



learning target

The four cases is one of the most important topics in German grammar but also one of the most difficult ones. That's why we will spend more time than usual to cover it. When you understood the cases you can handle a lot of problems like:

"declension" of definite and indefinite articles

German	English
Der Mann schreibt einen Brief.	The man writes a letter.
Die Frau gibt dem Kind einen Kuss.	The woman gives the child a kiss.
Eine Frau geht über die Straße.	A woman crosses the street.

"declension" of personal pronouns

German	English
Ich sehe dich .	I see you .
Ich gebe dir etwas.	I give you something.
Er schickt ihr einen Brief.	He sends a letter to her .

"declension" of possessive pronouns

German	English
Mein Vater heißt Gerhard.	My father's name is Gerhard.
Meine Mutter heißt Regina.	My mother's name is Regina.
Wie heißt deine Schwester?	What's the name of your sister?

declension of adjectives (adjective endings)

German	English
Ich habe eine hübsche Freundin.	I've got a pretty girlfriend.
Ich kenne diesen bösen Mann.	I know this bad man.
Schöne Strände gibt es überall.	Nice beaches are everywhere.

"declension" of "der-words"

German	English
Solche Leute lernen es nie.	Such people won't never learn it.
Welches Glas möchtest du?	Which glas do you want?
Dieses Haus ist sehr groß.	This house is very big



rules

What are the four cases?

1. Fall Nominativ	2. Fall Genitiv	3. Fall Dativ	4. Fall Akkusativ
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What is a case and what do we need it for?

The case (= Fall or Kasus) is a "tool" to explain which purpose has a noun in a sentence and in which relation is the noun to the other words. The case itself is no word. It's a fictional "thing" to help you to understand which ending words get or which article / pronoun we have to choose.

I want to test you. What's wrong with the following sentence?

Her gives **my** a kiss.

The correct sentence has to be: **She** gives **me** a kiss.

But why is it "She" and "me"? That's exactly the question! "She" is in the nominative case and "I" am in the dative case.

How can you find out which part of the sentence is in which case?

That's the master question. To answer it I will give you for every single case rules and then we will practise at first only 2 cases together, later 3 and finally all 4. Let's start!

1. Fall: Nominativ

1.) Every subject is in the nominative case.

What is the subject of a sentence?

The subject is the acting person / thing in a sentence. The subject is "doing" something.

example 1:

- **Der Mann** geht nach Hause. (The man goes home.)

You can ask who does something in the sentence? Who goes home? --> answer: der Mann

example 2:

- **Eine Frau** küsst einen Mann. (A woman kisses a man.)

You can ask who does something in the sentence? Who kisses a man? --> answer: eine Frau



2.) Nouns / pronouns which follow accusative prepositions are in the accusative case.

Accusative prepositionen

- **bis** (till, to, by)
- **durch** (through)
- **für** (for)
- **gegen** (against)
- **ohne** (without)
- **um** (around, to, at)

Whenever you see one of these prepositions it must be a signal for you that the following noun / pronoun is in the accusative case.

example 1:

- Ich kann ohne **dich** nicht leben. (I can't live without you.)

example 2:

- Ich kaufe ein Geschenk für **meinen Vater**. (I buy a present for my father.)

3.) Nouns / pronouns which follow "two-way" prepositions are either in the accusative case or the dative case.

"two-way" prepositionen

- **an** (at, on, to)
- **auf** (at, on, to, upon)
- **hinter** (behind)
- **in** (in, into)
- **neben** (beside, near, next to)
- **über** (about, above, across, over)
- **unter** (under, among)
- **vor** (before, in front of, ago)
- **zwischen** (between)

Your question is surely now how do you find out which of the two cases you have to use. The answer is quite easy.

