Guide to Grammar Terms

**Accusative case** Indicates the direct object or receiver of the verb action. Accusative is also used after certain prepositions.

Ich kaufe den Stuhl.   I'm buying the chair.
Sie fahren ohne ihre Freunde in Urlaub.   They're going on vacation without their friends.

**Adjective** A word that describes or modifies a noun or a pronoun.

**Attributive adjective** Any adjective that comes before a noun and describes it in some way. Attributive adjectives generally take special endings in German.

die lange Straße   the long street
ein schönes Haus   a beautiful house

**Demonstrative adjective** A type of adjective that points out or "demonstrates" a specific noun.

dieser, diese, dieses   this/that
dieser Tisch   this table
dieses Auto   this car

Was kostet diese Zeitung?   How much does this newspaper cost?
Wie findest du dieses Auto?   What do you think of that car?

**Possessive adjective** A type of adjective that indicates ownership, possession, or belonging.

mein, dein, sein, ihr, sein, unser, euer, ihr, ihr

Das ist mein Buch.   This is my book.
Sie fährt mit ihrer Schwester in die Stadt.   She’s going to town with her sister.

**Predicate adjective** Any adjective that follows the verb sein. It describes the subject of the sentence. A predicate adjective takes no ending in German.

Das Zimmer ist groß.   The room is large.
Die Straßen sind lang.   The streets are long.

**Adjectival noun** A noun that derives from an adjective. It takes the same endings as an adjective, except that it is capitalized.

Ich habe im Urlaub einen Deutschen kennengelernt.   I met a German (man) on my vacation.
Wir haben viel Interessantes erlebt.   We experienced a lot of interesting things.

**Adverb** A word that describes or modifies an adjective, a verb, another adverb, or a clause in a sentence. Adverbs do not take endings in German.

Er fährt schnell.   He is driving fast.
Antecedent A noun in a main clause to which a relative pronoun in a relative clause refers. For example, in the following sentence the noun Wagen is the antecedent to the relative pronoun den.

Das ist der Wagen, den er kaufen wollte. \textit{This is the car that he wanted to buy.}

Article A word that stands in front of a noun and makes it specific or general. There are two common kinds of articles: definite and indefinite.

Definite article An article that makes a noun more specific.

der, die, das \textit{the}

Der Wagen ist teuer. Ich kenne das Kind. \textit{The car is expensive. I know the child.}

Indefinite article An article that makes a noun more general.
ein, eine, ein \textit{a/an}

Eine Katze läuft durch den Garten. \textit{A cat is running through the yard.}

Auxiliary verb See Verb.

Case Case indicates how a noun or pronoun is used in a sentence. German has four cases: accusative, dative, genitive, and nominative. See also Accusative case, Dative case, Genitive case, or Nominative case.

Clause Part of a sentence containing a subject and a verb.

Dependent clause This type of clause cannot stand on its own. It is linked to a main clause. A dependent clause is introduced by a conjunction or relative pronoun that links it to the rest of the sentence.

Er hat gesagt, dass er zu Hause bleiben muss. \textit{He said that he has to stay at home.}

Independent clause This type of clause can stand on its own as a sentence.

Seine Mutter kommt aus Karlsruhe und sein Vater kommt aus Hamburg. \textit{His mother comes from Karlsruhe and his father comes from Hamburg.}

Infinitive clause An expanded phrase with an infinitive that requires it to be preceded by zu. It is most often used with specific verbs, nouns, or adjective phrases. (See also Infinitive.)

Ich habe keine Zeit, dich zu besuchen. Es macht uns Spaß, auf Facebook mit Freunden in Kontakt zu bleiben. \textit{I have no time to visit you. It’s fun for us to stay in contact with friends on Facebook.}

Relative clause A type of dependent clause that is introduced by a relative pronoun. The relative clause elaborates on the person, thing, or idea named in the main clause.

Dies ist eine Firma, die junge Leute mit Verkaufstalent sucht. \textit{This is a firm that seeks young people with sales talent.}
Comparative  The form of adjectives and adverbs used to compare two things or actions.

