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Intransitive verbs

(Verbs that cannot have an accusative object)

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What are intransitive verbs?

Intransitive verbs (in German: *intransitive Verben*) can only occur **without** an accusative object. Consequently, they can either be an [absolute verb](#) or used with a **different** object (dative, genitive, or prepositional object) in a clause. Furthermore, intransitive verbs have substantial restrictions regarding the formation of the passive voice. Compare their characteristics:

Intransitive verbs and objects

Intransitive verbs can **never** take an accusative object . However, **other** types of **objects** are still possible.

- Some intransitive **example verbs** are:
 - *helfen* (to help), *danken* (to thank), *liegen* (to lie), *warten* (to wait), *schlafen* (to sleep), etc.
- 💬 „Ich *warte* bereits seit einer Woche *auf ein Paket*.“ (I have already been waiting for a parcel for a week.)

→ with the **prepositional object** 'auf ein Paket' (for a parcel)

💡 „Jasmin **dankt ihrer Schwester**.“ (Jasmin thanks her sister.)

→ with the **dative object** 'ihrer Schwester' (her sister)

💡 „Die Kinder **schlafen**.“ (The kids are sleeping.)

→ This sentence shows the use as an absolute verb without an argument/object.

Intransitive verbs and the passive voice

Moreover, **intransitive verbs** can only form the **passive voice** to a **limited** extent. In most cases, the personal passive is not possible; however, they can sometimes construct the impersonal passive.

- Very often, the personal passive is **impossible**:

💡 „**Wir** danken **dir** für deine Mühe.“ (We thank you for your effort.)

→ Active sentence where 'dir' (you) is a **dative object** and 'Wir' (We) the **subject**.

💡 „**Dir** wird für deine Mühe gedankt.“ (Literally: You are thanked for your effort.)

→ Passive sentence without a subject; 'Dir' (You) remains the **dative object**.

💡 „**Dir** wird **von uns** für deine Mühe gedankt.“ (Literally: You are thanked for your effort by us.)

→ A subjectless passive sentence in which 'von uns' (by us) is a **prepositional object**.

- Nevertheless, the impersonal passive with '**es**' in place of the subject can occasionally be formed:

💡 „**Markus** hilft seinem Bruder bei den Hausaufgaben.“ (Markus helps his brother with his homework.)

→ active sentence with 'Markus' as the **subject**

💡 „**Es** wird seinem Bruder bei den Hausaufgaben geholfen.“ (His brother is helped with his homework.)

→ Including 'Es' as a **dummy subject** that replaces the actual subject.

Intransitive verbs and the tenses

Unlike the transitive verbs, **intransitive** ones can form the compound **past tenses** ([German verb tenses](#)) with both auxiliary verbs '**haben**' or with '**sein**'.

⚠ Be aware that the German past tenses include the Perfekt – in contrast to English with its present perfect.

- Some intransitive verbs such as those denoting motion usually require '**sein**':
 - *gehen* (to go), *laufen* (to walk), *rennen* (to run), *fahren* (to drive), *kriechen* (to crawl), *kommen* (to come), etc.
 - 💬 „Gestern *bin* ich nach Stuttgart *gefahren*.“ (Yesterday, I went to Stuttgart.)
→ Perfekt tense (perfect)
 - 💬 „Lars *war* bereits *gegangen*, als die Gäste kamen.“ (Lars had already left when the guests arrived.)
→ Plusquamperfekt (past perfect)
- Most others use '**haben**' as the necessary auxiliary:
 - *helfen* (to help), *arbeiten* (to work), *dauern* (to last), *warten* (to wait), etc.
 - 💬 „Wir *haben* schon sehr lange an diesem Projekt *gearbeitet*.“ (We have been working on this project for a very long time.)
→ Perfekt (present perfect)
 - 💬 „Die Sitzung *hatte* eine Stunde *gedauert*.“ (The session had lasted an hour.)
→ Plusquamperfekt (past perfect)

Further explanations referring to 'Intransitive verbs'

The following **explanations** are related to the topic '**Use of intransitive verbs** in German grammar' and may also be interesting:

- [Transitive verbs in German grammar](#)
- [Impersonal verbs](#)