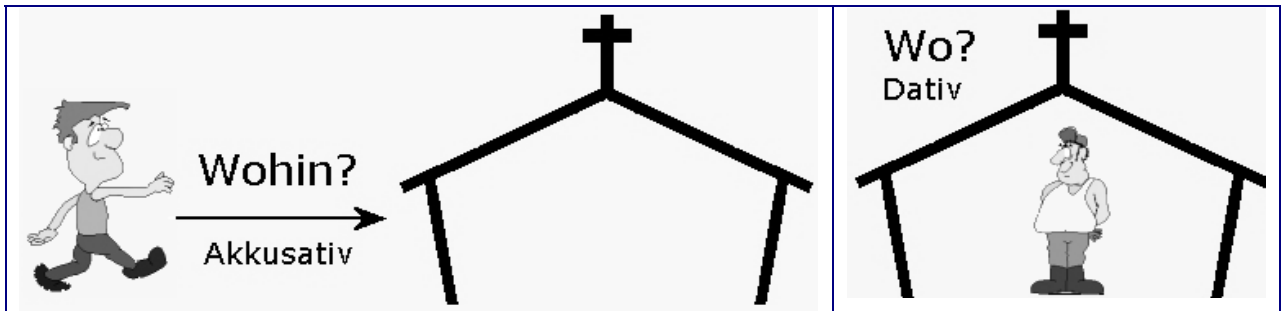
When you can ask "Wohin?" (=whereto?) then the object is in the accusative case. That means you describe a motion towards a destination.

When you can ask "Wo?" (=where?) then the object is in the dative case. That means you describe a single location or a state of rest.



examples:

- Ich gehe in die Kirche. (I'm going to the church.) ->Where do I go? -> to the church (I'm in motion. -> accusative case)
- Ich bin in der Kirche. (I'm in the church.) ->Where am I? -> in the church (I don't move. I'm staying there. -> dative case)



4.) Most time expressions are in the accusative case.

example 1:

- Ich gehe **jeden Tag** in die Schule. (I go every day to school.)

example 2:

- Ich war **letzten August** auf den Philippinen. (Last August I've been to the Philippines.)

3. Fall: Dativ

1.) The indirect object is in the dative case.

What is the indirect object of a sentence?

The indirect object is the beneficiary of the action in the sentence. Usually it's a person. You can also say the indirect object is the receiver of the direct object.

Der Mann gibt dem Kind das Buch.



- The man is doing something. He gives a book to the child. So the man is the subject of the sentence (=nominative case).
- The book is given. It's not acting. So it's the direct object (=accusative case).
- The child benefits from this action. After the action it owns a new book. So the child is the indirect object (=dative case).



2.) Nouns / pronouns which follow dative prepositions are in the dative case.

Dative prepositionen

- **aus** (from, out of)
- **außer** (except for, besides)
- **bei** (at, near)
- **gegenüber** (across from, opposite)
- **mit** (with, by)
- **nach** (after, to)
- **seit** (since, for)
- **von** (from, by)
- **zu** (at, to)

Whenever you see one of these prepositions it must be a signal for you that the following noun / pronoun is in the dative case.

example 1:

- Ich bleibe bei **dir**. (I stay with you.)

example 2:

- Ich fahre mit **dem Auto**. (I drive with the car.)

3.) Nouns / pronouns which follow "two-way" prepositions are either in the accusative case or the dative case.

See accusative case

4.) Nouns / pronouns which follow "dative verbs" are in the dative case.

Dative verbs

group 1 (often used)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • antworten (answer) | • helfen (help) |
| • bleiben (remain) | • Leid tun (be sorry) |
| • danken (thank) | • passen (suit) |
| • einfallen (think of) | • passieren (happen) |
| • erlauben (allow) | • schmecken (taste) |
| • fehlen (be missing) | • vertrauen (trust) |
| • gefallen (like) | • verzeihen (forgive) |
| • gehören (belong to) | • wehtun (hurt) |
| • glauben (believe) | • zuhören (listen to) |
| • gratulieren (congratulate) | • zustimmen (agree with) |



group 2 (rarely used)