Die Hotels in Hamburg waren teurer als in Berlin.  The hotels in Hamburg were more expensive than in Berlin.

Conjugation  Designates the form of a verb, in particular the endings and/or vowel changes of a verb stem. The endings indicate agreement with the subject and as well as various tenses, such as present or past, and moods, such as indicative or subjunctive.

Wir sehen dich.  We see you.
Möchtest du das?  Would you like that?
Ich wollte das nicht.  I did not want that.

Conjunction  A word that connects parts of a sentence such as words, phrases, or clauses.

Coordinating conjunction  Links two main clauses or a phrases.

Ich möchte gern Tennis spielen, aber ich muss leider arbeiten.  I would like to play tennis, but unfortunately I have work.

Subordinating conjunction  Links a main clause with a dependent clause.

Er bleibt zu Hause, weil er eine Erkältung hat.  He's staying at home because he has cold.

Dative case  Indicates to whom/what or for whom/what an action is done. It is also used after certain prepositions.

Er schenkt seiner Mutter ein iPhone zum Geburtstag.  He's giving his mother an iPhone for her birthday.

Da-compound  Combines the word da with a preposition and refers to things or concepts previously mentioned.

Bist du für oder gegen dieses Projekt?  Are you for or against this project?
—Ich bin dafür.  —I'm for it.

Der-words  Refer to nouns that are specific. They function like the definite article in terms of the endings they take.

dieser/diese/dieses  this/that
welcher/welche/welches  which

Diese Wohnung ist zentral gelegen.  This apartment is centrally located.
Welchen Schreibtisch kaufst du?  Which desk are you buying?

Direct object  The noun or pronoun that receives the action of the verb in a sentence. In German the direct object is in the accusative case.

Ich habe den Film gesehen.  I saw the film.
Ein-words  Refer to nouns that are not specific. They function like the indefinite article in terms of the endings they take. Possessive adjectives are also ein-words.

Hast du einen Wagen?  
— Nein, ich habe keinen Wagen. 
Das ist unsere Kusine Anna. 

Do you have a car? 
— No, I don’t have a car. 
That is our cousin Anna.

Gender  A grammatical categorization of words into three classes: masculine, feminine, and neuter. In German the genders are indicated (among other ways) by the definite articles as follows:

der = masculine, die = feminine, das = neuter

Genitive case  Commonly used to link nouns describing possession, ownership, or connection. It is also used after certain prepositions.

Der Rucksack des Studenten ist schwer. 
Wegen des Wetters fahren wir nicht in die Berge.

The student’s backpack is heavy. 
Because of the weather we’re not going to the mountains.

Imperative  Form of the verb that directs or commands someone to perform an action. The imperative has three types: formal, informal singular, and informal plural.

Fahren Sie langsamer! 
Fahr langsamer! 
Fahrt langsamer! 

Drive slower! (formal) 
Drive slower! (informal singular) 
Drive slower! (informal plural)

Indirect discourse  Reporting what another person has said indirectly, instead of quoting word for word. In German, indirect discourse is commonly used in newspapers to indicate objectivity or neutrality when reporting an event.

Der Autofahrer behauptet, er habe den Radfahrer nicht gesehen. 

The driver of the car claims he did not see the cyclist.

Indirect object  A noun or pronoun that indicates for whom or to whom an action is performed. In German the indirect object is expressed in the dative case.

Der Junge schenkt seiner Mutter einen Reiseführer. 

The boy is giving his mother a travel guide.

Infinitive  The basic form of the verb. In German the infinitive consists of the stem of the verb plus the ending -en or -n. It is the form listed in dictionaries.

geben, schicken, zeigen, lächeln, tun  give, send, show, smile, do

Interrogative pronoun  See Pronoun.

Mood  A set of verb categories that indicate the attitude of the speaker toward what he or she is saying. Mood is reflected in the form of the conjugated verb.
**Imperative mood** Directs someone to perform an action.

