “to scratch.” German took it in with the writing itself, and early: the loan passed through German sound changes — *sc-* became *sch-* — and joined the native strong verbs, its past becoming *schrieb*. A late loan would have done neither.

English refused it. **Write** is Old English *writan*, also “to scratch,” because runes were cut; German **reißen** and **ritzen** are its relatives. Two languages, two writing-words, both meaning *scratch*. Latin’s verb reached English anyway: **scribe**, **script**, **describe**, **transcript**. And one closes a circle back to **die Hand**. German **Hand** has **no Latin cousin** — Latin says *manus* — yet *manus* reached German as a loan: **Manuskript**. *Manu-* is *manus*, the hand; *-skript* is *scriptum*, this verb. A **Manuskript** is written *by hand*: the Latin hand-word German never inherited, bolted to the Latin writing-verb it did.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Die Hand schreibt. Ich schreibe Deutsch.”
- the four “I” forms — “ich denke, ich verstehe, ich lese, ich schreibe”
- the four “he” forms — “er denkt, er versteht, er liest, er schreibt” — only *liest* broke
- three inherited, one borrowed — “denken/think, verstehen/stand, lesen/gather”, then “schreiben/scribere”
- denken’s *d* — PIE *t*, Germanic *th*: Grimm’s law
- “Ich denke, also bin ich.” — and what *also* does
- *Manuskript* — *manus* plus *scriptum*

Before you move on

Say all four “I” forms. (*Ich denke, ich verstehe, ich lese, ich schreibe*.) Which is the loan? (*Schreiben*, from *scribere*, “to scratch” — as English *write* also meant.) Which “he” form breaks its vowel? (Only *liest*.) Which half of *Manuskript* did German never inherit? (*Manus*, its own **Hand**.) And German *also*? (**Therefore**.)

Chapter 38

Taking, Asking, Helping, Liking

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I take, I ask, I help and I like in German, sort all eight verbs of these two chapters into the three present-tense patterns, and use gern to say I like doing something.

The chapter closes on mögen, lieben and gern: the reader produces all eight ich forms of Chapters 24 and 25, sorts them into vowel-stays, vowel-breaks and the old third pattern, hangs gern on four verbs already learned, and runs the nine-word cousin roll-call. It reaches back to every atom of Chapter 24 and to Chapters 21 and 22 — Ich mag das Wetter, Ich mag die Katze, Der Hund mag Wasser.

38.1 nehmen — the verb English threw away

Four verbs about doing rather than thinking. **Schreiben** was a Latin word German took and English refused; this one is the reverse — a Germanic word English threw away and German kept.

Sounds you'll need

- long-e — a long *e*: **nehmen** = *NAY-men*.
- h-silent-lengthening — the **h** is silent, marking the long vowel.

You'll want to know: nehmen

nehmen means “to take.” It is what a **Hand** does.

- **ich nehme** — I take · **wir nehmen** — we take
- **du nimmst** — you take · **ihr nehmt** — you all take
- **er nimmt** — he takes · **sie nehmen** — they take

Grammar Lens: the rule again, and harder

You know where to look: **du** and **er**. Long *e* becomes short **i** — *du nimmst*, *er nimmt* — while *wir*, *ihr* and *sie* keep the *e*.

This goes further than *lesen* did: once the vowel shortens the silent *h* has no job, so it drops and the **m** doubles: *nehmen* but *nimmt*. Say them back to back — *NAY-men*, *NIMT*.

Three shapes now: *du liest* breaks its vowel; *du nimmst* breaks it and respells the word; *du schreibst* does not break at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

nehmen is Proto-Germanic **nemaną*, “to take.” English had it — Old English *niman* — and then **lost it**, because Norse settlers brought *taka* and English took **take** instead.

A lost word leaves fossils, and English carries two. **Numb** is the old past participle of *nim*: a hand *taken* by the cold. **Nimble** is “quick to take hold.”

Beyond Germanic the root **nem-* meant “to assign, to allot,” and Greek’s version is unexpectedly familiar: *némein*, “to distribute,” gives **nomad**, **economy** and **nemesis**.

Why it’s said this way

German **bekommen** means “to receive, to get” — not “to become.” Both are built from the same prefix and the same verb of motion, and then the meanings walked off in opposite directions. A German saying **Ich bekomme...** in a café is being served, not transformed.

Recognise *bekommen*; **say** *nehmen*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich nehme, du nimmst, er nimmt” — *NAY-me, NIMST, NIMT*
- “wir nehmen, ihr nehmt, sie nehmen” — the long *e* is back
- “Die Hand nimmt. Die Hand schreibt.”
- the three shapes — “du liest, du nimmst, du schreibst”
- the fossils — “nehmen, numb, nimble”
- borrowed against lost — “schreiben came in from Latin; niman went out”
- the trap — “bekommen is *receive*”

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms. (***Du nimmst, er nimmt*** — the *h* drops, the *m* doubles.) Which verb replaced the English cousin of *nehmen*? (**Take**, from Norse.) Name the two fossils it left. (**Numb** and **nimble**.) What does **bekommen** mean? (**To receive**.) And say “the hand takes.” (***Die Hand nimmt.***)

38.2 fragen — asking, and the three answers German gives back

After two vowel-breaking verbs, a rest: this one keeps its vowel everywhere. And you already own its answers — all **three** of them.

Sounds you’ll need

- vowel-a-german — a pure open *ah*: **fragen** = *FRAH-gen*.
- r-uvular-german — the soft guttural *r* you first met in *lernen*.

You’ll want to know: fragen

fragen means “to ask.”

- **ich frage · wir fragen**
- **du fragst · ihr fragt**

- **er fragt** · **sie fragen**

The noun sits beside it: **die Frage**, “the question.”

Grammar Lens: the vowel that stays

Check the two forms that break in a strong verb. *Du fragst. Er fragt.* The *a* has not moved.

fragen is a **weak** verb — the ordinary kind, built like *lernen* and *machen*: endings only, stem untouched. That matters, because after *lesen* and *nehmen* it is easy to start breaking vowels everywhere. Most German verbs are weak; the strong ones are a closed club, learned one at a time. Hold the pair: **du nimmst**, but **du fragst**.

Why it’s said this way

An asked question wants an answer, and you have the whole German set already. English has two. German has **three**:

- **ja** — yes.
- **nein** — no.
- **doch** — the one English has no word for: *yes, against what you just said*. It exists to contradict a negative.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

fragen goes back to Proto-Indo-European ***prek-**, “to ask.” Germanic turned that opening *p* into an *f* — the Grimm’s-law step that puts *father* beside Latin *pater*.

English once had the cousin, Old English *frignan*, and dropped it, just as it dropped the cousin of *nehmen*. The word it uses instead, **ask**, is a different Germanic word and no relation.

So English gets the root back only the long way round. Latin *precārī*, “to beg, to pray,” is the same verb, and gives **pray**, **prayer** and **precarious** — literally “held only by asking for it.”

One caution: Latin *rogāre*, “to ask,” behind *interrogate*, looks like a candidate and is **not** related — it belongs with *rēx* and *right*, a root about straightening and ruling.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich frage, du fragst, er fragt” — the *a* never moves
- “die Frage” — the question
- the contrast — “du liest, du nimmst”, then “du fragst”
- the three answers — “ja, nein, doch”
- the Latin cousins — “pray, prayer, precarious”
- the two verbs English dropped — “nehmen, fragen”

Before you move on

Is **fragen** strong or weak, and how do you know? (**Weak** — *du fragst*, the vowel never breaks.) Name German’s three answers. (**Ja**, **nein**, **doch** — the last contradicts a negative.) Is English *ask* a relative? (**No**.) Which English words carry the root instead? (**Pray**, **precarious**, through Latin *precārī*.) Say “I ask” and “I take.” (*Ich frage*. *Ich nehme*.)

38.3 helfen — one word, one sound law, two languages

Almost nothing sits between the two words: **helfen** *is* **help**. The lesson is the single sound that separates them — and it is not the law you already know.

Sounds you’ll need

- **h-pronounced** — a real, breathed *h*, unlike the silent one in *nehmen*.
- **f-final** — a clean *f*: **helfen** = *HEL-fen*.

You'll want to know: helfen

helfen means “to help,” and it is strong, so you know where to look:

- ich helfe · wir helfen
- du hilfst · ihr helft
- er hilft · sie helfen

The *e* becomes **i** in *du* and *er*, exactly as in *nehmen* — the third verb to do it, so by now you can predict it.

One honest limit: when German names the person helped, that person's word takes a noun form this book has not taught. Keep to **Ich helfe** on its own.

Why it's said this way

The noun is **die Hilfe**, “help” — the same *e* to *i* change, frozen. And **bitte** gave you the shape for asking politely: name the thing, then say **bitte**.

Hilfe, bitte. — “Help, please.”

A whole request, from one new noun and one old word.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

helfen is Proto-Germanic **helpaną*, and English **help** is the same inherited word.

The only difference is **p** against **f**, from a different law than the one behind **Haupt**. That was **Grimm's law**, the *first* shift, PIE sounds into Germanic ones — seen again in *fragen's* *p* becoming *f*. This is the **second**, High German shift, much later, and the event that split German from English. After a vowel, Germanic **p** became German **f**: *helpan* → **helfen**; *ship* → **Schiff**; *open* → **offen**; *sharp* → **scharf**; *deep* → **tief**.

Outside Germanic, be honest: *helfen* has **no secure cousins** — a proposed link to Lithuanian *šelpiti* is disputed.

English keeps a fossil, though. *Helfen* is still strong — *helfen*, *half*, *geholfen* — and *help* was too: its old **holp** and **holpen** survive in old Bibles and dialect. English let the shape go within recorded memory.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich helfe, du hilfst, er hilft” — the *e* breaks to *i*
- “Hilfe, bitte.”
- the strong pair — “du nimmst, du hilfst” — then the weak “du fragst”
- the second shift five times — “helfen/help, Schiff/ship, offen/open, scharf/sharp, tief/deep”
- which law was which — Grimm’s law gave *Haupt*; the second shift gave *helfen*

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms. (***Du hilfst, er hilft.***) Which shift separates *helfen* from *help*, and is it the one behind *Haupt* and *head*? (The **second**, High German shift — **no**, *Haupt* was **Grimm’s law**.) Name two more pairs from it. (**Schiff/ship, offen/open, scharf/sharp.**) Cousins outside Germanic? (**None secure.**) Ask for help politely. (***Hilfe, bitte.***)

38.4 mögen, lieben, gern — German’s three ways of liking

English says “I like.” German has **three** ways, and the commonest is not a verb.

You’ll want to know: mögen and lieben

mögen (“to like”, *MER-gen* — *ö* is *ay* with rounded lips) is a **third** pattern, an old verb whose *ich* and *er* forms take no ending:

- **ich mag · wir mögen**
- **du magst · ihr mögt**
- **er mag · sie mögen**

lieben (“to love”, *LEE-ben* — **ie** is a long *ee*) is weak: *ich liebe, du liebst, er liebt*.

Ich mag die Katze. · Der Hund mag Wasser. · Ich mag das Wetter. · Ich liebe Deutsch.

A masculine **der** noun changes its article after *mögen* — untaught here, so these use **die** and **das** words.

Grammar Lens: gern hangs on any verb

gern is an adverb, “gladly,” dropped in after a verb:

Ich lese gern. — “I read gladly”: **I like reading.** **Ich schreibe gern. · Ich helfe gern.**

English must rebuild the sentence, with *like* plus a verb in *-ing*; German changes nothing. So: **mögen** for a thing, **gern** for an activity, **lieben** for love.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

All three are English words you already own.

mögen is **maganq*, “to have power” — English **may**. The meaning slid from being able, to being inclined, to liking; the power sense survives in **might** and **die Macht**.

lieben is **leubaz*, “dear” — English **love** exactly, with **lief** and **believe** (to *hold dear*). **gern** is **gernaz*, “eager” — English **yearn**. So *Ich lese gern* is “I read yearningly.”

What you’ve built across these two chapters

- **vowel stays:** *denken, verstehen, fragen, schreiben* (strong only in its past).
- **vowel breaks:** *du liest, du nimmst, du hilfst*.
- **third pattern:** *ich mag, du magst, er mag*.
- **the traps:** **bekommen** is “receive,” never “become”; **also** is “therefore,” never “also.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich mag, du magst, er mag”
- “Ich mag die Katze. Der Hund mag Wasser. Ich mag das Wetter.”
- *gern* on four — “Ich lese gern. Ich schreibe gern. Ich helfe gern. Ich frage gern.”
- the breakers, then not — “du liest, du nimmst, du hilfst”, “du fragst”
- all eight “I” forms — “ich denke, ich verstehe, ich lese, ich schreibe, ich nehme, ich frage, ich helfe, ich mag”
- the roll-call — “denken/think, verstehen/stand, lesen/gather, schreiben/scribere, nehmen/numb, fragen/pray, helfen/help, mögen/may, lieben/love, gern/yearn”

Before you move on

How does German say “I like reading,” literally? (***Ich lese gern*** — “I read gladly.”) Say: you like the cat; the dog likes water. (***Ich mag die Katze. Der Hund mag Wasser.***) Which three of the eight break their vowel? (***Lesen, nehmen, helfen.***) And the two traps — **bekommen**, also? (Receive; therefore.)

Chapter 39

Sitting, Standing, Sleeping, Hearing

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I sit, I stand, I sleep and I hear in German, tell the second shift's t-branch from its p-branch, break a verb's a to ä for du and er, and say which of the four changes German made alone and which it made alongside English.

The chapter closes on hören, the one verb of the four whose vowel cannot break because it was born umlauted: the reader produces all four ich forms and all four er forms, names schlafen as the only breaker, tells Grimm's law on the h of hören and Hund from the second shift on sitzen and schlafen, and hangs gern on the new verb. It reaches back past its own chapter to Chapter 17's Grimm's law, Chapter 22's Hund and Katze with the Hund etymology that had never been revisited, and Chapter 25's mögen, lieben and gern, all three of which were orphans until here.

39.1 sitzen — the same word as *sit*, respelt by one law

Helfen *is* **help**, split by the second sound shift: Germanic **p** became German **f**. That law has other branches. This verb rides one.

Sounds you'll need

- **tz-affricate** — **tz** is one squeezed sound, *ts*, as in English *cats*.
- **i-short** — a short, tight *i*: **sitzen** = *ZIT-sen*, buzzed at the front because German *s* before a vowel is voiced.

You'll want to know: sitzen

sitzen means “to sit.”

- **ich sitze** — I sit · **wir sitzen** — we sit
- **du sitzt** — you sit · **ihr sitzt** — you all sit
- **er sitzt** — he sits · **sie sitzen** — they sit

Ich sitze. — a whole sentence, two words.

Grammar Lens: strong does not mean it breaks

Sitzen is a **strong** verb — its past is *saß*, not *sitzte*. But its present never breaks its vowel: *du sitzt*, *er sitzt*. Beside it, *helfen* breaks to *du hilfst*.

So “strong” is a fact about a verb’s **past**; the *du/er* break is a separate habit only some strong verbs have.

The doing verbs gave two ways to say you like something: **ich mag** with a thing, **gern** hung on a verb. This verb takes the second.

Ich sitze gern. — “I like sitting.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sitzen is Proto-Germanic **sitjaną*, and English **sit** is the same inherited word — Old English *sittan*, Old High German *sizzen*. The second, High German shift moved Germanic **p** to **f** in *helfen*. It moved Germanic **t** just as hard, to **z** (said *ts*) or **ss**: *sittan* → **sitzen**, *water* → **Wasser**, *eat* → **essen**, *ten* → **zehn**, *bite* → **beißen**. The food lesson handed you *Wasser* and the first numbers handed you *zehn* long before there was a name for what had happened to them. Under both lies PIE **sed-*, “to sit,” one of the family’s great providers. Latin *sedēre* gives **session**, **sedentary** and **preside**; Latin *sedēs*, “a seat,” gives the bishop’s **see**. Greek *hédra*, also “a seat,” gives

cathedral — the church with the bishop’s chair — and **polyhedron**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich sitze, du sitzt, er sitzt” — the *i* never moves
- the contrast — “du sitzt” beside “du hilfst”
- “Ich sitze gern.”
- the *t* branch four times — “sitzen/sit, Wasser/water, essen/eat, zehn/ten”
- the *p* branch beside it — “helfen/help”
- the seat words — “sitzen, sedēre, hédra, cathedral”

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms of *sitzen*. (***Du sitzt, er sitzt*** — no break.) Which of the doing verbs does break, and how? (***Helfen*** — *du hilfst*.) Which sound did the second shift turn German’s **z** and **ss** out of? (An old **t**.) Name two pairs from that branch. (***Wasser/water, essen/eat, zehn/ten***.) Say you like sitting. (***Ich sitze gern***.)

39.2 stehen — the verb that was hiding inside *verstehen*

Verstehen was broken into *ver-* plus *stehen*, and named *stehen* as English **stand**. Here is that verb alone, and the letter the two languages disagree about.

Sounds you’ll need

- **st-initial-scht** — **st** at the start of a German word is said *sht*.
- **h-silent-lengthening** — the **h** is silent and marks the long vowel: **stehen** = *SHTAY-en*.

You'll want to know: **stehen**

stehen means “to stand.”

- **ich stehe** — I stand · **wir stehen** — we stand
- **du stehst** — you stand · **ihr steht** — you all stand
- **er steht** — he stands · **sie stehen** — they stand

Like *sitzen*, it keeps its vowel all the way through. Two postures, two sentences:

Ich sitze. Ich stehe.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Germanic ran two stems off one root here: a short **stānq* and a longer **standanq* with an **n** wedged inside. English generalised the long one and got **stand**; German took the short one and got **stehen**, Old High German *stān*.

German did not lose the *n*. It kept it in the past: **ich stand**, and the participle **gestanden**. German's past tense is spelt the way English's present is, out of the same drawer of stems.

The root is PIE **steh₂-*, the one *verstehen* named, and it is everywhere. Latin *stāre* gave **state**, **station**, **stable**, **constant**. Greek *hístēmi*, “I set up,” gave **static**, **system** and **ecstasy** — standing outside yourself. German built **die Stadt**, a city: a standing-place. English built **stead**, **steady** and **instead**.

Why it's said this way

Notice the shape of what has happened. *Sitzen* goes back to **sed-*, and so does Latin's *sedēre*. *Stehen* goes back to **steh₂-*, and so does Latin's *stāre*.

Nothing was borrowed in either direction. Two families inherited the same two roots and held them to the same two meanings for thousands of years, because sitting and standing are things everybody does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich stehe, du stehst, er steht” — *SHTAY*, not *STAY*
- both postures — “Ich sitze. Ich stehe.”
- the verb inside the verb — “stehen, verstehen”
- where the *n* went — “ich stehe, ich stand, gestanden”
- the Latin pair — “sitzen/sedēre, stehen/stāre”
- what stands in English — “state, station, stable, stead”

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms. (***Du stehst, er steht.***) Which letter does English’s *stand* carry that German’s *stehen* does not? (An **n**.) Where does German still keep it? (In the **past** — *ich stand, gestanden.*) Which longer verb already taught has *stehen* inside it? (***Verstehen.***) Say “I sit. I stand.” (***Ich sitze. Ich stehe.***)

39.3 schlafen — *sleep*, under two coats of paint

Sitzen and *stehen* held their vowels still. This one does not — and it does not break the way the mind verbs broke either.

Sounds you’ll need

- sch-sh — **sch** is English *sh*: **schlafen** = *SHLAH-fen*.
- vowel-ae — **ä** is a flat *eh*: **schläft** = *SHLEFT*.

You’ll want to know: schlafen

schlafen means “to sleep.”

- ich schlafe · wir schlafen
- du schläfst · ihr schlaft
- er schläft · sie schlafen

Die Katze schläft. — “The cat is sleeping.”

Grammar Lens: the second kind of break

Lesen gave you one break: long *e* goes to **i** for *du* and *er* — *du liest*, *er hilft*. Here is the other: **a** takes two dots and becomes **ä** — *du schläfst*, *er schläft*.

Those two dots are the umlaut, the mark that turns *Buch* into *Bücher*. The break lands in the same slot as before, **du** and **er** and nobody else, so only its raw material is new: *e* verbs brighten to **i**, *a* verbs to **ä**.

Es regnet. Die Katze schläft.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

schlafen is Proto-Germanic **slēpaną*, and English **sleep** is the same inherited word — Old English *slæpan*, Old High German *slāfan*.

Two German changes sit between them. The first you know: the second shift, Germanic **p** to German **f**, as in *helfen*. The second is new — German turned **s** into *sh* before *l*, *m*, *n* and *w*, and wrote it down: *sleep* → **schlafen**, *swim* → **schwimmen**, *snow* → **Schnee**, *smith* → **Schmied**. It did the same before *p* and *t* and never spelt it, which is why *stehen* is said *SHTAY-en*.

Now the honest part. The old Indo-European verb for sleeping was **swep-*, still in plain view: Latin *somnus* gives **insomnia** and **somnolent**, Latin *sopor* gives **soporific**, Greek *hýpnos* gives **hypnosis**, and Old Norse *sofa* is Swedish *sova* today. German and English both threw that verb away and built a new one on **sleb-*, “to be slack” — German still has **schlaff**, “limp.” They made that swap **together**, before they were two languages.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich schlafe, du schläfst, er schläft” — the *a* brightens to **ä**
- the three verbs — “Ich sitze. Ich stehe. Ich schlafe.”
- “Es regnet. Die Katze schläft.”
- both breaks in the same slot — “du hilfst” beside “du schläfst”
- the *sch* row — “schlafen, schwimmen, Schnee, Schmied”

- the verb they both threw away — “somnus, hypnos, sova”

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms. (***Du schläfst, er schläft*** — two dots on the *a*.) Which two people does a German verb break for? (**Du** and **er**, always.) Name the two changes between *sleep* and *schlafen*. (**p** to **f**, and **s** to **sch**.) Why is *stehen* said *SHTAY-en*? (**Same change**, never spelt.) Say “the cat is sleeping.” (***Die Katze schläft***.)

39.4 hören — *hear*, and the end of a chapter that never moved

Ich sitze. Ich stehe. Ich schlafe. Three verbs that stay put.
Here is the fourth — the sense that works with your eyes shut.

Sounds you'll need

- umlaut-oe — **ö** is the *e* of *bed* said with rounded lips.
- r-uvular — the **r** is a soft scrape at the back: **hören** = *HUR-en*.

You'll want to know: hören

hören means “to hear.”

- **ich höre · wir hören**
- **du hörst · ihr hört**
- **er hört · sie hören**

The **ö** never moves. *Schlafen* grew its dots for *du* and *er*; *hören* was born with them, so nothing is left to break.

Der Hund hört. Die Katze hört.

Grammar Lens: liking it, the mögen way

gern hangs on this verb like any other:

Ich höre gern. — “I like listening.”

Gern is English **yearn**: underneath, “I hear yearningly.” Beside it is the other way of liking, **ich mag** — English **may**, with the power drained out.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

hören is Proto-Germanic **hauzijanq*, and English **hear** is the same inherited word.

This time the change is one they **share**. Gothic still says *hausjan*, with an **s**; Old English *hīeran* and Old High German *hōren* had both turned it to **r**. *Sitzen* shows where German left English; *hören* shows a road they walked together.

The **h** is Grimm’s law, the first shift: an old **k** became Germanic **h**. Greek kept the *k* — *akoúein*, “to hear,” which English borrowed back as **acoustic**. Same swap that made **kwon-* into **Hund** while Latin kept *canis*.

Some break the root up further, into “sharp” plus “ear” — which would make *hören* “sharp-eared” and put **das Ohr** inside it. Cited often, not settled.

Why it’s said this way

gehören means “**to belong**.” It is *ge-* welded onto *hören*, and began as “to hearken to”: what belongs to you answers when called.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- all four — “Ich sitze. Ich stehe. Ich schlafe. Ich höre.”
- the four *er* forms — “er sitzt, er steht, er schläft, er hört”
- “Der Hund hört. Die Katze schläft.”
- “Ich höre gern.”
- the shared change — “hausjan, hīeran, hören”
- the *h* row — “hören/akoúein, Hund/canis”
- “gehören is *belong*”

Before you move on

Give all four *ich* forms of this chapter. (***Ich sitze, ich stehe, ich schlafe, ich höre.***) Which breaks its vowel? (***Schlafen*** — *a* to *ä*.) Which letter did Gothic keep where German and English have *r*? (An *s*.) Which law put the *h* on *hören* and *Hund*? (**Grimm's law**.)

Chapter 40

Going, Running, Opening, Closing

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I go, I run and I open and close my hand in German, split a separable verb so its prefix waits at the end of the sentence, and say why German's line between walking and running is not where English draws it.

The chapter closes on schließen, the second verb in these chapters that German kept and English lost: the reader produces all of Chapter 27's verbs, splits both aufmachen and zumachen around die Hand, names Schloss, Schlüssel and Schluss as the household built on the kept verb, and runs the eight-verb morning that closes Chapters 26 and 27 together. It reaches back to Chapter 25's nehmen and the second shift on helfen, to Chapter 17's Hand and its final-d devoicing, which had never been revisited, and to Chapter 26's sitzen, stehen and hören.

40.1 gehen — go, and the word German never needed for walk

Four verbs that stayed put — sitting, standing, sleeping, hearing. Now a chapter that moves, opening on the verb German uses where English has two.