- **ähneln** (resemble)
- **befehlen** (command)
- **begegnen** (encounter)
- **dienen** (serve)
- **drohen** (threaten)
- **folgen** (follow)
- **gehorschen** (obey)
- **gelingen** (succeed)
- **geraten** (turn out well)
- **genügen** (be enough)
- **geschehen** (happen)
- **gleichen** (be like)
- **glücken** (be lucky)
- **lauschen** (overhear)
- **misslingen** (fail)
- **munden** (taste)
- **nützen** (be of use)
- **raten** (advise)
- **schaden** (harm)
- **schmeicheln** (flatter)
- **trauen** (trust)
- **widersprechen** (contradict)
- **winken** (wave)
- **zürnen** (be angry with)

Whenever you see one of these verbs it must be a signal for you that the following noun / pronoun is in the dative case.

example 1:

- Vertrau **mir!** (Trust me!)

example 2:

- Er antwortet **mir** nicht. (He doesn't answer me.)

5.) Nouns / pronouns are in the dative case when they are used with certain adjective and adverb expressions.

adjective and adverb expressions

- **ähnlich** (similar)
- **angenehm** (pleasant)
- **bekannt** (familiar)
- **böse** (angry)
- **dankbar** (grateful)
- **egal** (all the same)
- **gleichgültig** (indifferent)
- **klar** (clear)
- **lästig** (bothersome)
- **lieb** (dear)
- **möglich** (possible)
- **nützlich** (useful)
- **peinlich** (embarrassing)
- **recht** (OK)
- **unangenehm** (unpleasant)
- **unbegreiflich** (incomprehensible)
- **unbequem** (unpleasant)
- **unerklärlich** (unpleasant)
- **unklar** (unclear)
- **unmöglich** (impossible)
- **unnützlich** (impossible)
- **unverständlich** (incomprehensible)
- **wichtig** (important)



Because just a form of "be" is the verb in these sentences, only the adjectives/adverbs indicate the dative case.

example 1:

- Das ist **mir** klar. (That's clear to me.)

example 2:

- Das ist **ihm** peinlich. (That's embarrassing for him.)

2. Fall: Genitiv

1.) The genitive case is used when you describe possession / ownership.

example 1:

- **Der Familienname meiner Freundin** ist Pacana. (My girlfriend's family name is Pacana.)

example 2:

- **Das Kleid der Frau** ist schön. (The woman's skirt is nice.)

2.) The genitive case is used when you refer to a part of something else.
In English the "of-genitive" is used for this.

example 1:

- Am **Anfang des Sommers** sehe ich sie wieder. (At the beginning of summer I will see her again.)

example 2:

- **Das Ende des Films** war schlecht. (The end of the film was bad.)

3.) Nouns / pronouns which follow genitive prepositions are in the genitive case.

Genitive prepositionen

- **anstatt / statt** (instead of)
- **außerhalb** (outside of)
- **innerhalb** (inside of, within)
- **trotz** (in spite of)
- **während** (during)
- **wegen** (because of)



Whenever you see one of these prepositions it must be a signal for you that the following noun / pronoun is in the genitive case.

example 1:

- Trotz **der Probleme** machen wir weiter. (Despite the problems we carry on.)

example 2:

- Während **des Urlaubs** habe ich mich verliebt. (During the holiday I fell in love.)

The "s" - genitive

Like in English there is a way to indicate possessive by adding a "s" to the noun. Be careful, however. Only if the person, city or country - which "possesses" something - is called by their personal name you are allowed to use this form of genitive. Furthermore you should consider that you add the "s" without apostrophe.

- Der Familienname meiner Freundin ist Pacana. ("standard" genitive | translated word by word: *The family name of my girlfriend is Pacana.*)
- **Cathys** Familienname ist Pacana. ("s" - genitive | *Cathy's family name is Pacana.*)

An alternative way

An alternative way to indicate that something belongs to somebody (possessive) is the "von construct". The "real" genitive is mostly used in written German. In daily spoken German you will often hear the "von construct".

Consider that "von" is dative preposition and the following article, pronoun etc. must be in the dative case and not in the genitive case even though you express possessive.

