

English Grammar for Students of German

*The Study Guide
For Those Learning German
Third Edition*

*Heide Zorach
Charlotte Melin*

ENGLISH
GRAMMAR
FOR
STUDENTS
OF
GERMAN

English Grammar for Students of German

***The Study Guide
for Those Learning German***

Third edition

**Cecile Zorach
Charlotte Melin**

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Gramática española para estudiantes de inglés

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TO THE STUDENT

English Grammar for Students of German explains the grammatical terms that are in your German textbook and shows you how they relate to English grammar. The explanations and numerous examples in this handbook compare English and German grammar and point out some of the similarities and differences between the two languages. Once you understand the terms and concepts in your own language, it will be easier for you to learn how they apply to German.

Before you do your German homework, pick out the grammatical terms and concepts covered in the lesson you are about to study. Then, consult the index of *English Grammar for Students of German* to see where these topics are covered. Read the relevant pages carefully, making sure that you understand the explanations and examples. Finally, do the **Review** at the end of the chapters you have read and compare your answers with the ones in the **Answer Key** at the end of the handbook.

Tips for Studying a Foreign Language

1. **RULES**—Make sure you understand each rule before you move on to the next one. Language learning is like building a house, each brick is only as secure as its foundation.
2. **MEMORIZATION**—Memorization plays an important part in language learning. You will have to memorize vocabulary, verb conjugations, grammar rules, etc. Here are some steps to follow when you memorize new material:
 - Divide the passage into sections you can easily remember (for instance, 2 sentences or 5 words).
 - Read the section aloud several times.
 - Write the words down as you repeat them aloud to yourself.
 - Compare what you have written with the original.
 - Repeat the steps above until you can write what you have learned without mistakes.
 - Go on to memorize the next section in the same way.
 - Work at memorizing for only short periods of time. If you find you are not concentrating on the material, take a break or do a different part of your assignment.

3. **VOCABULARY**—Use any trick or gimmick that will help you remember German words. Here are some that students have found useful.
- Write each word on a different index card: German on one side, English on the other.
 - Use index cards of different colors to help you remember useful information: the gender of nouns (i.e., blue for masculine, red for feminine, yellow for neuter), or the parts of speech (i.e., green for verbs, orange for adjectives, etc.).
 - When learning the words, flip through the cards looking at the German word. Say the word aloud, then think of the English word that corresponds. Flip the card to check your answer. Shuffle the deck often so that words do not always appear in the same order. As you learn words, place those cards in a separate pile and concentrate on the ones you still need to learn.
 - As you memorize, organize the cards in different groupings and spread them out in rows or other arrangements on your desk or floor. For example, you might group together related vocabulary items (i.e., family members, hobbies, foods) or parts of speech that follow particular grammatical rules (i.e., strong verbs, weak verbs).
 - Remember that it is rare for there to be a perfect one-to-one correspondence between words in English and German. Make a note of important differences in meaning or usage on the cards.
4. **EXAMPLES**—Once you have mastered a new grammatical concept, make up simple statements. Begin by modeling your sentences after the examples in your textbook. Later you will be able to express your own ideas.
5. **CLASS AND VIDEOS**—Take notes while you are in class. When your teacher gives you a new example, or if you hear a new phrase while watching a video program, write it down so that you can analyze it at a later time.
6. **ASSIGNMENT**—Keep up with your assignments. When you are learning a language, you need daily practice and time to absorb new material. Catching up is almost impossible because you can only memorize a certain amount of material at one time.

7. **LANGUAGE LABORATORY**—It is better to listen to tapes for short periods at different times during the week than to try to do everything in one long sitting.
8. **COMPUTER EXERCISES**—These exercises are meant to give you practice and to test your mastery of grammatical rules and concepts. Always review your textbook before beginning computer assignments.

“Viel Glück!”

Cecile Zorach and Charlotte Melin

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INTRODUCTION

When you learn a foreign language, in this case German, you need to look at each word in three ways:

1. The **meaning** of the word—You must connect an English word with a German word that has an equivalent meaning.

Tree has basically the same meaning as the German word **Baum**.

Words with equivalent meanings are learned by memorizing vocabulary items. Sometimes two words are the same or very similar in both English and German. These words are called **cognates**. They are especially easy to learn.

German	English
Haus	house
Garten	garden
Student	student
intelligent	intelligent

Sometimes knowing one German word will help you learn another.

Knowing that **Kellner** is *waiter* should help you learn that **Kellnerin** is *waitress*; or knowing that **wohnen** means *to live* and that **Zimmer** means *room* should help you learn that **Wohnzimmer** means *living room*.

But usually there is little similarity between words, and knowing one German word will not help you learn another. In general, you must learn each vocabulary item separately.

