

Nominative, Accusative, and Dative: When to Use Them**Nominative**

- for the **subject** of a sentence: who or what is doing this?

Der Student lernt Deutsch.

- for **predicate nouns**: when the main verb is *sein* or *werden*, use the nominative for both subject and predicate nouns.

Das ist ein Tisch.

Accusative

- for the **direct object** of a sentence: who or what is being <verbed>?

Ich habe einen Tisch.

What is being had? A table.

Note that the very common expression "es gibt" (there is/are) requires that the noun be in the accusative case because it is grammatically a direct object.

Es gibt einen Stuhl da drüben.

There is a chair over there.

- after the **accusative prepositions** and postpositions: *durch, für, gegen, ohne, um* (memory aid: dogfu), as well as the postpositions *bis* and *entlang*. If a noun follows these prepositions, it will ALWAYS be in the accusative!

Er geht um den Tisch.

Around what? The table.

Ist das Geschenk für mich?

For whom? For me.

- **time expressions** in a sentence are usually in accusative: *jeden Tag, letzten Sommer, den ganzen Tag, diesen Abend*, etc. We haven't officially learned this yet, but it's good to know.

Jeden Morgen esse ich Brot zum Frühstück.

Every morning.

Dative

- for the **indirect object** of a sentence. An indirect object is the beneficiary of whatever happens in a sentence. It's usually a person, although it doesn't have to be. If you ask yourself: "TO whom or FOR whom is this being done?", the answer will be the indirect object, and in German it will need the dative case. Remember that not every sentence will have an indirect object -- only some verbs allow an indirect object: *to give (to), to bring (to), to tell (to), to buy (for), to send (to)* are some examples of verbs that will almost always have an indirect object. In English, we don't distinguish the direct and indirect object in the forms of words; instead, we often use "to" or "for" to mark these.

Ich gebe der Frau ein Buch.

I'm giving her a book = a book to her.

Er schenkt mir ein Buch.

He's giving me a book.

Ich habe das dem Mann schon gesagt.

I already told the man that.

- after the **dative prepositions**: *aus, außer, bei, mit, nach, seit, von, zu* (memory aid: Blue Danube Waltz). A noun immediately following these prepositions is ALWAYS in the dative case. There are many possible translations of these prepositions, depending on exactly what the context of the sentence is. Please refer to your textbook, pp. 239-240, for

more detailed explanation of the meanings of each preposition.

Sie haben ein Geschenk von ihrem Vater bekommen. *From their father.*
Außer meiner Mutter spricht meine ganze Familie Deutsch. *Except for my mother.*
 Ich fahre am Wochenende zu meiner Tante in Minnesota. *To my aunt's.*

• after **dative verbs**: *helfen, danken, gefallen, gehören, schmecken, passen*. See your book for more details on each verb. There's no direct translation that explains why these verbs take a dative object, it's just an idiosyncrasy of German -- it's best just to memorize these verbs as requiring the dative, even though the following noun doesn't 'feel' like an indirect object.

Ich helfe dir mit deinen Hausaufgaben. *I'm helping you = I'm giving help to you.*
 Wir danken Ihnen, Herr Stein. *We're thanking you = we're giving thanks to you.*

• with some **adjectives** which describe a condition. You'll just need to know these as fixed phrases.

Mir ist warm. *To me (it) is warm / I'm warm.*
 Wie geht es dir? *How's it going / How are you doing?*

• the preposition **"in"** often uses the dative case. Later this week you will be learning more about this preposition and how to use it correctly. For now, the most you need to know is that when 'in' is used with a stationary verb (e.g. He's in the house), it takes the dative case.

Der Tisch steht in der Küche. *Where is it? In the kitchen.*
 Mein Schreibtisch ist im Arbeitszimmer. *Note that im = in dem*
 Die Kinder sind in ihren Zimmern. *The children are in their rooms, plural.*

Summary: When to use which case

So, when you're trying to decide which case to use, consider the following things:

1. Is it a **fixed expression**? (such as *Mir ist kalt*, or *Es tut mir Leid*)
2. Does the noun follow either an **accusative** or a **dative preposition**? If so, this should be easy, since the preposition determines the case. Just make sure you know which prepositions take the accusative (dogfu) and which take the dative (Blue Danube Waltz). Once you have the accusative and dative prepositions memorized, these are your friends when it comes to case -- they tell you exactly what to do. (Next semester you will learn some other prepositions which aren't quite so easy.)
3. Is the verb a **dative verb**? If so, the object will be in the dative.
4. If none of the other conditions apply, then you need to determine which noun in the sentence is the **subject**, and put that in nominative. Then look for a **direct object** (put in accusative) and **indirect object** (put in dative). Remember that not every sentence necessarily has a direct object and an indirect object: some have only one or the other, or none at all.

If you need reference to these, here's a table of the different endings and pronouns in the three cases:

| | Nom | Akk | Dat | (Poss) |
|------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| 1 sg | ich | mich | mir | (mein_) |
| 2 sg | du | dich | dir | (dein_) |
| 3 sg | er | ihn | ihm | (sein_) |
| 3 sg | sie | sie | ihr | (ihr_) |
| 3 sg | es | es | ihm | (sein_) |
| 1 pl | wir | uns | uns | (unser_) |
| 2 pl | ihr | euch | euch | (euer_) |
| 3 pl | sie | sie | ihnen | (ihr_) |

| | | | | |
|-------------|--------|---------|----------------|--------|
| <i>form</i> | Sie | Sie | Ihnen | (Ihr_) |
| <i>masc</i> | der | den | dem | |
| <i>fem</i> | die | die | der | |
| <i>neut</i> | das | das | dem | |
| <i>plur</i> | die | die | den (+ _n) | |
| <i>masc</i> | ein | einen | einem | |
| <i>fem</i> | eine | eine | einer | |
| <i>neut</i> | ein | ein | einem | |
| <i>plur</i> | keine | keine | keinen (+ _n) | |
| <i>masc</i> | unser | unseren | unserem | |
| <i>fem</i> | unsere | unsere | unserer | |
| <i>neut</i> | unser | unser | unserem | |
| <i>plur</i> | unsere | unsere | unseren (+ _n) | |
| <i>masc</i> | dieser | diesen | diesem | |
| <i>fem</i> | diese | diese | dieser | |
| <i>neut</i> | dieses | dieses | diesem | |
| <i>plur</i> | diese | diese | diesen (+ _n) | |

It may help you to remember these changes with the mnemonic device “rese nese mr mn” -- in other words, der-die-das-die, den-die-das-die, dem-der-dem-den.

The question words **wer - wen - wem**

To ask “who” in German, you need to decided whether the “who” is the subject, the direct object, or the indirect object. The forms of ‘wer’ are just like the masculine article: *wer - wen - wem*.

Wer ist das?

Wer kommt morgen zur Party?

Wen hast du eingeladen?

Wem hast du das Buch gegeben?

Who is that?

Who's coming to the party tomorrow?

Whom did you invite?

To whom did you give the book?

