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Transitive verbs

(Verbs that can have an accusative object)


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What are transitive verbs?

In school grammar, **transitive verbs** (in German: *transitive Verben*) are verbs that **can** either have or **require** an accusative object as an argument. Regarding their valency, they are never monovalent. A transitive verb may also construct the passive voice, particularly the **dynamic passive**, in which the original object becomes the subject of the passive sentence. For learners of German as a foreign language, it is essential to know that all transitive verbs form the German compound tenses (e.g., Perfekt, Plusquamperfekt, etc.) with the auxiliary verb '**haben**'. Compare the characteristics in detail:

- **Transitive** verbs **can** always appear together with an **accusative object** . However, be aware that it does **not** have to be present necessarily.
 - Some examples of German transitive verbs are:
 - *lesen* (to read), *sehen* (to see), *kochen* (to cook), *schreiben* (to

write), *backen* (to bake), etc.

„*Silke schreibt.*“ (Silke is writing.)

→ This sentence shows the intransitive use because the accusative object is missing.

„*Silke schreibt einen Brief.*“ (Silke is writing a letter.)

→ Here, the verb 'schreiben' (write) occurs in transitive use with an object in the **accusative case**.

„*Silke schreibt in ihrem Zimmer.*“ (Silke is writing in her room.)

→ This statement demonstrates the intransitive use with an adverbial.

- Furthermore, it is possible to establish the **process passive** with **transitive verbs**. In such a case, the accusative object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence:

- **Example sentences:**

„*Der Angler fängt einen Fisch.*“ (The angler is catching a fish.)

→ This is a sentence in the active voice with 'einen Fisch' (a fish) as the **accusative object**.

„*Ein Fisch wird (vom Angler) gefangen.*“ (A fish is being caught [by the angler].)

→ Passive sentence with 'Ein Fisch' (A fish) as the **subject**; the prepositional object 'vom Angler' (by the angler) is optional.

- **Note:** There are only few exceptional transitive verbs that **cannot** form the dynamic passive voice. Some of them are ...

- verbs of **possession**:

- *wissen* (to know), *haben* (to own), *erhalten* (to receive), *kennen* (to know), *besitzen* (to possess), *bekommen* (to



- verbs that express an **amount** or a **quantity**:

- *kosten* (to cost), *wiegen* (to weigh), *betragen* (to amount),

umfassen (to comprise), etc.

- Additionally, the German **transitive** verbs always form the **compound tenses** in the past (see info box below) with the auxiliary verb '**haben**' if the clause is in the active voice. Compare:

„Ich *habe einen Kuchen gegessen.*“ (I have eaten a cake.)

- The tense is the Perfekt; the accusative object is '*einen Kuchen*' (a cake).

„Wir *hatten unseren Urlaub bereits gebucht.*“ (We had already booked our vacation.)

- The tense is the Plusquamperfekt; the accusative object is '*unseren Urlaub*' (our vacation).

▲ Information: Be careful with the distinction between the English and German **tenses**: In German, the **Perfekt** also expresses the **past**. In English, however, this is done by the past tense and not the present perfect.

Further explanations related to 'Transitive verbs'

The following **explanations** refer to the topic '**Using transitive verbs** (**verbs** that can have an **accusative object**) in German grammar' and might be helpful as well:

- [Intransitive verbs in German](#)
- [The object in German grammar](#)
- [The prepositional object in German grammar](#)
- [The grammatical voice \(active/passive\)](#)
- [The subject as a constituent of a sentence](#)

