



Der Wortbaukasten

How German Builds Its Words

A German Vocabulary Book • A2–B1

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SURABHI VERLAG

Der Wortbaukasten: How German Builds Its Words
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All German and English text in this volume is original, written freshly for this book and graded for learners at levels A2 and B1 of the Common European Framework.

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About the author



Anju Mishra came to German the way most of her readers do: as an adult, mid-career, with a life already in motion. After five years in the United States she moved to Germany, where a small daughter with German homework became the best reason imaginable to master the language properly. She did, all the way to C1, and along the way discovered that German is not a mountain of exceptions but a system of patterns. An MBA in finance taught her to look for that structure; teaching learners from around the world taught her how to share it. She lives in Germany with her husband and daughter, who remains her favourite reason to get every *der*, *die* and *das* right.

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How to use this book

German does not have half a million separate words. It has a modest set of roots, prefixes, and suffixes, and a wonderfully regular machine for combining them. This book teaches you the machine.

The book has two parts:

1. The Engine (chapters 1–12) teaches how words are built: the core verbs, the prefix system, word families, gender by suffix, compounds, and the little words that hold sentences together.
2. The World (chapters 13–32) puts the engine to work in twenty everyday fields, from finding a flat to protecting the environment. After every five units, a short review retrieves what you have learned.

How to read a chapter:

1. Read the German scene first. The highlighted words are the chapter's targets; the English mirror below resolves anything unclear.
2. Work through the pattern and the Word building box: this is where one rule replaces fifty flashcards.
3. Learn the Vocabulary list actively. Words marked **B1** are B1 level; everything unmarked is A2. The For recognition list you only need to understand.
4. Do the Exercises. Answers are at the back. The last exercise is always yours: write, speak, produce.

Every noun comes with its article and plural, every irregular verb with its full forms. Learn words whole, and the German you meet outside this book will already be half familiar.

The videos. Every unit of this book also exists as a free video, spoken by native-quality German voices. Each unit has a quick drill video for revision and a deep video with an example sentence and a bonus insight for every word. Hearing a word while you read it is the fastest way to fix both its sound and its spelling. Find them on the YouTube channel [AllesKlarMitAnju](#), and all books and courses at [AllesKlarMitAnju.com](#).

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Die wichtigsten Verben

The verbs that carry everything

A handful of verbs carries most of everyday German. Read Lena's day below: every highlighted word is one of them, and you will meet the same fifty again and again in every chapter of this book.

DEUTSCH

Um acht **ist** Lena schon wach. Sie **hat** heute frei, und draußen **scheint** die Sonne. „Was **mache** ich mit diesem Tag?“, **denkt** sie.

Sie **fragt** Tom: „**Willst** du an den See fahren? Wir **können** schwimmen, und du **darfst** mein neues Boot testen.“ Tom **muss** bis zwölf arbeiten. Aber dann? Dann **nimmt** er seine Tasche, **kauft** Brot und Käse und **läuft** zum Bahnhof. Der Zug **fährt** um halb eins.

Am See **liegt** Lena schon im Gras. Sie **liest** ein Buch und **isst** eine Erdbeere. „Du **sprichst** zu viel und **schwimmst** zu wenig“, **lacht** sie. Der Tag **wird** lang und warm und schön.

ENGLISH

At eight Lena is already awake. She has the day off, and outside the sun is shining. “What shall I do with this day?” she thinks.

She asks Tom: “Do you want to go to the lake? We can swim, and you can try out my new boat.” Tom has to work until twelve. But then? Then he takes his bag, buys bread and cheese, and runs to the station. The train leaves at half past twelve.

At the lake, Lena is already lying in the grass. She is reading a book and eating a strawberry. “You talk too much and swim too little,” she laughs. The day grows long and warm and beautiful.