*Ruf* mich bitte später **an**.  
*Please call me later.*

**Indicative mood** Used to make statements and form questions that are reality based.

Ich **wohne** in einer Kleinstadt.  
*I live in a small city.*

**Subjunctive mood** Expresses an event that is contrary to reality or possibly not factual. It can also be used to express polite requests and wishes. (See also *Subjunctive.*)

Ich wünschte, ich **hätte** mehr Zeit für meine Freunde.  
*I wish I had more time for my friends.*

Wenn ich nicht schlafen **könnte**, würde ich etwas fernsehen.  
*If I couldn’t sleep I would watch some television.*

**Negation** Making a statement or idea negative. As in English, German has several different ways of expressing negation.

Nein!  
Ich habe **kein** Geld.  
*No! I have no money.*

Er mag das **nicht**.  
*He does not like that.*

Wir wollen **nichts**.  
*We want nothing.*

**Nominative case** Usually indicates the subject of a sentence.

Der **Stuhl** kostet 70 Euro.  
*The chair costs 70 euros.*

**Noun** A word designating a person, place, thing, or idea. German nouns are capitalized.

- der **Freund**  
  *the friend*

- die **Zeitung**  
  *the newspaper*

**Compound noun** A word formed by combining several nouns.

- der **Biergarten**  
  *the beer garden*

- die **Handynummer**  
  *the cell phone number*

**Predicate noun** A noun following the verb *sein.*

Sebastian ist **ein Freund** von Felix.  
*Sebastian is a friend of Felix.*

**Number** A term that designates either singular (one) or plural (more than one). Nouns in German are said to “show number” in that they change form to indicate whether only one or more than one is meant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>der Freund</td>
<td>die Freunde <em>(friends)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>die Lampe</td>
<td>die Lampen <em>(lamps)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>das Haus</td>
<td>die Häuser <em>(houses)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participle** A form of the verb used in certain tense or adjective constructions. In German there are two types of participles: past participle and present participle.
**Past participle**  The form of the verb used in compound tenses that express a past event, such as the present perfect. (A compound tense is a verb tense that requires more than one word to be expressed.)

Sie hat das schon *gemacht*.  
*She has already done that.*

Wir haben viele Lieder *gesungen*.  
*We have sung many songs.*

**Present participle**  A form of the verb associated with the present tense. It may function as an adjective or adverb. In German the present participle ends in *-nd* and can take endings if used attributively.

**ADVERB:** Er spricht *ließ*end Deutsch.  
*He speaks German fluently.*

**ADJECTIVE:** das *weinende* Kind  
*the crying child*

**Particle**  Words commonly used in spoken German to add a particular flavor to what is being said.

-Denn intensifies a question.  
Wo bist du *denn*?  
*Where are you?*

-Doch and *mal* make a statement or request more casual.  
Besucht mich *doch mal!*  
*Why don’t you visit me some time.*

Sag *mal*, was machst du da?  
*Say, what are you doing there?*

**Possessive adjective**  See *Adjective*.

**Predicate adjective**  See *Adjective*.

**Predicate noun**  A noun that is used with the verb *sein* to name the subject of the sentence.

Das ist ein *Buch*.  
*That is a book.*

Diese Leute sind *Touristen*.  
*These people are tourists.*

**Preposition**  A word that combines with a noun phrase to express some sort of additional information. Prepositions are often used to state things such as time, means, manner, location, or goal of the action or idea being expressed. German prepositions are followed by a noun or pronoun in a particular case (accusative, dative, or genitive).

**ACCUSATIVE:** für meinen Vater  
*for my father*

**DATIVE:** mit Ihrem Wagen  
*with your car*

**GENITIVE:** wegen des schlechten Wetters  
*because of the bad weather*

**Two-way preposition**  A group of prepositions that can take either dative or accusative case depending on meaning. If they are used to express location or time, they take the dative case. If they are used to express direction or motion toward something or some place, or for other meanings, they take accusative. The most common two-way prepositions are listed below.

