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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.

Try to guess the related English word when learning a German word using sound correspondences

German and English both evolved from the same ancestor, i. e. (West) Germanic. Their respective evolution was governed by sound laws which are different for each language and which give them their specific "modern look". However, since they evolved from the same ancestor, this results in the following sound correspondences between these languages.

However, this is of course not the full picture. For example, the vowels are missing, since their correspondences are too complex. Nevertheless, these correspondences should be helpful.

The sound correspondences from *English to German*

English	German	example words
b	b	beard = Bart
p	pf, ff, f	path = Pfad, pepper = Pfeffer, deep = tief
f	f, v	free = frei, father = Vater
v	f, b	haven = Hafen, liver = Leber
d	t	day = Tag
t	tz, z, ss, s, ß	to sit = sitzen, tongue = Zunge, water = Wasser, that = das, hot = heiß
th	d	three = drei
g	g	gall = Galle
gh	ch	to laugh = lachen

c, k	k, ck, ch	cold = kalt, naked = nackt, to make = machen
qu	qu	quick = queck- e.g. in Quecksilber "quick silver, i.e. mercury"
h	h	hot = heiß
wh	w	what = was
w	w, u	world = Welt, new = neu
y	j, g	young = jung, to say = sagen
m	m	mouse = Maus
n	n	nose = Nase
nk	nk	to think = denken
l	l	lung = Lunge
r	r	red = rot
z	r	frozen = gefroren
s	s, r	summer = Sommer, was = war
sp	sp	to spin = spinnen
st	st	to stick = stecken
sh	sch	shimmer = Schimmer
sw	schw	to swim = schwimmen
sm	schm	smith = Schmied
sn	schn	snow = Schnee
sl	schl	to sleep = schlafen

The same sound correspondences from *German to English*

German	English	example words
b	b, v	Bart = beard, Leber = liver

pf	p	Pfad = path
ff	p	Pfeffer = pepper
f	f, v, p	frei = free, Hafen = haven, tief = deep
v	f	Vater = father
d	th	drei = three
t	d	Tag = day
tz	t	sitzen = to sit
z	t	Zunge = tongue
g	g, y	Galle = gall, sagen = to say
qu	qu	queck- e.g. in Quecksilber "quick silver, i.e. mercury" = quick
k	c, k	kalt = cold
ck	c, k	nackt = naked
h	h	heiß = hot
ch	c, k, gh	machen = to make, lachen = to laugh
sch	sh	Schimmer = shimmer
schw	sw	schwimmen = to swim
schm	sm	Schmied = smith
schn	sn	Schnee = snow
schl	sl	schlafen = to sleep
w	w, wh	Welt = world, was = what
u	w	neu = new
j	y	jung = young
m	m	Maus = mouse
n	n	Nase = nose
nk	nk	denken = to think

r	r, s, z	rot = red, war = was, gefroren = frozen
l	l	Lunge = lung
ß	t	heiß = hot
s	s, t	Sommer = summer, das = that
ss	t	Wasser = water
sp	sp	spinnen = to spin
st	st	stecken = to stick

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 its 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 !\[\]\(74d4806277d7e73349d8e8c0897931e9_img.jpg\) 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
definite					
article	der	das	der	das	die
word	Vater	Kind	Mensch	Junge	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	genitive	nominative
	singular	singular	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 definite article shows the grammatical gender (`der` (masculine), `die` (feminine), `das` (neuter)).

Having learned the aforementioned nouns including their forms, we can deduce the noun classes of these nouns:

word		singular		plural
		class		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.

[Finally, a PDF document containing detailed information on the \(fortunately completely regular!\) adjective inflection, as well as the inflection of both articles \(definite and indefinite\) can be found \[here\]\(#\).](#)

Numbers

Cardinal numbers

German cardinal numbers **can freely be used as nouns or as adjectives**. If there is a distinct adjective form (i.e. if the noun form can't be used as an adjective), then it will be explicitly listed in the table below beside the noun.

If German cardinal numbers are **used as a noun, they start with a capital letter**. However, all cardinal numbers are listed as adjectives in the table below.

Grammatical facts about *German cardinal numbers being used as nouns*:

- Their grammatical gender is **always feminine**.

- **Their genitive singular form is always identical to their nominative singular form.** Therefore, they belong to class `s3` which means that all of their singular forms are identical.
- **Their nominative plural form always ends in `-en`.** Therefore, they belong to class `p2` which means that all of their plural forms are identical, as well.

Grammatical facts about *German cardinal numbers being used as adjectives*:

- All of their forms are identical, i. e. **they are not inflected.**
- They have **no comparative or superlative forms.**

Ordinal numbers

A German ordinal number is **formed by adding the suffix `-t` to a German cardinal number.** Furthermore, the German ordinal numbers are **normal adjectives**. They are given in the table below in the nominative singular feminine form which ends in `-te` (this is the form that is also used in dictionaries) below each German *cardinal* number.

Fractions

A German fraction is **formed by adding the suffix `-tel` to a German cardinal number.** German fractions **can freely be used as nouns or adjectives**. They are given in the table below under each German *ordinal* number.

If German fractions are **used as a noun, they start with a capital letter.** Note that all fractions are listed as nouns in the table below.