THE BIG THREE

Three verbs carry the whole language: *sein* (to be), *haben* (to have), *werden* (to become). Their present forms are irregular, so it is worth knowing them by heart:

	<i>sein</i>	<i>haben</i>	<i>werden</i>
ich	bin	habe	werde
du	bist	hast	wirst
er/sie/es	ist	hat	wird

THE MOOD MAKERS

Modal verbs rarely stand alone. They colour another verb, which waits at the end of the sentence as an infinitive:

können • can, to be able to

Wir können heute schwimmen gehen. We can go swimming today.

müssen • must, to have to

Tom muss bis zwölf arbeiten. Tom has to work until twelve.

wollen • to want to

Willst du an den See fahren? Do you want to go to the lake?

dürfen • may, to be allowed to

Du darfst mein Boot testen. You may test my boat.

sollen • should, to be supposed to

Ich soll mehr Wasser trinken. I should drink more water.

möchten • would like to

Ich möchte ein Eis, bitte. I would like an ice cream, please.

VOCABULARY

The big three

sein (ist, war, ist gewesen) • to be

haben (hat, hatte, hat gehabt) • to have

werden (wird, wurde, ist geworden) • to become, to get

Modal verbs

können (kann, konnte) • can, to be able to

müssen (muss, musste) • must, to have to

wollen (will, wollte) • to want to

dürfen (darf, durfte) • may, to be allowed to

sollen (soll, sollte) • should, to be supposed to

mögen (mag, mochte) / **möchten** • to like / would like to

Strong everyday verbs

gehen (ging, ist gegangen) • to go, to walk

kommen (kam, ist gekommen) • to come

fahren (fährt, fuhr, ist gefahren) • to drive, to go (by vehicle)

laufen (läuft, lief, ist gelaufen) • to run, to walk

nehmen (nimmt, nahm, hat genommen) • to take

geben (gibt, gab, hat gegeben) • to give

sehen (sieht, sah, hat gesehen) • to see

lesen (liest, las, hat gelesen) • to read

essen (isst, aß, hat gegessen) • to eat

trinken (trank, hat getrunken) • to drink

sprechen (spricht, sprach, hat gesprochen) • to speak

schlafen (schläft, schlief, hat geschlafen) • to sleep

wissen (weiß, wusste, hat gewusst) • to know (a fact)

finden (fand, hat gefunden) • to find

bleiben (blieb, ist geblieben) • to stay

Regular workhorses

machen • to do, to make

sagen • to say

fragen • to ask

kaufen • to buy

lernen • to learn

wohnen • to live (reside)

arbeiten • to work

brauchen • to need

glauben • to believe

spielen • to play

Words to recognise

heißen (hieß, hat geheißen) • to be called

stehen (stand, hat gestanden) • to stand

liegen (lag, hat gelegen) • to lie

halten (hält, hielt, hat gehalten) • to hold, to stop

lassen (lässt, ließ, hat gelassen) • to let, to leave

bringen (brachte, hat gebracht) • to bring

denken (dachte, hat gedacht) • to think

kennen (kannte, hat gekannt) • to know (a person, a place)

Memory hooks

wissen or kennen?

wissen is for facts, kennen for people and places. Ich weiß, wo Tom wohnt. Ich kenne Tom.

Perfekt with sein

Verbs of movement or change build their Perfekt with sein, not haben: ist gegangen, ist gefahren, ist geworden. No movement, no change: hat gegessen, hat gelesen.

Old friends

haben is have, kommen is come, trinken is drink, essen is eat: English and German share these roots. Careful with wollen: it means to want, never “will”.

Vowel-change verbs

A few common verbs shift their vowel in the du and er/sie forms only: e to i/ie (er nimmt, sie liest), a to ä (er fährt, er läuft). Ich, wir, ihr and sie stay regular.

EXERCISES

Exercise 1. Match each idea to its modal verb.

1. permission 2. obligation 3. ability 4. wish
(a) können (b) möchten (c) dürfen (d) müssen

Exercise 2. Fill in the correct present form.

1. Tom _____ (nehmen) den Bus.
2. Der Zug _____ (fahren) um neun.
3. _____ (lesen) du gern Krimis?
4. Lena _____ (essen) eine Erdbeere.
5. Er _____ (schlafen) bis zehn.

Exercise 3. Build the sentence. Where does the second verb go?