- Der Familienname **von** Cathy ist Pacana. (translated word by word: *The family name of Cathy is Pacana.*)



Question words

At the end of the theory part I want you to show the way how Germans are taught the 4 cases at school. We just use some question words to find out which part of the sentence is in which case.

My experience showed me, however, that it's less helpful for foreigners. Nevertheless, I want you to show you this way.

case	question words
Nominativ	Wer oder Was? (Who or What?)
Genitive	Wessen? (Whose?)
Dative	Wem? (to Whom?) [furthermore: Wo? (Where?) / Woher? (Wherefrom?)]
Akkusativ	Wen oder Was? (Whom or What?) [furthermore: Wohin? (Whereto?)]

example 1:

Der Mann gibt dem Kind das Buch.

- Wer oder Was? gibt dem Kind das Buch? answer: der Mann (so "the man" has to be in the nominative case)
- Wem? gibt der Mann das Buch? answer: dem Kind (so "the child" has to be in the dative case)
- Wen oder Was? gibt er dem Kind? answer: das Buch (so "the book" has to be in the accusative case)

example 2:

Der Familienname meiner Freundin ist Pacana.

- Wessen Familienname ist Pacana? answer: meiner Freundin (so "my girlfriend's" has to be in the genitive case)

The rest of the sentence "Der Familienname ... ist Pacana" is a classical "predicate complement" (see nominative case, point 2). It's both in the nominative case.



tables

The following collection of tables is just an information source for the weeks and months to come. You don't have to learn them by heart.

"declension" of definite article (der, die, das = the)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	der Mann	die Frau	das Kind	die Familien
genitive	des Mann es	der Frau	des Kind es	der Familien
dative	dem Mann	der Frau	dem Kind	den Familien
accusative	den Mann	die Frau	das Kind	die Familien

As you already noticed not just the article changes. Some nouns get an additional ending as well. For more details check the topic „**Deklination der Substantive**“.

"declension" of indefinite article (ein = a, an)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	ein Mann	ein e Frau	ein Kind	-
genitive	ein es Mann es	ein er Frau	ein es Kind es	-
dative	ein em Mann	ein er Frau	ein em Kind	-
accusative	ein en Mann	ein e Frau	ein Kind	-

"declension" of indefinite "article" (kein = no, none)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	kein Mann	kein e Frau	kein Kind	kein e Kinder
genitive	kein es Mann es	kein er Frau	kein es Kind es	kein er Kinder
dative	kein em Mann	kein er Frau	kein em Kind	kein en Kindern
accusative	kein en Mann	kein e Frau	kein Kind	kein e Kinder

Basically, "ein" and "kein" are the same. They've got the same endings. "Kein" is just the negation of "ein". Regard that "ein" has (of course) no plural form because "ein" describes just one thing of something.



"declension" of personal pronouns (ich, du, er ... = I, you, he ...)

nominative	genitive	dative	accusative
ich	mein(e/er)	mir	mich
du	dein(e/er)	dir	dich
er	sein(e/er)	ihm	ihn
sie	ihr(e/er)	ihr	sie
es	sein(e/er)	ihm	es
wir	unser(e)	uns	uns
ihr	euer(e)	euch	euch
sie	ihr(e/er)	ihnen	sie
Sie	Ihr(e/er)	Ihnen	Sie

For the endings in the genitive case check the following tables: possessive pronouns.

"declension" of possessive pronouns (mein, dein, sein ... = my, your, his ...)

"declension" of the possessive pronoun (mein = my)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	mein Mann	meine Frau	mein Kind	meine Kinder
genitive	meines Mannes	meiner Frau	meines Kindes	meiner Kinder
dative	meinem Mann	meiner Frau	meinem Kind	meinen Kindern
accusative	meinen Mann	meine Frau	mein Kind	meine Kinder

"declension" of the possessive pronoun (dein = your, singular)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	dein Mann	deine Frau	dein Kind	deine Kinder
genitive	deines Mannes	deiner Frau	deines Kindes	deiner Kinder
dative	deinem Mann	deiner Frau	deinem Kind	deinen Kindern
accusative	deinen Mann	deine Frau	dein Kind	deine Kinder