Grammatical facts about *German fractions being used as nouns*:

- Their grammatical gender is **always neuter.**
- **Their genitive singular form always ends in `-s`.** Therefore, they belong to class `s1` which means that excluding the genitive singular, all of their singular forms are identical.
- **Their nominative plural form is always identical to the nominative singular form and thus, it always ends in `-el`.** Therefore, they belong to class `p1` which means that all of their plural forms are identical except the dative plural which adds a `-n`.

Grammatical facts about *German fractions being used as adjectives*:

- All of their forms are identical, i. e. **they are not inflected**.
- They have **no comparative or superlative forms**.

[!\[\]\(2bdfe261b986065ee0ac76460d6528c9_img.jpg\) Finally, here you can find the aforementioned table containing the German cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers, and fractions, as well as some extreme examples.](#)

How to learn German verbs

In German, every verb can be used in one of **three persons (first, second, or third)**, one of **two numbers (singular or plural)**, one of **six tenses (present, preterite, future, present perfect, preterite perfect, or future perfect)**, one of **three moods (indicative, subjunctive, or imperative)**, and one of **two voices (active or passive)**.

However, the imperative only exists in one single tense, i.e. the present.

This "grammar" here introduces another person, i.e. the **second polite**. Ordinary German grammars don't do this. Instead, they say that the forms of the third person plural are also used to refer to the second person singular in a polite manner. This "grammar" refers to this phenomenon as a distinct form called the **polite second person singular**, in order to avoid confusion.

Furthermore, there are **three infinitives for each verb (present, past, future) in one of two voices (active or passive)**, as well as **two participles (present, past) that grammatically behave like nouns**.

Information on the different forms of a German verb can be found on [!\[\]\(05be7c7a8995decd503647c99211f7c2_img.jpg\) Wiktionary](#). **In order to find a German verb in a dictionary, you need to look for the present infinitive form of the verb.**

For example, look at the Wiktionary entries of the regular verbs [!\[\]\(aa53ad6fea213b8b2226d3077e30533a_img.jpg\) lieben "to love"](#), [!\[\]\(a1c2189b125458bd8fa8822d0c2da6bc_img.jpg\) fragen "to ask"](#), [!\[\]\(2fd953c3ecfc88f2692d4bd02c4e8bdc_img.jpg\) ordnen "to bring in order"](#), [!\[\]\(aae91f6df6753c5c553ea412ecfb91bc_img.jpg\) arbeiten "to work"](#), [!\[\]\(0f3706b37117ecf113ff7aea6af0ad36_img.jpg\) handeln "to trade, to act"](#), and at the Wiktionary entries of the irregular verbs [!\[\]\(f1e0c8d6aedbada0d97f0ba5025bedc7_img.jpg\) sehen "to see"](#), [!\[\]\(baab783684af60591548f3f4a6e36b9a_img.jpg\) fahren "to drive"](#), [!\[\]\(5e7d2f66939fde7e91b2b1c3c12d9812_img.jpg\) geben "to give"](#), [!\[\]\(4deb584fb2b2256775a8315b0b4325c5_img.jpg\) gehen "to go"](#), [!\[\]\(5f3f03c074bb4a1e39502e9b1a81b6d7_img.jpg\) stoßen "to push"](#), [!\[\]\(427b603d57490576a1ff39a0c7aa2b28_img.jpg\) frieren "to feel cold"](#). (All of these verbs also appear in the PDF document mentioned below.)

However, it must be noted that **all passive forms are missing from the Wiktionary entries!**

[Please consult this PDF document for detailed information on the topic.](#)

An Anki deck with German irregular verbs can be downloaded [here](#).

This file is located in [this repository here](#).

This deck was created based on a list of German irregular verbs that can be found [here](#).

Additionally, a PDF document containing all information from this Anki deck can be consulted [here](#).

For a preposition, learn the cases that can be combined with it, as well as the meanings of those combinations, *if the following rules can't (!) explain the usage of the preposition in question*

- **Rule 1:** If a preposition is used with a sense of direction, then it must be combined with the accusative. E. g. *Ich gehe **in** den Raum.* "I go **in(to)** the room."
- **Rule 2:** Otherwise, a preposition must be combined with the dative. E. g. *Ich bin **in** dem Raum.* "I am **in(side)** the room."

Some examples of exceptions to these rules which would need to be learned:

*Doch **trotz** des schlechten Wetters gingen wir nach draußen.*

"However, **despite** the bad weather, we went outside."

(trotz is used with the genitive)

*Das ist der Weg **zu** den Schulgebäuden.*

"This is the way **to** the school buildings."

(zu is used with the dative, even though it has a sense of direction)

*Heute gehe ich nicht **ohne** meinen Hut nach draußen!*

"Today, I'm not going outside **without** my hat!"

(*ohne* is used with the accusative, even though it *doesn't* have a sense of direction)

Sources

[!\[\]\(5eb1325dfdc3f1cad8426726c0db51cd_img.jpg\) Source 1 \(German book\).](#)

[!\[\]\(eafc244b53721dd1ec133f0772f70fc7_img.jpg\) Source 2 \(German book\).](#)

[!\[\]\(d3fb9f94af8b26d1c844efa9a98805b0_img.jpg\) Table of Contents](#)