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To Riane, AJ, Jalyn, Tori, and Riley, my terrific grandkids.

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Introduction

Writing skills are usually the most difficult skills to acquire in a language. This is particularly true in a foreign language. The goal of this book is to guide you through the various types of structures in the German language and to illustrate how those structures combine to make sentences.

Naturally, in order to acquire writing skills you have *to write*. Therefore, you will be provided with an abundance of writing exercises. Some will require a small variation in a given sentence. Others will provide you with a series of words that you form into an appropriate sentence. And you will have plenty of opportunity for coming up with original sentences of your own. This development of your German sentence writing moves gradually and with careful explanation from the least complex activity to the most complex.



Make changes to given sentences.

Combine a series of words as a sentence. Writing skills developed Write original sentences.

In addition to the illustrations of how structures combine to form sentences, and the practice exercises, an answer key is provided at the end of the book. It includes not only the correct answers for the exercises but also sample sentences for you to use to compare to your original sentences.

Good sentence writing is not an impossible task. But it requires analysis and practice and a willingness to apply concepts and rules consistently. Let this book guide you, and you will discover a new confidence as you write more successfully in German.

Viel Glück!

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Declarative sentences and word order

1

Declarative sentences in both English and German consist of a subject and a predicate. In German, the subject is in the nominative case, and the verb in the predicate is conjugated appropriately for the subject and in a specific tense:

subject 1 verb 1 predicate Karl 1 singt 1 gut.

Karl sings well.

In the example sentence above, the subject is **Karl** and the verb **singt** is conjugated in the present tense for the third person singular subject. This basic structure is used in great abundance in the language and can be modified in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, its simple formula is *subject plus predicate*. If one of those elements is missing, you don't have a sentence.

Let's look at a series of sentences composed in this way. Take note of the subjects, the variety of verb types in the predicate, and the various tenses that can be used in declarative sentences. Many sentences are composed of a present perfect tense verb and the auxiliary **haben**:

Karin hat in Leipzig gewohnt. *Karin lived in Leipzig.*

Many are composed of a present perfect tense verb and the auxiliary **sein**:

Sie sind nach Kanada ausgewandert. *They emigrated to Canada.*

Many appear in the future tense with the auxiliary **werden**:

Die Kinder werden im Garten spielen. *The children will play in the garden.*

Others can be a combination of a modal auxiliary and an infinitive:

Niemand kann ihn verstehen. *No one can understand him.*

And still others can be written in the passive voice:

Deutsch wird hier gesprochen. *German is spoken here.*

In other words, a declarative sentence can take many forms.

Rewrite the following declarative sentences in the missing tenses.

1. Present Martin spricht kein Englisch.

Future Ich werde es machen können.

3. Present a.

Past a. _____

Present perfect b. _____

Future c. _____

2. Present a. _____

Past b. _____

Present perfect c. _____

Past b.

Present perfect Eine Schlange hat den Frosch gefressen.

Future c. _____

4. Present a.

Past Über dem Wald flogen viele Vögel.

Present perfect b. _____

Negation

Declarative sentences do not always make positive statements. They can be made negative by adding a negative word to the sentence or by changing a positive subject to a negative subject.

The most common way to negate a sentence is by the addition of the adverb **nicht** (*not*):

Karl singt gut. *Karl sings well.*

Karl singt nicht gut. *Karl doesn't sing well.*

German usually places **nicht** in front of the element that is negated. However, if that element is the verb itself, **nicht** follows the conjugated form or stands between the auxiliary and the corresponding infinitive or participle. **Nicht** also follows an adverb or adverbial phrase that describes *time* or *place* or an object that is in the *accusative case*:

Es geht nicht.

That won't work.

Sie sind nicht zu Hause gewesen.

They weren't at home.

Er konnte gestern nacht nicht schlafen.

He couldn't sleep last night.

Sie kennt den Mann nicht.

She doesn't know the man.

Nicht precedes a prepositional phrase or an adverbial that describes the *manner* in which something was done:

subject 1 verb 1 nicht 1 prepositional phrase Sie 1

fahren 1 nicht 1 nach Hause. *They're not driving home.*

English often requires the auxiliary *do/does* when negating. This does not occur in German:

Sie warten nicht auf Katrin. *They **don't** wait for Katrin.*

Er versteht nicht. *He **doesn't** understand.*

Onkel Fritz kommt nicht heute. *Uncle Fritz isn't coming today.* When negating a

noun, **kein** (*no, not any*) is used :

kein 1 noun

keine 1 Bücher

no/not any books

Ich habe kein Geld. *I don't have any money.*

Jack kennt keine Deutschen. *Jack doesn't know any Germans.*

Es dauert keine fünf Minuten. *It won't last more than five minutes.*

Rewrite each sentence, negating the underlined element with **nicht**.