"declension" of the possessive pronoun (sein = his)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	sein Mann	seine Frau	sein Kind	seine Kinder
genitive	seines Mannes	seiner Frau	seines Kindes	seiner Kinder
dative	seinem Mann	seiner Frau	seinem Kind	seinen Kindern
accusative	seinen Mann	seine Frau	sein Kind	seine Kinder



"declension" of the possessive pronoun (ihr = her)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	ihr Mann	ihre Frau	ihr Kind	ihre Kinder
genitive	ihres Mannes	ihrer Frau	ihres Kindes	ihrer Kinder
dative	ihrerem Mann	ihrer Frau	ihrerem Kind	ihreren Kindern
accusative	ihrerem Mann	ihre Frau	ihr Kind	ihre Kinder

"declension" of the possessive pronoun (unser = our)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	unser Vater	unsere Mutter	unser Kind	unsere Kinder
genitive	unseres Vaters	unsere Mutter	unseres Kindes	unsere Kinder
dative	unserem Vater	unsere Mutter	unserem Kind	unsere Kindern
accusative	unserem Vater	unsere Mutter	unser Kind	unsere Kinder

"declension" of the possessive pronoun (euer = your, plural)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	euer Vater	eure Mutter*	euer Kind	eure Kinder*
genitive	eures Vaters*	eurer Mutter*	eures Kindes*	eurer Kinder*
dative	eurem Vater*	eurer Mutter*	eurem Kind*	euren Kindern*
accusative	euren Vater*	eure Mutter*	euer Kind	eure Kinder*

As you can see all the possessive pronouns have got the same endings. So you have to know just one and you know all. If you compare it with the "declension" of indefinite article you will see they also have the same ending. That makes it much easier. Of course there is an exception. The possessive pronoun "euer" (=your, plural) sometimes drops the "e" in the middle (marked with a *). Forget this for now.



declension of adjectives (adjective endings)

declension of adjectives without article

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	gute <u>r</u> Mann	gute <u>e</u> Frau	gute <u>s</u> Kind	gute <u>e</u> Familien
genitive	gute <u>n</u> Mann <u>es</u>	gute <u>r</u> Frau	gute <u>n</u> Kind <u>es</u>	gute <u>r</u> Familien
dative	gute <u>m</u> Mann	gute <u>r</u> Frau	gute <u>m</u> Kind	gute <u>n</u> Familien
accusative	gute <u>n</u> Mann	gute <u>e</u> Frau	gute <u>s</u> Kind	gute <u>e</u> Familien

declension of adjectives with definite article (der, die, das)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	der gute <u>e</u> Mann	die gute <u>e</u> Frau	das gute <u>e</u> Kind	die gute <u>n</u> Familien
genitive	des gute <u>n</u> Mann <u>es</u>	der gute <u>n</u> Frau	des gute <u>n</u> Kind <u>es</u>	der gute <u>n</u> Familien
dative	dem gute <u>n</u> Mann	der gute <u>n</u> Frau	dem gute <u>n</u> Kind	den gute <u>n</u> Familien
accusative	den gute <u>n</u> Mann	die gute <u>e</u> Frau	das gute <u>e</u> Kind	die gute <u>n</u> Familien

declension of adjectives with indefinite article (ein)

case	Singular			Plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	ein gute <u>r</u> Mann	eine gute <u>e</u> Frau	ein gute <u>s</u> Kind	-
genitive	eines gute <u>n</u> Mann <u>es</u>	einer gute <u>n</u> Frau	eines gute <u>n</u> Kind <u>es</u>	-
dative	einem gute <u>n</u> Mann	einer gute <u>n</u> Frau	einem gute <u>n</u> Kind	-
accusative	einen gute <u>n</u> Mann	eine gute <u>e</u> Frau	ein gute <u>s</u> Kind	-

"declension" of "der-words"

