

cases overview

grimm grammar

⚡ Cases : Fälle

What is a case, you may ask. Good question. In a sentence, the different nouns (or pronouns) have different functions. For example, they can be the subject, the direct object, or the indirect object ... Although nouns in English don't change their shape depending on the role they play in the sentence, in German they do: specifically, they change the article that precedes them; and some nouns add an extra suffix as well.

❖ Der Nominativ

The nominative case is used to describe the subject of a sentence. The subject is the main actor in the sentence, the person who carries out an action:

▶ **Die sieben Zwerge** wohnen in der Dachetage.

The seven dwarves live in the loft apartment.

Die böse Königin wohnt in einem Turm mit einer Hexe.

The evil queen lives in a tower with a witch.

❖ Der Akkusativ

The accusative case is used to describe the direct object of a sentence. The direct object is the immediate recipient of an action or event:

▶ Die sieben Zwerge haben **eine neue Wohnung**.

The seven dwarves have **a new apartment**.

Die alte Hexe macht **ein Experiment** - ihre arme Katze!

The old witch is doing **an experiment** - her poor cat!

Schneewittchen studiert **Jura**.

Snow White is studying **law**.



The accusative case is also used with a few prepositions: **durch**, **für**, **gegen**, **ohne**, and **um**. There will be a handful of prepositions that can either take the accusative or the dative, but they are presented separately under [prepositions](#).

▶ Die sieben Zwerge gehen **durch den Wald** und singen ihr Lieblingslied: hi-ho, hi-ho ...

The seven dwarves are walking **through the forest** and are singing their favorite song: hi-ho, hi-ho ...

Sie sind ohne Ausnahme **für die Umwelt** und **gegen die Benutzung von Autos**, die zu viel Benzin verbrauchen.

They are **for the environment** and **against the use of cars** that use too much gas.

Sie **arbeiten ohne Maschinen oder Elektrizität**.

They work **without machines or electricity**.

Sie gehen jetzt **um einen schönen See** herum. He, Hatschi ist in den See gefallen. Kein Wunder, dass er immer niest!

Now they are walking **around a pretty lake**. Ooops, Sneezy fell into the lake. No wonder that he is always sneezing!

Finally, the accusative case is used to describe specific times:

Die sieben Zwerge wollten **den ganzen Nachmittag** im Wald verbringen.

The seven dwarves wanted to spend **the entire afternoon** in the forest.

Sie haben **den ganzen Monat** auf diesen Ausflug gewartet!

They waited for this outing **the entire month**!

Aber sie haben nur **eine Stunde** in der Natur verbringen können! Brummbär ist sehr grantig ...

But they were able to spend only **one hour** in nature. Grumpy is very grumpy ...

❖ Der Dativ

The dative case is used to describe the indirect object of a sentence. The indirect object is the recipient of the direct object. In addition to changes in the article, plural nouns also receive an -n suffix (except for nouns that already end in an -n).

Rotkäppchen bringt **der Großmutter** eine Flasche Wein und einen frischen Laib Brot.

Little Red Riding Hood brings **the grandmother** a bottle of wine and a fresh loaf of bread.

Der Wolf zeigt **dem kleinen Mädchen** seine großen Augen, seine großen Ohren, seinen großen Mund ... und dann frisst er es auf!

The wolf shows **the little girl** his big eyes, his big ears, his big mouth ... and then he gobbles her up!

The dative case is also used with some prepositions: **aus, außer, bei, mit, nach, seit, von, zu, gegenüber**.

Der Jäger kommt **zu dem Haus von der Großmutter**. Er will **mit der Großmutter** sprechen. Er liebt sie! Aber er hört nur ein lautes Schnarchen.

The hunter comes **to the house of the grandmother**; he wants to talk **to her**. He loves her! But he hears loud snoring.

Der Wolf ist **nach seinem Mittagessen** eingeschlafen.

The wolf fell asleep **after his lunch**.

Der Jäger schleppt den Wolf **zu dem Fluss** und schneidet ihm den Bauch auf. Rotkäppchen und die Großmutter springen **aus dem Bauch** des Wolfs - aber der Jäger kann nichts sagen ... Die Großmutter riecht nicht so gut ...

The hunter drags the wolf **to the river** and cuts open his stomach. Little Red Riding Hood and the grandmother jump **out of the wolf's stomach** - but the hunter doesn't say anything ... The grandmother doesn't smell so good ...



Finally, the dative case is used with a handful of verbs, for example **danken, einfallen, folgen**, and **helfen**:

Rotkäppchen **dankt dem Jäger**.

Little Red Riding Hood thanks **the hunter**.

Er hat **dem kleinen Mädchen geholfen**. Er hat ihm sogar das Leben gerettet!

The hunter helped **the little girl**; he even saved her life!

Die Großmutter und Rotkäppchen **folgen dem Jäger** zum Schloss - dort ist das Leben viel sicherer ... na ja, und auch viel sauberer.

Grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood **follow the hunter** to the castle - life is much safer there ... and, of course, also much cleaner.

✦ Der Genitiv

The genitive case is dying a slow death in the German-speaking countries, especially in spoken language where it is being replaced by the dative case. Nevertheless, it's important for you to know about the genitive case because you will still encounter it in writing.

The genitive case describes possession and can be signaled by an **-s** suffix at the end of proper nouns or by a change in the article (and an additional **-s** suffix on masculine and neuter nouns):

Der Jäger mag **Rotkäppchens** Großmutter!

The hunter likes **Little Red Riding Hood's** grandmother!

Kann er das Herz **der alten Frau** gewinnen?

Can he win the heart **of the old woman**?

Wird er am Ende **des Märchens** mit seiner Geliebten in alle Ewigkeit zusammen sein?

At the end **of the fairy tale**, will he be together with his beloved for ever and ever?

The genitive case is also used with several prepositions: **(an)statt**, **trotz**, **während**, and **wegen**:

Nach seiner Erfahrung erzählt Rotkäppchen seiner Mutter, was ihm passiert ist: Mutti, **statt meiner Großmutter** lag der Wolf im Bett!

After her experience, Little Red Riding Hood tells her mother what happened to her: Mom, **instead of my grandmother**, the wolf was in the bed!

Die Mutti antwortet dem Mädchen: Und du hast ihn **trotz seiner großen Augen, großer Nase und großen Zähnen** nicht erkannt?

Her mother answers the little girl: And you didn't recognize him **in spite of his big eyes, big nose and big teeth**?

Rotkäppchen sagt schluchzend: Mutti, du bist nicht sehr mitfühlend! **Wegen der Dunkelheit** konnte ich nichts sehen! Es war doch circa 1810 und es gab noch gar keine Elektrizität!

Little Red Riding Hood sobs out: Mom, you are not very sympathetic! **Because of the darkness** I couldn't see anything! It was, after all, about 1810 and there was no electricity yet!

