



learning target

Aim of this section is to learn the correct use of *als*, *wenn* and *wann*.

German	English
Wann besuchst du uns?	When are you going to visit us?
Als er ein Kind war, ...	When he was a child ...
Wenn wir ein Problem haben, ...	When we have a problem ...

rules

There are 3 words in German to express the English word **when**.

wann

- **Wann** is used in **question** and indirect "questions".

examples (direct questions):

- **Wann** bist du nach Deutschland gekommen? (When did you come to Germany?)
- **Wann** beginnt der Unterricht? (When will the class start?)
- Weißt du, **wann** du die Prüfung machst? (Do you know when you will take the exam?)
- Könnten Sie mir sagen, **wann** der Zug abfährt? (Could tell me when train is leaving?)

examples (indirect "questions"):

- Ich weiß nicht, **wann** meine Eltern kommen. (I don't know when my parents will come.)
- Es ist nicht klar, **wann** sie ins Ausland geht. (It's not clear when she will go abroad.)
- Wir haben keine Ahnung, **wann** der Unterricht beginnt. (We have no idea when the class will start.)

As you can see indirect "questions" are in fact statements!

Actually, they are the answer to a question where you have to use "wann".

- *question*: Weißt du, **wann** deine Eltern kommen? (Do you know when your parents are coming?)
- *answer*: Ich weiß nicht, **wann** meine Eltern kommen. (I don't know when my parents are coming.)



als

- **Als** is used to speak about a **single event in the past**.
- **Als** is used to speak about a **period of time in the past** which can be regarded as one event.

Clear indicators for "als" are time expressions like:

- **gestern** (yesterday)
- **letzte Woche** (last week)
- **letztes Jahr** (last year)

Consider that you can use "als" only in the past tense!

examples:

- *single event*: **Als** Cathy nach Deutschland kam, ... (When Cathy came to Germany ...)
- *single event*: **Als** ich 18 Jahre alt wurde, ... (When I turned 18 ...)
- *single event*: **Als** er mich gestern anrief, ... (When he called me yesterday ...)

- *period of time*: **Als** ich auf den Philippinen war, ... (When I was in the Philippines ...)
- *period of time*: **Als** ich in Berlin lebte, ... (When I lived in Berlin ...)
- *period of time*: **Als** ich ein Kind war, ... (When I was a child ...)

wenn

- **Wenn** is used to speak about **present events**.
- **Wenn** is used to speak about **future events**.
- **Wenn** is used to speak about a **repeated event in the past**.

The best way to find out if you have to use "wenn" or "als" in the past tense is:
Try to replace *when* by **whenever**. If it's possible you have to use "wenn".

Clear indicators for "wenn" are:

- **immer** (always)
- **jedes Mal** (every time)



examples:

- *present tense*: **Wenn** ich zur Schule fahre, nehme ich den Bus. (When I go to school I take the bus.)
- *present tense*: **Wenn** du Zeit hast, kannst du mich gerne besuchen. (When you have time you can visit me.)
- *present tense*: **Wenn** ich durstig bin, trinke ich Wasser. (When I'm thirsty I drink water.)

- *future tense*: **Wenn** ich groß bin, werde ich Arzt. (When I'm mature I'll become doctor.)
- *future tense*: **Wenn** wir im Sommer nach Amerika fliegen, besuchen wir euch. (When we go to America this summer we will visit you.)
- *future tense*: **Wenn** wir mit der Arbeit fertig sind, gehen wir Billiard spielen. (When we have finished work we'll go playing billiard.)

- *repeated event - past tense*: (Immer) **Wenn** ich zur Schule fuhr, nahm ich den Bus. (When (Whenever) I went to school I took the bus.)
- *repeated event - past tense*: (Immer) **Wenn** wir eine Party machten, gab es Ärger. (When (Whenever) we had a party there was trouble.)
- *repeated event - past tense*: (Immer) **Wenn** wir in München waren, sind wir ins Museum gegangen. (When (Whenever) we were in Munich we went to the museum.)

Besides the meaning of "when" **wenn** has a second meaning (=if).

For further information check the topic "ob und wenn".