Sounds you'll need

- **h-silent-lengthening** — the **h** is silent and lengthens: **gehen** = GAY-en, built exactly like *stehen*, *SHTAY-en*.
- **ge-prefix** — **ge-** at the front is said *guh*, never *jee*.

You'll want to know: *gehen*

gehen means “to go” — and also “to walk.” German does not split those.

- ich *gehe* · wir *gehen*
- du *gehst* · ihr *geht*
- er *geht* · sie *gehen*

Ich *stehe*. Ich *gehe*.

Two verbs cut to the same short shape, each with a silent *h* propping the vowel up. Say them together and you hear a matched pair: *SHTAY-en*, *GAY-en*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

gehen is Proto-Germanic **gānq* and English *go* is the same inherited word, Old English *gān*.

Both languages then hit the same problem: the verb had no usable past, and each went shopping. English took *went*, really the past of *wend*, and left *wend* stranded. German took *ging* and *gegangen* from another old verb, **ganganq*, “to walk” — which English still owns in *gangway*, *gangplank*, and Scots *gang*, “to go.”

Gegangen carries the same *ge-* you met on *gehören*: an old prefix German fastens to a past participle.

Beyond Germanic, be honest — the deeper root of *go* is **disputed**, with no agreed list of cousins. It is the one verb here that cannot be followed back.

Why it's said this way

Because *walk* is not an old word for travelling on foot. Old English *wealcan* meant “to roll, to toss,” and its German cousin *walken* still means what it always meant: **to full cloth**, to work wool by trampling it.

English promoted that trampling verb around 1200. German never did, so *gehen* covers both jobs.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich gehe, du gehst, er geht”
- the matched pair — “Ich stehe. Ich gehe.”
- the borrowed pasts — “go/went” beside “gehen/ging/gegangen”
- where English kept the other verb — “gangway, gangplank”
- the *ge-* on both — “gehören, gegangen”
- what *walken* does — it fulls cloth, it does not travel

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms. (***Du gehst, er geht.***) Which English verb is *gehen*? (**Go**, and **walk** as well.) Where did *went* come from? (From ***wend.***) What does German’s cousin of *walk* mean? (**To full cloth.**) How far back can *gehen* be traced? (**Not past Germanic.**)

40.2 laufen — the verb that lies across English’s line

Ich gehe covers going and walking. German has two words for *run*, and one of them is not only about running.

Sounds you’ll need

- diphthong-au — **au** is the *ow* of *house*: **laufen** = *LOW-fen*.
- diphthong-eu — **äu** is the *oy* of *boy*: **läuft** = *LOYFT*.

You’ll want to know: **laufen**

laufen means “to run” — and often “to walk.”

- **ich laufe · wir laufen**
- **du läufst · ihr lauft**
- **er läuft · sie laufen**

The *schlafen* break is here too, in the same *du* and *er* slot: **au** brightens to **äu**.

Der Hund läuft.

Why it's said this way

English draws a hard line between *walk* and *run*. German draws it elsewhere, and leaves one verb lying across it.

- **gehen** — on foot, unhurried.
- **laufen** — on foot at any speed at all.
- **rennen** — flat out. *ich renne, du rennst, er rennt.*

So **Wir laufen** is “we’re walking” or “we’re running,” and only the situation tells you which. That holds across most of Germany. In **Austria** it does not: there *laufen* means *run*. This book teaches the German usage.

Der Hund rennt. — no ambiguity left.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

laufen is Proto-Germanic **hlaupaną*, and English kept it as **leap** — Old English *hlēapan*. One more **p** against **f**, the second shift, on the pattern of *helfen/help*, *offen/open* and *schlafen/sleep*.

English holds three more scraps: **lope**, and — through Dutch relatives of the same verb — **elope** and **interloper**, both people running off.

Outside Germanic there are **no secure cousins**.

Rennen is a sharper story. Germanic had **rinnaną*, “to run, to flow,” and beside it a causative **rannijaną*, “to make something run.”

German fused the two into **rennen** and kept *rinnen*, “to trickle,” alongside. English fused the same two into **run** — one merger, carried out separately in each language.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich laufe, du läufst, er läuft” — *LOW-fuh, LOYFST, LOYFT*
- the three speeds — “Ich gehe. Ich laufe. Ich renne.”
- “Der Hund läuft. Der Hund rennt.”
- the *p/f* row now four long — “helfen/help, offen/open, schlafen/sleep, laufen/leap”

- the runaways — “lope, elope, interloper”
- the doubled merger — “rinnen, rennen” beside English’s one *run*

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms of *laufen*. (*Du läufst, er läuft* — *au* to *äu*.) Which English verb is *laufen*? (**Leap** — and it means *run*.) Which German verb means only “run fast”? (**Rennen**.) Does **Wir laufen** mean walking or running? (**Either** — except in Austria, where it is running.) Say “the dog runs.” (*Der Hund rennt*.)

40.3 öffnen — *open*, which was always the word *up*

Ich gehe. Ich laufe. Ich renne. Now something done with the hands, and the German habit that breaks a verb in two.

Sounds you’ll need

- umlaut-oe — **ö** is the *e* of *bed* with rounded lips.
- fn-cluster — **-fn-** runs straight together: **öffnen** = *UFF-nen*.

You’ll want to know: öffnen

öffnen means “to open.”

- **ich öffne · wir öffnen**
- **du öffnest · ihr öffnet**
- **er öffnet · sie öffnen**

An extra **e** slips in for *du*, *er* and *ihr*, because *öffnst* cannot be said. Now a noun you already have, whose **d** is spoken as a **t**:

Ich öffne die Hand. — “I open my hand.” (*dee Hant*)

Grammar Lens: a verb that comes apart

Öffnen is the neutral, slightly formal word. What people say out loud is **aufmachen**, and both halves are yours already: **auf** from *auf Wiedersehen*, **machen** from your first verbs.

Here is the German part. In an ordinary sentence, **the prefix leaves the verb and waits at the end**:

Ich mache die Hand auf. — literally “I make the hand up.”

Machen takes the slot after *ich*; *auf* goes to the back and sits there. German does this to hundreds of verbs, and calls them **separable**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Behind the verb is the adjective **offen**, “open” — which the doing verbs already put beside **open** as a **p-to-f** pair from the second shift. The better secret is that **neither word is a root**. Old English *open* goes back to Proto-Germanic **upana-*, “put up,” formed on the word that is now English **up** — it has the shape of a past participle, though no such verb “to up” is attested. German ran the same sum and got *offen*, which is why *offen* and **auf** are relatives and not merely neighbours.

So *aufmachen* is not a quaint compound. It is the ancient recipe for “open,” rebuilt out loud — and German pulls it apart every time you use it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich öffne, du öffnest, er öffnet” — the extra *e*
- “Ich öffne die Hand.” — *dee Hant*
- the split — “Ich mache die Hand auf.”
- the *p/f* pair — “offen/open”
- what it is made of — “auf, up, offen, open”
- the feet verbs before the hand one — “Ich gehe. Ich laufe. Ich renne.”

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms. (*Du öffnest, er öffnet.*) Which older word is *offen* built from? (**Auf** — English **up**.) Where does *auf* go in **Ich mache die Hand auf?** (**To the end.**) What is such a verb called? (**Separable.**) How is the *d* of *Hand* spoken? (As a **t**.)

40.4 schließen — the second verb English lost

You can open a hand two ways, **ich öffne** and **ich mache ... auf**. Closing works the same, and the closing verb has the stranger history.

Sounds you'll need

- **ie-long-ee** — **ie** is a long *ee*: **schließen** = *SHLEE-sen*.
- **eszett** — **ß** is a sharp *s*, and it appears here because the *ee* before it is long.

You'll want to know: schließen

schließen means “to close,” and also “to lock.”

- **ich schließe** · **wir schließen**
- **du schließt** · **ihr schließt**
- **er schließt** · **sie schließen**

Its everyday partner is **zumachen** — *zu* plus *machen* — splitting exactly as *aufmachen* did:

Ich schließe die Hand. Ich mache die Hand zu.

The vowel shortens in the past, and the moment it does the **ß** becomes **ss**: *schließen*, but *schloss*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

schließen is Proto-Germanic **sleutana*, “to shut, to bolt.” Dutch kept it as *sluiten*. **English has nothing** — no inherited cousin at all.

So English closes things with borrowed and unrelated words. **Close** is Latin *claudere*, by way of French. **Shut** is native but a different verb entirely: Old English *scyttan*, to **shoot** a bolt across a door.

That makes two verbs here with the same shape of story. The doing verbs gave you *nehmen*, which English lost to Norse *take*. This is the second.

On the verb it kept, German built a household: **das Schloss**, a lock — and, because a castle is the locked place, a castle; **der Schlüssel**, a key; **der Schluss**, the end. English says **conclusion** for that last one, from *claudere* — the same idea out of the other family's parts.

A link between the Germanic verb and Latin *claudere* has been **proposed**. It is not established.

What you've built across these two chapters

Eight verbs, and a whole small morning:

**Ich schlafe. Ich höre. Ich stehe. Ich gehe. Ich laufe.
Ich renne. Ich sitze. Ich mache die Hand auf. Ich
mache die Hand zu.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ich schließe, du schließt, er schließt”
- the pair — “Ich mache die Hand auf. Ich mache die Hand zu.”
- the spelling swap — “schließen, schloss”
- the household — “Schloss, Schlüssel, Schluss”
- the two lost verbs — “nehmen, schließen; English took *take* and *close*”
- the four *p/f* pairs — “helfen/help, offen/open, schlafen/sleep, laufen/leap”
- the whole morning — “Ich schlafe. Ich höre. Ich stehe. Ich gehe. Ich laufe. Ich renne. Ich sitze.”

Before you move on

Give the *du* and *er* forms. (***Du schließt, er schließt.***) Which English verb is the cousin of *schließen*? (**None** — English lost it.) Where did *close* and *shut* come from? (**Latin**, and from **shoot**.) Name three words German hung on the verb. (**Schloss, Schlüssel, Schluss.**) Close your hand, both ways, then run the eight verbs.

Chapter 41

Coffee, Tea, and Milk

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can politely ask for coffee, tea, or milk in German, and say which of the three words is native and which two are loans.

The chapter closes on Milch, the native word beside two loans: the reader produces all three drinks with der/die articles, extends Chapter 19's Wasser, bitte pattern to Kaffee, bitte and Tee, bitte, and states each word's route — Kaffee overland through Arabic, Turkish and Italian; Tee by sea from Hokkien Chinese by way of Dutch; Milch never borrowed at all. It reaches back to Chapter 19's bitte pattern and rescues Chapter 27's final atoms, GE-LEX-SCHLIESSEN-10 and GE-ETYMON-SCHLIESSEN-11, which no lesson had revisited.

41.1 der Kaffee — the drink that closes one chapter and opens another

The last chapter ended by closing a hand. Now open the day with something to drink — and a new use for a request pattern you already own.

You'll want to know: der Kaffee

der Kaffee — coffee. Masculine.

Bitte taught you a complete polite request out of two known words: **Wasser, bitte**. The same pattern takes any drink you can name:

Kaffee, bitte. — Coffee, please.

Sounds you'll need

Kaffee is said two ways, and both are standard: many speakers in the north stress the first syllable, **KAF**-fay; many in the south, and most international learners' material, stress the second, kaf-**FAY**. Unlike *gehen* and *laufen*'s Germany/Austria split, this one is not regional in any strict sense — you will hear both from native speakers in the same city.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Kaffee is a loanword, and a young one by this book's standard — nothing like *Wein*'s two-thousand-year-old borrowing from Latin *vīnum*. The word travelled **Arabic qahwa** → **Ottoman Turkish kahve** → **Italian caffè** → **German Kaffee**. English *coffee* and French *café* took the same Italian step, which is why the whole spread of European words for the drink still rhymes with each other despite crossing four language families to get here.

The last chapter closed on **schließen**, a verb Proto-Germanic built and English lost outright. *Kaffee* is the opposite kind of word: nothing here is inherited, and nothing needed to be — German simply took the whole word, sound and all, the way it took *Wein* centuries earlier.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Kaffee” — either stress, both correct
- “Kaffee, bitte.” — the *bitte* pattern, one word swapped
- the route — “qahwa, kahve, caffè, Kaffee”

Before you move on

Give “coffee” with its article. (**Der Kaffee**.) Ask for it politely. (**Kaffee, bitte**.) Name the three languages the word crossed before German. (**Arabic, Turkish, Italian**.) Is *Kaffee* inherited like *schließen*, or borrowed like *Wein*? (**Borrowed**.)

41.2 der Tee — the same loan as English, by the same ship

Kaffee came overland through Turkey and Italy. The next drink took a completely different road — by sea.

You'll want to know: der Tee

der Tee — tea. Masculine.

Tee, bitte. — Tea, please.

Sounds you'll need

Tee is spelled almost exactly like the English word it translates, and said nothing like it. German **ee** is a long, steady *ay*: **Tee** = *TAY*, not *tea*'s *ee*. Looking alike on the page and sounding different is its own small trap — worth naming so it doesn't catch you.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Tee is Hokkien Chinese *tê*, the word for the plant in the coastal Chinese dialect that Dutch traders dealt with directly. Dutch **thee** carried it into Europe by sea, and German took the word from Dutch — the same route English **tea** followed, which is why *Tee* and *tea* match as closely as they do.

That is not the only road this word took. Languages reached by the **overland** trade routes out of northern China took a different syllable of the same Chinese word: **Hindi *chai*, Russian *chai*, Turkish *çay***. One plant, one Chinese word, two pronunciations of it — split by whether a language got the word from a ship or a caravan. *Kaffee*'s three-hop route through Turkish and Italian was its own single path; tea forked into two.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Tee” — say it *TAY*, not *tea*
- “Tee, bitte.” — “Kaffee, bitte.” — same pattern, two drinks
- the fork — “tê, thee, Tee, tea” by sea; “chai, chai, çay” overland

Before you move on

Give “tea” with its article, and say it correctly. (**Der Tee** — *TAY*.) Which language gave German the word, and by what route? (**Hokkien Chinese *tê*, by way of Dutch sea trade.**) Name one language that got the same Chinese word overland instead. (**Hindi, Russian, or Turkish.**) Does *Tee* sound the way it’s spelled in English? (**No** — same letters, different vowel.)

41.3 die Milch — the one that was never borrowed

Kaffee came from Arabic by way of Turkish and Italian. *Tee* came from Chinese by way of Dutch. The third drink needed no ship and no caravan — German already had it.

You’ll want to know: die Milch

die Milch — milk. Feminine.

Milch, bitte. — Milk, please.

Sounds you’ll need

German’s **ch** is not one sound but two. After a back vowel like the *a* of *Nacht*, it is a rasp at the back of the throat. After a front vowel or consonant like the *i* of **Milch**, it is soft, made further forward — closer to a hissed *h*. Say *ich* (your own word for “I”) right before *Milch* and you are making the same sound twice.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Milch is native Germanic, from ***meluks**, and further back from Proto-Indo-European ***h₂melg-**, “to milk” — the action came first, and the word for the substance is simply that verb, frozen into a noun. English **milk** is the exact same word, inherited rather than borrowed, which makes it the cousin of German *Melker* (“milker”) the way *denken* is the cousin of *Dank*.

So the trio closes the way the food lesson did: **Wasser** was native beside the loanword **Wein**; here, **Milch** is native beside the loanwords

Kaffee and **Tee**. Two loans, one inherited word, in both chapters — but this time the loans arrived from opposite directions on the map, one overland and one by sea, and only the native word needed no journey at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Milch” — the soft *ch*, as in *ich*
- all three requests — “Kaffee, bitte. Tee, bitte. Milch, bitte.”
- the shape of the chapter — “Wasser native, Wein borrowed; Milch native, Kaffee and Tee borrowed”

Before you move on

Give “milk” with its article. (**Die Milch.**) Is it native or borrowed? (**Native** — inherited **meluks*, the twin of English *milk*.) Which two drinks in this chapter were borrowed, and from where? (**Kaffee** from Arabic/Turkish/Italian; **Tee** from Hokkien Chinese by way of Dutch.) Which earlier chapter set up the exact same native/borrowed shape? (**Chapter 11 — Wasser and Wein.**)

Chapter 42

Friend and Family

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a friend, male or female, and my family in German, build a feminine person-noun with -in, and say which of the three words is native and which is borrowed.

The chapter closes on Familie, the one Latin loan beside two native words: the reader produces der Freund, die Freundin and die Familie with articles, builds the feminine -in suffix on a masculine person-noun and names its one English fossil (vixen), and states that Familie gathers the very members Chapter 10 already named (Vater, Mutter, Bruder, Schwester, Geschwister). It reaches back to Chapter 2's freut mich, which shares Freund's root, and to Chapter 10's family words.

42.1 der Freund — a word that was already a compliment

You were taught **freut mich** — “pleased to meet you,” literally “it gladdens me.” The person doing the gladdening has a name of their own, and it is built from the very same root.

You'll want to know: der Freund

der Freund — friend (male, or a friend in general). Masculine.

Das ist der Freund. — “This/That is the friend.”

Sounds you'll need

eu is a diphthong said *oy*, exactly as in English *boy*: **Freund** = *FROYND*. It is the same sound spelled **äu** in *Häuser* and *läuft*, just without the umlaut in front of it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Freund and English **friend** are not merely cousins — they are the exact same inherited word, Proto-Germanic **frijōnds*. That word was never a plain noun to begin with: it is a **frozen present participle** of the verb **frijōnā*, “to love,” so *Freund* literally means “the one who is loving.” *freut mich* is built on the same family: both trace to Proto-Indo-European **preyH-*, “to love, to please.” The goddess **Frigg** — whose day German keeps as *Freitag* and English as **Friday** — carries the same root one step further.

Milch needed no journey to reach German; *Freund* did not either — but where *Milch* is a noun that was always a noun, *Freund* is a verb that stopped moving and became one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Freund” — *FROYND*
- “Das ist der Freund.”
- the family — “Freund, freut mich, Frigg, Friday — all one root”

Before you move on

Give “friend” with its article. (**Der Freund**.) What part of speech did *Freund* start out as? (**A verb** — a frozen present participle of “to love.”) Which greeting phrase shares its root? (**Freut mich**.) Which day of the week carries the same PIE root one step further? (**Freitag** / **Friday**, from the goddess **Frigg**.)

42.2 die Freundin — one suffix, and the fox that kept it in English

You have **der Freund**. German does not need a new word for the feminine — it needs one small, reusable ending.

You'll want to know: die Freundin

die Freundin — friend (female). Feminine.

Das ist die Freundin. — “This/That is the (female) friend.”

Grammar Lens: the ending that builds a whole class of nouns

Add **-in** to a masculine noun for a person and you get the feminine: **der Lehrer** → **die Lehrerin** (“teacher”), **der Student** → **die Studentin** (“student”), **der Freund** → **die Freundin**. It is entirely regular, and it works on almost any such noun you will ever meet — one rule, not a new word each time.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

-in is native Germanic, not a Latin import — English inherited the same suffix and mostly stopped using it. Almost mostly: one English word still carries it, fossilized, unrecognized as a suffix by most speakers who use it — **vixen**, “female fox,” built the same way *Freundin* is built. English did not lose this pattern by borrowing over it; it simply stopped reaching for it, and later borrowed French *-ess* (**princess**, **actress**) to do the same job instead. German never stopped.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Freundin” — Freund plus -in
- “Das ist die Freundin.”
- the pattern — “Lehrer/Lehrerin, Student/Studentin, Freund/Freundin”
- the English fossil — “fox, vixen — the same -in, once”

Before you move on

Give “friend (female)” with its article. (**Die Freundin.**) What suffix builds it from *Freund*, and what does that suffix do generally? (**-in** — it makes the feminine of a person-noun.) Is *-in* borrowed or native? (**Native** — English inherited it too.) Name the one English word that still shows it. (**Vixen.**)

42.3 die Familie — the word that gathers Eltern and Geschwister

You have **der Freund** and **die Freundin**, both native, both built on a verb meaning “to love.” The word for the group at home has a completely different history.

You’ll want to know: die Familie

die Familie — family. Feminine.

Das ist die Familie. — “This/That is the family.”

You already have the members: **Vater, Mutter, Bruder, Schwester** — and the collective **Geschwister**, “siblings.” *Familie* is the word that gathers all of them into one group.

Sounds you’ll need

Familie keeps all three vowels distinct: *fa-MEE-lee-eh*, four syllables in careful speech, with the stress on the second. It does not collapse the way English *family* does.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Familie is a Latin loan: **familia**, “household,” related to **famulus**, “servant” or “slave” — a Roman household word, not originally a word about blood relation at all. English **family** borrowed the very same Latin root, by way of Old French, well before German did; German took *Familie* directly from Latin later, in the early modern period, which is why the two loans look so close to identical without one having been copied from the other.

So this small chapter runs the same shape twice: **Freund** and

Freundin are native, built from a Germanic verb meaning “to love”; **Familie** is borrowed, from a Roman word that first meant “household staff.” The food lesson set up exactly this pattern with **Wasser** native beside **Wein** borrowed, and the drinks just ran it a third time with **Milch** beside **Kaffee** and **Tee**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Familie” — *fa-MEE-lee-eh*
- “Das ist die Familie.”
- the members inside it — “Vater, Mutter, Bruder, Schwester, Geschwister”
- native beside borrowed — “Freund, Freundin native; Familie borrowed”

Before you move on

Give “family” with its article. (**Die Familie**.) Is it native or borrowed? (**Borrowed** — Latin *familia*, “household.”) What did *familia* first mean, before “relatives”? (**Household** — kin to *famulus*, “servant.”) Which two words from this chapter are native instead? (**Freund** and **Freundin**.)

Chapter 43

Eyes, Ears, Mouth, Nose

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the eye, ear, mouth, and nose in German, and say which of the four traces to a confirmed ancient root and which does not.

The chapter closes on Nase, cousin of both English nose and Latin nasus by separate descent: the reader produces all four face parts with articles and plurals, names Auge and Ohr as words with confirmed Proto-Indo-European roots, names Mund as inherited but not traced further, and completes Chapter 17's face by running Kopf, Auge, Ohr, Mund, Nase, Hand together. It reaches back to Chapter 17's Kopf and Hand and to Chapter 26's hören, rescuing the disputed 'sharp-eared' link between hören and Ohr.

43.1 das Auge — back to the head, one part at a time

You already have **der Kopf** and **die Hand**. The head has more in it than its own name — starting with what you see with.

You'll want to know: das Auge

das Auge — eye. Neuter.

Das ist das Auge. — “This/That is the eye.”

The plural is **die Augen** — both eyes together, the form you will hear far more often than the singular.

Sounds you'll need

au is a diphthong said *ow*, as in English *how*: **Auge** = *OW-geh*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Auge is Proto-Germanic **augô*, the direct cousin of English **eye** — both inherited, no loan in either direction, from Proto-Indo-European **h₃ek^w-*. That root did not stay hidden in only the Germanic family: Latin turned it into **oculus** (giving English **ocular**, **binoculars**), and Greek into **ophthalmós** (giving English **ophthalmology**). Three branches of one family tree, and English ended up borrowing back two Latin and Greek reflexes of the very root it had already inherited natively as *eye*.

Kopf was a container word that took over the everyday job. *Auge* needed no such replacement — it has meant “eye” the whole way down.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “das Auge” — *OW-geh*; “die Augen” — both eyes
- “Das ist das Auge.”
- the three-family root — “Auge/eye, Latin *oculus*, Greek *ophthalmós*”

Before you move on

Give “eye” with its article, and its plural. (**Das Auge, die Augen.**) Is it native or borrowed? (**Native** — cousin of English *eye*.) Name one English word borrowed from the *same* PIE root by way of Latin or Greek. (**Ocular, binoculars, or ophthalmology.**)

43.2 das Ohr — the part hören was named for

You have the eye. You already have the verb for what the next part does — **hören**, “to hear” — without ever naming the part itself.

You'll want to know: das Ohr

das Ohr — ear. Neuter.

Das ist das Ohr. — “This/That is the ear.”

Plural: **die Ohren**.

Sounds you'll need

Ohr is a single long *o*, said the way you'd say the letter itself in English: **Ohr** = *OHR*, no glide, no second vowel.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Ohr is Proto-Germanic **auzô*, the direct cousin of English **ear** — both from Proto-Indo-European **h₂ous-*. One disputed idea about **hören** was already flagged: some accounts break its root into “sharp” plus “ear,” which would put this very word, *Ohr*, hiding inside the verb for using it. That analysis was marked cited but unsettled there, and it stays unsettled here — a tidy story is not the same as a confirmed one. What is confirmed: *Ohr* and *ear* are not two words that happen to sound alike. They are one Germanic word, unbroken since before English and German were different languages.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “das Ohr” — a plain long *o*; “die Ohren”
- “Das ist das Ohr.”
- the maybe-link — “hören, Ohr — sharp-eared, unsettled”

Before you move on

Give “ear” with its article and plural. (**Das Ohr, die Ohren**.) Is it native or borrowed? (**Native** — cousin of English *ear*.) What disputed idea would put this word inside *hören*? (**The “sharp-eared” root analysis** — cited, not settled.)

43.3 der Mund — where the family tree runs out

Auge and *Ohr* both trace cleanly to Proto-Indo-European. This one does not go nearly as far back with any certainty — and saying so honestly is the lesson.