-an, auf, hinter, in, neben, über, unter, vor, zwischen
DATIVE . . .
LOCATION: Man kauft Brot in der Bäckerei.
TIME: An einem sonnigen Tag...
ACCUSATIVE . . .
DIRECTION: Herr Glättli geht in die Bäckerei.
MOTION TOWARD A GOAL: Ich hänge das Bild an die Wand.
OTHER: Ich denke an dich.

You buy bread in the bakery.
On a sunny day . . .
Mr. Glättli is going to the bakery.
I’m hanging the picture on the wall.
I’m thinking of you.

Pronoun  A word that stands for a person or a noun.

Interrogative pronoun  A word that introduces a question.
Wer ist das?  Who is that?
Wann kommst du?  When are you coming?

Personal pronoun  Stands for a person or a noun. Its distinct forms indicate the number (singular or plural), case (nominative, accusative, dative, or genitive), and gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter). Here are a few examples.
der Mann = er  the man = he
der Wagen = er  the car = it
die Rechtanwältin = sie  the lawyer (fem.) = she
das Land = es  the country = it
den Leuten = ihnen  to the people = to them

Reflexive pronoun  A pronoun that stands for the same person as the subject of the sentence.
Das Kind wäscht sich.  The child gets washed (i.e., washes itself).
Die Studentin interessiert sich für Musik.  The student is interested in music.

Relative pronoun  A pronoun that introduces a dependent clause and refers back to a noun already mentioned.
Das ist ein Mensch, der alles weiß.  He is a person who knows everything.

Sentence Bracket (Satzklammer)  German grammar exhibits the sentence bracket in many different forms. The conjugated verb and its complement form a bracket around the core of the sentence. In general, the complement can be an infinitive, a separable prefix, or a past participle. The conjugated verb is the second element of the sentence and the complement is the last element.

In the first example, the sentence bracket encloses what is between rufe and an.
Ich rufe dich heute Abend an.  I’ll call you this evening.

In the next example, the sentence bracket encloses what is between wollen and essen.
Wir wollen morgen Abend in der Stadt essen.
We want to eat in the city tomorrow evening.

Finally, the last example shows the enclosed information between sind and gegangen.

Deutsch: Na klar!  Guide to Grammar Terms
Nach dem Spiel sind wir mit Anna und Kevin in die Kneipe gegangen. After the game we went to a pub with Anna and Kevin.

**Subject** The person or thing performing an action expressed by the verb. The subject is expressed in the nominative case in German; it can be a noun or pronoun.

Anna wohnt in Aachen. Anna lives in Aachen.

Der Markt liegt im Zentrum. The marketplace is in the center of town.

Es (=das Haus) ist klein. It is small.

**Subjunctive** The subjunctive is one of the three moods expressed by verbs. The other two are the indicative and the imperative. The subjunctive can either express a hypothetical possibility or a wish or something that is contrary to fact (Subjunctive II) or it can be used to report what someone has said without quoting them directly (Subjunctive I). Subjunctive II is often called “contrary-to-fact subjunctive” while subjunctive I is referred to as “indirect discourse subjunctive.”

**Subjunctive I** Reports what someone has said without quoting them directly

Herr Peters sagt, er wisse es nicht. Mr. Peters says he doesn’t know it.

**Subjunctive II** Expresses something not factual, wishful thinking, or politeness

Wenn ich Geld hätte! If I had money!

Ich möchte reisen. I would like to travel.

Wenn ich Zeit hätte, würde ich öfter ins Kino gehen. If I had time I would go to the movies more often.

Könntest du mir bitte einen Gefallen tun? Could you please do me a favor?

**Superlative** Form of an adjective or adverb expressing the highest degree of comparison.

das schönste Land the most beautiful country
der längste Fluss the longest river

Erläuft am schnellsten. He runs the fastest.

**Tense** The form of a verb indicating time: past, present, or future.

**Future** Expresses something that will happen in the future.

Ich werde in einer Villa wohnen. I will live in a villa.

The future tense also expresses probability with the addition of the adverb wohl or wahrscheinlich.

Mein Freund wird wohl einen neuen Job bekommen. My boyfriend will likely get a new job.

