

**Time out: transitive or intransitive grammar**

## transitive verb. . . direct object

### accusative case

Your knowledge about the nominative case in German is rather complete, and by now you should be quite skilled in using the nominative forms to name and describe persons and things. We are now ready to expand into the accusative case and its uses and forms.

Since the accusative case is innately linked to a certain kind of verb, let's take a brief, but important, detour to learn a bit more about verbs.

### active verbs: transitive and intransitive

We have already made a clear distinction between active and (statal) inactive verbs. If we take a closer look at active verbs, you will see that there are two very distinct types: *transitive* and *intransitive*.

**A transitive verb is an active verb that can command a direct object. An intransitive verb is an active verb that cannot command a direct object.** A simple distinction! The question now is: What is a direct object?

### direct object

Most students have heard *that a direct object is the receiver of the action or that which is acted upon by the verb*. While these are correct answers - no doubt memorized in grammar or high school - many students do not really understand what these definitions actually mean. There is a much more simple and concrete way to define a direct object.

**A direct object is the person or thing controlled or manipulated in some way by the subject**

Remember that a transitive verb is a verb that can command a direct object. That means the verb is capable of being used with a direct object. Determining whether a verb is transitive is easy to do. Simply consider the meaning of the verb in question and ask yourself if you can manipulate or control a person or thing with the verb. A few examples will illustrate this sufficiently:

**to see**            Can you see someone or something? Yes. Therefore, the verb is transitive.  
(The control or manipulation involved is visual.)

- to hear** Can you hear someone or something? Yes. Therefore the verb is transitive. (The control or manipulation involved is auditory.)
- to ask** Can you ask someone or something? Yes. Therefore the verb is transitive. (The control or manipulation is interrogatory.)
- to die** Can you die someone? No! (You can *kill* someone, and *kill* is a transitive verb, but you can't *die* someone.) There is no control over another person or thing with *die*, so the verb is transitive. (X)

**The following verbs are all transitive.** Take the time now to be sure of their meaning and forms. They will be used in the next section in example sentences.

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*den die das den die*

**accusative case: definite article**

The following simple sentences will illustrate clearly how the definite article operates in the accusative case with direct objects.

**Masculine direct objects:**

Inge sieht **den Mann**.

As you can see, the accusative

Fritz hat **den Mantel**.

form of the direct object is *den*.

Der Kellner wischt **den Tisch**.

This is in sharp contrast to the

Ich trage heute **den Pullover**.

nominative form. der

**Feminine direct objects:**

Wir fragen **die Studentin** jetzt.

The feminine accusative form of the

Meine Mutter öffnet **die Tür**.

definite article *die*, is identical to

Hans kauft **die Krawatte**.

the nominative form

Die Sekretärin hört **die Chefin**.

**Neuter direct objects:**

liest

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Das Kind liest **das Buch**.

The neuter accusative form of the

Wir machen **das Licht** aus.

definite article is *das*. ~~The form is~~

Die Frau trägt **das Kleid**.

The form is identical to the nominative.

### Plural direct objects:

Schließen Sie **die Fenster**!

The plural accusative form, *die* is

**Der Professor** fragt **die Studenten**.

identical to the nominative form.

Ich habe **die Hefte**

↳ feminine

Kaufen sie **die zwei Anzüge**?

Wir lesen **die Bücher**.

**Summary:** The accusative forms of the definite article are identical to the nominative forms with the exception of the masculine, where there is a change from *der* to *den*.

### Word order specific direct object and adverb of time

When you compose a sentence that contains a specific direct object (definite article and noun) the specific direct object may be mentioned before or after an adverb of time:

EXAMPLES: Ich trage **das Kleid heute**. Beate schreibt **jetzt den Brief**.

However, if new information is provided in a sentence, it is often placed at the end of the sentence. This happens very often in conversational exchanges where answers to specific questions are frequent. Notice the questions and the answers below that illustrate this:

Was lesen Sie heute?... Ich lese heute **die Zeitung**.

Wann kaufen Sie das Auto? .... Ich kaufe das Auto **morgen**.

Word order with direct objects and adverbs of time will be reviewed in Teil 4,18. You might find reading the first half of that section helpful at this time.

### Übungen:

A. **Concept Check.** Answer the following questions with the correct information.

1. A sentence that contains no action is a statal sentence.
2. The verb in such a sentence is a \_\_\_\_\_ verb.

3. A sentence that contains an action is an <sup>a</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ verb.
4. A verb in such a sentence is an \_\_\_\_\_ verb.
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ of a sentence containing action is the doer of *it*.
  
6. The case of this word is always the \_\_\_\_\_ case.
7. The form of the definite article for a masculine subject is \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The form of the definite article for a feminine subject is \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The form of the definite article for a neuter subject is \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The form of the definite article for a plural subject is \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The \_\_\_\_\_ of a sentence is the person or thing manipulated by the subject. \_\_\_\_\_.
12. The case of this verb is always the \_\_\_\_\_ case.
13. The form of the definite article for a masculine direct object is \_\_\_\_\_.
14. The form of the definite article for a feminine direct object is \_\_\_\_\_.
15. The form of the definite article for a neuter direct object is \_\_\_\_\_.
16. The form of the definite article for a plural object is \_\_\_\_\_.
17. It is clear that the nominative and accusative forms of the definite article are identical except for the \_\_\_\_\_.
18. A verb that is capable of accommodating a direct object is called a \_\_\_\_\_ verb.
19. Such a verb contains action that is \_\_\_\_\_ in some way.
20. Generally speaking, what tends to be mentioned first: a specific direct object or an adverb of time? \_\_\_\_\_.
21. The above tendency is often ignored, however, when a new information is presented in a sentence.  
New information tend to be mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ whether it be an object or adverb.

**The following verbs are transitive.** Take time now to be sure of their meanings and forms.

haben (hat)

wischen

kaufen

bringen

brauchen to need

waschen (ã)

verkaufen

nehmen (nimmst)

öffnen/an-machen

sehen ((ie)

lesen (ie)

tragen (schließen/aus-machen

hören

schreiben