ExaMPIE: Sie laufen in den Garten.
Sie laufen nicht in den Garten.

1. Das ist das beste Buch.

2. Sie ist am Nachmittag angekommen.

3. Ihr Mann ist bei einem Unglück umgekommen.

4. Er hat helfen wollen.

5. Frau Schneider hat sich wohl gefühlt.

6. Die Studenten sitzen im lesesaal.

7. Seine Frau hat ihn betrogen.

Rewrite each sentence, negating the underlined element with **kein**.

ExaMPIE: luise hat die Zeitung.
luise hat keine Zeitung.

1. Meine Großmutter trinkt Kaffee.

2. Boris hat interessante Bücher gefunden.

3. Die Jungen haben den Kindern geholfen.

4. Der Dieb hat ein Wort gesagt.

5. In diesem Wald gibt es Bären.

6. Ich werde das unter diesen Umständen tun.

Übung

1•4

Rewrite each sentence, negating the underlined element with **kein** or **nicht**, whichever is appropriate.

1. Ihr Sohn hat mitgehen wollen.

2. Die leute gehen in seinen laden.

3. Ich klebte die Marke auf den Brief.

4. Der Bodensee ist der größte See.

5. Ein Mann spricht mit ihm.

6. Die lehrerin brauchte einen Kugelschreiber.

7. Der betrunkene Mann fährt schnell.

Niemand, nichts, and niemals

The negative pronouns **niemand** (*no one, nobody*) and **nichts** (*nothing*) are high-frequency words and are commonly used to negate a sentence. The same is true of the adverb **nie** or **niemals** (*never*). **Niemand** and **nichts** can act as subjects or objects. Compare their use in the following examples:

Niemand besucht sie.

No one is visiting them.

Sie versteht niemanden.

She doesn't understand anybody.

Nichts interessiert ihn.

Nothing interests him.

Ich habe nichts für die Kinder.

I have nothing for the children.

Nie / niemals is used adverbially:

Er geht nie (niemals) ins Kino.

He never goes to the movies.

Just like **jemand**, **niemand** can have a declensional ending in the accusative and dative cases. That ending, however, is optional:

Nominative jemand niemand

Accusative jemand *or* jemanden niemand *or* niemanden

Dative jemand *or* jemandem niemand *or* niemandem

Übung

1·5

Change the underlined word(s) in each sentence to the appropriate negative word: **niemand**, **nichts**, or **nie (niemals)**.

ExaMPLE: Thomas hat zehn Euro.

Thomas hat nichts.

1. Die Mädchen wollen Schlittschuh laufen.

2. Der Polizist wird den Dieb verhaften.

3. Manfred geht alle paar Tage in die Stadt.

4. Meine Verwandten waren gestern in Berlin.

5. Sonja wird ihre kranke Tante in Hamburg besuchen.

6. Er will etwas zu essen haben.

Word order

The sentences you have encountered so far all began with the subject of the sentence. But German sentences can begin with other elements as well. When this occurs, the verb in the sentence will precede the subject. Consider the following sentences. Notice that the English sentences cannot always follow the German word order, particularly when the German sentence begins with a direct object:

| | | |
|---------------|--|--|
| aDVErB | Gestern war er in der Stadt. | <i>Yesterday he was in the city.</i> |
| DirEcT oBJEcT | Das verstehe ich nicht. | <i>I don't understand that.</i> |
| clauSE | Als ich in Berlin war , besuchte ich meinen Onkel. | <i>When I was in Berlin, I visited my uncle.</i> |

In the previous examples, the various German sentences began with an adverb (**Gestern**), a direct object (**Das**), and a clause (**Als ich in Berlin war**). And in each case the subject was preceded by the verb:

non-subject element 1 verb 1 subject 2 inverted subject and verb

Übung

1•6

Rewrite each of the following sentences by beginning them with the underlined word or phrase.

ExaMPLE: Die Vorstellung beginnt um zwei Uhr.

Um zwei Uhr beginnt die Vorstellung.

1. Sie ist leider wieder krank geworden.

2. Martin blieb den ganzen Tag zu Hause.

3. Ich verbringe meine Freizeit in der Bibliothek.

4. Ich begegnete meinen Nachbarn, als ich um die Ecke kam.

5. Ich möchte im Herbst nach Italien reisen.

6. Sie geht oft ins Theater, wenn sie in London ist.

It is important to remember that German sentences that begin with some element other than the subject cannot always be translated word for word into English. For example:

Den Mann beißt der Hund.

Those words translate as *the man bites the dog*, but the German sentence begins with the direct object and must, therefore, be translated into English as *the dog bites the man*.

