

Deutsch Zusammen

Kapitel Zwölf – Wie richte ich meine Wohnung ein?

Teil 12,1

Die Zeitung liegt auf dem Tisch, und ich stelle den Kaffee auf den Tisch.

In this **Teil** you will learn about two-way prepositions. These are prepositions that sometimes govern the accusative and sometimes govern the dative case.

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Two-way prepositions

You have practiced using two classes of prepositions this far in your study of German. You know that the prepositions **durch**, **für**, **gegen**, **ohne**, and **um** (*dogfu*) are followed by the accusative case; likewise you know that the accusative case precedes the accusative postposition **entlang**. In [Kapitel 11](#) you learned that the prepositions **aus**, **außer**, **bei**, **mit**, **nach**, **seit**, **von**, and **zu** are followed by the dative case, and that the dative postposition **gegenüber** is preceded by the dative case.

A third group of prepositions are called *two-way prepositions* (**Wechselpräpositionen** in German) because they sometimes govern the accusative, and sometimes govern the dative. As you might expect, the choice of a case to use after these prepositions is not arbitrary. The two-way prepositions are **an**, **auf**, **hinter**, **vor**, **über**, **unter**, **in**, **neben**, and **zwischen**.

First, let's examine the principles that guide the selection of the accusative or dative case after these prepositions. Then we can examine each preposition in turn to see how to use it.

Accusative case

The perception of movement is an important consideration when you use the two-way prepositions. Remember how you had to take movement into account when you learned how to form the conversational past ([Teil 8,9](#)). Intransitive verbs that involve movement from one place to another require **sein** instead of **haben** as a helping verb. In a sentence containing a two-way preposition, the accusative case is required if there is movement by anyone or anything from one place to another. This may involve either the subject of the sentence or the direct object, and the movement may be physical movement from point A to point B, or a transfer of some sort (visible or invisible) from point A to point B. To understand this concept better, think about what sort of movement is described in the following English sentences.

1. The kids ran *in(to) the house*.

Analysis: The subject (the kids) are moving physically from point A (somewhere outside the house) to point B (somewhere inside the house). Since there is movement from point A to point B, the accusative case would be required after the preposition *into* if this were a German sentence.

2. The instructor is writing *on(to) the blackboard*.

Analysis: In this sentence, a word is moving from one place to another, but the movement is not very physical, perhaps not even apparent. The movement involved is a transfer (invisible!) from the mind of the instructor (point A) onto the blackboard (point B). Since there is a transfer from point A to point B, if this were a German sentence, the accusative case would be required after the preposition *onto*.

Dative case

In a sentence containing a two-way preposition, if *no movement or transfer* occurs from one place to another, and only *location* is indicated, the dative case is required after the two-way preposition.

3. The kids are *in the house*.

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Analysis: In this sentence we are indicating the location of the subjects (the kids). The location is the house (point A). Since there is *no movement or transfer* to another place (point B), the dative case would be required after the preposition *in*, if this were a German sentence.

4. The word is on the blackboard.

Analysis: In this sentence we are reporting the location of the subject (the word). The location is on the blackboard. Since there is *no movement* from point A to point B, if this were a German sentence, the *dative* case would be required after the preposition *on*.

5. The kids are jumping around *in the room*.

Analysis: In this sentence, the kids are moving, but they are not going anywhere. The phrase with *in* shows the location of the movement, not where it is going. The movement is not from point A to point B, but fixed at point A. Since there is no movement from one place to another, but only *movement at a location and within a confined area*, the *dative* case would be required after the preposition *in*.

The example sentence should make clear that the key factor in determining what case to use after a two-way preposition is the meaning of the verb.

Movement or transfer from one place to another --> accusative case
 No movement or transfer from one place to another --> dative case

Remember: German has three categories of prepositions. The first category always requires the accusative case. The second category always requires the dative case. Only for the third category, the two-way prepositions, do you ever need to consider whether there is any movement from A to B.

Some key verbs and two-way prepositions

The two-way prepositions are used primarily to express destination and location. Several key verbs that you may want to use with some of these prepositions follow.

setzen, legen, hängen, stellen

setzen, gesetzt	<i>to set (something) down</i> + reflexive pronoun = <i>to sit down</i> (lit.: <i>to set oneself down</i>)
legen, gelegt	<i>to lay (something) down</i> + reflexive pronoun = <i>to lay (oneself) down</i>
hängen, gehängt	<i>to hang (something)</i>
stellen, gestellt	<i>to put (something someplace), to place (something someplace)</i> (The verb stellen indicates that what is placed is put in a upright position.)

These verbs have the following features in common:

1. They are all regular verbs.
2. They are all transitive verbs (i.e., they given direct objects and use **haben** as the helping verb for the conversational past tense).
3. They all involve the movement or transfer of the direct object (person or thing) from one place to another.
4. Because they involve transfer of the direct object from one place to another, they all force the use of the accusative case after a two-way preposition.

sitzen, liegen, hängen, stehen

sitzen, gesessen	<i>to sit, be situated</i> (i.e., the state of sitting at rest)
liegen, gelegen	<i>to lie, be situated</i> (i.e., the state of horizontal rest)
hängen, gehangen	<i>to hang</i> (i.e., the state of suspension)

stehen, gestanden *to stand (upright), be situated (i.e., the state of standing vertically at rest)*

These verbs have the following features in common:

1. They are all irregular verbs.
2. They are all intransitive verbs, i.e., they do not govern direct objects.
3. They are all stative verbs. Since there is no action, there can be no movement or transfer of any kind from one place to another.
4. Because there is no transfer of any kind from one place to another, these verbs take **sein** as their auxiliary verb in the conversational past, and they all force the use of the dative case after two-way prepositions.

Aligning the first set of verbs with the second set, you can recognize four verbal pairs. Each pair involves a cause-and-effect relationship that determines whether an associated two-way preposition governs the accusative or the dative.

setzen (setting something down) results in **sitzen** (something sitting at rest)

legen (laying something down) results in **liegen** (something lying at rest)

hängen (hanging something [up]) results in **hängen** (something hanging at rest)

stellen (putting something someplace) results in **stehen** (something standing at rest)

Note: Speakers of German often use the more specific **stehen**, **liegen**, and **hängen** instead of **sein** to indicate where something is situated. If the object you are describing is in an upright position, use **stehen** instead of **sein**.

- Die Lampe **steht** auf dem Tisch. *The lamp is [standing] on the table.*

If it is in a horizontal position, use **liegen** instead of **sein**. Cities, for example are said to "lie" on rivers or in countries.

- Die Zeitung **liegt** auf dem Tisch. *The newspaper is [lying] on the table.*
- Hamburg **liegt** in Norddeutschland. *Hamburg is/lies/is situated in Northern Germany.*
- Frankfurt **liegt** am Main. *Frankfurt is/lies/is situated on the Main.*

If it is suspended in some way, use **hängen** instead of **sein**. Example:

- Die Lampe **hängt** über dem Tisch. *The lamp is [hanging] over the table.*

Units of printed information (e.g., Wort, Satz, Information, Auskunft, Artikel) are said to "stand" in books, newspapers, and brochures and on posters, signs, and blackboards, etc., perhaps because prints appear to be in an upright position. Therefore, you use **stehen** instead of **sein**.

- Was er gesagt hat, **steht** in der Zeitung. *What he said is [standing] in the newspaper.*

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