You'll want to know: der Mund

der Mund — mouth. Masculine.

Das ist der Mund. — “This/That is the mouth.”

Plural: **die Münder**.

Sounds you'll need

Mund takes a short, closed *u*, as in English *put*: **Mund** = *MOONT* (final *d* devoiced, as in *Hand*).

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Mund is Proto-Germanic **munþaz*, and English **mouth** is that same inherited word — no loan in either direction, exactly like *Ohr* and *ear*. Here the two words part company. *Ohr* and *Auge* both trace on to confirmed Proto-Indo-European roots. *Munþaz* does not: proposed deeper connections exist, but no single one is agreed upon by standard references. Rather than hand you a tidy-sounding root that is not actually settled, this lesson stops at Proto-Germanic. An honest “we don’t fully know” is worth more than an invented ancestor.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Mund” — *MOONT*; “die Münder”
- “Das ist der Mund.”
- the honest stop — “Mund and mouth, inherited — but no further-back root is agreed”

Before you move on

Give “mouth” with its article and plural. (**Der Mund, die Münder.**) Is it native or borrowed? (**Native** — cousin of English *mouth*.) Does its root trace to a confirmed PIE ancestor, the way *Auge* and *Ohr* do? (**No** — the trail goes cold at Proto-Germanic.)

43.4 die Nase — the face, complete

Auge. Ohr. Mund. One part of the face is left, and it closes what *Kopf* opened and never finished.

You’ll want to know: die Nase

die Nase — nose. Feminine.

Das ist die Nase. — “This/That is the nose.”

Plural: **die Nasen.**

Sounds you’ll need

Nase opens on a long, open *a*: **Nase** = *NAH-zeh*, with the *s* voiced to *z* between two vowels — the mirror image of *Hand*’s final *d* devoicing to *t*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Nase is Proto-Germanic **nasō*, the inherited cousin of English **nose** — and, further back, of Latin **nasus**, which gave English **nasal** and **nostril**. One Proto-Indo-European root, **nas-*, split into Germanic and into Latin independently; German *Nase* and the Latin-derived word are family by **descent**, exactly like *rot* and *rouge*, never by borrowing.

That gives this small face four parts with four different shapes of story: **Auge** and **Ohr** trace cleanly to confirmed PIE roots; **Mund** is inherited but its root before Proto-Germanic is not agreed upon; **Nase** traces to a root Latin also inherited, on its own branch. Four native words, four different depths of certainty — which is the honest way etymology actually looks, not four identical tidy stories.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “die Nase” — *NAH-zeh*; “die Nasen”
- “Das ist die Nase.”
- the whole face — “Kopf, Auge, Ohr, Mund, Nase, Hand”
- the cousin — “Nase, nose, nasus — one PIE root, two families”

Before you move on

Give “nose” with its article and plural. (**Die Nase, die Nasen.**) Which Latin word is its distant cousin, and what English word does that Latin word give? (**Nasus**, giving **nasal**.) Name all five face and head words from Chapters 17 and 30. (**Kopf, Auge, Ohr, Mund, Nase.**) Which of the four words of this chapter does not trace past Proto-Germanic? (**Mund.**)

Chapter 44

Arm, Finger, Foot, Heart

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the arm, finger, foot, and heart in German, completing the Hand/Arm/Finger/Fuß/Herz table Chapter 17 named but did not finish teaching, and say which of the four shows Grimm's law and which sits outside it.

The chapter closes on Herz, the third word in the book to show Grimm's law's k-to-h swap: the reader produces all four words with articles, names Arm as a word outside Grimm's law's reach entirely, Fuß as a second p-to-f case beside Vater, and Finger's disputed link to fünf, and finally completes the five-word table Chapter 17 printed but only taught one-fifth of. It reaches back to Chapter 17's Hand and Grimm's law, Chapter 26's hören, and Chapter 22's Hund, all three of which supply the k-to-h comparison.

44.1 der Arm — the word Hand's own table already named

The *Hand* lesson ran a table — **Hand, Arm, Finger, Fuß, Herz** — to show how closely German and English match on the body. Only *Hand* was actually taught. Here is the second name from that table.

You'll want to know: der Arm

der Arm — arm. Masculine.

Das ist der Arm. — “This/That is the arm.”

Plural: **die Arme**.

Sounds you'll need

Arm is said almost exactly as it is spelled, with German's open *ah* vowel: **Arm** = *AHRM*. Of everything in this chapter, it is the smallest gap between the German word and its English cousin.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Arm is Proto-Germanic **armaz*, the direct cousin of English **arm**, from Proto-Indo-European **h₂er-*, “to fit together, to join.” That same root, by a separate Latin path, gave English **art** (a fitting-together of skill) and **harmony** by way of Greek. *Vater/father* and *Fuß/foot* both show Grimm's law loudly, because their starting consonants were exactly the ones the law changed. *Arm* shows why the law is a **rule about specific sounds**, not a blanket difference between German and English: the consonants in **armaz* were never in the law's path, so nothing had to move, and *Arm* and *arm* still look like the same word today for the same reason *Hand* and *hand* do.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Arm” — *AHRM*; “die Arme”
- “Das ist der Arm.”
- the point — “Grimm's law only moves the sounds in its path; Arm's sounds were never in it”

Before you move on

Give “arm” with its article and plural. (**Der Arm, die Arme**.) Which earlier table already named this word? (**Hand**'s table — *Hand, Arm, Finger, Fuß, Herz*.) Why does *Arm* look almost identical to English *arm*, when *Vater/father* do not? (**Its sounds were never in Grimm's law's path.**)

44.2 der Finger — maybe “one of the five”

The third name from the *Hand* table, and the first numbers come back for a cameo.

You’ll want to know: der Finger

der Finger — finger. Masculine, spelled and said almost exactly like English.

Das ist der Finger. — “This/That is the finger.”

Plural: **die Finger** — unchanged, one of the small set of German plurals that add nothing at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Finger is Proto-Germanic **fingraz*, inherited straight into English with no change of shape at all — the closest match of any word in this chapter.

Why it’s said this way

You were taught **fünf**, “five,” from Germanic **fimf*. One proposed account connects **fingraz* to that very number, as if a finger were once simply “one of the five.” It is a satisfying story, and it shows up often — but it is reported by standard references as **plausible, not proven**: the sound changes needed to get from **fimf* to **fingraz* are not fully regular, so the link stays a proposal rather than a settled fact. Held loosely, the way *hören* held “sharp-eared”.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Finger” — “die Finger”, unchanged plural
- “Das ist der Finger.”
- the maybe-link — “Finger, fünf — plausible, not proven”

Before you move on

Give “finger” with its article and plural. (**Der Finger, die Finger** — unchanged.) What number might *Finger* be built on, and how certain is that link? (**Fünf, “five”** — **plausible, not proven.**) Name one other word in this book that carries the same kind of unsettled-but-cited etymology. (**Hören’s** “sharp-eared” account.)

44.3 der Fuß — Grimm’s law, on a second word

One name left on the *Hand* table, and it turns out to run the very same sound-law you already learned on a completely different word.

You’ll want to know: der Fuß

der Fuß — foot. Masculine.

Das ist der Fuß. — “This/That is the foot.”

Plural: **die Füße** — the umlaut marking more than one, the same fronting pattern behind *Mann* → *Männer*.

Sounds you’ll need

Fuß = *FOOSS*, a long *u* followed by the sharp *s* spelled **ß**. The colour words already gave you the rule this word follows exactly: **ß** after a **long** vowel, **ss** after a short one — the same reason *weiß* keeps its **ß** while *Fluss* does not.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Fuß is Proto-Germanic **fōts*, cousin of English **foot**, from Proto-Indo-European **pōds*. That opening **p** → **f** is the very shift **Vater/father** showed you — Grimm’s law, run again here on an unrelated word, with the identical result: Latin kept the old *p* in **ped-** (giving English **pedal, pedestrian**), Germanic moved it to *f* in both *Fuß* and *foot*.

This chapter has now shown you two shapes of Grimm’s law and one word that never needed it at all: **Vater** and **Fuß** both shift *p* → *f*; **Arm** sits outside the law’s reach entirely, unchanged in both languages.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “der Fuß” — *FOOSS*; “die Füße”
- “Das ist der Fuß.”
- the shift, twice — “Vater/father, Fuß/foot — both p to f”

Before you move on

Give “foot” with its article and plural. (**Der Fuß, die Füße.**)
Which family word already showed this same sound-law step?
(**Vater/father**, both $p \rightarrow f$.) Why does *Fuß* keep its **ß** while *Fluss*
does not? (**Long vowel before it, by the eszett rule.**)

44.4 das Herz — the body list, complete at last

The *Hand* lesson printed a five-word table and taught you one of them. This lesson teaches the fifth and closes it.

You’ll want to know: das Herz

das Herz — heart. Neuter — the one organ word in this chapter that breaks the masculine pattern of *Arm*, *Finger* and *Fuß*.

Das ist das Herz. — “This/That is the heart.”

Plural: **die Herzen.**

Sounds you’ll need

Herz takes a short, open *e*, as in English *bed*: **Herz** = *HAIRTS*, the *z* said *ts*, exactly as in *Katze*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Herz is Proto-Germanic **hertan*, cousin of English **heart**, from Proto-Indo-European **kērd-*. The opening consonant is Grimm’s law again — old **k** became Germanic **h** — the identical step already heard on **hören** (against Greek *akoúein*, English *acoustic*) and on **Hund**

(against Latin *canis*). Three separate words, one law, heard a third time: *k* stays *k* in the languages that didn't shift, and softens to *h* in every Germanic one.

That five-word list is finally complete. **Hand** was taught that chapter; **Arm**, **Finger**, **Fuß** and now **Herz** waited fourteen chapters for their turn. All five are native Germanic, all five are direct cousins of their English translations, and not one of them was borrowed from anywhere.

Grammar Lens: the whole chapter, run once more

Run this chapter's four words back to back: **der Arm**, said almost exactly as spelled, sitting outside Grimm's law entirely; **der Finger**, identical to English and maybe — not certainly — built on **fünf**; **der Fuß**, the *p* → *f* Grimm's-law twin of *Vater*, its **ß** long-vowel-marked exactly as Chapter 13 taught; and **das Herz**, the *k* → *h* twin of *hören* and *Hund*. Four words, four different sound-law stories, and not one of them borrowed.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “das Herz” — *HAIRTS*; “die Herzen”
- “Das ist das Herz.”
- the whole list, complete — “Hand, Arm, Finger, Fuß, Herz”
- the k-to-h swap, three times — “Hund/canis, hören/akoúein, Herz/kardia”

Before you move on

Give “heart” with its article and plural. (**Das Herz, die Herzen**.) Which two earlier words showed the same Grimm's-law *k* → *h* swap? (**Hören** and **Hund**.) Name all five words from that original table, now that all five are taught. (**Hand, Arm, Finger, Fuß, Herz**.) Which one breaks the chapter's masculine pattern, and how? (**Herz** — it is **neuter**.)

Chapter 45

Not One, Not a Scrap

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say that I have none of a thing, choose correctly between German's two negatives, and put the second one where the sentence wants it.

Every noun the book owns is cancelled and every verb it owns is refused, in one pass: the six things on the table, the household, the four words on the face, and the verbs. The chapter costs two new words and one welded ending, because kein is ein with two letters on the front and keinen carries the -en that the einen lesson already handed over as a bare word.

45.1 kein — “no,” and the two words hiding inside it

Say the four words that closed the last chapter — **Arm, Finger, Fuß, Herz** — and then say **nicht** and **eins**. Two of those six are about to be welded together.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the four words for what is on your face — *Auge, Ohr, Mund, Nase*

You'll want to know: kein

kein — “no,” “not a,” in front of a *der*-word or a *das*-word.

Said *kine*, rhyming with English *mine*: the **ei** is the *eye* sound you have had since **eins**, and the final **n** is plain.

Where you would say **ein**, say **kein** to cancel it:

ein Hund → **kein Hund** — “a dog” → “no dog”

ein Brot → **kein Brot** — “a loaf” → “no loaf”

Nothing else in the phrase moves. The **k** goes on the front of the word you already have, and the noun stands exactly as it stood.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

kein is Old High German *nihein*, which is **ni** (“not”) plus **ein** (“one”). *Not one*. The *ni-* wore down to nothing over a thousand years and left the *k* that had crept in beside it, and the modern word no longer looks like its own parts.

English did the identical thing with its own two words, and English still shows the seam:

the pieces	what they made
<i>ne</i> + <i>ān</i> (“not” + “one”)	nān → none , no
<i>ni</i> + <i>ein</i> (“not” + “one”)	nihein → kein

So “*kein Brot*” and “*no bread*” are the same sentence, built twice out of the same two ideas by two languages doing it separately.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “kein” — *kine*, rhyming with English *mine*
- the pair — “ein Hund”, then “kein Hund”
- it with food — “kein Brot”
- it with the body words from the last chapter — “kein Arm”, “kein Finger”
- the two pieces, then the word — “ni ... ein ... kein”

Twice through: “ein Hund, kein Hund.”

Before you move on

Which word does *kein* cancel? (**ein**.) What two pieces are inside it? (**Ni** and **ein**.) Which English word was built from the same two? (**None**.) Which body word from the last chapter shows Grimm's *p* → *f*? (**Fuß**.) Next: *kein* in front of a *die*-word.

45.2 keine — the same word, in front of a *die*

Kein Hund. Now do the same to **eine Katze** before you read on. You already know the answer; you learned it on *ein* and *eine* long ago.

You'll want to know: **keine**

keine — the shape *kein* takes in front of a *die*-word.

eine Katze → **keine Katze** — “a cat” → “no cat”

eine Nacht → **keine Nacht** — “a night” → “no night”

And it is the shape in front of a **plural**, whatever the noun's own gender, because a German plural takes *die*:

keine Hände — “no hands”

The extra **-e** is not a new ending. It is *eine*'s **-e**, unmoved. Put the *k* on the front of the word you already say and stop there.

Grammar Lens: one word cancels the whole family

Something worth noticing before the next lesson complicates it: German gets **two** jobs out of these two shapes. *Keine Katze* is “no cat” — one cat, and there is not one. *Keine Hände* is “no hands” — however many there might have been, there are none. English needs *no* for the first and *no* for the second and *not any* for a third case, and never had to decide which; German lets the noun's own article decide it, so there is nothing extra to remember. Mass words take *kein* and *keine* too, on the same reasoning — **die Milch** is a *die*-word, so:

Ich habe keine Milch. — “I have no milk.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “eine Katze”, then “keine Katze”
- the other pair, from the chapter before — “ein Hund, kein Hund”
- with a mass word — “Ich habe keine Milch.”
- with a face word — “keine Nase”
- with a plural — “keine Hände”
- the sentence everyone says — “Ich habe keine Zeit.”

Twice through: “Ich habe keine Zeit.”

Before you move on

Which shape goes in front of *Katze*, and why? (**Keine** — *Katze* is a *die*-word, so it takes *eine*, so it takes *keine*.) Which shape goes in front of a plural? (**Keine**, because every German plural takes *die*.) Say “I have no time.” (**Ich habe keine Zeit.**) Next: what happens when the thing you do not have is the *object* of *haben*.

45.3 keinen — for the thing you do *not* have

Say “I have a brother” — **Ich habe einen Bruder.** That lesson handed you *einen* as a single word and promised the system behind it would come later. Some of it arrives now, and it costs nothing, because you are about to watch a word you met yesterday do the identical thing.

You’ll want to know: keinen

keinen — “no,” “not a,” for a *der*-word that is the thing being had.

Ich habe einen Bruder. → Ich habe keinen Bruder.

The *-en* is the one from *einen*, unchanged. You are not learning a second ending; you are watching the ending you already own ride along on the negative word, because *kein* is *ein* with two letters welded to the front and nothing else touched.

Grammar Lens: three shapes, and the one that moves

Line the three up against what they stand in front of and one thing jumps out:

in front of	naming it	having it
a <i>der</i> -word (<i>Hund</i>)	kein Hund	keinen Hund
a <i>die</i> -word (<i>Schwester</i>)	keine Schwester	keine Schwester
a <i>das</i> -word (<i>Brot</i>)	kein Brot	kein Brot

Only the *der* line changes. *Die* and *das* words look identical whether they are the thing doing or the thing done to — which is why you have got this far without meeting the question at all, and why *einen* could be handed over as a plain word for twenty-three chapters.

That is the whole of what German asks of you here, and it is much less than the reputation suggests: **one line out of three moves, and it is the *der* line.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the pair — “Ich habe einen Bruder”, then “Ich habe keinen Bruder”
- with the broken forms of *haben* — “du hast keinen Hund”, “er hat keinen Hund”
- the drink that is a *der*-word — “Ich habe keinen Kaffee.”
- the drink that is a *der*-word too — “Ich habe keinen Tee.”
- the *die*-word, which does not move — “Ich habe keine Schwester.”

Twice through: “Ich habe keinen Bruder und keine Schwester.”

Before you move on

Which of the three shapes changes when the noun is the thing being had? (Only the **der** one — *kein* becomes *keinen*.) Where have you seen that *-en* before? (On **einen**, in *ich habe einen Bruder*.) Say “I have no brother and no sister.” (**Ich habe keinen Bruder und keine Schwester**.) Next: which negative word to reach for when there is no noun to cancel.

45.4 **kein oder nicht** — picking the right one

You now own two words that both mean “not”. Say them: **kein** and **nicht**. German makes you choose, and the choosing turns out to be mechanical.

- *Recall*: two chapters back, the two words for what you hear with and what you eat with — *Ohr* and *Mund*

Grammar Lens: one cancels a noun, one cancels the rest

kein goes in front of a noun that would otherwise have carried *ein*. **nicht** cancels anything else at all.

Test it by asking whether *ein* could stand where you are about to negate. If it could, reach for *kein*; if it could not, reach for *nicht*.

Ich habe keinen Hund. — no *Hund*. A noun, so *kein*.

Das ist nicht gut. — nothing to put *ein* in front of. *Gut* is a quality, so *nicht*.

Ich verstehe nicht. — the verb itself is what fails. *Nicht*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The two words are cousins, and knowing it makes the split easier to hold. Both begin life as the ancient negative particle **ni**, and each picked up a different second half:

- **ni** + **ein** (“one”) → **nihein** → **kein**, which cancels *a thing*.
- **ni** + a word meaning *a whit, a scrap* → **niwiht** → **nicht**, which

cancels *anything at all*.

English ran the same fork: *ne* + *ān* gave **none**, *ne* + *ā-wiht* gave **naught** and then **not**. The choice is a fossil of what each word once counted.

Your turn

Say which negative each one wants, out loud, before you say the sentence.

Say these aloud:

- a noun, so *kein* — “Ich habe keinen Hund.”
- a quality, so *nicht* — “Ich bin nicht müde.”
- a verb, so *nicht* — “Ich verstehe nicht.”
- a noun, so *kein* — “Ich habe keine Zeit.”
- a verb, so *nicht* — “Ich schlafe nicht.”
- the three verbs of the body at rest, all cancelled — “ich sitze nicht, ich stehe nicht, ich schlafe nicht”

Twice through: “Ich habe keinen Hund. Ich bin nicht müde.”

Before you move on

What question decides the choice? (Could **ein** have stood there? If yes, *kein*; if no, *nicht*.) Which one cancels a quality? (**Nicht**.) Which ancient word starts both of them? (**Ni**.) Say “I do not understand.” (**Ich verstehe nicht**.) Next: where in the sentence that *nicht* has to stand.

45.5 nicht am Ende — where the “not” goes

You can pick the right negative. Now the last piece of this chapter: German is fussy about *where* **nicht** stands, and the fussiness has one cause you can see through.

Grammar Lens: it stands in front of what it cancels

nicht stands **immediately in front of the word it cancels** — and when what it cancels is the verb itself, there is nothing in front of it to stand before, so it goes to the **end**.

Both halves of that are one habit, seen from two sides:

Das ist nicht gut. — the quality is cancelled, so *nicht* leads it.

Ich wohne nicht in Berlin. — the place is cancelled, so *nicht* leads it.

Ich verstehe nicht. — the verbing is cancelled. There is no word left to lead, and *nicht* falls to the far end.

English parks its *not* beside the helper verb and leaves it — *I do not live in Berlin* — so German's *nicht* sounds to an English ear as though it drifts. It is being aimed.

Why it's said this way

The end-of-sentence habit has a history. **Nicht** began as a **noun** — *niwih*, “not a whit”, a scrap of a thing — and a German object goes late. So the old sentence was something like “*I understand not-a-scrap*”, with the scrap sitting where any object sits.

The meaning drained out of the noun and left the position behind. A separable prefix goes to that same far end, for a related reason:

German finishes a sentence with the piece that completes its sense.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- cancelling a quality — “Das ist nicht gut.”
- cancelling a place — “Ich wohne nicht in Berlin.”
- cancelling the verb, so *nicht* goes last — “Ich verstehe nicht.”

- the four verbs of taking things in and putting them out, each cancelled — “ich höre nicht, ich sehe nicht, ich lese nicht, ich schreibe nicht”
- aim it, then move it — “Das ist nicht gut”, then “Ich höre nicht”

Twice through: “Ich verstehe nicht. Das ist nicht gut.”

Before you move on

Where does *nicht* stand against an adjective? (**Straight in front** — *nicht gut*.) Against the verb? (**At the end**.) What was *nicht* before it was a negative? (A **noun**, *niwih*.) Say the three sentences.

45.6 Nichts davon — the chapter, run cold

Two questions before you say anything. Which negative goes in front of a noun, and what decides which of its three shapes you use? Then: where does the other negative stand?

Your turn: everything on the table, cancelled

Six things this book has put in front of you to eat and drink. Say each one's article first, then cancel it.

Say these aloud:

- *das* Brot → “kein Brot”
- *das* Wasser → “kein Wasser”
- *der* Wein → “kein Wein”, and having it, “keinen Wein”
- *der* Kaffee → “kein Kaffee”, “keinen Kaffee”
- *der* Tee → “kein Tee”, “keinen Tee”
- *die* Milch → “keine Milch”, which does not move

Your turn: the distant band — the people and the face

Now reach further back — the animals, the household, and the four words on your face. Nothing here is new; the negative in front of it is.

Say these aloud:

- the two animals — “kein Hund” and “keine Katze”
- the household, having none of them — “keinen Bruder, keine Schwester, keine Mutter, keinen Vater”
- the pair the *-in* suffix made — “keinen Freund, keine Freundin”
- the collective — “keine Familie”
- the four on your face — “kein Auge, kein Ohr, keinen Mund, keine Nase”
- which of those four is a *die*-word, and prove it by its negative — “*die* Nase, keine Nase”

Your turn: the verbs, refused

Say these aloud:

- the verb cancelled, so *nicht* goes last — “Ich verstehe nicht.”
- the quality cancelled, so *nicht* leads it — “Das ist nicht gut.”
- “Ich bin nicht müde.”
- the noun, so *kein* — “Ich habe keine Zeit.”
- both in one breath — “Ich habe keine Zeit und ich verstehe nicht.”

Before you move on

Say the three shapes and what each stands in front of. (***Kein*** before a *der* or *das* word, ***keine*** before a *die* word and every plural, ***keinen*** before a *der* word that is being had.) What two pieces is *kein* built from? (**Ni** and **ein** — “not one”.) And when does the other negative go to the end of the sentence? (When what it cancels is **the verb**.) Next: the question that has no question word in it.

Chapter 46

When the Verb Steps to the Front

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask a question that expects yes or no, give a one-word command, and ask who, when and why.

Every statement in the book becomes a question and every verb becomes a command. Three of the six W-words were already owned, so the chapter buys the whole interrogative system for three new words plus two sentence shapes – and the fourth, fifth and sixth W arrive predicted rather than memorised, because Grimm’s law lines German w- up against English wh- one word at a time.

46.1 Wohnst du in Berlin? — the question that has no question word

You have owned **ja**, **nein** and **doch** since the yes-and-no chapter, and you have never been shown the question they answer. Say the three first, then read on.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the two negatives and what each cancels — *kein* for a noun, *nicht* for the rest

Grammar Lens: the verb moves to the front

To ask something answerable with *ja* or *nein*, take the statement and put the **verb first**.

Nothing else changes. No extra word, no rising list of rules:

Du wohnst in Berlin. → Wohnst du in Berlin? · Er

hat einen Bruder. → Hat er einen Bruder?

The verb has stood in slot two for the whole book. Move it one place left and the sentence becomes a question.

Why it's said this way

English used to do this and stopped. “*Speak you German*” is ordinary Elizabethan word order. Somewhere after Shakespeare, English stopped moving its verbs and built a machine instead — the **do** in *do you speak German*, which means nothing at all. German never built it, because it never lost the habit. The German question is the older one; the English *do* is the innovation.

Your turn

Say the statement, then flip it.

Say these aloud:

- “Du wohnst in Berlin.” → “Wohnst du in Berlin?”
- “Er hat einen Bruder.” → “Hat er einen Bruder?”
- the three drinks, asked for — “Hast du Kaffee, Tee, Milch?”
- answer with last chapter’s negative — “Nein, ich habe keinen Kaffee.”
- the contradiction — a negative question, answered “Doch!”

Twice through: “Wohnst du in Berlin? — Ja. / Nein.”