1. wir / können / schwimmen / heute
2. ich / müssen / arbeiten / bis sechs
3. du / wollen / fahren / an den See

Exercise 4. wissen or kennen?

1. Ich _____ die Antwort nicht.
2. _____ du meinen Bruder?
3. Sie _____ Berlin sehr gut.
4. Wir _____, wo der Bahnhof ist.

Exercise 5. Your turn.

Describe your perfect free day in five German sentences. Use at least one modal verb and three verbs from this chapter.

Trennbare Verben: das Muster

One pattern, a hundred words

Read Jonas's morning below. The highlighted words are the verbs, and almost every one is built from two parts: a small prefix and a verb you already know. Learn the pattern once, and dozens of verbs come for free.

DEUTSCH

Um halb sieben **wacht** Jonas **auf**. Er **steht** langsam **auf**, **macht** das Fenster **auf** und **atmet** tief **ein**. Kalt! Er **macht** das Fenster schnell wieder **zu**.

In der Küche **macht** er das Radio **an**. Zu laut. Er **macht** es wieder **aus**. Er **zieht** sich **an**, packt seine Tasche und **ruft** seine Kollegin an: „Ich **hole** dich um acht **ab**, dann **fahren** wir zusammen **los**.“

Am Abend **kommt** Jonas **zurück**. Er **macht** die Tür **zu**, **zieht** die Schuhe **aus** und setzt sich aufs Sofa. Was für ein Tag.

ENGLISH

At half past six Jonas wakes up. He gets up slowly, opens the window, and breathes in deeply. Cold! He quickly closes the window again.

In the kitchen he turns the radio on. Too loud. He turns it off again. He gets dressed, packs his bag, and calls his colleague: "I'll pick you up at eight, then we'll set off together."

In the evening Jonas comes back. He closes the door, takes off his shoes, and sits down on the sofa. What a day.

THE PATTERN

Here are the verbs from Jonas's day:

auf·wachen auf·stehen auf·machen ein·atmen zu·machen
 an·machen aus·machen sich an·ziehen an·rufen ab·holen
 los·fahren zurück·kommen aus·ziehen

Thirteen verbs. Only seven roots. Ten small prefixes do everything else, and each prefix keeps one core meaning from verb to verb:

Präfix	Core meaning	Example
an-	on, onto, at	anrufen (to call)
auf-	up, open	aufstehen (to get up)
aus-	out, off	ausmachen (to turn off)
ein-	in, into	einatmen (to breathe in)
zu-	closed, towards	zumachen (to close)
ab-	away, off	abholen (to pick up)
los-	off, away (start!)	losfahren (to set off)
mit-	along, with	mitkommen (to come along)
zurück-	back	zurückkommen (to come back)
weg-	away, gone	weggehen (to go away)

Why are they called separable? Because in a normal sentence, the prefix breaks off and moves to the very end. The verb is a boomerang: you throw the prefix to the end of the sentence, but it still belongs to the verb.

Context	Example
Main clause	Ich rufe dich an .
zu + infinitive	..., um dich anzurufen .
Perfekt	Ich habe dich angerufen .

Note the last two rows: zu and ge go **BETWEEN** prefix and verb. That is the surest sign that the two parts are still one word.

— ONE ROOT, ONE FAMILY

Now watch the machine work. Take one root you already know and attach the prefixes. Every combination is a real, everyday verb:

Word building

One root, six verbs: machen (to make, to do)

an·machen • to turn on

Machst du das Licht an? Will you turn on the light?

aus·machen • to turn off

Mach den Fernseher aus! Turn the TV off!

auf·machen • to open

Ich mache das Fenster auf. I open the window.

zu·machen • to close

Der Laden macht um acht zu. The shop closes at eight.

mit·machen • to join in

Wir spielen. Machst du mit? We're playing. Are you in?

weiter·machen • to carry on

Kurze Pause, dann machen wir weiter. Short break, then we carry on.

You did not learn six new words. You learned one pattern and applied it six times.