"declension" of the pronoun (dies- = this, these)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	diese <u>r</u> Mann	diese <u>e</u> Frau	diese <u>s</u> Kind	diese <u>e</u> Kinder
genitive	diese <u>s</u> Mann <u>es</u>	diese <u>r</u> Frau	diese <u>s</u> Kind <u>es</u>	diese <u>r</u> Kinder
dative	diese <u>m</u> Mann	diese <u>r</u> Frau	diese <u>m</u> Kind	diese <u>n</u> Kindern
accusative	diese <u>n</u> Mann	diese <u>e</u> Frau	diese <u>s</u> Kind	diese <u>e</u> Kinder



"declension" of the pronoun (jen- = that, those)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	jen <u>er</u> Mann	jen <u>e</u> Frau	jen <u>es</u> Kind	jen <u>e</u> Kinder
genitive	jen <u>es</u> Mann <u>es</u>	jen <u>er</u> Frau	jen <u>es</u> Kind <u>es</u>	jen <u>er</u> Kinder
dative	jen <u>em</u> Mann	jen <u>er</u> Frau	jen <u>em</u> Kind	jen <u>en</u> Kind <u>ern</u>
accusative	jen <u>en</u> Mann	jen <u>e</u> Frau	jen <u>es</u> Kind	jen <u>e</u> Kinder

"declension" of the pronoun (welch- = which)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	welch <u>er</u> Mann	welch <u>e</u> Frau	welch <u>es</u> Kind	welch <u>e</u> Kinder
genitive	welch <u>es</u> Mann <u>es</u>	welch <u>er</u> Frau	welch <u>es</u> Kind <u>es</u>	welch <u>er</u> Kinder
dative	welch <u>em</u> Mann	welch <u>er</u> Frau	welch <u>em</u> Kind	welch <u>en</u> Kind <u>ern</u>
accusative	welch <u>en</u> Mann	welch <u>e</u> Frau	welch <u>es</u> Kind	welch <u>e</u> Kinder

"declension" of the pronoun (solch- = such)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	solch <u>er</u> Mann	solch <u>e</u> Frau	solch <u>es</u> Kind	solch <u>e</u> Kinder
genitive	solch <u>es</u> Mann <u>es</u>	solch <u>er</u> Frau	solch <u>es</u> Kind <u>es</u>	solch <u>er</u> Kinder
dative	solch <u>em</u> Mann	solch <u>er</u> Frau	solch <u>em</u> Kind	solch <u>en</u> Kind <u>ern</u>
accusative	solch <u>en</u> Mann	solch <u>e</u> Frau	solch <u>es</u> Kind	solch <u>e</u> Kinder

"declension" of the pronoun (jed- = each, every)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	jed <u>er</u> Mann	jed <u>e</u> Frau	jed <u>es</u> Kind	jed <u>e</u> Kinder
genitive	jed <u>es</u> Mann <u>es</u>	jed <u>er</u> Frau	jed <u>es</u> Kind <u>es</u>	jed <u>er</u> Kinder
dative	jed <u>em</u> Mann	jed <u>er</u> Frau	jed <u>em</u> Kind	jed <u>en</u> Kind <u>ern</u>
accusative	jed <u>en</u> Mann	jed <u>e</u> Frau	jed <u>es</u> Kind	jed <u>e</u> Kinder

"declension" of the pronoun (manch- = some)

case	singular			plural
	male	female	neuter	-
nominative	manch <u>er</u> Mann	manch <u>e</u> Frau	manch <u>es</u> Kind	manch <u>e</u> Kinder
genitive	manch <u>es</u> Mann <u>es</u>	manch <u>er</u> Frau	manch <u>es</u> Kind <u>es</u>	manch <u>er</u> Kinder
dative	manch <u>em</u> Mann	manch <u>er</u> Frau	manch <u>em</u> Kind	manch <u>en</u> Kind <u>ern</u>
accusative	manch <u>en</u> Mann	manch <u>e</u> Frau	manch <u>es</u> Kind	manch <u>e</u> Kinder

As you can see all "der-words" have got the same ending. If you know one then you know all.