Before you move on

What turns a German statement into a yes-or-no question? (**The verb moves to first place.**) What did English build when it stopped? (The empty **do**.) Which answer-word contradicts a negative question? (**Doch.**)

46.2 Komm! — the sentence with no subject at all

Take **kommen** and strip the *-en* off it. What is left is the stem, **komm-**, and it is about to be a whole sentence on its own.

Grammar Lens: the stem, alone

To tell one person you are on *du* terms with to do something, say the **stem and nothing else**.

Komm! — “Come!” · **Geh!** — “Go!” · **Sag!** — “Say!”

Two things are missing, and both matter. There is **no ending** — this is the one shape of a German verb that wears none. And there is **no pronoun**, in a language that has spent forty chapters insisting the subject slot be filled.

A command is the single place German lets that slot stay empty, because the person addressed is standing right there.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

The bare stem is the oldest shape a verb has anywhere in this family. English kept it too — *come, go, say, open, listen* — which is why an English command and a German one line up word for word and syllable for syllable:

Hör! — *Hear!* · **Sieh!** — *See!* · **Lies!** — *Read!* ·
Schreib! — *Write!*

Two of those hide something you already know: the vowel of *sehen* and *lesen* breaks in the *du* form, and the command takes the broken vowel with it. **Sieh** and **lies**, not *seh* and *les*.

Your turn

Find the stem before you say the command.

Say these aloud:

- *kommen* → “Komm!”
- *gehen* → “Geh!”

- sagen → “Sag!”
- the pair that opens and closes — “Öffne!” and “Schließ!”
- the one that hears — “Hör!”
- the two with a broken vowel — “Lies!” and “Sieh!”

Twice through: “Komm! Geh! Hör!”

Before you move on

What shape is a German command? (**The bare stem** — no ending.) What does it leave out that German otherwise demands? (**The pronoun.**) Both this and a yes-or-no question begin with the verb — so what tells them apart? (The question **has a subject after the verb**; the command has none.) Next: the six question words, and the letter they all begin with.

46.3 wer — “who,” and the letter the whole family shares

You already own three question words — **was**, **wo**, **wie**. Say them, and notice what all three start with.

You’ll want to know: wer

wer — “who.”

Said *vair*: the **w** is a *v*, as it has been since *wie* and *wir*, and the **e** is long.

Wer ist das? — “Who is that?”

Take care with one trap. German **wer** means *who*; German **wo** means *where*, and an English eye reads it as *who*. The two swap appearances across the languages, and only practice fixes it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

wer is Latin **quis** and English **who**, from Proto-Indo-European **k^wis*. Grimm’s law turned **k^w** into Germanic **hw**; English wrote *hw* and

flipped it to **wh**; German wore the *h* off. That one step lines the two languages up letter for letter:

German	English
wer	who
was	what
wo	where
wann	when
warum	why

Five of those six you can now predict rather than memorise, and the sixth breaks the pattern in both languages at once: German **wie** against English **how**, where English lost the *w* instead of the *h*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wer” — *vair*, and “Wer ist das?”
- the trap, both ways — “wer” is *who*, “wo” is *where*
- about the people you know — “Wer ist der Freund? Wer ist die Freundin?”
- “Wer ist die Mutter? Wer ist der Vater?”
- the command from the last lesson, then the question — “Sag!” then “Wer ist das?”

Twice through: “Wer ist das?”

Before you move on

What does *wer* mean, and what is the trap? (**Who** — and *wo*, which looks like it, means *where*.) Which Latin word is its cousin? (**Quis**.) What sound law turns English *wh-* into German *w-*? (**Grimm’s law**, which made *k^w* into *hw*; English kept the *h*, German dropped it.) Next: the fifth W.

46.4 wann — “when,” and the question the calendar was waiting for

Predict this one before you read it. English *when* begins *wh*-.
What must the German be?

You’ll want to know: wann

wann — “when.”

Said *vann*, with a short flat *a* and the *v*-sound on the front. The double **nn** keeps the vowel short, which is the same spelling habit you met in *Mann* and *kann*.

Wann ist das? — “When is that?”

The clock chapter gave you **Es ist ein Uhr** and no way to ask for it.
Now you have one:

Wann? — Um ein Uhr.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

wann and English **when** are one word, on the same **k^w*- root that gave *wer* and *who*. So the second row of the table is filled in by the rule rather than by memory, and the vocabulary this book spent five chapters on is suddenly askable:

Wann? — Am Montag. · Wann? — Im Januar. ·
Wann? — Im Dezember.

Seven weekdays, twelve months and four seasons have been sitting in your head with no question attached to them. One word attaches all twenty-three.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “wann” — *vann*, short *a*
- “Wann ist das?”

- two weekdays as answers — “Am Montag”, “Am Samstag”
- the day the sun owns — “Am Sonntag”
- two months — “Im Januar”, “Im Dezember”
- the four seasons — “im Frühling, im Sommer, im Herbst, im Winter”

Twice through: “Wann? — Am Montag.”

Before you move on

Say “when” in German and name the English word it is. (**Wann**; *when*.) Which root does it share with *wer*? (***k^w**-.) Answer *wann* with a weekday and with a month. (**Am Montag. Im Januar.**) Which season is English *harvest*? (**Herbst**.) Next: the sixth W, and the two words hiding inside it.

46.5 warum — “why,” and the two words welded inside it

Five W-words are yours: **wer**, **was**, **wo**, **wann**, **wie**. Say all five, then take the sixth.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the negative for a *der*-word you do not have — *keinen*

You’ll want to know: warum

warum — “why.”

Said *va-ROOM*, and the stress is on the **second** syllable — which is unusual enough to be worth marking, because almost every German word you have met so far leans on its first.

Warum? — “Why?”

Warum lernst du Deutsch? — “Why are you learning German?”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

warum is two words that stopped being two. The first half, **war-**, is an old shape of **was**; the second, **-um**, is the ordinary German **um**, “about”. *About what.*

English built its own *why*-word the identical way and it is still readable: **wherefore** is *where* plus *for*, “for what”. Shakespeare’s “*wherefore art thou Romeo*” is not asking where Romeo is. It is asking **why**.

So both languages fused a question word to a small preposition, and both ended up with a *why* that once meant *about what* or *for what*. German’s fusion went further and hid the seam; English’s is still visible, which is why *wherefore* looks quaint and *warum* looks like a single word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “warum” — *va-ROOM*, stress on the second half
- the two pieces, then the word — “war ... um ... warum”
- “Warum lernst du Deutsch?”
- the whole set, in one breath — “wer, was, wo, wann, warum, wie”
- ask about the drink — “Warum Tee?”

Twice through: “Warum lernst du Deutsch?”

Before you move on

Which syllable of *warum* is stressed? (**The second** — *va-ROOM*.)
 What two words are welded inside it? (An old **was** and **um**, “about”.) Which English word was built the same way?
 (**Wherefore** — *where* plus *for*.) Say all six W-words. Next: the chapter, run cold.

46.6 Frag mich! — the chapter, run cold

Two sentence shapes put the verb first, and they mean different things. Name both. Then say the six W-words in one breath.

Your turn: ask about the people and the clock

Say these aloud:

- “Wer ist das?” about each — “der Bruder, die Schwester, die Mutter, der Vater”, and the four Latin cousins they keep: *frater*, *soror*, *mater*, *pater*
- “Wann?” answered by the clock — “Um ein Uhr”, and the Latin word inside *Uhr*: *hora*

Your turn: the distant band — flip every statement you own

Every statement in this book can now be a question. Take the verb and move it left.

Say these aloud:

- “Du wohnst in Berlin.” → “Wohnst du in Berlin?”; “Du lernst Deutsch.” → “Lernst du Deutsch?”
- the six things to eat and drink, asked for — “Hast du Kaffee, Tee, Milch, Brot, Wasser, Wein?”
- the two animals, then last chapter’s answer — “Hast du einen Hund?” “Nein, ich habe keinen Hund.” “Hast du eine Katze?” “Nein, ich habe keine Katze.”
- which of those words German bought and which it always had — *Kaffee* and *Tee* came from far away, *Milch* and *Brot* did not

Your turn: commands

Strip the *-en*, then say it.

Say these aloud:

- “Komm! Geh! Sag!”
- “Hör! Öffne! Schließ!”
- “Schreib!”
- the two whose vowel breaks — “Lies! Sieh!”

Before you move on

What turns a statement into a yes-or-no question? (**The verb moves to first place.**) What does a command leave out? (**The pronoun.**) Which sound law lines German *w-* up with English *wh-*? (**Grimm's.**) And which of the six W-words is two words welded together? (***Warum*** — an old *was* plus *um*.)

Chapter 47

Which One, and the Form the Book Owed You

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask which one and how many, put a der-word into the shape it takes when something is done to it, say that a thing exists, and leave an adjective alone when it follows the verb.

Every der-word in the book is run through the shape it takes when something happens to it, and every adjective is run through the shape it takes when nothing does. The chapter costs five items and pays a debt the einen lesson wrote down in plain sight: GE-C14-einen told the reader to take einen 'as a word for now, not as a system', and named the chapter that would explain it. This is that chapter.

47.1 welcher — “which,” and the two pieces inside it

Wer asks which person. *Was* asks which thing. Neither can ask **which one of these**, and that is the word this lesson buys.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the three shapes of the negative article — *kein, keine, keinen*

You'll want to know: welcher

welcher — “which”, standing in front of a noun.

The ending copies the article the noun already takes, so you have nothing new to learn once you know its gender: **welcher** for a *der*-word, **welche** for a *die*-word, **welches** for a *das*-word.

Welcher Hund? · Welche Katze? · Welches Brot?

Said *VEL-cher*, with the soft ich-sound of *ich* and *nicht* in the middle.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

welcher is two ancient pieces: **hwa-** — the *what* you already meet at the front of every W-word — and **-līk**, “like, bodily form”, the ancestor of English **-ly** and of the word **like** itself. *What-like*. English built its own word out of the very same two: *hwā* + *līc* gave **hwilc**, which wore down to **which**. So both languages ask “which one” by asking “what kind”, and the shared seam is still visible if you set *wel-cher* beside *wh-ich*.

Your turn

Say the article first, then the matching shape.

Say these aloud:

- *der* Hund → “Welcher Hund?”
- *die* Katze → “Welche Katze?”
- *das* Brot → “Welches Brot?”
- *der* Kaffee → “Welcher Kaffee?”
- *die* Milch → “Welche Milch?”

Twice through: “Welcher Hund? Welche Katze? Welches Brot?”

Before you move on

What decides the ending on *welcher*? (**The article the noun takes.**) Give all three. (***Welcher, welche, welches.***) What two pieces is it built from? (**Hwa-** and **-līk** — “what-like”.) Which English word was built the same way? (***Which.***)

47.2 wie viel, wie viele — how much and how many

You can count to twenty and you cannot ask anybody for a number. Say **zwölf** and **zwanzig**, then take the question that was missing.

You'll want to know: wie viel · wie viele

wie viel — “how much”, for something you would not count.
wie viele — “how many”, for things you would.

Wie viel Milch? — how much milk. · **Wie viele Hunde?**
 — how many dogs.

English draws the identical line with two words too, *much* against *many*, so nothing is new except the German for it. The **-e** on *viele* is the plural ending you have carried since *die*.

One phrase to bank whole: **Wie viel Uhr ist es?**, literally *how much clock is it*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

viel is Proto-Indo-European **pelh₁-*, “to fill”. Grimm’s law turned that **p** into **f**, as it did in *Fuß* against Latin *pes*, and the word reached English as **full**. The same root sits in Greek *poly-* and Latin *plenus*. German asks *how full* where English asks *how much*.

Your turn

Decide countable or not before you speak.

Say these aloud:

- not countable — “Wie viel Milch, Wasser, Kaffee?”
- countable — “Wie viele Hunde? Wie viele Katzen?”
- the clock phrase, then the answer — “Wie viel Uhr ist es?” “Es ist ein Uhr.”
- the *p* that became *f*, twice — “Fuß und viel”

- the two questions side by side — “Welcher Kaffee?” and “Wie viel Kaffee?”

Twice through: “Wie viel Milch? Wie viele Hunde?”

Before you move on

Which one goes with milk, and why? (**Wie viel** — milk is not counted.) Which goes with dogs? (**Wie viele**.) What English word is *viel*? (**Full**, by the same $p \rightarrow f$ step that gave *Fuß*.) Ask the time. (**Wie viel Uhr ist es?**)

47.3 den — the form the book has owed you since einen

Say **einen** and **keinen**. Both wear an *-en* that no other shape of their word wears, and both were handed to you as plain words with the promise that the system behind them would come later. It comes now.

You’ll want to know: den

den — “the”, for a *der*-word that is the thing being done to.

Der Hund ist hier. → **Ich habe den Hund**.

The dog standing is *der Hund*; the dog being had is *den Hund*. German writes the difference on the article rather than on the noun.

Grammar Lens: one row of three moves

When a noun is the thing being done to, only the **der**-words change shape.

naming it	doing something to it
der Hund	den Hund
die Milch	die Milch
das Brot	das Brot

That is the whole announcement, and it is smaller than German’s reputation suggests. *Die* and *das* stand still. So do their *ein* and *kein* partners — **eine**, **keine**, **ein**, **kein** — while *ein* becomes **einen** and

kein becomes **keinen** on exactly the row where *der* becomes *den*. Three words you already say, all moving together, all on one row. Nothing new has been added; a pattern has been pointed at.

Why it's said this way

English ran this system too and threw nearly all of it away. Three survivors remain, all pronouns: **whom, him, them**. “*Whom did you see*” is precisely what *den* does. English kept the marking only where it was shortest; German kept it on the article, where it stays visible on every noun.

Your turn

Name it, then do something to it.

Say these aloud:

- “der Hund” → “Ich habe den Hund.”
- “der Wein” → “Ich habe den Wein.”
- “der Kaffee” → “Ich habe den Kaffee.”
- the two that do not move — “das Brot”, “das Wasser”
- the three that move together — “den, einen, keinen”
- ask about it first — “Wie viele Hunde?”, then “Ich habe den Hund”; “Wie viel Kaffee?”, then “Ich habe den Kaffee”

Twice through: “Der Hund — den Hund.”

Before you move on

Which of the three articles changes when its noun is done to? (**Only *der*, which becomes *den*.**) Which two words you already say change on the same row? (***Einen* and *keinen*.**) Which three English words are the last survivors of the same system? (**Whom, him, them.**)

47.4 Der Tag ist gut — the adjective that stays still

Say **gut**, then **guten Tag**, then **gute Nacht**. The same adjective wears three shapes, and you have never been told what decides which.

Grammar Lens: the ending comes from standing in front

A German adjective takes an ending only when it stands **in front of** its noun. After *ist*, it stands bare.

Der Tag ist gut. — bare. The adjective comes after the verb.

Guten Tag. — an ending. The adjective comes before the noun.

So the greeting and the verdict are the same word in two positions, and the position is the whole story. This is the single most economical thing in German adjectives: half of all the adjective forms in the language are **the dictionary word, unchanged**, and you get that half free.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English does the opposite of both halves: it never inflects an adjective at all, in either position. *The day is good, good day* — one shape, always.

So every German adjective you own is already usable after *ist* with no work:

Die Katze ist schwarz. · Der Wein ist rot. · Ich bin müde.

The colours from the colour chapters, the *müde* from the wellbeing chapter and the *gut* from page one all behave the same way the moment a verb stands in front of them.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- bare, after the verb — “Der Tag ist gut.”
- with an ending, in front — “Guten Tag.”
- the colours, all bare — “Der Wein ist rot”, “Die Katze ist schwarz”, “Das Brot ist weiß”
- two more bare ones — “Ich bin müde”, “Das ist schön”
- the two that emigrated to Romance — “blau” and “blank”

Twice through: “Der Tag ist gut. Guten Tag.”

Before you move on

When does a German adjective take an ending? (**Only in front of its noun.**) What shape does it wear after *ist*? (**The dictionary shape, bare.**) Say the pair that has been on page one since the beginning. (*Der Tag ist gut / guten Tag.*)

47.5 es gibt — “it gives,” which is German for “there is”

You met **es** as the weather’s subject — the *es* that stands for nobody. It has one more famous job, and it needs the form you learned two lessons ago.

You’ll want to know: es gibt

es gibt — “there is”, “there are”. Literally: *it gives*.

Es gibt Kaffee. — “There is coffee.”

Es gibt einen Hund. — “There is a dog.”

Es gibt keinen Kaffee. — “There is no coffee.”

The phrase never changes shape. Whether one thing exists or twenty, it stays **es gibt** — the *es* is the same empty subject as in the weather, standing in a slot German insists on filling.

Grammar Lens: what follows it is an object

Because *geben* means *give*, the thing that exists is grammatically the thing being **given** — so it takes the done-to form this chapter has taught.

Es gibt den Hund. · Es gibt einen Hund. · Es gibt keinen Hund.

Every one of those is a *der*-word wearing its *-n*, and that is not a special rule for *es gibt*. It is the ordinary rule, arriving in the commonest sentence you will ever want it in.

Four languages, four different verbs for the same idea: German **gives** it, French **has it there**, Spanish **has** it outright, English **puts** it there. Only German's choice makes the thing an object, and that is why *es gibt* is the place a learner meets the case system whether or not anyone explained it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Es gibt Kaffee.” and “Es gibt Tee.”
- with the marked article — “Es gibt einen Hund.”, “Es gibt einen Wein.”
- negated — “Es gibt keinen Kaffee.”, “Es gibt keine Milch.”
- the two uses of the empty *es*, side by side — the weather, then existence
- “Es gibt Brot und Wasser.”

Twice through: “Es gibt keinen Kaffee.”

Before you move on

What does *es gibt* say word for word? (***It gives.***) Does it change when there are many things? (**No** — it never moves.) What form does the thing after it take? (**The done-to form** — *einen, keinen, den.*) Say “there is no coffee.” (**Es gibt keinen Kaffee.**)

47.6 Welchen? — the chapter, run cold

Three questions first. Which row of the three articles moves?
When does an adjective take an ending? What does *es gibt* say
word for word?

Your turn: which one, and how many

Say these aloud:

- the three shapes — “Welcher Hund? Welche Katze? Welches Brot?”
- the uncounted, then the counted — “Wie viel Milch, Wasser, Kaffee?” and “Wie viele Hunde, Katzen?”; then “Welcher Wein? Welcher Tee?”
- refuse each, choosing the negative — “Es ist kein Wein” against “Das ist nicht gut”, and name the test
- as a command — “Sieh den Hund!” and “Hör den Hund!”

Your turn: the distant band — every der-word, done to

Every *der*-word this book owns, moved. Name the article, then move it.
Say these aloud:

- the drinks — “der Kaffee, den Kaffee; der Tee, den Tee; der Wein, den Wein”
- the people — “der Bruder, den Bruder; der Vater, den Vater; der Freund, den Freund”
- the body — “der Arm, den Arm; der Finger, den Finger; der Fuß, den Fuß; der Mund, den Mund; der Kopf, den Kopf”
- the animal and the times of day — “den Hund, den Tag, den Abend”
- three with *es gibt* — “Es gibt den Hund. Es gibt einen Bruder. Es gibt keinen Kaffee.”
- the two bought far away against the two never lent — *Kaffee* and *Tee* against *Fuß* and *Mund*

Your turn: adjectives that stay still

Say these aloud:

- the colours after a verb, bare — “Der Wein ist rot. Das Brot ist weiß. Die Katze ist schwarz.” Then “grün, gelb, blau”
- “Ich bin müde. Das ist schön. Der Tag ist gut.” Then four verbs of the body, still yours — “gehen, laufen, sitzen, stehen”

Before you move on

Name the three words that change together on the *der* row. (***Den, einen, keinen.***) Which two articles never move? (***Die*** and ***das.***) And what does *es gibt* demand of what follows it? (**The done-to form.**)

Chapter 48

Two Thoughts, One Sentence

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 3 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can join two thoughts with and, or, but, but-rather and because, and I know which of them sends the verb to the end.

Every verb the book owns is given a reason, twice: once with denn and the verb in slot two, once with weil and the verb walked to the far end. The chapter is where the reader learns that German saves its last position for the piece that completes the sense – the third time the book has sent something there, after the separable prefix and the nicht that cancels a verb.

48.1 oder — “or,” and the question every German ends with

Und has been yours since the wellbeing lessons and is the only joining word in the book. Say “Kaffee und Tee”, then take the second one.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the two shapes of *how many* — *wie viel* for what you cannot count, *wie viele* for what you can

You’ll want to know: oder

oder — “or”.

Said *OH-der*, long *o*, soft trailing *r*.

Kaffee oder Tee? · Milch oder Wasser?

Nothing moves around it. Like *und*, it stands between two things and joins them, and the verb stays where it was.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

oder and English **or** are the same Germanic word, **efbau* — English wore it to one syllable, German kept two. German then gave it a job English builds a whole clause for. Put **oder?** on the end of a statement:

Das ist gut, oder? — “That’s good, isn’t it?”

English needs *isn’t it*, *doesn’t he*, *haven’t they* — a different tag for every verb and person. German needs one word, unchanged. You will hear it constantly.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Kaffee oder Tee?” and “Milch oder Wasser?”
- the animals — “Hund oder Katze?”
- both joiners in one breath — “Brot und Wein”, “Brot oder Wein”
- the tag — “Das ist gut, oder?”
- a choice with a quantity in it — “Wie viel Kaffee oder wie viel Tee?” and “Wie viele Hunde oder wie viele Katzen?”

Twice through: “Kaffee oder Tee? — Das ist gut, oder?”

Before you move on

Say “coffee or tea”. What English word is *oder*? (**Or**, the same word with a syllable worn off.) What does *oder?* do at the end of a sentence? (**Turns it into a question expecting agreement** — English’s *isn’t it*.)

48.2 aber — “but,” the word that turns a sentence around

Und adds. *Oder* offers a choice. Neither can say that the second half disagrees with the first.

You’ll want to know: aber

aber — “but”.

Said *AH-ber*, long *a*, soft *r*.

Der Tag ist gut, aber ich bin müde. — “The day is good, but I’m tired.”

Das ist schön, aber teuer. — “That’s lovely, but expensive.”

The verb does not move. *Aber* joins two whole sentences without disturbing either — which is what makes it, *und* and *oder* one family, and worth knowing before the two words in this chapter that **do** disturb things.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

aber was once **afar*, “after, again” — a cousin of German **ab** (“off”) and of Greek **apo-**, which English carries in *apostrophe* and *apology*. A word about position became a word about contrast.

English did the identical thing with different pieces. **But** is Old English *be-ūtan*, “by-out” — *without, outside of*. Two languages, two small words about where a thing stands, both promoted to mean *however*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Der Tag ist gut, aber ich bin müde.”
- “Das ist schön, aber ich habe keine Zeit.”
- with last chapter’s negative — “Ich habe Tee, aber keinen Kaffee.”
- the three joiners in a row — “und, oder, aber”

Twice through: “Der Tag ist gut, aber ich bin müde.”

Before you move on

Say the three joiners you now own. (*Und, oder, aber.*) Does the verb move after any of them? (**No.**) What did *aber* mean before it meant “but”? (**After, again** — a word about position.) Next: the fourth “but”, which German keeps for one job only.

48.3 sondern — the “but” that corrects

German already has one word that exists only to contradict a negative: **doch**, which answers “*Hast du keinen Hund?*” with *yes I do*. It has a second, and it does the same job inside a sentence.

You’ll want to know: sondern

sondern — “but rather”, after a negative, when the second half replaces what the first half denied.

Das ist nicht schwarz, sondern weiß. — “That isn’t black, it’s white.”

Compare it with the word from the last lesson, which cannot do this job:

Das ist schwarz, aber schön. — two things, both true. **Das ist nicht schwarz, sondern weiß.** — the second corrects the first.

The test is short: if the first half is negative and the second half puts something in its place, German wants *sondern*. Otherwise it wants *aber*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sondern is also a verb, meaning **to separate**, and English keeps that verb too: **sunder**, and the *asunder* of *torn asunder*. So the joiner that corrects a negative is, underneath, the word for keeping two things apart — which is exactly what it does to the wrong answer and the right one.

English has no separate word here and never did. It says *but* both times and lets the tone do the work. German marks the difference, and it marks it a second time with **doch** in answers, so the pattern is one

you have already met.

Your turn

Decide which “but” the sentence wants before you say it.

Say these aloud:

- a correction — “Das ist nicht schwarz, sondern weiß.”
- a correction — “Das ist kein Kaffee, sondern Tee.”
- two things both true, so *aber* — “Der Wein ist rot, aber gut.”
- the answer-word that does the same job — “Doch!”

Twice through: “Das ist nicht schwarz, sondern weiß.”

Before you move on

When does German want *sondern* rather than *aber*? (**After a negative, when the second half replaces what was denied.**) What English verb is *sondern*? (**To sunder** — to separate.) Which answer-word does the same job in one syllable? (**Doch.**)

48.4 denn — “because,” with nothing moved

Four joiners are yours and none of them can give a reason. Say the four, and note that the verb has stayed in slot two after every one of them.

You’ll want to know: denn

denn — “for”, “because”.

Ich bin müde, denn ich habe nicht geschlafen. — “I’m tired, because I didn’t sleep.”