Knowing that **Mann** means *man* will not help you learn that **Frau** means *woman*.

Even words that have the same basic meaning in English and German only rarely have identical meanings in all situations.

The German word **Mann** generally has the same meaning as the English word *man*, but it can also mean *husband*. The German word **Frau** usually means *woman*, but it can also mean a married woman, *Mrs.*, or even *Ms.*

In addition, there are times when words in combination take on a special meaning.

The German word **stehen** means *to stand*; **Schlange** basically means *snake*. But **Schlange stehen** means *to stand in line, to line up*.

An expression whose meaning as a whole (**Schlange stehen**) differs from the meaning of the individual words (**stehen** and **Schlange**) is called an **idiom**. You will need to pay special attention to these idiomatic expressions in order to recognize them and use them correctly.

2. The **classification** of a word—English and German words are classified in categories called **parts of speech**. We will consider the eight different parts of speech used in German:

noun	article
pronoun	adverb
verb	preposition
adjective	conjunction

Each part of speech has its own rules for spelling and use. You must learn to identify the part of speech of each word so that you can choose the correct German equivalent and know what rules to apply.

Look at the word *that* in the following sentences:

- a. Have you read *that* newspaper?
- b. She said *that* she was busy.
- c. Here is the record *that* he bought.¹

The English word is the same in all three sentences, but in German three different words would be used and three different sets of rules would apply because each *that* is a different part of speech.

3. The **use** of the word—A word must also be identified according to the role it plays in the sentence. Each word, whether English or German, has a specific role or function in the sentence. Determining the word's function will help you choose the correct German equivalent and know what rules apply.

Look at the word *her* in the following sentences:

- a. I don't know *her*.
- b. Have you told *her* your story?
- c. We know *her* father.²

The English word is the same in all three sentences, but in German three different words would be used because each *her* has a different function.

¹a. Adjective-see p. 123; b. Subordinating conjunction-see p. 156; c. Relative pronoun-see p. 114.

²a. Direct object-see p. 26; b. Indirect object-see p. 28; c. Possessive adjective-see p. 133.

Careful

As a student of German you must learn to recognize both the part of speech and the function of each word in a given sentence. This is essential because words in a German sentence have a great deal of influence on each other. Compare the following sentence in English and in German.

*The small blue **book** is on the big old table.*

Das kleine blaue **Buch** ist auf dem großen alten Tisch.

IN ENGLISH

In English, the only word that affects the form of another word in the sentence is *book*, which causes us to say *is*. If the word were *books*, we would have to say *are*.

IN GERMAN

In German, the word for *book* (**Buch**) not only affects the word for *is* (**ist**), but also the spelling and pronunciation of the German words for *the* (**das**), *small* (**klein**), and *blue* (**blau**). The words for *is on* (**ist auf**) and *table* (**Tisch**) affect the spelling and pronunciation of the equivalent words for *the* (**dem**), *big* (**groß**), and *old* (**alt**). The only word not affected by the words surrounding it is the word for *on* (**auf**).

Since parts of speech and function are usually determined in the same way in English and German, this handbook will show you how to identify them in English. You will then learn to compare English and German constructions. This will give you a better understanding of the explanations in your German textbook.

1. WHAT IS A NOUN?

A **noun** is a word that names something.

IN ENGLISH

Let us look at some different types of words that are nouns:

- a person friend, sister, brother, John, Mary, Professor Jones
- a place city, state, country, Austria, New York
- a thing desk, house, border, water, hand, Monday
- an animal dog, bird, fish, Spot, Fluff
- an event
or activity vacation, birth, death, jogging, growth
- an idea
or concept truth, poverty, inertia, peace, fear, beauty

As you can see, a noun can name something tangible, i.e., that you can touch (*door, restaurant, cat*), or it can refer to something abstract, i.e., something you understand with your mind (*honor, love, justice, humor*).

A noun that does not state the name of a specific person, place, thing, etc., is called a **common noun**. A common noun begins with a small letter, unless it is the first word of a sentence. All the words above that are not capitalized are common nouns.

A noun that is the name of a specific person, place, thing, etc. is called a **proper noun**. A proper noun always begins with a capital letter. All the words above that are capitalized are proper nouns.

Her name is Mary.

common	proper
noun	noun

A noun that is made up of two words is called a **compound noun**. A compound noun can be a common noun, such as *video game* and *ice cream*, or a proper noun, such as *Western Europe* and *North America*.

To help you learn to recognize nouns, here is a paragraph where the nouns are in *italics*.

The *United States* imports many *items* from German speaking *countries*. German *automobiles*, ranging from moderately priced *models* to elegant *cars*, have earned a *reputation* here for their excellent *performance*. *Germany* also supplies us with fine *tools*,

cameras, and electronics. Many Americans value imported Swiss watches. Nearly everyone in our country appreciates the taste of Swiss chocolate. And some people here would feel lost in the winter without their pair of Austrian skis.