Word building

The same machine, one more root: **kommen** (to come)

an·kommen • to arrive

Der Zug kommt um neun an. The train arrives at nine.

mit·kommen • to come along

Wir gehen ins Kino. Kommst du mit? We're off to the cinema. Coming?

zurück·kommen • to come back

Wann kommst du zurück? When are you coming back?

vorbei·kommen • to drop by

Komm doch morgen kurz vorbei! Do drop by tomorrow!

VOCABULARY

Morning and evening

auf·wachen (ist aufgewacht) • to wake up

auf·stehen (stand auf, ist aufgestanden) • to get up

ein·schlafen (schläft ein, schlief ein, ist eingeschlafen) • to fall asleep

sich an·ziehen (zog an, hat angezogen) • to get dressed

sich aus·ziehen (zog aus, hat ausgezogen) • to undress

fern·sehen (sieht fern, sah fern, hat ferngesehen) • to watch TV

On and off, open and shut

an·machen • to turn on

aus·machen • to turn off

auf·machen • to open

zu·machen • to close

Ways and people

an·rufen (rief an, hat angerufen) • to call, to phone

ab·holen • to pick up

an·kommen (kam an, ist angekommen) • to arrive

los·fahren (fährt los, fuhr los, ist losgefahren) • to set off

mit·kommen (kam mit, ist mitgekommen) • to come along

mit·bringen (brachte mit, hat mitgebracht) • to bring along

zurück·kommen (kam zurück, ist zurückgekommen) • to come back

vorbei·kommen (kam vorbei, ist vorbeigekommen) • to drop by **B1**

weg·gehen (ging weg, ist weggegangen) • to go away

Everyday life

ein·kaufen • to shop, to go shopping

ein·laden (lädt ein, lud ein, hat eingeladen) • to invite

auf·räumen • to tidy up

auf·passen • to pay attention, to watch out

aus·füllen • to fill out (a form)

vor·bereiten • to prepare **B1**

zu·hören (+ Dat.) • to listen

auf·hören (mit + Dat.) • to stop

mit·machen (bei + Dat.) • to join in **B1**

weiter·machen • to carry on, to continue **B1**

Words to recognise

ab·fahren • to depart

aus·steigen • to get off

ein·steigen • to get on

um·steigen • to change (trains)

an·fangen • to begin

aus·sehen • to look, to appear

nach·denken • to think over

statt·finden • to take place

Memory hooks

The standalone test

Can the prefix stand alone as a word? An, auf, aus, ein, mit, zu, zurück, weg: yes. Then the verb separates. These prefixes ARE ordinary prepositions and adverbs doing a second job.

The stress test

Separable verbs stress the prefix: AUFstehen, ANrufen, EINkaufen. Say them out loud with the stress at the front, and your ear will learn the rule before your head does.

English does this too

Turn on, turn off, come along, drop by: English phrasal verbs are the same idea. English puts the particle after the verb; German glues it to the front and lets the sentence pull it off again.

EXERCISES

Exercise 1. Match each prefix to its core meaning.

1. *auf-* 2. *aus-* 3. *mit-* 4. *zurück-* 5. *ein-* 6. *los-*
 (a) back (b) up, open (c) along (d) out, off (e) in, into (f) off, away
 (start)

Exercise 2. Fill in the verb, correctly split.

Use: anrufen, abholen, zumachen, einkaufen, aufstehen.

1. Ich _____ dich morgen vom Bahnhof _____.
2. Es ist kalt. _____ bitte das Fenster _____!
3. Am Samstag _____ wir auf dem Markt _____.
4. Sonntags _____ ich erst um zehn Uhr _____.
5. _____ du mich heute Abend _____?

Exercise 3. Build the sentence (present tense, main clause).

1. du / aufstehen / um sieben
2. der Zug / ankommen / um halb neun
3. wir / einladen / unsere Nachbarn
4. ich / mitbringen / einen Kuchen

Exercise 4. The Baukasten: which verb means ...?

Build it from a prefix + machen, kommen, or hören.

1. to turn off the light 2. to come back 3. to listen 4. to join in 5. to stop

Exercise 5. Your turn.

Describe your own morning in five German sentences. Use at least five separable verbs from this chapter.

Read the rest.

The full book is available at AllesKlarMitAnju.com

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