Look at the second half. **Ich** first, **habe** second — the ordinary order the book has used since your first question. *Denn* gives a reason and changes nothing, which makes it the easiest reason-word German has and the one to reach for first.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

denn and **dann** (“then”) were one word. German split the pair and gave each half a job: *dann* says **when**, *denn* says **why**. English is a cousin of both and kept only the *when* — **then** — so the *why* half has no English survivor at all.

You can still hear the join. “*It rained, then I stayed home*” and “*It rained, so I stayed home*” are nearly the same sentence, and a reason is very often a *before* wearing different clothes.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich bin müde, denn ich habe keine Zeit.”
- with the past you already own — “Ich bin müde, denn ich habe gelernt.”
- all five joiners — “und, oder, aber, sondern, denn”
- prove the verb has not moved — “denn ich habe ...”, subject first, verb second
- the question this word answers — “Warum?” then “..., denn ich habe keine Zeit.”
- the other two W-words, each answered with *denn* — “Wer lernt Deutsch?” and “Wann lernst du?”, and their English twins, *who* and *when*, which begin with the *wh*- Grimm’s law left behind

Twice through: “Ich bin müde, denn ich habe gelernt.”

Before you move on

Where does the verb stand after *denn*? (**Second, as always.**)
 What word was *denn* once the same as? (***Dann***, “then” — English kept only that half.) Next: the other word for “because”, which does not leave the sentence alone.

48.5 weil — “because,” and the verb goes to the end

Denn gave a reason and moved nothing. This word gives the same reason and moves the most important thing in the sentence.

- *Recall*: two chapters back, the phrase that says a thing exists — *es gibt*, and the marked form it demands

You’ll want to know: weil

weil — “because”.

Said *vile*, rhyming with *mile*: the same *ei* you say in *kein* and *nein*.

Grammar Lens: the verb travels to the far end

After **weil**, the verb leaves slot two and goes **last**.

Set the two reason-words side by side and only one thing differs:

Ich bin müde, denn ich habe keine Zeit. Ich bin müde, weil ich keine Zeit habe.

Same words, same meaning, and *habe* has walked to the end of the line. This is the third time the book has sent something to the far end of a German sentence. A separable prefix goes there. *Nicht* goes there when it cancels the verb. Now the verb itself goes there, whenever a word like *weil* opens the clause. German saves its last position for the piece that completes the sense, and it is worth expecting from here on.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

weil is a worn-down **dieweil**, “during the while that” — and **die Weile** is English **while**, the same word. So German’s *because* began as a word about **time**.

English walked the same road with **since**: “*since Tuesday*” is time, “*since you asked*” is cause, and nobody notices the crossing. A reason and a before-and-after are close enough that both languages made the trip.

Your turn

Say the *denn* version first, then move the verb.

Say these aloud:

- “..., denn ich habe keine Zeit.” → “..., weil ich keine Zeit habe.”
- “Ich lerne Deutsch, weil ich in Berlin wohne.”
- the verb travelling, out loud — “habe ... keine Zeit habe”
- the three things German sends to the end — a prefix, *nicht*, and now the verb

Twice through: “Ich bin müde, weil ich keine Zeit habe.”

Before you move on

What happens to the verb after *weil*? (**It goes to the end.**) And after *denn*? (**Nothing** — it stays in slot two.) What word is hiding inside *weil*? (**Die Weile** — English *while*.) Which English reason-word made the same journey from time to cause? (**Since.**)

48.6 Zwei Gedanken — the chapter, run cold

Six joiners. Five leave the verb where it stands and one does not. Name all six, then name the one that moves it.

Your turn: joining, without moving anything

Say these aloud:

- joined — “Brot und Wein”, “Kaffee oder Tee”, “Milch oder Wasser”
- contrasted — “Der Wein ist rot, aber gut.”
- corrected — “Das ist nicht weiß, sondern schwarz.”
- the six colours, two of them corrections — “Nicht grün, sondern gelb. Nicht blau, sondern rot.”

Your turn: the distant band — reasons over everything

Every verb the book owns can now carry a reason. Say each pair twice — once with *denn* and the verb in place, once with *weil* and the verb at the end.

Say these aloud:

- “Ich lerne Deutsch, denn ich wohne in Berlin.” → “..., weil ich in Berlin wohne.”
- “Ich bin müde, denn ich habe keine Zeit.” → “..., weil ich keine Zeit habe.”
- the verbs of taking in and putting out, each given a reason — *lesen, schreiben, hören, sehen*
- the verbs of the body — *schlafen, sitzen, stehen, gehen, laufen, rennen*
- the pair with a prefix that already goes to the end — *öffnen* and *schließen*
- the three things German sends last — a prefix, *nicht*, the verb after *weil*

Before you move on

Which joiner corrects a negative? (**Sondern.**) Which two give a reason, and what is the difference? (**Denn**, verb in slot two; **weil**, verb at the end.) Which of the six is also a tag question? (**Oder?**) And which one is *die Weile* in disguise? (**Weil.**)

Chapter 49

Mine, Yours, His, Hers

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 4 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say whose something is with all four possessives, and introduce somebody who is not me.

Every person and every object the book owns is claimed and then done something to. The four possessives cost their first two letters and nothing else, because they wear the endings ein bought, kein banked and den confirmed – six words, one ending set, and the reader had already paid for it three times.

49.1 mein — the word you have been saying since you first gave your name

Say **mein Name ist ...**. You have said it since the second chapter as a single block. The first word of it is about to become a word of its own.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the phrase that says a thing exists — *es gibt*

You'll want to know: mein

mein — “my”.

mein Bruder · meine Schwester · mein Brot

English splits this word in two — *my* in front of a noun, *mine* standing alone — and the split is late and unnecessary. **mein** and **mine** are one word, Proto-Germanic **mīnaz*, and German never divided it.

Grammar Lens: the family of six

mein takes the endings **ein** takes. So does **kein**, and so will the three words in the next three lessons.

You paid for this two chapters ago without being told. *Ein* becomes **eine** before a *die*-word and **einen** when a *der*-word is done to. *Kein* does the same. **Mein** does the same:

mein Bruder → **Ich habe meinen Bruder.** **meine Schwester** → **Ich habe meine Schwester.**

One ending set, six words wearing it. Learning the fourth, fifth and sixth costs nothing at all, because the endings were bought with *ein*, banked again with *kein*, and confirmed a third time with *den*.

Your turn

Say the article first, so the ending falls out of it.

Say these aloud:

- *der* Bruder → “mein Bruder”, then done-to, “meinen Bruder”
- *die* Schwester → “meine Schwester”, which does not move
- “meine Mutter, mein Vater”
- “mein Freund, meine Freundin”
- the three that move on the same row — “einen, keinen, meinen”

Twice through: “mein Bruder — meinen Bruder.”

Before you move on

Which endings does *mein* take? (**The ones *ein* takes** — and *kein*.)
Say “my brother” as the thing you have. (**Meinen Bruder.**)
Which two English words are *mein*? (***My*** and ***mine***, split late and needlessly.)

49.2 dein — “your,” and the third *th* that became a *d*

Say **du** and **dir**. Both were once English *thou* and *thee*. Predict the German for *thine* before you read on.

You’ll want to know: dein

dein — “your”, to somebody you call *du*.

dein Bruder · **deine Schwester** · **deinen Bruder**

The endings are *mein*’s endings, which were *ein*’s endings. Nothing new is being learned here except the first two letters.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Three words, one shift, and you have now seen all three:

English	German
thou	du
thee	dir
thine	dein

Germanic **þ* hardened into German **d** across the board, so any English word beginning *th-* is worth testing against a German *d-*. *That* is **das**. *Three* is **drei**. *Thank* is **danken**. The rule has been paying out since your first article and it will keep paying.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “dein Bruder, deine Schwester”
- the pair — “mein Freund, dein Freund”
- a question with it — “Wer ist deine Freundin?”
- the *th* to *d* rule, four times — “that/das, three/drei, thank/danke, thine/dein”

Twice through: “Wer ist dein Bruder?”

Before you move on

Say “your sister” and “your brother”. Which English word is *dein*? (*Thine*.) Which sound law lines the two up? (**Germanic *p* becoming German *d***.) Whose endings does *dein* wear? (*Ein*’s — like *kein* and *mein*.)

49.3 sein — “his,” and a collision worth meeting head-on

Sein is the verb *to be*, the one with three roots braided into it. Say **er ist**. Now meet a second, unrelated word spelled the same way.

You’ll want to know: sein

sein — “his”.

sein Bruder · **seine Schwester** · **seinen Bruder**

Same endings again — *ein*’s. Third word in a row that costs nothing but its first letters.

The two *seins* are genuinely two words. The possessive is Proto-Germanic **sīnaz*, a cousin of Latin **suus**. The verb is the braided one. They arrived at the same spelling from opposite directions and German never separated them.

Grammar Lens: how a reader tells them apart

The position settles it, every time, without exception:

sein Bruder — a noun follows, so this is *his*. **Ich will sein** — no noun follows, so this is *to be*.

A possessive is always leaning on a noun. An infinitive is not. German has more of these collisions than English does — *sie* alone runs three jobs — and each time, what resolves it is the shape of the sentence around the word rather than the word itself.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sein Bruder, seine Schwester”
- the three so far — “mein Vater, dein Vater, sein Vater”
- “Das ist sein Hund.”
- the collision, both ways — “sein Bruder” and the bare verb, “sein”

Twice through: “mein Vater, dein Vater, sein Vater.”

Before you move on

Say “his mother” and “his brother”. What else is the word *sein*? (The verb *to be*.) What tells them apart? (**Whether a noun follows.**) Say the three possessives you now own. (*Mein, dein, sein.*)

49.4 ihr — “her,” and a word with three jobs

Ihr already means *you all*. **Sie** already means *she, they* and formal *you*. German is comfortable with a word doing several jobs, and this lesson adds one more.

You’ll want to know: ihr

ihr — “her”.

ihr Bruder · ihre Schwester · ihren Bruder

Said *eer*: the **h** is silent and stretches the *i*, exactly as it does in *Ihnen*. The endings are *ein*’s, for the fourth time.

Grammar Lens: three jobs, all settled by position

Where the word stands says which job it is doing:

- **ihr wohnt** — a verb with *-t* follows, so this is *you all*.
- **ihr Bruder** — a noun follows, so this is *her*.

- **Ihr Bruder**, capitalised — the formal *your*, which the capital marks the same way it marks formal *Sie*.

Nothing here is ambiguous in a real sentence, and the capital does real work — a third reason for the capitalisation rule the writing chapter taught.

The same *ihr* also means *their*, which is one job too many to add today; the book will come back to it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ihr Bruder, ihre Schwester”
- all four — “mein, dein, sein, ihr”
- the two jobs side by side — “ihr wohnt” and “ihr Hund”
- “Das ist ihre Mutter.”

Twice through: “mein, dein, sein, ihr.”

Before you move on

Name the four possessives. (*Mein, dein, sein, ihr.*) What tells you which job *ihr* is doing? (**What follows it** — a verb or a noun.) What does the capital on *Ihr* mean? (**The formal *your*.**)

49.5 das ist — introducing somebody who is not you

You can give your own name three ways and shake hands afterwards. You cannot yet introduce anybody else, and the phrase that does it is two words you already have.

You’ll want to know: das ist

das ist — “this is”, “that is”.

Das ist mein Bruder. — “This is my brother.”

Das ist meine Schwester. — “This is my sister.”

And the reply is one you have owned since your first introduction: **Freut mich.**

Grammar Lens: the *das* that ignores gender

Look at the second sentence again. **Schwester** is a *die*-word, and the phrase still opens with **das**. That is not a mistake, and it is not the article.

The **das** at the front of the sentence is the older, pointing word the article descends from — the demonstrative behind English **that**. It points at a person without committing to a gender, so it stays **das** in front of everybody:

Das ist mein Vater. · Das ist meine Mutter. · Das ist mein Hund.

English does the same thing and hides it as well: *that is my sister* uses a word that started life as the neuter *þæt* and long ago stopped caring.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Das ist mein Bruder.” — then answer, “Freut mich.”
- “Das ist meine Schwester.” — the *das* does not become *die*
- the household — “Das ist meine Mutter. Das ist mein Vater.”
- with the other three possessives — “Das ist dein Freund. Das ist seine Freundin. Das ist ihr Hund.”

Twice through: “Das ist meine Schwester. — Freut mich.”

Before you move on

Introduce your sister. (**Das ist meine Schwester.**) Why is it not *die ist*? (**That *das* is the old pointing word, not the article, and it ignores gender.**) What do you say back? (**Freut mich.**)

49.6 Wer ist das? — the chapter, run cold

Name the four possessives. Then name the two older words whose endings all four borrow, and say why that means the four cost almost nothing.

Your turn: introduce everybody

Every person this book has named, introduced and claimed.

Say these aloud:

- “Das ist mein Bruder. Das ist meine Schwester.”
- “Das ist meine Mutter. Das ist mein Vater.”
- the two collective words — “meine Eltern, meine Geschwister”
- the pair the *-in* suffix built — “mein Freund, meine Freundin”
- “Das ist meine Familie.” then answer, “Freut mich.”
- the four Latin cousins those words keep — *frater, soror, mater, pater*

Your turn: the distant band — everything, claimed

Put *mein* in front of everything, and then do something to it.

Say these aloud:

- the animals — “mein Hund, meinen Hund; meine Katze”
- the table — “mein Kaffee, meinen Kaffee; mein Brot; meine Milch”
- the body, all of it — “mein Kopf, meine Hand, mein Arm, mein Fuß, mein Herz, mein Auge, mein Ohr, mein Mund, meine Nase”
- the two abstractions — “mein Name”, “meine Zeit”
- the six words on one ending set — “ein, kein, mein, dein, sein, ihr”
- the *der*-row, five words deep — “den, einen, keinen, meinen, deinen”

Your turn: the far band — the last three chapters, over one family

Everything since the negation chapter, said about one family.

Say these aloud:

- joined and corrected — “Das ist nicht mein Bruder, sondern mein Vater.” “Das ist meine Schwester, aber sie ist müde.”
- with a reason both ways — “Das ist mein Bruder, denn er hat meinen Namen.” “Ich frage meine Mutter, weil ich keine Zeit habe.”
- existence and its marked form — “Es gibt keinen Kaffee.” “Es gibt einen Bruder oder eine Schwester.”
- the three W-words, aimed at people — “Wer ist das? Wann? Warum?”
- the two words built out of *not* and *one* — German’s **kein** and English’s **none**
- the two W-words whose English twins begin *wh-* — “wer/who, wann/when”

Before you move on

Say all six words that share one ending set. (***Ein, kein, mein, dein, sein, ihr.***) Which row of endings moves? (**The *der* row.**) Introduce your sister and answer yourself. (**Das ist meine Schwester. — Freut mich.**) Which other job does *sein* do, and which other two does *ihr* do?

Chapter 50

The One It Happens To

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say who a verb is aimed at with all six object pronouns, and bend a verb back onto its own subject.

Every verb of address in the book is pointed at every person, and the der-row is run six words deep – den, einen, keinen, meinen, deinen and now ihn, all moving together. The reflexive costs one word rather than six, because mich, dich, uns and euch already did that job; and freut mich, said since the reader’s first introduction as an unexplained block, turns out to have been a reflexive all along.

50.1 dich — “you,” as the one it happens to

You own **mich** (“me”) and **mir** (“to me”), and on the *du* side you own **du**, **dir** and now **dein**. One shape is missing from that row.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the joiner that sends the verb to the end — *weil*

You’ll want to know: dich

dich — “you”, when you are the one being done to.

Said *dikh*, with the soft ich-sound of *ich*, *mich* and *nicht*.

Ich sehe dich. — “I see you.”

Ich höre dich. — “I hear you.”

It is *mich*’s partner exactly: **ich** → **mich**, **du** → **dich**. One vowel apart, one job apart, and the pattern is visible without being taught.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English once had this whole row and let it collapse. *Thou* was the doer, *thee* was both the done-to and the to-whom, *thine* the possessive. German kept four distinct shapes where English kept three and then lost all of them:

du · dich · dir · dein

Every one begins with the *d* that was English *th*, so the row is predictable from a rule you have had since the second chapter.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich sehe dich.” and “Ich höre dich.”
- “Ich verstehe dich.” and “Ich frage dich.”
- the pair — “Ich sehe dich”, “Du siehst mich”
- the whole *du* row — “du, dich, dir, dein”

Twice through: “Ich sehe dich. Du siehst mich.”

Before you move on

Say the four shapes of *du*. (**Du, dich, dir, dein.**) Which one is the done-to? (**Dich.**) Say “I hear you.” (**Ich höre dich.**)

50.2 ihn — “him,” on the row that always moves

One row of German keeps changing shape and the other two do not. Say **der** → **den**, **ein** → **einen**, **kein** → **keinen**, **mein** → **meinen**. The pronoun does it too.

You'll want to know: **ihn**

ihn — “him”, and also “it” when the *it* is a *der*-word.

Said *een*: the **h** is silent and stretches the vowel, as in *ihr* and *Ihnen*.

Ich sehe ihn. — “I see him.”

Der Hund? Ich sehe ihn. — “The dog? I see it.”

That second sentence is the one an English speaker forgets. A German *der*-word is *ihn*, whatever it is made of, because German picks the pronoun by the article and not by whether the thing is alive.

Sie and **es** do not move at all — the *die* row and the *das* row stand still here exactly as their articles do.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English **him** looks like a translation of *ihn* and is not the same form. *Him* was originally the **to-whom** shape, and it swallowed the done-to shape *hine* somewhere in the Middle Ages. German never let that merger happen, which is why it still has **ihn** for the done-to and **ihm** for the to-whom.

So the two languages did not lose the same thing. English lost the distinction; German lost nothing and merely stopped being able to explain it briefly.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich sehe ihn.” and “Ich höre ihn.”
- the thing, not the person — “Der Hund? Ich sehe ihn.”
- “Der Kaffee? Ich trinke ihn.” and “Der Wein? Ich sehe ihn.”
- the row that does not move — “Die Katze? Ich sehe sie.”
- the three done-to pronouns so far — “mich, dich, ihn”

Twice through: “Ich sehe ihn. Ich sehe sie.”

Before you move on

Which pronoun replaces a *der*-word being done to? (***Ihn*** — alive or not.) Which two do not change at all? (***Sie*** and ***es***.) What was English *him* originally? (**The to-whom form**, which swallowed the done-to one.)

50.3 uns — “us,” and the one place German is simpler

Ich has three shapes — *ich*, *mich*, *mir*. Say them, then take the plural, which has two.

You’ll want to know: uns

uns — “us”, and also “to us”.

Er sieht uns. — “He sees us.”

Er gibt uns Kaffee. — “He gives us coffee.”

One word, both jobs. Where *ich* needed *mich* and *mir*, **wir** needs only **uns**, and the language stops distinguishing exactly where it had been insisting.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

uns and English **us** are the same word, worn to the same length in both languages. English *us* also does both jobs — *he sees us*, *he gives us coffee* — so this is one row where the two languages agree completely and nothing has to be learned twice.

It is worth noticing *why* the agreement happened. German kept its distinctions in the singular, where the words are short and said constantly; it let them go in the plural, where they are longer and rarer. English did the same thing to *thou* and *thee* four centuries later, only more thoroughly.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Er sieht uns.” and “Er hört uns.”
- both jobs at once — “Er sieht uns” and “Er gibt uns Kaffee”
- the four done-to pronouns — “mich, dich, ihn, uns”
- “Verstehst du uns?”

Twice through: “Er sieht uns. Er gibt uns Kaffee.”

Before you move on

How many shapes does *wir* have? (**One** — *uns*, for both jobs.) How many does *ich* have? (**Three** — *ich, mich, mir*.) Say “he sees us.”

50.4 euch — “you all,” and the word English promoted

Ihr is *you all*. It needs a done-to shape, and the shape it has is the most quietly famous word in this chapter.

You’ll want to know: euch

euch — “you all”, when you are the ones being done to. It also covers *to you all*, exactly as *uns* covers both jobs.

Said *oykh*: the **eu** is the *oy* of English *boy*, and the **ch** is the soft one.

Ich sehe euch. — “I see you all.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English had this word. Old English **ēow** was the done-to shape of **ġē** (“ye”), and **ēow** is exactly what German’s *euch* is.

Then English did something strange. It let **ēow** — the **object** form — take over the subject job as well, so *ye* died out and **you** became the only word left for the second person, singular or plural, doer or done-to. Modern English addresses everybody with what was once a plural object pronoun.

German still has the whole set standing: **du, dich, dir** for one person, **ihr, euch** for several, **Sie, Ihnen** for a stranger. English boiled all of

that down to **you**, and *y'all* is the attempt to build the plural back.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich sehe euch.” and “Ich höre euch.”
- the five done-to pronouns — “mich, dich, ihn, uns, euch”
- the three ways to address people — “dich, euch, Ihnen”
- the English word all of them collapsed into — *you*

Twice through: “mich, dich, ihn, uns, euch.”

Before you move on

What is the done-to shape of *ihr*? (**Euch.**) Which English word is it? (**You** — by way of Old English *ēow*.) Which English word did *ēow* push out? (**Ye.**) Say all five done-to pronouns you now own.

50.5 sich — the verb bent back on itself

You have said **freut mich** since the second chapter without asking what the *mich* is doing there. This lesson answers it.

Grammar Lens: when the doer and the done-to are the same

When the person doing something is also the person it happens to, German puts the done-to pronoun in anyway.

Ich wasche mich. — “I wash.” Literally *I wash me*.

English drops the pronoun in most of these — *I wash, I shave, I dress* — and German never does. Every done-to pronoun you own is already the right one: *mich, dich, uns, euch*. Nothing new is needed for four of the six.

You'll want to know: sich

sich — the one shape German uses for *himself*, *herself*, *itself*, *themselves* and formal *yourself*.

Said *zikh*, with a *z* at the front and the soft *ich*-sound at the back.

Er wäscht sich. · **Sie wäscht sich.** · **Sie waschen sich.**

Where English needs four different words with *-self* welded on, German needs one, and it never changes.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

sich is Latin **sē** and French **se**, all descended from Proto-Indo-European ***swe-**, “one’s own”. English lost the pronoun and kept the root inside words built on it: **self**, **suicide**, and — by a long road — **sibling**, a person of one’s own kin. Which finally explains **freut mich**: *freuen* is one of these verbs, so *es freut mich* is “it gladdens me”, and the greeting you have said a hundred times was a reflexive construction all along.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich wasche mich.” and “Er wäscht sich.”
- the whole set, four owned and one new — “mich, dich, sich, uns, euch”
- the greeting, taken apart — “freut mich”
- “Sie freut sich.”

Twice through: “Ich wasche mich. Er wäscht sich.”

Before you move on

How many English words does *sich* cover? (**Four or more** — himself, herself, itself, themselves.) Which four done-to pronouns did you already own for this job? (**Mich, dich, uns, euch.**) And what has *freut mich* been all along? (**A reflexive** — “it gladdens me”.)

50.6 mich, dich, sich — the chapter, run cold

Say the six done-to pronouns. Then name the two that did not have to be learned as new words, and say why.

Your turn: point every verb at somebody

Six verbs of address, six pronouns. Run the grid by ear, not by reading it. Say these aloud:

- “Ich sehe dich. Ich sehe ihn. Ich sehe euch.”
- “Ich höre dich. Er hört uns. Wir hören euch.”
- “Ich verstehe dich.” and “Verstehst du mich?”
- “Ich frage dich.” and “Ich helfe dir.” — one takes the done-to shape, one takes the to-whom
- the two verbs of the page — “Ich lese es. Ich schreibe es.”

Your turn: the distant band — the row that moves

Six words now move together on one row. Say the article, then the whole family, then the pronoun that replaces it.

Say these aloud:

- “der Hund → den Hund, einen Hund, keinen Hund, meinen Hund → ihn”
- “der Kaffee → den Kaffee → ihn”; “der Tee → den Tee → ihn”; “der Wein → den Wein → ihn”
- the people — “den Bruder, den Vater, den Freund → ihn”
- the body — “den Arm, den Fuß, den Finger, den Kopf, den Mund → ihn”
- the two rows that stand still — “die Katze → sie”, “die Milch → sie”, “das Brot → es”

Your turn: bent back

Say these aloud:

- “Ich wasche mich. Du wäschst dich. Er wäscht sich.”
- “Wir waschen uns. Ihr wascht euch.”
- the greeting that turns out to be one of these — “Freut mich.”

Before you move on

Which pronoun replaces a *der*-word being done to? (***Ihn***.) Which two pronouns never change shape? (***Sie*** and ***es***.) How many English words does *sich* cover? (**Four or more**.) And which English pronoun is *euch*? (***You*** — the object form that took the whole job.)

Chapter 51

The Bracket

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I can, must and would like to do, hold the second verb until the end of the sentence, and build both families of past participle.

Every verb in the book is put inside a bracket, and then the seven preceding chapters are run in one breath over one small set of nouns. The chapter names a habit the reader has met three times already – a separable prefix, a past participle and a nicht that cancels a verb all go to the same last slot – so the modal bracket arrives as the fourth instance of one rule rather than a fourth rule.

51.1 können — “can,” and the verb that meant *know*

The simple-past chapter gave you **konnte**, “could”. You have been able to say what you could do and not what you can do, which is an odd way round. This lesson fixes it.

- *Recall:* two chapters back, the four possessives — *mein, dein, sein, ihr*

You’ll want to know: können

können — “to be able”, “can”.