IN GERMAN

It is very easy to recognize nouns. German capitalizes all nouns, making no distinction between proper nouns and common nouns.

Terms Used to Talk About Nouns

GENDER—A noun has gender; that is, it can be classified according to whether it is masculine, feminine, or neuter (see **What is Meant by Gender?**, p. 6).

NUMBER—A noun has a number; that is, it can be described as being either singular or plural (see **What is Meant by Number?**, p. 9).

FUNCTION—A noun can have a variety of functions in a sentence; that is, it can be the subject of the sentence (see **What is a Subject?**, p. 24), a predicate noun (see **What is a Predicate Noun?**, p. 32), or an object (see **What are Objects?**, p. 26).

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Circle the nouns in the following sentences.

1. The student asked the teacher a question.
2. Our textbook has a picture on the cover.
3. Eric wants a new tape deck for his birthday.
4. The cows stood in the middle of a grassy field.
5. Actions speak louder than words.
6. The audience enjoyed her wit and candor.

2. WHAT IS MEANT BY GENDER?

Gender in the grammatical sense means the classification of a word as **masculine**, **feminine**, or **neuter**.

Gender plays only a small role in English; however, since it is at the very heart of the German language, let us see which parts of speech indicate gender in English and in German.

English	German
pronouns	nouns
possessive adjectives	pronouns
	adjectives
	articles

Since each part of speech follows its own rules to indicate gender, you will find gender discussed in the sections dealing with articles and with the various types of pronouns and adjectives. In this section we shall look at the gender of nouns only.

IN ENGLISH

Nouns themselves do not have gender, but sometimes when they stand for a person or animal, we treat them as if they had grammatical gender, based on their biological sex. If we replace a noun with *he* or *she*, we automatically use *he* for males and *she* for females. Nouns which name things that do not have a sex are replaced by *it*.

Nouns referring to males indicate the masculine gender.

The *boy* waved; *he* was tired, and I was glad to see *him*.

|
 noun
 male

 |
 masculine

 |
 masculine

Nouns referring to females indicate the feminine gender.

My *aunt* came for a visit; *she* is nice and I like *her*.

|
 noun
 female

 |
 feminine

 |
 feminine

All other nouns do not indicate a gender; they are considered neuter.

There is a *tree* in front of the house. *It* is a maple.¹

|
 noun
 thing

 |
 neuter

¹There are a few well-known exceptions, such as *ship*, which is referred to as *she*. It is custom, not logic, which decides. "The S/S United States sailed for Europe. *She* is a good ship."

IN GERMAN

All nouns are either masculine, feminine, or neuter. This means that all objects, animals, events, and abstract ideas have a grammatical gender, as do the names of countries.

The gender of most German nouns cannot be explained or figured out. These nouns have a grammatical gender that is unrelated to biological sex. Here are some examples of English nouns classified under the gender of their German equivalents.

Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
table	lamp	window
heaven	hope	girl
tree	plant	bread
month	season	year
state	Switzerland	Germany
beginning	reality	topic

You will have to memorize the grammatical gender of every German noun you learn. This gender is important not only for the noun itself, but also for the spelling and pronunciation of the words it influences.

Gender can sometimes be determined by looking at the ending of a German noun. The list on p. 167 shows you noun endings which signal masculine, feminine, and neuter nouns. You will find it helpful to familiarize yourself with these endings as you learn individual nouns.

Careful

It is easy to determine the grammatical gender of a German noun whose meaning is linked to biological sex (males usually have masculine gender → *Peter, man, brother*; females usually have feminine gender → *Sarah, woman, sister*). A number of nouns, however, have a grammatical gender different from the biological sex of the persons or animals they name. The words for *baby, child, and girl* are all neuter because they refer to young or small beings. Often, too, a German noun will have different forms when it refers to the different sexes. For example, the noun “student” has two equivalents, **Studentin** for females and **Student** for males (see Appendix, p. 167). You will want to pay extra attention to such words because it is easy to forget that they have a special grammatical gender in German.

▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼REVIEW▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼

- I. Circle M (masculine), F (feminine), or N (neuter) next to the nouns whose gender you can identify, and (?) next to the nouns whose gender you would have to look up in the dictionary.

1. clock	M	F	N	?
2. mother	M	F	N	?
3. son	M	F	N	?
4. pear	M	F	N	?
5. radio	M	F	N	?

- II. By consulting the list on p. 167, determine the gender of the following German words.

1. Lehrer	M	F	N
2. Brötchen	M	F	N
3. Freundin	M	F	N
4. Sonntag	M	F	N
5. Buchhandlung	M	F	N