

# Reflexive Verben – Deutsch 101-326

## Reflexive Verben

### [Zusammenfassung](#)

[Diagnostic Exercises](#) You will be asked 20 questions. IF YOU GET A QUESTION WRONG, KEEP TRYING UNTIL YOU GET IT RIGHT. THE PROGRAM WILL ONLY CALCULATE YOUR SCORE IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED ALL THE QUESTIONS. Incorrect guesses will reduce your score. When you are finished, click “Submit” if you are satisfied with your score.

[Practice Exercises](#)

Remember you need a score of at least 80% in order to get a “check” for this assignment.

### [Definition](#)

[Table of Reflexive Pronouns](#)

### [Obligatory and Optional Reflexives](#)

[Accusative vs Dative Reflexive Pronouns](#)

### [Important Details](#)

[A List of Common Reflexive Verbs](#)

## Zusammenfassung

- A reflexive verb is a verb that has an object which is the same as the subject of the verb ==> the action of the reflexive verb is something one is doing to or for oneself. Some verbs are always reflexive, others are not. This is discussed in more detail [below](#). Click [here](#) for some examples.
- The reflexive pronouns are similar to the regular accusative and dative pronouns, but in the 3rd person singular and plural, there is only one form of the reflexive pronoun for all genders and both accusative and dative: **sich**. Click [here](#) to see the table of reflexive pronouns, and compare it to the table of regular accusative and dative pronouns.
- Languages differ in what actions they consider to be reflexive. Some verbs will always be accompanied by a reflexive pronoun, e.g. Germans always think of *sich kämmen*, *sich waschen*, *sich beeilen* [=to hurry up] and even *sich erkälten* [=to catch a cold] as something one is doing to oneself. In general, the reflexive is obligatory for many more verbs in German than in English; a representative [list of such reflexive verbs](#) is provided in the last section. Any other transitive verb [i.e. verb that can take an object] will be reflexive when its subject and object are the same. Thus, if Larry hits Moe and Curly over the head, the verb *schlagen* will not be reflexive, but if Larry hits **himself** on the head, you need to use a reflexive pronoun with *schlagen*. Finally, there are some cases where it is up to you to decide whether you want to emphasize that one is performing the action for oneself: in German as in English, I can say “Ich kaufe einen [Opel](#)” [=I buy an Opel] or “Ich kaufe **mir** einen Opel” [=I buy **myself** an Opel]. Click [here](#) for some examples.
- Normally the reflexive pronoun will be accusative. If the verb already has an accusative object, however, then the reflexive pronoun will be dative. Note that you will only notice this difference in the ich- and du-forms, since for all the other persons, the accusative and dative reflexive pronouns are identical. Click [here](#) for some examples.
- Note that the plural reflexive pronouns can sometimes be used to express that two people are

doing something to each other, and are thus sometimes interchangeable with the adverb “einander.” Reflexive constructions are also sometimes used as substitutes for the passive. Click [here](#) for more details and examples.

- Click [here](#) for a list of common reflexive verbs.
- Finally, a warning: after reading about reflexive verbs, it is natural to overuse reflexive pronouns for a while. Please remember that you should only use reflexive pronouns in the situations described here!

[Zurück nach oben](#)

## Practice Exercises

Try these to see if you understand reflexive pronouns!

[Reflexive or not?](#) This exercise asks you to decide whether you need the reflexive pronoun **sich** or a regular third person singular or plural pronoun. The third person is used since for the first and second person singular and plural, the reflexive pronouns are the same as the regular pronouns anyway. Click [here](#) and [here](#) if this exercise gives you trouble.

[Pick the correct reflexive pronoun to fill in the blank](#) This exercise allows you to practice using a variety of reflexive pronouns with a variety of reflexive verbs. Click [here](#) and [here](#) if this exercise gives you trouble.

[Ein wunderbarer Urlaub](#) Decide if you need an accusative or a dative reflexive pronoun to fill in the blank. This exercise focuses primarily on **mich** and **mir** since the accusative and dative reflexive pronouns are the same for most of the other persons. Click [here](#) if this exercise gives you trouble.

[Exzentriker](#) Practice using a variety of reflexive pronouns in this exercise about the habits of various eccentric people.