Ich kann. — “I can.” · **Du kannst.** — “You can.”

Notice the *ich* form. It is **kann**, not *könne*: this verb takes no ending at all in the first person, and its vowel changes as well. A small closed family of German verbs behaves like this, and every one of them is a word you will say constantly — which is the usual bargain, since the commonest words are the ones worn irregular by use.

Ich kann Deutsch. — “I can speak German”, with no second verb at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

können and English **can** are one word, and both began as a word for **knowing**. The root is Proto-Indo-European **ǵneh₃-*, which also gave English **know**, Scots **ken**, Latin **nōscō** and Greek **gnosis**. So *I can* once meant *I know how*, and the drift from knowledge to ability happened before English and German separated. That is why *ich kann Deutsch* — “I know German” — still sounds entirely ordinary with no verb after it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich kann.” then “Du kannst.”
- the pair with the past you already had — “Ich kann” and “Ich konnte”
- “Ich kann Deutsch.”
- the old meaning, out loud — *can* was *know*

Twice through: “Ich kann Deutsch.”

Before you move on

What is the *ich* form of *können*? (**Kann** — no ending, and a changed vowel.) What did the word mean before it meant *be able*? (**To know** — the root behind *know* and *ken*.) Say “I can speak German” without a second verb. (**Ich kann Deutsch.**)

51.2 möchten — “I would like,” the politest verb in the book

Mögen is yours, and so is **bitte**. Between them you can say what you like and you can say please, and you still cannot order a coffee.

You’ll want to know: möchten

möchten — “would like”.

Ich möchte einen Kaffee, bitte. — “I’d like a coffee, please.”

That sentence is the single most useful one in this chapter, and every piece of it is already yours except the verb: the *einen* from the having lessons, the *bitte* from the requests lesson, and the *Kaffee* from the drinks chapter.

Like *kann*, the *ich* form takes no ending: **ich möchte, du möchtest**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

möchten is **mögen** with its vowel bent — the umlaut doing grammatical work again, as it has done in every plural that took one. The bent form is historically a *past* shape pressed into service for the present, and that is precisely what makes it polite. English runs the identical trick and nobody notices:

*I **will** have a coffee → I **would** like a coffee **Can** you help
→ **Could** you help*

A past-shaped verb standing in the present puts a little distance between the speaker and the demand. Both languages found the same politeness strategy, and German marks it with two dots.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich möchte einen Kaffee, bitte.”
- “Ich möchte einen Tee, bitte.” and “Ich möchte Wasser, bitte.”

- the blunt one, then the polite one — “Ich mag Kaffee” and “Ich möchte einen Kaffee”
- the two modals so far — “ich kann, ich möchte”

Twice through: “Ich möchte einen Kaffee, bitte.”

Before you move on

Which verb is *möchten* a bent form of? (*Mögen*.) What is the bend doing? (**Making it polite** — a past-shaped form used in the present.) Which English pair does the same? (*Will* and *would*.) Order a coffee.

51.3 müssen — “must,” and the ending that is missing in both languages

Say **ich kann** and **ich möchte**. Neither took the *-e* that ordinary verbs take. Say **er wohnt** and hear the *-t* that ordinary verbs do take, and then watch the third modal do without it too.

You’ll want to know: **müssen**

müssen — “to have to”, “must”.

Ich muss. · **Du musst.** · **Er muss.**

The **ich** form and the **er** form are identical, and both are bare. That is the mark of this small family: no *-e*, no *-t*, and a vowel that changes.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English has exactly the same hole, in exactly the same words, and every English speaker has been ignoring it for life:

he walks, he lives, he thinks — but *he must, he can, he may*, with no *-s* at all.

The reason is one accident, eight hundred years old and shared. This handful of verbs were once **past tenses**, and a past tense took no ending in the present because it was not a present. They then drifted into meaning present things and kept their bare shape.

So the missing *-t* in *er muss* and the missing *-s* in *he must* are the same missing ending, and if the English one has never bothered you, the German one need not either.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Ich muss.” “Du musst.” “Er muss.”
- the three modals — “ich kann, ich möchte, ich muss”
- an ordinary verb beside them — “er wohnt” against “er muss”
- the English hole out loud — “he walks” against “he must”

Twice through: “Ich kann, ich möchte, ich muss.”

Before you move on

What ending does *er muss* take? (**None** — and neither does *er kann*.) Which English verbs have the same hole? (***Must, can, may*** — no *-s*.) Why? (**They were past tenses once**, and a past tense took no present ending.) Next: where the second verb goes.

51.4 die Verbkammer — the bracket German has been building all along

Name three things this book has already sent to the end of a German sentence. Take your time; you have met all three.

Grammar Lens: the modal holds slot two, the other verb waits at the end

A modal takes slot two, and the verb it governs goes **last**, in its dictionary form.

Ich kann Deutsch sprechen. — “I can speak German.”

Ich muss Deutsch lernen. — “I must learn German.”

Ich möchte einen Kaffee trinken. — “I’d like to drink a coffee.”

Two verbs, one at each end, and everything the sentence is about held between them. German grammarians call that shape a **Klammer**, a bracket, and it is the skeleton of an ordinary German sentence.

Why it's said this way

This is not a new rule. It is the fourth appearance of one habit, and the four were taught chapters apart:

- a **separable prefix** goes to the end — *ich mache die Tür auf*;
- a **past participle** goes to the end — *ich habe Deutsch gelernt*;
- **nicht** goes to the end when it cancels the verb — *ich verstehe nicht*;
- and now an **infinitive** goes to the end after a modal.

Four different pieces, one position. German reserves the last slot of a sentence for whatever completes the sense, and asks its listener to wait. That is the single most-remarked feature of the language, and by the time it is named here you have already met three quarters of it.

Your turn

Say the modal, then hold the second verb until the end.

Say these aloud:

- “Ich kann Deutsch lernen.”
- “Ich muss schlafen.” and “Ich möchte gehen.”
- with the verbs of the page — “Ich kann lesen. Ich kann schreiben.”
- “Ich möchte dir helfen.”
- the four things that go last — a prefix, a participle, *nicht*, an infinitive

Twice through: “Ich muss Deutsch lernen.”

Before you move on

Where does the modal stand, and where does the other verb stand? (**Slot two, and last.**) In what form is the second verb? (**The dictionary form.**) Name the four things German sends to the end of a sentence. Next: the participle that ends in *-en*.

51.5 gegangen — the other half of the past

Say **ich habe gelernt**. The participle is wrapped in **ge-** and ends in **-t**, which the past chapter taught. Now say **ich bin gegangen** — which you have also said, and which ends in something else entirely.

Grammar Lens: the second family ends in -en

German builds participles two ways. The weak family wraps the stem in **ge-** and **-t**. The strong family wraps it in **ge-** and **-en**, and very often changes the vowel as well.

gehen → **gegangen** · **sehen** → **gesehen** · **lesen** → **gelesen** · **schreiben** → **geschrieben**

The **ge-** is the same unstressed wrapper in both families, so half of every participle in the language is already yours. What the strong family adds is the **-en** ending and a vowel that may move — and the moving vowel is the same strong-verb behaviour that gave you *du liest* and *du siehst*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

English split its participles the same way, into the same two shapes, and every English speaker sorts them without thinking:

weak

walked, learned, asked

strong

gone, seen, written, given

That *-en* on *given* and *written* is German's *-en* on *gegeben* and *geschrieben* — the same ending, in the same job, inherited rather than borrowed. English then lost the *ge-* wrapper, which German kept, so the German participle is the fuller survival of a shape both languages had.

Your turn

Say the dictionary form, then wrap it.

Say these aloud:

- “gehen → gegangen”, “sehen → gesehen”
- “lesen → gelesen”, “schreiben → geschrieben”
- the weak family beside it — “gelernt, gesagt, gemacht”
- the two helpers with the two families — “Ich habe gelesen.” “Ich bin gegangen.”
- the English pair that proves the split — “walked” against “written”

Twice through: “Ich habe gelesen. Ich bin gegangen.”

Before you move on

What are the two participle endings? (**-t** for the weak family, **-en** for the strong.) What do both families share? (**The ge- wrapper**, never stressed.) Which English participles end in **-en**? (**Gone**, **seen**, **written**, **given** — the same family, the same ending.)

51.6 Was kann ich? — the chapter, and the seven before it, run cold

Name the four things German sends to the end of a sentence.

Then say the two participle endings and what both families share.

Your turn: the bracket over every verb

Every verb the book owns, held at the end of a bracket. Say the modal first and make yourself wait for the second verb.

Say these aloud:

- “Ich kann lesen, schreiben, hören, sehen.”
- “Ich muss schlafen, gehen, laufen, lernen.”
- “Ich möchte fragen, helfen, nehmen.”

- the pair that opens and closes — “Ich muss die Tür öffnen. Ich muss die Tür schließen.”
- the two of rest — “Ich möchte sitzen. Ich möchte stehen.”
- the chapter’s own sentence — “Ich kann Deutsch lernen.”

Your turn: the distant band — eight chapters in one breath

Everything the last seven chapters bought, in order, over one small set of nouns.

Say these aloud:

- negation — “Ich habe keinen Hund. Ich verstehe nicht.”
- a question and a command — “Hast du einen Hund?” “Komm!”
- the three new W-words — “Wer? Wann? Warum?”
- which and how many — “Welcher Hund? Wie viele Hunde?”
- the marked row and existence — “Ich sehe den Hund. Es gibt keinen Kaffee.”
- an adjective that stays still — “Der Kaffee ist gut.”
- two joined thoughts, both ways — “Ich möchte Kaffee, aber ich habe keine Zeit.” “Ich bin müde, weil ich keine Zeit habe.”
- whose, and who — “Das ist mein Bruder. Das ist sein Hund.”
- the done-to row — “Ich sehe ihn. Ich sehe dich. Ich sehe euch.”
- bent back — “Er wäscht sich.”
- and all of it in one sentence — “Ich möchte meinen Bruder fragen, weil ich ihn nicht verstehe.”

Before you move on

Say the three modals. (**Kann, möchte, muss** — none of them with an ending.) Where does the second verb go, and in what form? (**Last, in the dictionary form.**) Name the four things German sends to that same last slot. (**A separable prefix, a past participle, the *nicht* that cancels a verb, and an infinitive**)

after a modal.) And which participle ending marks the strong family? (*-en.*)

Chapter 52

Reading — Nouns, Sentences, and a First Paragraph

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read German nouns off a page, follow a sentence whose verb waits at the end, and hold a whole paragraph without translating it word by word.

Forty-eight words of German with no new word in them, including the one line where weil sends the verb to the far end and the reader has to hold the sentence open.

52.1 (reading) — six nouns, and a capital letter doing real work

Every word below you have met. Not one is new.

What is new is that nobody says them first.

Read this

Brot Kaffee Wasser Buch Bruder Schwester

Read down the list once, without stopping.

Again, and notice they all begin with a capital. Every one of them.

Grammar Lens: the capital is information

German capitalises every noun. Spoken, that rule is invisible and costs nothing. Written, it is the single most useful thing on a German page for a beginner.

It means you can find the nouns in a sentence before you understand the sentence. In a language that puts its verb at the end and its cases on the articles, knowing which words are the things is most of the way to a reading.

That is the trade: a writer capitalises a hundred nouns so a reader can skip a hundred decisions.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six words down the list, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

What do all six have in common on the page? (**A capital letter** — and it tells you they are nouns.)

52.2 (reading) — six sentences, and a wait at the end

The last lesson gave you nouns. These are whole sentences.

You have said every one of them.

Read this

Ich kann Deutsch. Ich möchte lernen. Ich muss arbeiten.
Wer ist das? Das ist mein Bruder. Danke!

Read down once, without stopping.

Again — and this time notice where the second verb sits in the first three.

Grammar Lens: the bracket, from the outside

You have been building the bracket from the inside: choose the modal, park the verb at the end. Reading it, the bracket arrives the other way round — **möchte** comes early and then you wait.

That wait is what German reading is. A reader holds the front of the sentence open until the last word closes it, and the modal at the front is the signal to start holding.

Six lines, and three of them ask you to wait.

Your turn

- *Say it*: the six lines, once, in order, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

What does a modal at the front tell a reader? (**To wait** — the sentence is not finished until the last word.)

52.3 (reading) — the first paragraph

Six nouns, then six sentences. Now a whole paragraph.

Forty-eight words, and not one of them is new.

Read this

Guten Tag! Ich heiße Anna. Das ist mein Bruder. Er ist sehr gut. Wir trinken Kaffee und essen Brot. Ich lese ein Buch. Das Buch ist schön und alt. Ich kann Deutsch. Ich möchte viel lernen, weil Deutsch schön ist. Morgen muss ich arbeiten. Danke und auf Wiedersehen.

Read it once without stopping. Do not translate as you go — let the sentences arrive.

Now read it again, and find the one line where the verb is last.

Grammar Lens: the word that moves a verb

Ich möchte viel lernen, weil Deutsch schön ist. That **ist** at the end is not a mistake and not a style. **Weil** put it there.

Und does not do that. Nor does **aber**. Four of the shortest words in German, and one of them rearranges the sentence after it while the others leave it alone.

Reading is where that stops being a rule you apply and becomes something you see coming. The comma and the **weil** together are the warning: hold on, the verb is at the far end.

This is the first whole paragraph the book has asked you to hold at once, and it works because everything in it was paid for.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the paragraph aloud, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many words in that paragraph were new? (**None.**)

Which joiner moves the verb, and which two leave it alone? (**Weil** moves it; **und** and **aber** do not.)

Chapter 53

Writing — Your Own Line

Modes: ✍ pen (1) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can write one line about myself from a closed supply of known words, with nothing to copy, and capitalise every noun.

Complete GE-W02-eigene-zeile: a greeting and a name chosen rather than copied, with the capitals checked before anything else.

53.1 Your own line — the first writing with no model

You have written **Hallo** four ways: traced, copied, copied from memory, and written from the sound alone.

Every one of those had something to reach for. This one does not.

Writing — controlled composition

Write **one line** about yourself: a greeting, then your name.

Nothing is supplied. You choose the words, and the supply you are choosing from is closed — only what this book has taught you.

Before you write, one thing to decide deliberately rather than by accident: **which nouns get a capital?** In German the answer is *all of them*, not only the ones that name a person or a place. Your line will have at least one, and an English-trained hand will lower-case it without noticing.

Write the line. Then read it back and check the capitals **before** you check anything else.

Before you move on

Which German nouns take a capital letter? (**All of them.**)
And what did you have to choose, that the last four lessons chose
for you? (**The words.**)

Chapter 54

Writing — With A Clock

Modes: ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can complete the Start Deutsch 1 writing paper's two parts inside its published twenty minutes, filling all five fields and keeping the text near thirty words.

Complete GE-W03-mit-der-uhr: six minutes for the five fields and fourteen for the thirty-word text, then count the words and check the capitals last.

54.1 The same writing, with a clock

You wrote your own line with as long as you liked.

A task you can only do untimed is not yet a task you can do.
Here are the exam's own conditions.

Writing — timed production

What Goethe publishes. The Start Deutsch 1 writing paper runs **20 minutes** and holds **two** parts: a form with **five** fields to complete, and a short personal text of about **thirty words**.

Those numbers are read out of `task-shapes/a1.json`, which transcribes the Goethe materials. They are not invented for this page.

Split the time the way the paper does. **Six minutes** for the five fields, starting now. Fill every one — a blank field scores nothing and cannot be argued with.

Now **fourteen minutes** for the thirty-word text.

When the time is up, stop even mid-word. An unfinished paper is information. An untimed one is not.

Before you move on

Count your words. **Thirty** is the published length, and it is a target rather than a floor: a text of fifteen has not done the task, and one of sixty has spent time the paper did not give you.

Now the German-specific check, and do it last because it is the one a clock destroys first: **the capitals**. Under time pressure a hand reverts to the habits it learned first, and for most readers of this book those habits are English ones.

Goethe awards the certificate on **60 of 100 overall** and publishes no separate pass mark for writing — which means a weak writing paper can be carried by the other three. Knowing that is not permission to write badly; it is the reason to know exactly how weak yours is.

Chapter 55

Writing — Four Lines, And The Joiner You Can See

Modes: ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can write four connected lines to a named reader, joining with **und** and **aber** and giving a reason with **weil**, and check that **weil** actually moved the verb to the end.

Complete GE-W04-vier-zeilen: four lines to one reader, at least one joined with **und** or **aber** and one with **weil**, then point at the verb in the **weil** line and check it is last.

55.1 Four lines, and the joiner you can see

The last lesson asked for writing that was **finished on time**. This one asks for writing that **holds together**.

Pick one person who will read it.

What to know first

Connected writing is not **longer** writing. Four short lines can be connected; one long line can fail to be. What makes it connected is that a sentence stops standing on its own.

You hold three joiners, and German does something with the third that the first two do not. **und** adds. **aber** sets against. Both leave the sentence they join exactly as it was.

weil does not. It picks the verb up and puts it at the **end**.

That is worth stopping on, because it means German shows you the join in the word order itself. In most languages you can only tell that two clauses were joined by reading the joining word. In German the second clause visibly rearranges — and a reader who sees a verb arrive late knows a reason is being given before they have finished the sentence.

Writing — connected composition

Write **four lines** to the person you picked.

At least one must use **und** or **aber**. At least one must use **weil** — and in that one, check the verb has actually moved.

Use only words you already write. This lesson adds no vocabulary; the whole exercise is the joining.

Before you move on

Cover your first line and read the second alone. Does it still make sense without the first? If it does, you wrote a **list** — which is where you were one lesson ago.

Then find your **weil** line and point at the verb. Is it last? If it is sitting where it would sit in a sentence on its own, the word is doing nothing: you wrote *und* with a different spelling.

Pronunciation — a reference, not a chapter

A **reference**, not a chapter. Each lesson names the sounds its word needs; this is where to look them up. German spelling is far more phonetic than French — mostly you say what you see — so this page is short.

Ids (e.g. **ch-ach**) are cited in each lesson's frontmatter **sounds:** field.

Vowels

- **vowel-a-german** — **a** = a clean open *ah* (*Tag*, *Nacht*).
- **vowel-o-german** — **o** = *oh* (*Morgen*).
- **vowel-u-german** — **u** = *oo* as in *food* (*gut* = *goot*).
- **Umlauts** shift the vowel forward: **ä** $\approx$ *eh*, **ö** $\approx$ the vowel in *fur*, **ü** = the front-rounded *ee* (same as French *u*). (Later.)
- Doubled vowels are long; a vowel before a doubled consonant is short.

Consonants that differ

- **ch-ach** — **ch** after *a/o/u* = a guttural sound at the back of the throat (Scottish *loch*): *Nacht* = *nahkht*, *Buch* = *bookh*. After *e/i* it's softer (like a strong *h* in *hue*).
- **z-ts** — **z** = *ts* (*zehn* = *tsayn*); **s** before a vowel = *z* (*sagen* = *ZAH-gen*); **ß** = a sharp *ss*.
- **h-pronounced** — **h** at the start of a word **is** pronounced (unlike Spanish/French): *hallo*, *Haus*. After a vowel it just lengthens it (*gehen*).

- **d-t-final** — German **de-voices final consonants**: a final *d* sounds like *t*, final *g* like *k*, final *b* like *p*. *Abend* = *AH-bent*, *Tag* = *tahk*.
- **r-uvular-german** — **r** = a soft guttural at the back of the throat (like French), or lightly rolled in the south. Often barely voiced at the end of a word (*Morgen* ≈ *MOR-gn*).
- **w** = English *v* (*Wasser* = *VAS-ser*); **v** = English *f* (*Vater* = *FAH-ter*); **j** = English *y* (*ja* = *yah*).

The two big habits

- **Every noun is Capitalized** — *Tag*, *Nacht*, *Morgen* — not just names. A spelling rule unique to German among these languages.
- **Final devoicing** (above): what's written *-d/-g/-b* is said *-t/-k/-p*.

The High German Consonant Shift (a decoding tool, not pronunciation)

Not about *saying* words but *recognizing* them: German pushed certain consonants forward, so English and German cousins differ predictably. Learn it and you can guess across the two languages:

- English **d** → German **t**: good → gut, **day** → **Tag**.
- English **t** → German **s** / **ss** / **z**: water → Wasser, that → das, ten → zehn.
- English **p** → German **pf** / **f**: **apple** → **Apfel**, ship → Schiff.
- English **k** → German **ch**: make → machen, book → Buch.

(This is a *different* shift from Grimm's Law, which is the older PIE→Germanic change shared by both English and German — see the *Nacht* lesson.)

Glossary

This glossary collects every word and phrase taught in the book. Pronunciation appears when it differs from the written form; chapter numbers show where each entry is introduced.

Abend

evening (der Abend — masculine)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

aber

but — the third joiner, and the first word in the book that sets two thoughts against each other

Introduced in Chapter 48.

acht

eight — the rasp you already own, on a number you already know

Introduced in Chapter 8.

achtzehn

eighteen — the digit whole again, and the -cht you have had since Nacht

Introduced in Chapter 19.

alt

old — the adjective the German age sentence is built on

Introduced in Chapter 27.

auf

on, upon — the small word the formal goodbye is built on

Introduced in Chapter 4.

auf Wiedersehen

goodbye, formally — literally “on the seeing-again”

Introduced in Chapter 4.

bald

soon — and the same word as English bold

Introduced in Chapter 4.

bis

until, up to — the preposition every soft German goodbye is built from

Introduced in Chapter 4.

bis bald

see you soon — the first of the bis... family
Introduced in Chapter 4.

bis morgen

see you tomorrow — and the bis... family, complete
Introduced in Chapter 4.

bis später

see you later — the vaguest of the bis... family
Introduced in Chapter 4.

bitte

please — and also “you’re welcome,” “here you go,” and “pardon?”
Introduced in Chapter 3.

bitte

please — place the familiar courtesy word after a small request
Introduced in Chapter 32.

blank

shiny, polished, bare — a German word that is not a colour, and became one
abroad
Introduced in Chapter 20.

blau

blue — the fourth colour, and the second German word the Romance languages
took
Introduced in Chapter 21.

bleiben

to stay — a verb that takes sein while meaning the exact opposite of change
Introduced in Chapter 29.

danke

thank you — which is really “I think of you”
Introduced in Chapter 3.

das Auge

eye — the third gender back on a body part, and a direct Germanic cousin of
English eye
Introduced in Chapter 43.

das Brot

bread — and the third article, das, which completes the set you were given in
chapter one
Introduced in Chapter 17.

das Herz

heart — the last name from the *Hand* table, closing it with the same k-to-h
Grimm’s law swap already heard on hören and Hund
Introduced in Chapter 44.

Das ist mein Bruder

this is — the phrase that introduces somebody else, using a *das* that stands for no gender at all

Introduced in Chapter 49.

das Jahr

the year — the span the twelve months add up to, and a word German never borrowed

Introduced in Chapter 15.

das Ohr

ear — another direct Germanic cousin of its English translation, and the sense *hören* already named

Introduced in Chapter 43.

das Wasser

water — a second *das*-word, and the *w* that is said as a *v*

Introduced in Chapter 17.

das Wetter, es regnet

weather — a NATIVE Germanic word, unlike Romance's shared Latin *tempus* family; *Wetter* is the SAME word as English "weather," and *regnet* is the SAME word as English "rain"

Introduced in Chapter 34.

dein

your — the second of the six, and the same consonant shift that turned *thou* into *du*

Introduced in Chapter 49.

denken

to think — the verb you already met hiding inside *danke*, and the same inherited word as English *think*

Introduced in Chapter 37.

denn

for, because — the reason word that leaves the sentence alone, and the same word as *dann* and English *then*

Introduced in Chapter 48.

der / die / das

the (masculine / feminine / neuter)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

der April

April — the one month whose Roman name nobody can be sure about

Introduced in Chapter 13.

der Arm

arm — named on the *Hand* table and now finally taught, a word Grimm's law never had to touch

Introduced in Chapter 44.

der August

August — the second and last month named for a man, and the last name the calendar ever gave

Introduced in Chapter 14.

der Bruder

brother — the same word as English brother with one vowel of difference

Introduced in Chapter 16.

der Dezember

December — decem, ten, the last month and the last of the four numbered ones

Introduced in Chapter 14.

der Donner

thunder — the noun, and the god's name hiding inside it

Introduced in Chapter 10.

der Februar

February — the one month named for a ritual rather than a person or a god

Introduced in Chapter 13.

der Finger

finger — identical to its English cousin, and possibly, though not certainly, built on the word for “five”

Introduced in Chapter 44.

der Freund

friend — a Germanic cousin of English friend, both frozen out of the same old verb meaning “to love”

Introduced in Chapter 42.

der Frühling

spring — früh plus -ling, “the early one”, a season German named rather than borrowed

Introduced in Chapter 15.

der Fuß

foot — the fourth name from the *Hand* table, and the same p-to-f Grimm's law pattern Vater already taught

Introduced in Chapter 44.

der Herbst

autumn — and the word is one English still has, doing a different job

Introduced in Chapter 15.

der Januar

January — Janus, the god of doorways, which is what a first month is

Introduced in Chapter 13.

der Juli

July — the first month in the year named after a man, and he named it himself

Introduced in Chapter 14.

der Juni

June — Juno, queen of the gods, and a j that sounds like Januar's
Introduced in Chapter 13.

der Kaffee

coffee — a loanword that crossed from Arabic to German by way of Turkish and Italian, and the first word in a new polite request
Introduced in Chapter 41.

der Kopf

the head — masculine, capitalised, with final pf
Introduced in Chapter 30.

der Lenz

spring, the old poetic word — worth recognising, not worth saying
Introduced in Chapter 15.

der Mai

May — Maia, a goddess of growth, and the shortest month name German has
Introduced in Chapter 13.

der März

March — Mars's month, and once the first month of the whole Roman year
Introduced in Chapter 13.

der Mittag

noon — Mitte plus Tag, a compound you can read before you are told it
Introduced in Chapter 12.

der Monat

the month — and the word itself is the moon, before Rome supplied the names to put in it
Introduced in Chapter 13.

der Mond

the moon — the noun the first weekday is built on, and English's own word untouched
Introduced in Chapter 10.

der Mund

mouth — the same inherited word as English mouth, with a root the standard accounts do not agree on past Proto-Germanic
Introduced in Chapter 43.

der November

November — novem, nine, and a word German and English spell identically
Introduced in Chapter 14.

der Oktober

October — octo, eight, and German spells the Latin c as a k because German spells that sound with a k
Introduced in Chapter 14.

der Sabbat

the Sabbath — the only word in the week that is neither Germanic nor Latin
Introduced in Chapter 11.

der September

September — the seventh month, which is now the ninth, and the name never
caught up

Introduced in Chapter 14.

der Sommer

summer — the season whose German and English names are the same word,
barely disguised

Introduced in Chapter 15.

der Tee

tea — a word that looks like its English cousin and is not said like it, and
travelled to Europe by sea rather than overland

Introduced in Chapter 41.

der Vater

father — spelled with a V and said with an f, which is the whole chapter in one
letter

Introduced in Chapter 16.

der Wein

wine — a der-word, and the one thing on this table Rome supplied

Introduced in Chapter 17.

der Winter

winter — spelled exactly as in English, and the fourth of the four

Introduced in Chapter 15.