Übung

1·7

Rewrite each of the following sentences by placing the direct object at the beginning of the sentence.

ExaMPLE: Der Hund beißt den Mann.

Den Mann beißt der Hund.

1. Er hat den Wecker reparieren lassen.

2. Sie wissen das nicht.

3. Die Jungen spielen Schach.

4. Man muss das nicht.

5. Die Frau kaufte einen Mantel im Kaufhaus.

Übung

1·8

Rewrite the following sentences by beginning each one first with an adverb, then with a prepositional phrase, and finally with a clause of your choosing.

1. Meine Familie isst italienisch.

a. adverb _____

b. Prepositional phrase _____

c. _____
clause

2. Sonja spielte Tennis.

a. adverb _____

b. Prepositional phrase _____

c. _____
clause

3. Seine Freundin wird einen neuen Wagen kaufen.

a. adverb _____

c. _____

b. Prepositional phrase _____

clause

Übung

1·9

Compose sentences using the words provided in each list. Add any necessary words.

ExaMPLE: morgen / kommen / er / mit / Freund / nach Hause

Morgen kommt er mit einem Freund nach Hause.

1. in / Woche / werden / wir / wieder / Wien / sein

2. Mutter / müssen / um / sechs / aufstehen / und / Stadt / fahren

3. als / ich / in / Hauptstadt / sein / gehen / ich / oft / Museum

Übung

1•10

Write original sentences. Begin each one with the cue words provided.

ExaMPLE: (heute)

Heute werde ich meine Tante in Berlin besuchen.

1. (jemand)

2. (vor einer Woche)

3. (um zehn Uhr)

Interrogative sentences

In both English and German, there is a variety of ways to form questions. In German questions that concern the action of a verb and in some English questions, the verb precedes the subject:

verb 1 subject Ist 1 Martin zu Hause?

Is Martin at home?

But if the question concerns the action of a verb, English most often uses the auxiliary *to do* to form the question. For example:

verb 1 subject Sprechen 1 Sie Deutsch? *Do you speak German?*

verb 1 subject Kaufte 1 er einen Mantel?

Did he buy a coat?

With the verb *to be* and sometimes with the verb *to have*, however, the auxiliary *to do* is not needed in English. Instead, as in German, the question begins with the verb:

Ist sie wieder krank? *Is she sick again?*

Waren sie in München? *Were they in Munich?*

Haben Sie keinen Pass? *Have you no passport?*

If the verb *to have* is transitive, a question can be formed either with the auxiliary verb *to do* or without it. However, the form that uses *to do* is more common in modern English:

Hast du genug Geld? *Do you have enough money?* or

Have you enough money?

Hatten sie kein Handy? *Didn't they have a cell phone?* or

Had they no cell phone?

If the verb *to have* is the auxiliary of a perfect tense, the auxiliary verb *to do* cannot be used in the formation of a question:

Hat er sein Heft gefunden? *Has he found his notebook?*

Hatte Sonja ihre Tasche verloren? *Had Sonja lost her purse?*

The auxiliary *to do* is used in English questions only in the present and past tenses with the exception, of course, of *to be* and *to have* as illustrated in the previous examples. The English future tense also avoids using *to do* in a question. Other auxiliaries, such as certain modal auxiliaries, also avoid it:

Wirst du auch mitkommen? *Will you come along, too?*

Kannst du mir helfen? *Can you help me?*

If the English modal requires the particle word *to* in order to complete its meaning, use *to do* to form a question. *To be able to* is an exception to this rule, because the verb *to be* is involved: *to be able to Are you able to breathe all right?* *to have to Does he have to shout like that?* *to need to Did the dogs need to be fed?*

The point being made here is that it is important to realize that you cannot translate English questions directly into German. You have to look at the structure of the English sentence and modify for the German approach to forming questions for the action of a verb: *the verb precedes the subject in a German question:*

verb 1 subject = **eine Frage** Let's

look at a few examples:

Statement: Er singt sehr gut. *He sings very well.*

Question: Singt er sehr gut? *Does he sing very well?*

Statement: Sie ging nach Hause. *She went home.*

Question: Ging sie nach Hause? *Did she go home?*

The same word order is required when a modal is used in the sentence:

Statement: Du musst so oft rauchen. *You have to smoke so often.*

Question: Musst du so oft rauchen? *Do you have to smoke so often?*

If the sentence is in the present perfect tense, the auxiliary verb precedes the subject.

Statement: Der Mann ist gestorben. *The man has died.*

Question: Ist der Mann gestorben? *Has the man died?*

In a future tense sentence, the auxiliary **werden** precedes the subject:

Statement: Wir werden mit ihm reisen. *We will travel with him.*

Question: Werden wir mit ihm reisen? *Will we travel with him?*

2.

3.