[Zurück nach oben](#)

## Definition

A reflexive verb is a verb that has an object which is the same as the subject of the verb ==> the action of the reflexive verb is something one is doing to or for oneself. Some verbs are reflexive all or most of the time, others are only reflexive when used in certain ways. Here are some examples to illustrate what is meant by this definition. Where the infinitive is listed with a reflexive pronoun in the table below, the verb is reflexive all or most of the time; in many cases, the corresponding English verb is not reflexive. This is discussed in more detail [below](#).

sich erkälten	Er erkältet <b>sich</b> .	He catches a cold. [literally: he “colds” himself ==> he is the subject, and he is also the object] She gets dressed. [literally: she dresses herself ==> she is the subject, and she is also the object]
sich anziehen	Sie zieht <b>sich</b> an.	The only way for this verb not to be reflexive is if someone dresses <i>someone else</i> .
sich amüsieren	Ich habe <b>mich</b> auf dem Nagelbett amüsiert.	I enjoyed myself on the bed of nails. [==> I am the subject, and I am also the object] The only way for this verb not to be reflexive is if someone amuses <i>someone else</i> .

machen	Er macht <b>sich</b> einen Teller Käsespätzle.	He makes himself a plate of cheese Spätzle. [==> He is the subject, and he is doing this for himself, so he is also the (indirect) object (the Spätzle being the direct object in this case)]
lieben	Erst muss man <b>sich</b> selbst lieben. Dann kann man Deutsch lieben.	First one must love oneself. Then one can love German. [In the first sentence one is loving oneself, i.e. one is the subject and the object, and the sentence is reflexive. In the second sentence, one is the subject and German is the object; these are different, so the second sentence is not reflexive.]
weh tun	Er hat <b>sich</b> auf dem Nagelbett weh getan. Ich habe ihm nicht weh getan.	He hurt himself on the bed of nails. I did not hurt him. [In the first sentence he is the subject, and he is also the object and the sentence is reflexive. In the second sentence, I am and he is the object; these are different, so the second sentence is not reflexive.]

[Zurück nach oben](#)

## Table of Reflexive Pronouns

The reflexive pronouns are similar to the regular accusative and dative pronouns, but in the 3rd person singular and plural, there is only one form of the reflexive pronoun for all genders and both accusative and dative: **sich**:

Person	Accusative Reflexive Pronoun	Dative Reflexive Pronoun
ich	mich	mir
du	dich	dir
er/sie/es	<b>sich</b>	<b>sich</b>
wir	uns	uns
ihr	euch	euch
sie/Sie	<b>sich</b>	<b>sich</b>

Compare this to the table of regular accusative and dative pronouns:

Person	Accusative Pronoun	Dative Pronoun
ich	mich	mir
du	dich	dir
er/sie/es	<b>ihn/sie/es</b>	<b>ihm/ihr/ihm</b>
wir	uns	uns
ihr	euch	euch
sie/Sie	<b>sie/Sie</b>	<b>ihnen/Ihnen</b>

[Zurück nach oben](#)

## Obligatory and Optional Reflexives

### Obligatory Reflexives

Languages differ in what actions they consider to be reflexive. Some verbs will always be accompanied by a reflexive pronoun, e.g. Germans always think of *sich kämmen*, *sich waschen*, *sich beeilen* [=to hurry up] and even *sich erkälten* [=to catch a cold] as something one is doing to oneself.

In general, the reflexive is obligatory for many more verbs in German than in English; a representative [list of such reflexive verbs](#) is provided in the last section; here is an excerpt from that list related to grooming and one's daily routine:

Deutsch	Englisch	Beispiel
sich (+Akk) baden	to take a bath	Ich bade <b>mich</b> gern jeden Sonntag.
sich (+Akk) duschen	to shower	Es ist gesund, <b>sich</b> manchmal kalt zu duschen.
sich (+Akk/+Dat) waschen, du wäschst, wusch, hat gewaschen	to wash (oneself)	Niemand liebt mich. Ich muss <b>mir</b> den Rücken alleine waschen.
sich (+Akk/+Dat) kämmen	to comb oneself	Ihr seid cool, weil ihr <b>euch</b> nie die Haare kämmt.
sich (+Akk/+Dat) rasieren	to shave	Niemand rasiert <b>sich</b> gern den Rücken.
sich (+Akk/+Dat) an•ziehen, zog an, hat angezogen	to get dressed	Zieh <b>dir</b> die Lederhosen an!
sich (+Akk) beeilen	to hurry	Wir müssen <b>uns</b> beeilen!
sich (+Akk) verfahren, verfuhr, hat verfahren	to lose one's way (by car)	Habt ihr <b>euch</b> wieder verfahren?
sich (+Akk) verlaufen, verlief, hat verlaufen	to lose one's way (on foot)	Nein, wir haben <b>uns</b> verlaufen.
sich (+Akk) verspäten	to be late	Deshalb haben wir <b>uns</b> verspätet.
sich (+Akk) aus•ruhen	to rest	Es ist OK. Ruht <b>euch</b> jetzt aus.
sich (+Akk) setzen	to sit down	Darf ich <b>mich</b> auf dein antikes Sofa setzen?
sich (+Akk) hin•legen	to lie down	Leg <b>dich</b> lieber hin.