Deutsch

German, the language — and it means “of the people”

Introduced in Chapter 5.

dich

you, as the one it happens to — the partner of mich, and English *thee* one more
time

Introduced in Chapter 50.

die (plural)

the — the one plural article German uses for every gender

Introduced in Chapter 1.

die Eltern

parents — a plural with no singular, and underneath it a comparative meaning
“the older ones”

Introduced in Chapter 16.

die Familie

family — the whole group the Eltern and Geschwister already named the
members of, and this chapter’s one Latin loan beside two native words

Introduced in Chapter 42.

die Freundin

friend (female) — built on Freund with the native feminine suffix -in, the same suffix English kept in exactly one fossil word, vixen
Introduced in Chapter 42.

die Geschwister

siblings — one word for brothers and sisters together, which English has to say in three
Introduced in Chapter 16.

die Hand

the hand — the same word as English, and unrelated to Romance manus
Introduced in Chapter 30.

die Jahre

the plural of das Jahr, which is the form the age sentence needs and the only form it uses
Introduced in Chapter 27.

die Jahreszeit

season — literally year-time, a compound you can now read without being told
Introduced in Chapter 15.

die Milch

milk — the native Germanic word that closes this trio, standing beside two loanwords the way Wasser once stood beside the loanword Wein
Introduced in Chapter 41.

die Mitte

the middle — the native piece both of the day's pivots are built from
Introduced in Chapter 12.

die Mitternacht

midnight — the second pivot, and the -cht/-ght pair paying off again
Introduced in Chapter 12.

die Mutter

mother — a die-word, and the one family word whose first sound nothing ever touched
Introduced in Chapter 16.

die Nase

nose — the fourth face-part, cousin of English nose and of Latin nasus, and the payoff that completes the face *Kopf* only started
Introduced in Chapter 43.

die Schwester

sister — and once you strip the sch back to an s it is the English word
Introduced in Chapter 16.

die Sonne

the sun — the noun behind Sunday, and a die-word where English has no gender at all
Introduced in Chapter 11.

die Stunde

an hour's span — the native word that survived beside the borrowed one, with the jobs divided

Introduced in Chapter 12.

die Uhr

the clock, and o'clock — the first everyday German word in this book that Rome supplied

Introduced in Chapter 12.

die Zeit

time — a Germanic word with no Latin in it at all, and the second half of the word for season

Introduced in Chapter 15.

Dienstag

Tuesday — named for a war-god both languages kept, under two different names

Introduced in Chapter 10.

dir

to you — the informal partner of mir

Introduced in Chapter 3.

Donnerstag

Thursday — the thunder-god's day, and the same god-slot under three names

Introduced in Chapter 10.

drei

three — the same word, with th worn down to d

Introduced in Chapter 6.

dreizehn

thirteen — the rule's first run, and it is exactly what you would predict

Introduced in Chapter 19.

du / Sie

you (familiar / formal)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

du bist

you are — bin plus the -st ending you already know, and the one place sein behaves

Introduced in Chapter 26.

du hast

you have — the first form where the b falls out and the rule stops working

Introduced in Chapter 22.

du hast gesagt

you said — the second slot, where haben drops its b exactly as English have does

Introduced in Chapter 24.

du warst

you were — the familiar -st ending again, now on the past stem

Introduced in Chapter 28.

einen

a, an — the form the word takes for a masculine thing you have, and the first sighting of a system taught later
Introduced in Chapter 22.

eins

one — and the ei that is always the English word “eye”
Introduced in Chapter 6.

elf

eleven — and it is not irregular, it is a different rule
Introduced in Chapter 18.

Entschuldigung

sorry / excuse me (literally “un-guiling,” from Schuld “guilt/fault”)
Introduced in Chapter 33.

er hat

he has — the second and last form where the b falls out
Introduced in Chapter 22.

er hat das gemacht

he did that — the third slot, and the first Perfekt sentence with something in the middle
Introduced in Chapter 24.

er ist

he is — the form that also serves sie, es and das, and the one that matches Latin est
Introduced in Chapter 26.

er war

he was — the same word as ich war, because the German simple past gives its third person no ending
Introduced in Chapter 28.

er • sie • es

he, she, it — the three third-person pronouns, and the -t they share
Introduced in Chapter 5.

es

it — the placeholder German puts in front of a state
Introduced in Chapter 3.

es geht

“it goes” — the German shrug, and what saying nothing extra means
Introduced in Chapter 3.

es gibt

there is, there are — literally “it gives”, and it takes the done-to form this chapter has taught
Introduced in Chapter 47.

Es ist zwei Uhr

telling the time — es ist, a number you own, and Uhr
Introduced in Chapter 12.

euch

you all, as the ones it happens to — and the word English quietly promoted to be its only “you”

Introduced in Chapter 50.

fahren

to travel, to drive — motion with a vehicle under it, and English fare hiding inside

Introduced in Chapter 29.

fragen

to ask — a weak verb whose vowel stays put, and whose closest English relatives came in from Latin as pray and precarious

Introduced in Chapter 38.

Freitag

Friday — the one day named for a goddess, and the Roman she replaced

Introduced in Chapter 10.

freut mich

pleased to meet you (literally “it gladdens me”)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

früh

early — the word the first season is built out of, and a cousin of English early

Introduced in Chapter 15.

fünf

five — and the p-to-f law caught in one word

Introduced in Chapter 7.

fünfzehn

fifteen — the rule’s third run, and where English clipped and German did not

Introduced in Chapter 19.

gehen

to go — and the verb German uses for “how are you?”

Introduced in Chapter 3.

gehen

to go, and to walk — because German has no separate word for walking, and English’s walk turns out to be a word about cloth

Introduced in Chapter 40.

gelernt

learned — the wrap on lernen, and the sentence you can finally say about yourself

Introduced in Chapter 23.

gemacht

made, done — the wrap applied to machen, and the one spelling surprise in it

Introduced in Chapter 23.

gesagt

said — the first past participle, and the first time a German ending arrives with a beginning attached

Introduced in Chapter 23.

gestern

yesterday — the word that fills the middle of a Perfekt sentence, and morgen's opposite number

Introduced in Chapter 24.

gewohnt

lived, dwelt — the wrap on *wohnen*, and the English fossil that still means “accustomed”

Introduced in Chapter 23.

grün, gelb

green and yellow — grün is native Germanic, the direct cousin of English's OWN “green” (a different root entirely from Latin's *viridis*); gelb is native too, and is usually said to share its ultimate PIE root with French's *jaune*, though that particular link is less secure than it first appears

Introduced in Chapter 36.

gut

good; well

Introduced in Chapter 1.

Gute Nacht

good night

Introduced in Chapter 1.

Guten Abend

good evening

Introduced in Chapter 1.

Guten Morgen

good morning

Introduced in Chapter 1.

Guten Tag

hello / good day (polite)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

haben

to have — the twin of English *have*, and the workhorse the rest of the book leans on

Introduced in Chapter 22.

hallo

hello (informal)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

heißen

to be called / to be named

Introduced in Chapter 2.

helfen

to help — the same word as English *help*, separated by one sound law, and still strong in German the way English's *help* once was

Introduced in Chapter 38.

hören

to hear — the same verb as English hear, and the closing of a chapter of four things you do without going anywhere

Introduced in Chapter 39.

Hund, Katze

dog and cat — Hund is native Germanic, cognate with English's OWN discarded word "hound"; Katze, surprisingly, is NOT native — it's the same borrowed Latin word behind French chat and Spanish gato (though not every European language shares it)

Introduced in Chapter 35.

ich

I

Introduced in Chapter 2.

ich bin

I am — the first form of sein, and it comes from a different verb than the infinitive does

Introduced in Chapter 26.

ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt

I am twenty years old — the answer, word for word the English sentence

Introduced in Chapter 27.

ich habe gesagt

I said — the first filled slot of the Perfekt, and a sentence you can use whole

Introduced in Chapter 24.

ich hatte

I had — haben's own Präteritum, and one of the handful that everybody says out loud

Introduced in Chapter 25.

ich heiße / du heißt / Sie heißen

one verb, three endings — the ending machine every German verb runs

Introduced in Chapter 2.

ich heiße...

my name is... (literally "I am called...")

Introduced in Chapter 2.

ich konnte

I could — a Präteritum that survives in ordinary speech everywhere, north and south alike

Introduced in Chapter 25.

Ich lerne Deutsch

your first sentence built from parts, not handed to you whole

Introduced in Chapter 5.

ich machte

I made, I did — the second verb through the -te ending

Introduced in Chapter 25.

ich sagte

I said, in one word — the Präteritum of sagen, beside the Perfekt that means exactly the same

Introduced in Chapter 25.

ich war

I was — the past of sein, and a third stem that shares nothing with the other two

Introduced in Chapter 28.

ihn

him — the pronoun that moves on the same row as den, einen, keinen and meinen

Introduced in Chapter 50.

Ihnen

to you, formally — the capitalised to-whom that goes with Sie

Introduced in Chapter 3.

ihr

her — the fourth of the six, and a word that now does three separate jobs in this book

Introduced in Chapter 49.

ihr

you all — the plural you English gave up

Introduced in Chapter 5.

ihr seid

you are, to more than one person — the form English lost when it dropped its plural you

Introduced in Chapter 26.

in

in — the same word as English in, and it needs no learning at all

Introduced in Chapter 5.

ja

yes

Introduced in Chapter 31.

kein

no, not a — the word German builds out of “not” and “one”, exactly as English built *none*

Introduced in Chapter 45.

keine

no, not a — in front of a die-word, and in front of every plural, wearing the same -e that eine wears

Introduced in Chapter 45.

keinen

no, not a — for a der-word that is the thing you have, the negative twin of einen

Introduced in Chapter 45.

kommen

to come — English come with one consonant shifted, and the second verb of the sein family

Introduced in Chapter 29.

können

can, to be able — English *can*, and a verb that once meant *to know*

Introduced in Chapter 51.

laufen

to run — and to walk, because German draws the line in a different place from English, with *rennen* at the fast end

Introduced in Chapter 40.

lernen

to learn — and its noun is English lore

Introduced in Chapter 5.

lesen

to read — a verb that first meant “to gather”, and the first one in this book whose vowel changes in the du and er forms

Introduced in Chapter 37.

machen

to make, to do — and it is just English make

Introduced in Chapter 5.

mein

my — pulled out of the phrase it has been hiding in since you first gave your name, and the head of a family of six words that share one set of endings

Introduced in Chapter 49.

mich

me — the object form of ich

Introduced in Chapter 2.

mir

to me, for me — the form German uses for the person a thing happens to

Introduced in Chapter 3.

Mittwoch

Wednesday — the first day that breaks the pattern, because the Church would not name one for Wodan

Introduced in Chapter 10.

möchten

would like — the politest thing in German, and a bent form of the mögen you already own

Introduced in Chapter 51.

mögen, lieben

to like and to love — plus gern, the adverb that lets any verb say “I like doing this” and has no English shape at all

Introduced in Chapter 38.

Montag

Monday — the pattern's first instance, and the one weekday English and German name identically

Introduced in Chapter 10.

Morgen

morning (der Morgen — masculine)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

morgen

tomorrow — the second job of the Morgen you already know

Introduced in Chapter 4.

müde

tired — the first adjective that says something about a person, and it needs no ending here

Introduced in Chapter 26.

müssen

must, to have to — English *must*, one of the very few English verbs with no -s in the third person, for the same reason

Introduced in Chapter 51.

Nacht

night (die Nacht — feminine)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

nehmen

to take — the verb English lost, though it left numb and nimble behind as fossils

Introduced in Chapter 38.

nein

no

Introduced in Chapter 31.

neun

nine — the oy vowel from Deutsch, twice in one word

Introduced in Chapter 9.

neunzehn

nineteen — the last of the -zehn numbers, and the rule's eighth clean run

Introduced in Chapter 19.

nicht

not — German's plain negator

Introduced in Chapter 3.

oder

or — the second joining word, on the same Germanic root as English *or*, and the tag question every German speaker ends a sentence with

Introduced in Chapter 48.

öffnen

to open — built on *offen*, which is English *open*, which is really the word up; and the doorway into German's separable verbs

Introduced in Chapter 40.

rot

red — the third colour, and the one humans name first after black and white
Introduced in Chapter 21.

sagen

to say — the verb this chapter builds its past tense on
Introduced in Chapter 23.

Samstag

Saturday — the second day that breaks the pattern, and the only one German
bought rather than inherited
Introduced in Chapter 11.

schlafen

to sleep — the same word as English sleep under two coats of German paint, and
a second way for a strong verb to break
Introduced in Chapter 39.

schließen

to close — the second verb in these chapters that German kept and English lost,
and the one that locked up Schloss, Schlüssel and Schluss
Introduced in Chapter 40.

schön

beautiful, nice — and the word that upgrades a thank-you
Introduced in Chapter 3.

schreiben

to write — the one verb in this chapter German did not inherit but borrowed,
from Latin scribere
Introduced in Chapter 37.

schwarz

black — the first of four colours, all of them home-grown Germanic
Introduced in Chapter 20.

sechs

six — where chs is simply an x
Introduced in Chapter 8.

sechzehn

sixteen — sechs without its s, because the s and the ts would collide
Introduced in Chapter 19.

sehen

to see — a straight cognate of English see
Introduced in Chapter 4.

sehr

very — the intensifier that turns gut into a real answer
Introduced in Chapter 3.

sein

his — spelled exactly like the verb *to be*, and the collision is worth meeting
head-on
Introduced in Chapter 49.

sein

to be — the partner of haben, and the most irregular verb German has
Introduced in Chapter 26.

sich

himself, herself, itself, themselves — one German word where English needs four,
and the pronoun that bends a verb back onto its own subject
Introduced in Chapter 50.

sie sind / Sie sind

they are, and the polite you are — one form, and the capital letter is the only
difference
Introduced in Chapter 26.

sieben

seven — and the s that buzzes at the front of a word
Introduced in Chapter 8.

siebzehn

seventeen — sieben without its -en, one syllable saved
Introduced in Chapter 19.

sitzen

to sit — the same inherited word as English sit, respelt by the other branch of the
shift that separated helfen from help
Introduced in Chapter 39.

so lala

so-so — the sing-song middle of the answer ladder
Introduced in Chapter 3.

sondern

but rather — the second “but”, reserved for correcting a negative, which is the
same job doch does for a question
Introduced in Chapter 48.

Sonnabend

Saturday in the north — Sun-eve, built from two words you already own
Introduced in Chapter 11.

Sonntag

Sunday — the one day the Church left alone, where Romance renamed it entirely
Introduced in Chapter 11.

spät

late — and später, “later,” your first comparative
Introduced in Chapter 4.

stehen

to stand — the verb hiding inside verstehen, and the one place German keeps a
letter English put in the wrong tense
Introduced in Chapter 39.

Tag

day (der Tag — masculine)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

tschüss

bye, casually — and secretly the same blessing as adiós

Introduced in Chapter 4.

und

and — and the two-word move that returns a question

Introduced in Chapter 3.

uns

us — the same word as English *us*, doing both German jobs at once, which is the one place German is simpler

Introduced in Chapter 50.

verstehen

to understand — literally “to stand around a thing”, the same picture English built independently in understand

Introduced in Chapter 37.

vielen Dank

many thanks — the noun behind danke, and the warmest everyday thank-you

Introduced in Chapter 3.

vier

four — spelt with a v, said with an f

Introduced in Chapter 7.

vierzehn

fourteen — the rule’s second run, with the V that is an f

Introduced in Chapter 19.

wann

when — the fourth W, and the first question this book can ask about the clock and the calendar it already owns

Introduced in Chapter 46.

warum

why — two old words fused into one, “about what”, the same build as English *wherefore*

Introduced in Chapter 46.

was

what — the fourth w-question, and the one you will use most

Introduced in Chapter 5.

weil

because — the reason word that sends the verb to the end, built out of *die Weile*, which is English *while*

Introduced in Chapter 48.

weiß

white — and the first everyday word that needs the ß you were given in chapter four

Introduced in Chapter 20.

welcher

which — built as “what-like”, the identical two pieces English welded into *which*

Introduced in Chapter 47.

wer

who — and the W that every German question word begins with, against the WH that every English one begins with

Introduced in Chapter 46.

werden

to become — the change-of-state half of the rule, in one word

Introduced in Chapter 29.

wie

how

Introduced in Chapter 2.

Wie alt bist du?

how old are you — word for word the English question, built from four words you own

Introduced in Chapter 27.

Wie geht es dir?

how are you? — informal, and every piece already yours

Introduced in Chapter 3.

wie heißen Sie?

what’s your name? (literally “how are you called?”)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

wie viel · wie viele

how much and how many — one distinction German marks and English marks too, on a word that is English *full*

Introduced in Chapter 47.

wieder

again — the “back” hiding inside withdraw

Introduced in Chapter 4.

wir

we — and the ending that is the dictionary form again

Introduced in Chapter 5.

wir haben gesagt

we said — the fourth slot, where the helper is the infinitive itself

Introduced in Chapter 24.

wir sind

we are — the plural form, and the first one that looks like the infinitive

Introduced in Chapter 26.

wir waren

we were — the plural past, and the last form of sein you need
Introduced in Chapter 28.

wo

where — the third of German's w-questions
Introduced in Chapter 5.

wohnen

to live, to dwell — your first regular German verb
Introduced in Chapter 5.

zehn

ten — one consonant photographed three times
Introduced in Chapter 9.

zwanzig

twenty — where the ending changes from zehn to -zig
Introduced in Chapter 19.

zwei

two — English two with its t turned into the ts of z
Introduced in Chapter 6.

zwölf

twelve — the second and last number to refuse the pattern
Introduced in Chapter 18.

Review Questions

Try these without looking ahead. Every prompt comes from the same canonical lesson data as its chapter. Answers begin in the next section.

Chapter 30

30.1 *Kopf / Haupt — two head-words*

Which inherited German head-word survives in compounds such as Hauptstadt?

Chapter 52

52.1 *(reading) — six nouns, and a capital letter doing real work*

Which of the six would you drink?

52.2 *(reading) — six sentences, and a wait at the end*

Which line says something is necessary?

52.3 *(reading) — the first paragraph*

Which word sends the verb to the end?

Answer Key

The first response is the canonical display answer. When a question accepts other authored forms, they appear underneath.

Chapter 30

30.1 *Kopf / Haupt — two head-words*

Answer: Haupt

Chapter 52

52.1 *(reading) — six nouns, and a capital letter doing real work*

Answer: coffee

Also accepted: Kaffee

52.2 *(reading) — six sentences, and a wait at the end*

Answer: ich muss arbeiten

Also accepted: Ich muss arbeiten.; muss

52.3 *(reading) — the first paragraph*

Answer: weil

Also accepted: because

Index

Look up an English meaning, a dedicated language topic, or a chapter topic. Each linked reference opens the chapter where the material is introduced; the focus labels name only explicitly typed lesson sections.

A

a, an — the form the word takes for a masculine thing you have, and the first sighting of a system taught later *einen*

Chapter 22, p. 249

ä ö ü — the two dots that used to be an e

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, grammar, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 55

again — the “back” hiding inside withdraw *wieder*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 4, p. 55

An Ancient Cousin and a Second Emigrant

chapter topic; Chapter 21, p. 241

an hour’s span — the native word that survived beside the borrowed one, with the jobs divided *die Stunde*

explicit focus: pronunciation, usage and culture; Chapter 12, p. 137

and — and the two-word move that returns a question *und*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 3, p. 33

April — the one month whose Roman name nobody can be sure about *der April*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 13, p. 149

Arm, Finger, Foot, Heart

chapter topic; Chapter 44, p. 415

arm — named on the *Hand* table and now finally taught, a word Grimm’s law never had to touch *der Arm*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 44, p. 415

August — the second and last month named for a man, and the last name the calendar ever gave *der August*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 14, p. 161

autumn — and the word is one English still has, doing a different job *der Herbst*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

B

beautiful, nice — and the word that upgrades a thank-you *schön*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

because — the reason word that sends the verb to the end, built out of *die Weile*, which is English *while* *weil*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 48, p. 451

Being Your Years

chapter topic; Chapter 27, p. 307

bin, ist, war — three verbs under one roof

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 28, p. 315

black — the first of four colours, all of them home-grown

Germanic *schwarz*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 20, p. 231

blau, taken apart

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 21, p. 241

blue — the fourth colour, and the second German word the

Romance languages took *blau*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 21, p. 241

bread — and the third article, das, which completes the set you were given in chapter one *das Brot*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 17, p. 201

Bread, Water, Wine

chapter topic; Chapter 17, p. 201

Brot and bread

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 17, p. 201

brother — the same word as English brother with one vowel of difference *der Bruder*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 16, p. 185

Bruder and frater

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 185

but rather — the second “but”, reserved for correcting a negative, which is the same job doch does for a question *sondern*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 48, p. 451

but — the third joiner, and the first word in the book that sets two thoughts against each other *aber*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 48, p. 451

bye, casually — and secretly the same blessing as adiós *tschüss*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 4, p. 55

C

can, to be able — English *can*, and a verb that once meant *to know können*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 51, p. 481

coffee — a loanword that crossed from Arabic to German by way of Turkish and Italian, and the first word in a new polite

request *der Kaffee*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 41, p. 397

Coffee, Tea, and Milk

chapter topic; Chapter 41, p. 397

D

day (der Tag — masculine) *Tag*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

December — *decem*, ten, the last month and the last of the four numbered ones *der Dezember*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 14, p. 161

den — the form the book has owed you since *einen*

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 47, p. 441

der angekommene Zug — where the ending comes back

grammar topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 29, p. 325

der Stamm — drop the *-en*, and you have the machine

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 5, p. 77

Der Tag ist gut — the adjective that stays still

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 47, p. 441

die Verbkammer — the bracket German has been building all along

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 51, p. 481

Dog and Cat

chapter topic; Chapter 35, p. 355

dog and cat — *Hund* is native Germanic, cognate with English's OWN discarded word "hound"; *Katze*, surprisingly, is NOT native — it's the same borrowed Latin word behind French *chat* and Spanish *gato* (though not every European language shares it) *Hund, Katze*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 35, p. 355

E

ear — another direct Germanic cousin of its English translation, and the sense *hören* already named *das Ohr*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 43, p. 409

early — the word the first season is built out of, and a cousin of English *early* *früh*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

eight — the rasp you already own, on a number you already know *acht*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 8, p. 107

eighteen — the digit whole again, and the -cht you have had since *Nacht* *achtzehn*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217

ein und eine — when “one” becomes “a”

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 7, p. 101

eleven — and it is not irregular, it is a different rule *elf*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 18, p. 211

evening (der Abend — masculine) *Abend*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

eye — the third gender back on a body part, and a direct Germanic cousin of English *eye* *das Auge*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 43, p. 409

Eyes, Ears, Mouth, Nose

chapter topic; Chapter 43, p. 409

F

family — the whole group the *Eltern* and *Geschwister* already named the members of, and this chapter’s one Latin loan beside two native words *die Familie*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 42, p. 403

Farewells

chapter topic; Chapter 4, p. 55

father — spelled with a V and said with an f, which is the whole chapter in one letter *der Vater*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 16, p. 185