**Past perfect** Used to talk about a past event that preceded another event in the past.

Bevor wir in Urlaub fuhren, hatten wir alle Rechnungen bezahlt. Before we went on vacation we had paid all the bills.

**Present** Expresses something happening at the moment or in general.
Lucas spielt Karten.  
Lucas is playing cards.  
Lucas plays cards.

**Present perfect** The tense generally used to talk about past events in conversation.

Gestern Abend haben wir im Restaurant gegessen.  
We ate in a restaurant last night.

**Simple past** Form of the past tense used mostly to narrate past events in writing or in formal speech.

Two years ago we made a trip to Spain. We packed our things in a backpack. We went by bus. Along the way we stayed in youth hostels.

**Verb** A word that expresses an action or state of being. German verbs are often categorized in different groups based on how they are formed or used.

**Auxiliary verb** A verb used in conjunction with another verb to form compound tenses, typically sein, haben, werden, and modals. (See also Modal auxiliary verb.)

Wir haben das gesehen.  
We saw that.  
Sie sind nach Berlin gefahren.  
They went to Berlin.  
Ich werde das machen.  
I will do that.

**Inseparable prefix verb** Verbs with prefixes that do not “separate” from the main part of the verb when conjugated or used as past participles. With these verbs the accent is not on the prefix.

Wir haben unsere Großmutter in Ulm besucht.  
We visited our grandmother in Ulm.  
Wir haben die Bücher in der Bibliothek vergessen.  
We forgot the books in the library.

**Irregular verb** A verb that is not regular. A general term for a strong or mixed verb. (See below.)

**Mixed verb** A verb that has a vowel or stem change in the simple past as well as the ending in -te and a past participle ending in -t.

bringen > brachte, gebracht  
bring > brought, brought

**Modal auxiliary verb** A helping verb that indicates a particular attitude towards the action expressed, such as ability, desire, or necessity.

Ich kann das machen.  
I can do that.  
Er will kommen.  
He wants to come.  
Wir müssen heute arbeiten.  
We have to work today.  
Sie möchten hier bleiben.  
They would like to stay here.

**Reflexive verb** A verb that takes a reflexive pronoun as direct or indirect object.

Ich interessiere mich für Physik.  
I’m interested in physics.  
Er putzt sich die Zähne.  
He is brushing his teeth.
**Regular verb** Another term for a weak verb. (See below.)

**Separable prefix verb** Compound verb that consist of a prefix plus an infinitive. The prefix is to be separated from the main verb when used in a sentence.

mitkommen: Ich **komme** heute **mit**.  
Anrufen: Sie **ruft** uns bald **an**.  
*I’m coming along* today.  
*She will* call us soon.

**Strong verb** A verb that has a vowel change in certain forms of present and/or simple past, as well as a past participle ending in **-en**.

fahren > fährt, fuhr, gefahren  
*drive* > *drives*, *drove*, *driven*

**Weak verb** A verb that has **-te** in the simple past and a past participle ending in **-t**.

wohnen > wohnte, gewohnt  
*live* > *lived*, *lived*

**Verb stem** See *Infinitive*.

**Voice** Refers to whether the subject of a sentence performs or receives the action in a sentence.

**Active voice** The subject of the sentence carries out the action.

Die Studenten **essen** in der Mensa.  
*The students* eat in the cafeteria.

**Passive voice** The subject of the sentence receives the action.

Das Essen **wird** oft nicht **gegessen**.  
*The food* is often not *eaten*.

**Weak masculine noun** Masculine nouns that have special forms in the genitive, dative, and accusative cases. The weak noun takes either an **-n** or **-en** ending.

**der Mensch:** Das Leben des Menschen **ist** schwer.  
*The life of the human* is difficult.

**der Student:** Der Hut gehört dem Studenten.  
*The hat belongs to the student.*

**der Herr:** Siehst du den Herrn da drüben?  
*Do you see the gentleman over there?*

**Wo-compound** A compound question word that is composed of the prefix **wo-** plus a preposition. It refers to things or ideas.

**Wofür** interessierst du dich?  
*What are you interested in?*

**Woegen** bist du?  
*What are you against?*