## Reflexives with other Transitive Verbs when Subject and Object are the same

Any other transitive verb [i.e. verb that can take an object] will be reflexive when its subject and object are the same. Thus, if Larry hits Moe and Curly over the head, the verb *schlagen* will not be reflexive, but if Larry hits **himself** on the head, you need to use a reflexive pronoun with *schlagen*.

verletzen	Jake Barnes hat <b>sich</b> verletzt.	Jake Barnes hurt himself. [Jake is the subject and the object ==> reflexive]
verletzen	Eine Kugel hat Jake Barnes verletzt.	A bullet injured Jake Barnes. [The bullet is the subject, Jake is the object ==> not reflexive]
schreiben	Hemingway hat viele Romane geschrieben.	Hemingway wrote many novels. [Hemingway is the subject, the novels are the object ==> not reflexive]
schreiben	Hat Hemingway in seinen Büchern über <b>sich</b> selber geschrieben?	Did Hemingway write about himself in his books? [Hemingway is the subject and the object ==> reflexive]
hassen	Hemingway hat den Film <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> (1932) gehasst. [Er dachte der Film war zu romantisch.]	Hemingway hated the movie <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> (1932). [Hemingway is the subject and the movie is the object ==> not reflexive]

hassen     Hat Hemingways  
**sich** selbst gehasst?

Did Hemingway hate himself? [Hemingway is  
the subject and the object ==> reflexive]

Notice the adverbs “selbst” and “selber” in two of the above examples. This is sometimes used to give added emphasis to the reflexive character of the action. Don’t confuse this with the other meaning of “selbst” and “selber,” namely, “by oneself,” as in: “Ich muss immer alles selber machen” or “Ich kann mir meine Schuhe selbst anziehen.”

## Optional Reflexives

Finally, there are some cases where it is up to you to decide whether you want to emphasize that one is performing the action for oneself: in German as in English, I can say “Ich kaufe einen [Opel](#)” [=I buy an Opel] or “Ich kaufe **mir** einen Opel” [=I buy **myself** an Opel]. More examples of this:

kaufen	Ich kaufe die deutsche Ausgabe von Harry Potter. Ich kaufe <b>mir</b> die deutsche Ausgabe von Harry Potter.	I buy the German edition of Harry Potter. I buy <b>myself</b> the German edition of Harry Potter.
machen	Wir machen einen <a href="#">SPAM Reuben</a> . Wir machen <b>uns</b> einen SPAM Reuben.	We make a SPAM Reuben. We make <b>ourselves</b> a SPAM Reuben.

[Zurück nach oben](#)

## Accusative vs Dative Reflexive Pronouns

Normally the reflexive pronoun will be accusative. If the verb already has an accusative object, however, then the reflexive pronoun will be dative. Note that you will only notice this difference in the ich- and du-forms, since for all the other persons, the accusative and dative reflexive pronouns are identical.

Ich wasche mich. [no object other than the reflexive object]     I’m washing myself.

Ich wasche mir das Gesicht.

[here, the verb already has an accusative object: “das Gesicht,” the specific part of my body that needs washing because it’s covered in disgusting

filth and I have a big date tonight, though no amount of washing is going to remove the huge, throbbing, excruciatingly painful, greenish zit [der

Pickel] on the tip of my nose. Consequently, my face, which is being washed, is accusative, and I’m the beneficiary/recipient of this action ==> dative]

Ich habe mir beim Skifahren auf dem Großglockner den Arm gebrochen.

[here, the arm is the specific part of my body that I broke, so again it’s accusative and I’m the “beneficiary”/recipient of this action ==> dative]

Kauf dir ein Bonbon!