February — the one month named for a ritual rather than a person or a god *der Februar*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 13, p. 149

fifteen — the rule’s third run, and where English clipped and German did not *fünfzehn*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217

finger — identical to its English cousin, and possibly, though not certainly, built on the word for “five” *der Finger*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 44, p. 415

five — and the p-to-f law caught in one word *fünf*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 7, p. 101

foot — the fourth name from the *Hand* table, and the same p-to-f Grimm’s law pattern Vater already taught *der Fuß*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 44, p. 415

for, because — the reason word that leaves the sentence alone, and the same word as dann and English *then* *denn*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 48, p. 451

Four, Five, and the Article Hiding in Eins

chapter topic; Chapter 7, p. 101

Four lines, and the joiner you can see

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 55, p. 499

four — spelt with a v, said with an f *vier*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 7, p. 101

fourteen — the rule’s second run, with the V that is an f *vierzehn*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217

Friday — the one day named for a goddess, and the Roman she replaced *Freitag*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 10, p. 119

friend — a Germanic cousin of English friend, both frozen out of the same old verb meaning “to love” *der Freund*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 42, p. 403

Friend and Family

chapter topic; Chapter 42, p. 403

friend (female) — built on Freund with the native feminine suffix -in, the same suffix English kept in exactly one fossil word,

vixen *die Freundin*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 42, p. 403

G

ge-...-t — the wrap that makes a participle

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 23, p. 259

gegangen — the other half of the past

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 51, p. 481

gegangen — the participle that never changes

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 29, p. 325

German, the language — and it means “of the people” *Deutsch*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 77

Going, Running, Opening, Closing

chapter topic; Chapter 40, p. 387

good evening *Guten Abend*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

good morning *Guten Morgen*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

good night *Gute Nacht*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

good; well *gut*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

goodbye, formally — literally “on the seeing-again” *auf**Wiedersehen*

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 4, p. 55

Gott plus Tag

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Green and Yellow

chapter topic; Chapter 36, p. 357

green and yellow — grün is native Germanic, the direct cousin of English’s OWN “green” (a different root entirely from Latin’s viridis); gelb is native too, and is usually said to share its ultimate PIE root with French’s jaune, though that particular link is less secure than it first appears *grün, gelb*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 36, p. 357

Greetings

chapter topic; Chapter 1, p. 1

Großschreibung — why German capitalises every noun

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 4, p. 55

H**hab- through the machine**

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 22, p. 249

haben is not habēre

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 22, p. 249

haben plus a participle — the everyday past

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 24, p. 269

Hallo — copy one greeting with help

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

Hallo — write it from the sound

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

Hallo — write it with the model covered

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

he did that — the third slot, and the first Perfekt sentence with something in the middle *er hat das gemacht*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 24, p. 269

he has — the second and last form where the b falls out *er hat*

Chapter 22, p. 249

he is — the form that also serves sie, es and das, and the one that matches Latin est *er ist*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 26, p. 295

he, she, it — the three third-person pronouns, and the -t they

share *er · sie · es*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 77

he was — the same word as ich war, because the German simple

past gives its third person no ending *er war*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 28, p. 315

Head and Hand

chapter topic; Chapter 30, p. 339

heart — the last name from the *Hand* table, closing it with the same k-to-h Grimm's law swap already heard on hören and

Hund *das Herz*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 44, p. 415

hello / good day (polite) *Guten Tag*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

hello (informal) *hallo*

explicit focus: pronunciation, writing, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

her — the fourth of the six, and a word that now does three

separate jobs in this book *ihr*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 49, p. 461

Herbst and harvest

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 15, p. 171

him — the pronoun that moves on the same row as den, einen,

keinen and meinen *ihn*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 50, p. 471

himself, herself, itself, themselves — one German word where

English needs four, and the pronoun that bends a verb back onto

its own subject *sich*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 50, p. 471

his — spelled exactly like the verb *to be*, and the collision is

worth meeting head-on *sein*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 49, p. 461

Homegrown numbers, imported months

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 9, p. 111

how *wie*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 21

How Are You?

chapter topic; Chapter 3, p. 33

how are you? — informal, and every piece already yours *Wie geht es dir?*

Chapter 3, p. 33

how much and how many — one distinction German marks and English marks too, on a word that is English *full wie viel · wie viele*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 47, p. 441

how old are you — word for word the English question, built from four words you own *Wie alt bist du?*

Chapter 27, p. 307

I**I** *ich*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 21

I am — the first form of sein, and it comes from a different verb than the infinitive does *ich bin*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 26, p. 295

I am twenty years old — the answer, word for word the English sentence *ich bin zwanzig Jahre alt*

Chapter 27, p. 307

I Am, You Are

chapter topic; Chapter 26, p. 295

I could — a Präteritum that survives in ordinary speech everywhere, north and south alike *ich konnte*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 25, p. 281

I had — haben's own Präteritum, and one of the handful that everybody says out loud *ich hatte*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 25, p. 281

I made, I did — the second verb through the -te ending *ich machte*

Chapter 25, p. 281

I said, in one word — the Präteritum of sagen, beside the Perfekt that means exactly the same *ich sagte*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 25, p. 281

I said — the first filled slot of the Perfekt, and a sentence you can use whole *ich habe gesagt*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 24, p. 269

I was — the past of sein, and a third stem that shares nothing with the other two *ich war*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 28, p. 315

ich bin gegangen — the perfect built on sein

grammar topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 29, p. 325

ich bin gewesen — and the rest of the learned list

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 29, p. 325

in — the same word as English in, and it needs no learning at all *in*

Chapter 5, p. 77

Introducing Yourself

chapter topic; Chapter 2, p. 21

“it goes” — the German shrug, and what saying nothing extra means *es geht*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 3, p. 33

It means “I said,” not only “I have said”

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 24, p. 269

it — the placeholder German puts in front of a state *es*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

J**Jahr and alt, taken apart**

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 27, p. 307

January — Janus, the god of doorways, which is what a first month is *der Januar*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 13, p. 149

July — the first month in the year named after a man, and he named it himself *der Juli*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 14, p. 161

June — Juno, queen of the gods, and a j that sounds like**Januar’s** *der Juni*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 13, p. 149

K**kein oder nicht — picking the right one**

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 45, p. 421

Komm! — the sentence with no subject at all

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 46, p. 431

Kopf / Haupt — two head-words

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 30, p. 339

L

late — and später, “later,” your first comparative *spät*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 55

learned — the wrap on lernen, and the sentence you can finally

say about yourself *gelernt*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 23, p. 259

-lif — “left over”

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 18, p. 211

lived, dwelt — the wrap on wohnen, and the English fossil that

still means “accustomed” *gewohnt*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 23, p. 259

M

made, done — the wrap applied to machen, and the one spelling

surprise in it *gemacht*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 23, p. 259

many thanks — the noun behind danke, and the warmest

everyday thank-you *vielen Dank*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

March — Mars’s month, and once the first month of the whole

Roman year *der März*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 13, p. 149

März and Dienstag

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 13, p. 149

May — Maia, a goddess of growth, and the shortest month name

German has *der Mai*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 13, p. 149

me — the object form of ich *mich*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 21

midnight — the second pivot, and the -cht/-ght pair paying off

again *die Mitternacht*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 12, p. 137

milk — the native Germanic word that closes this trio, standing

beside two loanwords the way Wasser once stood beside the

loanword Wein *die Milch*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 41, p. 397

Mine, Yours, His, Hers

chapter topic; Chapter 49, p. 461

Mittag and midi

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 12, p. 137

Monday — the pattern’s first instance, and the one weekday

English and German name identically *Montag*

Chapter 10, p. 119

morning (der Morgen — masculine) *Morgen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

mother — a die-word, and the one family word whose first sound

nothing ever touched *die Mutter*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 16, p. 185

mouth — the same inherited word as English mouth, with a root

the standard accounts do not agree on past Proto-Germanic *der Mund*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 43, p. 409

must, to have to — English *must*, one of the very few English

verbs with no -s in the third person, for the same reason *müssen*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 51, p. 481

Mutter and mater

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 185

my name is... (literally “I am called...”) *ich heiße...*

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 2, p. 21

my — pulled out of the phrase it has been hiding in since you

first gave your name, and the head of a family of six words that

share one set of endings *mein*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 49, p. 461

N

nicht am Ende — where the “not” goes

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 45, p. 421

night (die Nacht — feminine) *Nacht*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

Nine, Ten, and the Months That Are Numbers

chapter topic; Chapter 9, p. 111

nine — the oy vowel from Deutsch, twice in one word *neun*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 9, p. 111

nineteen — the last of the -zehn numbers, and the rule’s eighth

clean run *neunzehn*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217

no *nein*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 31, p. 345

no, not a — for a der-word that is the thing you have, the

negative twin of einen *keinen*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 45, p. 421

no, not a — in front of a die-word, and in front of every plural,
wearing the same -e that eine wears *keine*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 45, p. 421

no, not a — the word German builds out of “not” and “one”,
exactly as English built *none* *kein*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 45, p. 421

noon — **Mitte plus Tag**, a compound you can read before you
are told it *der Mittag*

Chapter 12, p. 137

nose — the fourth face-part, cousin of English nose and of Latin
nasus, and the payoff that completes the face *Kopf* only

started *die Nase*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 43, p. 409

not — **German’s plain negator** *nicht*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

Not One, Not a Scrap

chapter topic; Chapter 45, p. 421

November — **novem, nine**, and a word German and English spell
identically *der November*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 14, p. 161

O

October — **octo, eight**, and German spells the Latin c as a k
because German spells that sound with a k *der Oktober*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 14, p. 161

old — the adjective the German age sentence is built on *alt*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 27, p. 307

on, upon — the small word the formal goodbye is built on *auf*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 55

one — and the ei that is always the English word “eye” *eins*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 95

One Left Over

chapter topic; Chapter 18, p. 211

One, Two, Three

chapter topic; Chapter 6, p. 95

one verb, three endings — the ending machine every German
verb runs *ich heiße / du heißt / Sie heißen*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 2, p. 21

or — the second joining word, on the same Germanic root as
English *or*, and the tag question every German speaker ends a
sentence with *oder*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 48, p. 451

P

parents — a plural with no singular, and underneath it a comparative meaning “the older ones” *die Eltern*

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 185

Please

chapter topic; Chapter 32, p. 349

please — and also “you’re welcome,” “here you go,” and “pardon?” *bitte*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 3, p. 33

please — place the familiar courtesy word after a small request *bitte*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 32, p. 349

pleased to meet you (literally “it gladdens me”) *freut mich*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 21

R

Reading — Nouns, Sentences, and a First Paragraph

chapter topic; Chapter 52, p. 491

red — the third colour, and the one humans name first after black and white *rot*

explicit focus: pronunciation, usage and culture; Chapter 21, p. 241

rot, taken apart

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 21, p. 241

S

said — the first past participle, and the first time a German ending arrives with a beginning attached *gesagt*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 23, p. 259

Saturday in the north — Sun-eve, built from two words you already own *Sonnabend*

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 11, p. 129

Saturday — the second day that breaks the pattern, and the only one German bought rather than inherited *Samstag*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 11, p. 129

schwarz, taken apart

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 20, p. 231

Schwester and soror

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 185

- season** — literally year-time, a compound you can now read
without being told *die Jahreszeit*
 explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 15, p. 171
- see you later** — the vaguest of the bis... family *bis später*
 Chapter 4, p. 55
- see you soon** — the first of the bis... family *bis bald*
 Chapter 4, p. 55
- see you tomorrow** — and the bis... family, complete *bis morgen*
 explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 4, p. 55
- sein, not haben**
 grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 27, p. 307
- September** — the seventh month, which is now the ninth, and
 the name never caught up *der September*
 explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 14, p. 161
- seven** — and the s that buzzes at the front of a word *sieben*
 explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 8, p. 107
- seventeen** — *sieben* without its -en, one syllable saved *siebzehn*
 explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217
- shiny, polished, bare** — a German word that is not a colour, and
 became one abroad *blank*
 explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 20, p. 231
- Siblings, not borrowings**
 grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 6, p. 95
- siblings** — one word for brothers and sisters together, which
 English has to say in three *die Geschwister*
 explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 185
- sister** — and once you strip the sch back to an s it is the English
 word *die Schwester*
 explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 16, p. 185
- Sitting, Standing, Sleeping, Hearing**
 chapter topic; Chapter 39, p. 377
- Six, Seven, Eight**
 chapter topic; Chapter 8, p. 107
- six** — where chs is simply an x *sechs*
 explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 8, p. 107
- sixteen** — *sechs* without its s, because the s and the ts would
 collide *sechzehn*
 explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217
- so-so** — the sing-song middle of the answer ladder *so lala*
 explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 3, p. 33
- soon** — and the same word as English bold *bald*
 explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 4, p. 55
- Sorry**
 chapter topic; Chapter 33, p. 351

sorry / excuse me (literally “un-guiling,” from Schuld “guilt/fault”) *Entschuldigung*

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 33, p. 351

spring — früh plus -ling, “the early one”, a season German named rather than borrowed *der Frühling*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

spring, the old poetic word — worth recognising, not worth saying *der Lenz*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

summer — the season whose German and English names are the same word, barely disguised *der Sommer*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

Sunday — the one day the Church left alone, where Romance renamed it entirely *Sonntag*

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 11, p. 129

Suppletion — filling a verb in from another verb

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 28, p. 315

T

Taking, Asking, Helping, Liking

chapter topic; Chapter 38, p. 367

-te — the one-word past

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 25, p. 281

tea — a word that looks like its English cousin and is not said like it, and travelled to Europe by sea rather than overland *der Tee*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 41, p. 397

Telling the Time

chapter topic; Chapter 12, p. 137

telling the time — es ist, a number you own, and Uhr *Es ist zwei Uhr*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 12, p. 137

ten — one consonant photographed three times *zehn*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 9, p. 111

thank you — which is really “I think of you” *danke*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

The b that fell out

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 22, p. 249

The Bracket

chapter topic; Chapter 51, p. 481

the clock, and o'clock — the first everyday German word in this book that Rome supplied *die Uhr*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 12, p. 137

The Colour German Lent Away

chapter topic; Chapter 20, p. 231

The dental preterite — a Germanic invention

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 25, p. 281

The endings you can actually hear

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 5, p. 77

The First Verbs

chapter topic; Chapter 5, p. 77

The forms that stayed spoken

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 25, p. 281

The gathering Ge-

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 185

The ge- that English lost

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 23, p. 259

The German Weekend

chapter topic; Chapter 11, p. 129

The Gods of the Week

chapter topic; Chapter 10, p. 119

the hand — the same word as English, and unrelated to**Romance manus *die Hand***

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 30, p. 339

the head — masculine, capitalised, with final pf *der Kopf*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 30, p. 339

the (masculine / feminine / neuter) *der / die / das*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

the middle — the native piece both of the day's pivots are built from *die Mitte*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 12, p. 137

the month — and the word itself is the moon, before Rome**supplied the names to put in it *der Monat***

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 13, p. 149

the moon — the noun the first weekday is built on, and English's own word untouched *der Mond*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 10, p. 119

The One It Happens To

chapter topic; Chapter 50, p. 471

The Pair That Proves Grimm's Law

chapter topic; Chapter 16, p. 185

The participle waits at the back

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 24, p. 269

The Past Built From Have

chapter topic; Chapter 24, p. 269

The Past That Takes To Be

chapter topic; Chapter 29, p. 325

The Pattern That Never Breaks

chapter topic; Chapter 19, p. 217

**the plural of *das Jahr*, which is the form the age sentence needs
and the only form it uses *die Jahre***

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 27, p. 307

The Roman Calendar

chapter topic; Chapter 13, p. 149

**the Sabbath — the only word in the week that is neither
Germanic nor Latin *der Sabbat***

Chapter 11, p. 129

The same retreat, three times over

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 25, p. 281

The same writing, with a clock

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 54, p. 497

The Seasons Go Native

chapter topic; Chapter 15, p. 171

The Simple Past

chapter topic; Chapter 25, p. 281

the sun — the noun behind Sunday, and a die-word where**English has no gender at all *die Sonne***

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 11, p. 129

**the — the one plural article German uses for every gender *die*
(*plural*)**

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 1, p. 1

The two clipped digits

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 19, p. 217

The word that emigrated

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 20, p. 231

The Wrappled Participle

chapter topic; Chapter 23, p. 259

the year — the span the twelve months add up to, and a word**German never borrowed *das Jahr***

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

**there is, there are — literally “it gives”, and it takes the done-to
form this chapter has taught *es gibt***

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 47, p. 441

**they are, and the polite you are — one form, and the capital
letter is the only difference *sie sind* / *Sie sind***

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 26, p. 295

**thirteen — the rule’s first run, and it is exactly what you would
predict *dreizehn***

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217

this is — the phrase that introduces somebody else, using a *das* that stands for no gender at all *Das ist mein Bruder*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 49, p. 461

three — the same word, with *th* worn down to *d* *drei*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 6, p. 95

Three Verbs Under One Roof

chapter topic; Chapter 28, p. 315

thunder — the noun, and the god's name hiding inside it *der*

Donner

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 10, p. 119

Thursday — the thunder-god's day, and the same god-slot under

three names *Donnerstag*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 10, p. 119

time — a Germanic word with no Latin in it at all, and the

second half of the word for season *die Zeit*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

tired — the first adjective that says something about a person,

and it needs no ending here *müde*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 26, p. 295

to ask — a weak verb whose vowel stays put, and whose closest

English relatives came in from Latin as pray and

precarious *fragen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 38, p. 367

to be called / to be named *heißen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 21

to be — the partner of *haben*, and the most irregular verb

German has *sein*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 26, p. 295

to become — the change-of-state half of the rule, in one

word *werden*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 29, p. 325

to close — the second verb in these chapters that German kept

and English lost, and the one that locked up *Schloss*, *Schlüssel*

and *Schluss* *schließen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 40, p. 387

to come — English come with one consonant shifted, and the

second verb of the *sein* family *kommen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 29, p. 325

to go — and the verb German uses for “how are you?” *gehen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

to go, and to walk — because German has no separate word for walking, and English's walk turns out to be a word about

cloth *gehen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 40, p. 387

To Have

chapter topic; Chapter 22, p. 249

to have — the twin of English have, and the workhorse the rest of the book leans on *haben*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 22, p. 249

to hear — the same verb as English hear, and the closing of a chapter of four things you do without going anywhere *hören*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 39, p. 377

to help — the same word as English help, separated by one sound law, and still strong in German the way English's help once was *helfen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 38, p. 367

to learn — and its noun is English lore *lernen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 77

to like and to love — plus gern, the adverb that lets any verb say “I like doing this” and has no English shape at all *mögen, lieben*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 38, p. 367

to live, to dwell — your first regular German verb *wohnen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 77

to make, to do — and it is just English make *machen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 77

to me, for me — the form German uses for the person a thing happens to *mir*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

to open — built on offen, which is English open, which is really the word up; and the doorway into German's separable verbs *öffnen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 40, p. 387

to read — a verb that first meant “to gather”, and the first one in this book whose vowel changes in the du and er forms *lesen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 37, p. 359

to run — and to walk, because German draws the line in a different place from English, with rennen at the fast end *laufen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 40, p. 387

to say — the verb this chapter builds its past tense on *sagen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 23, p. 259

to see — a straight cognate of English see *sehen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 55

to sit — the same inherited word as English sit, respelt by the other branch of the shift that separated helfen from help *sitzen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 39, p. 377

to sleep — the same word as English sleep under two coats of German paint, and a second way for a strong verb to

break *schlafen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 39, p. 377

to stand — the verb hiding inside *verstehen*, and the one place

German keeps a letter English put in the wrong tense *stehen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 39, p. 377

to stay — a verb that takes *sein* while meaning the exact

opposite of change *bleiben*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 29, p. 325

to take — the verb English lost, though it left numb and nimble

behind as fossils *nehmen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 38, p. 367

to think — the verb you already met hiding inside *danke*, and

the same inherited word as English think *denken*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 37, p. 359

to travel, to drive — motion with a vehicle under it, and English

fare hiding inside *fahren*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 29, p. 325

to understand — literally “to stand around a thing”, the same

picture English built independently in understand *verstehen*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 37, p. 359

to write — the one verb in this chapter German did not inherit

but borrowed, from Latin *scribere* *schreiben*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 37, p. 359

to you, formally — the capitalised to-whom that goes with

Sie Ihnen

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

to you — the informal partner of *mir* *dir*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

tomorrow — the second job of the Morgen you already

know *morgen*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 55

Tuesday — named for a war-god both languages kept, under two

different names *Dienstag*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 10, p. 119

twelve — the second and last number to refuse the pattern *zwölf*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 18, p. 211

twenty — where the ending changes from *zehn* to *-zig* *zwanzig*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 19, p. 217

two — English two with its *t* turned into the *ts* of *z* *zwei*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 6, p. 95

Two Thoughts, One Sentence

chapter topic; Chapter 48, p. 451

U

Uhr, taken apart

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 12, p. 137

until, up to — the preposition every soft German goodbye is built from *bis*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 4, p. 55

us — the same word as English *us*, doing both German jobs at once, which is the one place German is simpler *uns*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 50, p. 471

V

Vater and pater

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 185

Verbs of the Mind

chapter topic; Chapter 37, p. 359

very — the intensifier that turns gut into a real answer *sehr*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 33

W

Wasser and water

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 17, p. 201

water — a second das-word, and the w that is said as a v *das Wasser*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 17, p. 201

we — and the ending that is the dictionary form again *wir*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 5, p. 77

we are — the plural form, and the first one that looks like the infinitive *wir sind*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 26, p. 295

we said — the fourth slot, where the helper is the infinitive itself *wir haben gesagt*

Chapter 24, p. 269

we were — the plural past, and the last form of sein you need *wir waren*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 28, p. 315

Weather

chapter topic; Chapter 34, p. 353

weather — a NATIVE Germanic word, unlike Romance’s shared Latin *tempus* family; Wetter is the SAME word as English “weather,” and regnet is the SAME word as English “rain” *das Wetter, es regnet*

Wetter, es regnet

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 34, p. 353

Wednesday — the first day that breaks the pattern, because the Church would not name one for Wodan *Mittwoch*

explicit focus: pronunciation, usage and culture; Chapter 10, p. 119

Wein and vinum

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 17, p. 201

weiß, taken apart

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 20, p. 231

what’s your name? (literally “how are you called?”) *wie heißen Sie?*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 2, p. 21

what — the fourth w-question, and the one you will use most *was*
Chapter 5, p. 77

When the Calendar Stopped Naming

chapter topic; Chapter 14, p. 161

when — the fourth W, and the first question this book can ask about the clock and the calendar it already owns *wann*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 46, p. 431

When the Verb Steps to the Front

chapter topic; Chapter 46, p. 431

where — the third of German’s w-questions *wo*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 5, p. 77

which — built as “what-like”, the identical two pieces English welded into *which* *welcher*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 47, p. 441

Which One, and the Form the Book Owed You

chapter topic; Chapter 47, p. 441

Which past, and where

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 25, p. 281

white — and the first everyday word that needs the ß you were given in chapter four *weiß*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 20, p. 231

who — and the W that every German question word begins

with, against the WH that every English one begins with *wer*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 46, p. 431

Why German keeps the pronoun

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 5, p. 77

Why “to be” is the messiest word in every language

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 28, p. 315

why — two old words fused into one, “about what”, the same

build as English *wherefore* *warum*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 46, p. 431

Wie geht es Ihnen? — the same question, at a distance

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 3, p. 33

wine — a der-word, and the one thing on this table Rome

supplied *der Wein*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 17, p. 201

winter — spelled exactly as in English, and the fourth of the

four *der Winter*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 15, p. 171

Wohnst du in Berlin? — the question that has no question word

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 46, p. 431

would like — the politest thing in German, and a bent form of

the mögen you already own *möchten*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 51, p. 481

Writing — **Four Lines, And The Joiner You Can See**

chapter topic; Chapter 55, p. 499

Writing — **With A Clock**

chapter topic; Chapter 54, p. 497

Writing — **Your Own Line**

chapter topic; Chapter 53, p. 495

Y

yes *ja*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 31, p. 345

Yes and No

chapter topic; Chapter 31, p. 345

yesterday — the word that fills the middle of a Perfekt sentence,

and morgen’s opposite number *gestern*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 24, p. 269

you all, as the ones it happens to — and the word English

quietly promoted to be its only “you” *euch*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 50, p. 471

you all — the plural you English gave up *ihr*

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 77

you are — bin plus the -st ending you already know, and the one

place sein behaves *du bist*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 26, p. 295

you are, to more than one person — the form English lost when

it dropped its plural you *ihr seid*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 26, p. 295

**you, as the one it happens to — the partner of mich, and English
thee one more time** *dich*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 50, p. 471

you (familiar / formal) *du / Sie*

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 21

**you have — the first form where the b falls out and the rule
stops working** *du hast*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 22, p. 249

**you said — the second slot, where haben drops its b exactly as
English have does** *du hast gesagt*

Chapter 24, p. 269

**you were — the familiar -st ending again, now on the past
stem** *du warst*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 28, p. 315

your first sentence built from parts, not handed to you whole *Ich
lerne Deutsch*

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 5, p. 77

Your own line — the first writing with no model

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 53, p. 495

**your — the second of the six, and the same consonant shift that
turned thou into du** *dein*

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 49, p. 461

Z

Ziffer plus zehn — the rule

grammar topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 19, p. 217

-zig and -ty

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 19, p. 217

zwei Uhr, not zwei Uhren

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 12, p. 137

Other

ß — the letter that is two s's in a coat

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 4,
p. 55