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How to learn German vocabulary effectively?

Use a vocabulary learning app.

I recommend using [Anki](#).

Use a good vocabulary card deck for Anki.

I recommend downloading and importing **one** of the following decks:

- [A Frequency Dictionary of German - German to English.apkg](#).
- [A Frequency Dictionary of German - English to German.apkg](#).

These files are located in [this repository here](#).

Unfortunately, as these decks are identical with the only difference that their vocabulary cards are mirrored, due to how Anki manages decks, these decks cannot coexist with each other within the Anki app. Therefore, you need to choose **one** of these decks.

These decks are slightly changed variants of [this deck](#). The following changes have been made:

- 7 words have been suspended and cannot be learned, **unless they get unsuspended**, as they are too confusing in the beginning to learn as vocabulary. These words are:
 - **der** "the; that, those; who, that"
 - **sein** "to be; (past tense)"
 - **ein** "a, an; one (of)"
 - **haben** "to have; (past tense)"
 - **sie** "she, her; they, them; you"
 - **werden** "to become, get; (future tense); (passive voice)"
 - **ihr** "you, her; her, their, hers, theirs; your".
- On the answer side of every card there is now additionally the corresponding [Wiktionary](#) entry to every German word. There you can find additional information that the cards otherwise lack.

For every noun, learn the grammatical gender, the genitive singular and the nominative plural.

In German, every noun has one of **three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine, or neuter)**. Also, every German noun can be used in one of **four cases (nominative, genitive, dative, or accusative)**, as well as in one of **two numbers (singular or plural)**.

Information on the grammatical gender of a German noun, as well as it's different forms in case and number can be found on [Wiktionary](#).

Learning the grammatical gender, the genitive singular, as well as the nominative plural of a German noun is important, because this information will tell you how to use the nouns properly (grammatically) in a sentence.

The grammatical gender of a German noun can be guessed correctly with varying accuracy (more information on this can be found [here](#)), nevertheless it often just needs to be learned.

Besides, every German noun is a member of a singular class (s1, s2a, s2b, or s3) as well as a member of a plural class (p1, p2). These classes are explained below.

The four singular classes:

The form of the **genitive singular** determines the singular class of a German noun. Therefore, the genitive singular needs to be learned.

- **Nouns of class s1:** the genitive singular ends in -s or -es
 - all other singular cases are identical to the nominative singular
 - the dative singular can sometimes **optionally** end in -e
- **Nouns of class s2a:** the genitive singular ends in -en
 - the dative and accusative singular end in -en, as well
- **Nouns of class s2b:** the genitive singular of a neuter noun ends in -en
 - only dative singular ends in -en, as well
 - the accusative singular, however, is identical to the nominative singular
- **Nouns of class s3:** the genitive singular is identical to the nominative singular
 - all other singular cases are identical to the nominative singular, as well

Some examples for the **singular cases**:

noun class	s1	s1	s2a	s2b	s3
word	der Vater	das Kind	der Mensch	das Junge	die Mutter
grammatical gender	masculine	neuter	masculine	neuter	feminine
"the ..."	"father"	"child"	"human being"	"young (thing)"	"mother"
nominative	Vater	Kind	Mensch	Junge	Mutter
genitive	Vaters	Kindes	Menschen	Jungen	Mutter
dative	Vater	Kind(e)	Menschen	Jungen	Mutter
accusative	Vater	Kind	Menschen	Junge	Mutter

Compare the articles on Wiktionary on these nouns: [der Vater](#) "the father", [das Kind](#) "the child", [Mensch](#) "the human being", [das Junge](#) ("weak declension") "the young (thing)", [die Mutter](#) "the mother".

The two plural classes:

The form of the **nominative plural** determines the plural class of a German noun. Therefore, the nominative plural needs to be learned.

- **Nouns of class p1:** the nominative plural ends in -e, -el, or -er
 - the dative plural adds a -n
 - all other plural cases are identical to the nominative plural

- **Nouns of class p2:** the nominative plural of a noun ends in any other way
 - all other plural cases are identical to the nominative plural

Some examples for the **plural cases**:

noun class	p1	p1	p1	p2	p2
word	Tische	Schlüssel	Männer	Bären	Autos
	"tables"	"keys"	"men"	"bears"	"cars"
nominative	Tische	Schlüssel	Männer	Bären	Autos
genitive	Tische	Schlüssel	Männer	Bären	Autos
dative	Tischen	Schlüsseln	Männern	Bären	Autos
accusative	Tische	Schlüssel	Männer	Bären	Autos

Compare the articles on Wiktionary on these nouns: 🖱 [der Tisch](#) "the table", 🖱 [der Schlüssel](#) "the key", 🖱 [der Mann](#) "the man", 🖱 [der Bär](#) "the bear", 🖱 [das Auto](#) "the car".