[Here, the accusative object is “das Bonbon”; you’re the beneficiary/recipient when you buy it ==> dative]

I’m washing my face.

I broke my arm while skiing on the Großglockner.

Buy yourself some candy!

[Zurück nach oben](#)

## Important Details

- The plural reflexive pronouns can sometimes be used to express that two people are doing something to each other, and are thus sometimes interchangeable with the adverb “einander.” In some cases, it is preferable to use “einander” in order to avoid ambiguity: see the third example below:

Wir haben uns in der Stadt getroffen.

Wir haben einander in der Stadt getroffen.

We met (each other) in town.

Sie hatten sich jahrelang nicht mehr gesehen.

Sie hatten einander jahrelang nicht mehr gesehen.

They hadn't seen each other for years.

Die Affen entfernen sich die Läuse.

Die Affen entfernen einander die Läuse.

With “sich” this can mean the monkeys are each removing their own lice on their own bodies, or that they are doing this for each other.

With “einander,” it has to mean that they are doing it for each other.

- Reflexive constructions are sometimes used as substitutes for the passive. Particularly common in this context is the expression “sich lassen” [“(it) lets itself be done,” i.e. “(it) can be done”]:

Das lässt sich (nicht) machen.

That can (can't) be done.

Die Dose SPAM lässt sich leicht öffnen.

The can of SPAM can be opened easily.

“Scheiße” schreibt sich mit “ß”.

“Scheiße” is spelled with an “ß”.

- Another use of “sich lassen” is to express that one is having something done **for oneself**:

Ich lasse mir die Haare schneiden. I'm having my hair cut.

Wir lassen uns ein Haus bauen. We're having a house built for ourselves.

[Zurück nach oben](#)

## A List of Common Reflexive Verbs

Deutsch

Englisch

Significantly different meanings of the verb when not used reflexively

sich (+Akk) baden

to take a bath

sich (+Akk) duschen

to shower

sich (+Akk/+Dat) waschen, du wäschst, wusch, hat gewaschen

to wash (oneself)

sich (+Akk/+Dat) kämmen

to comb oneself

sich (+Akk/+Dat) rasieren

to shave

sich (+Akk/+Dat) an•ziehen, zog an, hat angezogen

to get dressed

sich (+Akk) beeilen

to hurry

sich (+Akk) verfahren, verfuhr, hat verfahren

to lose one's way (by car)

sich (+Akk) verlaufen, verlief, hat verlaufen	to lose one's way (on foot)	
sich (+Akk) verspäten	to be late	
sich (+Akk) aus•ruhen	to rest	
sich (+Akk) setzen	to sit down	
sich (+Akk) hin•legen	to lie down	to put something down
sich (+Dat) etwas merken	to commit something to memory	
sich (+Dat) etwas überlegen	to think something over	
sich (+Akk) (gut/schlecht) fühlen	to feel well/ill etc.	to sense (physically or mentally)
sich (+Akk) erkälten	to catch a cold	
sich (+Dat) etwas brechen	to break something (arm, leg)	to break (something); to vomit
sich (+Akk) erholen	to recover	
sich (+Akk) amüsieren	to have a good time, enjoy oneself	to amuse someone
sich (+Akk) langweilen	to be bored	
sich (+Dat) etwas an•sehen, du siehst an, sah an, hat angesehen	to take a look at something	
sich (+Dat) etwas ein•bilden	to ( <u>falsely</u> ) imagine/think something	
sich (+Dat) etwas vor•stellen	to imagine something (in the sense of picturing it)	
sich (+Akk) benehmen, benahm, hat benommen	to behave (well, badly, oddly)	
sich (+Akk) entschuldigen	to apologize	to excuse (someone/something)
sich (+Akk) vor•stellen	to introduce oneself	
sich (+Akk) erinnern an (acc.)	to remember	to remind
sich (+Akk) freuen auf (acc.)	to look forward to	
sich (+Akk) freuen über (acc.)	to be glad about	
sich (+Akk) gewöhnen an (acc.)	to get used to	
sich (+Akk) interessieren für	to be interested in	
sich (+Akk) kümmern um	to look after, to bother about	
sich (+Akk) sehnen nach	to long for	
sich (+Dat) Sorgen machen um	to be worried about	
sich (+Akk) verlieben in (acc.)	to fall in love with	

[Zurück nach oben](#)