

Cases: The Dative

You already learned that the nominative case is used to designate the subject of a sentence (*Einheit 2.2*), and the accusative case is used for the direct object of a sentence (*Einheit 3.8*).

The dative case also has several distinct functions:

- it designates the person for or to whom something is done, also known as the indirect object.
- for example:
 - *Luca schenkt seiner* Oma einen Blumenstrauß.
 - *Ich schenke meinem* Freund ein Buch.

As you can see in the sentences below, the dative case often appears in a sentence with three nouns:

- the person who is doing something (=the subject, in the nominative case),
- the recipient or the person for or to whom something is being done (=the indirect object, in the dative case),
- and the object that is being given from the subject to the recipient (=direct object, in the accusative case).

subject (Nom.)	verb	indirect object (Dat.)	direct object (Acc.)
<i>Luca</i> <i>Ich</i>	<i>schenkt</i> <i>schenke</i>	<i>seiner</i> Oma <i>meinem</i> Freund	<i>einen Blumenstrauß.</i> <i>ein Buch.</i>

As with the nominative and accusative cases, the dative case is also signaled by special forms of pronouns and endings for articles and possessive determiners.

	masculine	feminine	neuter	plural***
endings	-m	-r	-m	-n
definite article	de m	der 	de m	de n
indefinite article	ein em kein em	ein er kein er	ein em kein em	--- kein en
possessive determiners	mein em dein em sein em /ihr em / sein em unser em eur em ihr em /Ihr em	mein er dein er sein er /ihr er / sein er unser er eur er ihr er /Ihr er	mein em dein em sein em /ihr em / sein em unser em eur em ihr em /Ihr em	mein en dein en sein en /ihr en / sein en unser en eur en ihr en /Ihr en

*** See *Achtung* on the next page about a special rule for dative plural nouns.

ACHTUNG All nouns (except for some proper names) add -n in the dative plural, unless their plural ends in -n already or a -s, for example:

die Freunde (Nom. pl.) → den Freunden**n** (Dat. pl.)

die Kinder (Nom. Pl.) → den Kindern**n** (Dat. Pl.)

die Bücher (Nom. pl.) → den Büchern**n** (Dat. pl.)

die Hobbys (Nom. pl.) → den Hobbys (Dat. pl.) (Don't add an -n)

Ich schenke meinen Freunden**n** Konzertkarten.

Der Mann gibt den Kindern**n** Schokolade.

In German, some verbs always take the **dative case**, meaning the person or thing affected by the action is in dative.

- *antworten* (to answer): *Er antwortet **der** Lehrerin.*
- *danken* (to thank): *Ich danke **dir**.*
- *folgen* (to follow): *Der Hund folgt **dem** Kind.*
- *gehören* (to belong to): *Das Buch gehört **mir**.*
- *gratulieren* (to congratulate): *Ich gratuliere **dir** zum Geburtstag!*
- *helfen* (to help): *Kannst du **meinem** Bruder bitte helfen?*
- *passen* (to fit, suit): *Die Hose passt **mir** nicht.*

These verbs often describe actions or feelings directed **toward** someone rather than **done to** someone—so they don't take a direct object (accusative), but an indirect one (dative).

The dative case is also used **after specific prepositions**:

- **aus** (from, out of): *Ich komme **aus dem Haus**.*
(I'm coming out of the house.)
- **außer** (except for, besides): ***Außer meinem Bruder** war niemand da.*
(Except for my brother, no one was there.)
- **bei** (at, near, with): *Ich wohne **bei meinen Eltern**.* (I live with my parents.)
- **mit** (with): *Wir fahren **mit dem Bus**.* (We're going by bus.)
- **nach** (after, to – for cities/countries): *Wir fliegen **nach Deutschland**.*
(We're flying to Germany.)
- **seit** (since, for): ***Seit einem Jahr** lerne ich Deutsch.*
(I've been learning German for a year.)
- **von** (from, of): *Das Geschenk ist **von meiner Tante**.*
(The gift is from my aunt.)
- **zu** (to – people or small places): *Lori fährt **zu ihrer Familie**.*
(Lori is going to her family.)

wer, wen, and wem — are all forms of "**who**", but they change depending on the **case** in the sentence:

Form	Case	Question Answered	Example
wer	Nominative	Who? (does the action)	<i>Wer kauft einen Ring?</i>
wen	Accusative	Whom? (receives action)	<i>Wen liebst du? Ich liebe meine Frau.</i>
wem	Dative	To/for whom?	<i>Wem kauft Herr Ebert einen Ring?</i>

*Wer kauft einen Ring? **Herr Ebert** kauft einen Ring.*

*Was kauft er? Er kauft **einen Ring**.*

*Wem kauft Herr Ebert einen Ring? Er kauft **seiner Frau** einen Ring.*

There are also idiomatic expressions that use the dative case:

- *Wie geht es Ihnen?/Wie geht es dir?* (formal/informal: How are you?)
- *Wie geht es deinem Vater?* (informal: How is your father?)
- *Es tut mir Leid.* (I'm sorry.)
- *Das ist mir egal.* (I don't care.)
- *Mir fällt nichts ein.* (I can't think of anything.)
- *Wie gefällt dir mein Mantel?* (How do you like my coat?)
- *Diese Jacke steht dir.* (This jacket looks good on you.)