Therefore, you need to learn, for example:

article	nominative singular	genitive singular	nominative plural
der	Vater	Vaters	Väter
das	Kind	Kindes	Kinder
der	Mensch	Menschen	Menschen
das	Junge	Jungen	Jungen
die	Mutter	Mutter	Mütter
der	Tisch	Tisches	Tische
der	Schlüssel	Schlüssels	Schlüssel
der	Mann	Mannes	Männer
der	Bär	Bären	Bären
das	Auto	Autos	Autos

Explanation: The article shows the grammatical gender (**der** (masculine), **die** (feminine), **das** (neuter)).

Having learned the previous forms, we can deduce the noun classes of these nouns:

word	singular class	plural class
Vater	s1	p1
Kind	s1	p1
Mensch	s2a	p2
Junge	s2b	p2
Mutter	s3	p1
Tisch	s1	p1
Schlüssel	s1	p1

Mann	s1	p1
Bär	s2a	p2
Auto	s1	p2

Irregular nouns: The nouns 🐾 Herz "heart", 🐾 Name "name", 🐾 Buchstabe "letter", 🐾 Funke "spark", 🐾 Gedanke "thought", and 🐾 Wille "will".

Also, there are some more subtleties mostly connected with the use of names of persons which cannot be treated here.

For adjectives, learn the irregular comparative and superlative forms

Regularly, the positive, comparative, and superlative look like this:

positive	comparative	superlative
grün "green"	grüner "greener"	am grünsten "the greenest"
frisch "fresh"	frischer "fresher"	am frischesten "the freshest"

Compare the articles on Wiktionary on these adjectives: 🐾 grün "green", 🐾 frisch "fresh".

From this, we can deduct the following **rules for regular adjectives**:

- * the POSITIVE needs to be learned
- * the comparative = POSITIVE + er
- * the superlative = am + POSITIVE + (e)sten

Therefore it suffices to learn the POSITIVE of regular German Adjectives.

Irregularly, however, these 3 forms might look like this:

positive	comparative	superlative
hart "hard"	härter	am härtesten
groß "big"	größer	am größten
klug "prudent, smart"	klüger	am klügsten
gut "good"	besser	am besten
viel "many, much"	mehr	am meisten
gern "willingly, gladly"	lieber	am liebsten
bald "soon"	eher	am ehesten
oft "often"	öfter	am häufigsten

Compare the articles on Wiktionary on these adjectives: 🐾 hart "hard", 🐾 groß "big", 🐾 klug "prudent, smart", 🐾 gut "good", 🐾 viel "many, much", 🐾 gern "willingly, gladly", 🐾 bald "soon", 🐾 oft "oft".

Explanation: Fortunately, most irregular adjectives in German behave like **hart**, **groß**, and **klug** which show themselves a regularity: In the comparative, as well as in the superlative, they add two dots above the vowel which results in a different pronunciation, but other than that they are completely regular.

For every verb, there are 6 forms that need to be learned

These forms are:

- the **infinitive** ("to do")
- the 3rd person singular **present** indicative ("he does")
- the 3rd person singular **preterite** indicative ("he did")
- the 3rd person singular **preterite subjunctive** ("he would do")
- the 2nd person singular **imperative** ("Do!")
- the **past participle with its auxiliary** ("to have done")

If you know these 6 forms of a verb, then you can derive **all** other forms from them. **Unfortunately, it can't be shown here how this works, as this would go too far for now.**

Regularly, these 6 forms look like this (the examples are **fragen** "to ask" and **ordnen** "to organize"):

fragen	fragt	fragte	fragte	frag	gefragt haben
ordnen	ordnet	ordnete	ordnete	ordne	geordnet haben

Compare the articles on Wiktionary on these verbs: [fragen](#) "to ask", [ordnen](#) "to organize".

From this, we can deduct the following **rules for regular verbs**:

- * the INFINITIVE needs to be learned
- * the 3rd person singular present indicative = INFINITIVE - en + (e)t
- * the 3rd person singular preterite indicative = INFINITIVE - en + (e)te
- * the 3rd person singular preterite subjunctive = INFINITIVE - en + (e)te
- * the 2nd person singular imperative = INFINITIVE - en + (e)
- * the past participle with its auxiliary = ge + INFINITIVE - en + (e)t + haben

These regular forms don't need to be learned, as we know the rules to create them. Therefore, we only need to learn the INFINITIVE of regular German verbs.

Irregularly, however, these 6 forms might look like this (the example is **sehen** "to see"):

sehen	sieht	sah	sähe	sieh	gesehen haben
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Compare the articles on Wiktionary on this verb: [sehen](#) "to see".

As a consequence, in the case of the **irregular German verb** **sehen** "to see", **all 6 forms need to be learned.**

Two Anki decks with German irregular verbs are available here:

- [👉 German to English](#)
- [👉 English to German](#)

These files are located in in [👉 this repository here](#).

This time, **both** decks can be used in Anki simultaneously!

These decks were created based on a list of German irregular verbs that can be found [👉 here](#).

For every preposition, learn the cases that can be combined with it, as well as the meanings of those combinations.

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Sources

[👉 Source \(German book\)](#).

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