

Introduction to the German Dative Case

Sounds of the Dative Case

Use the following mnemonic device to help you learn the final endings of words that mark the dative.
“mister man” (m r m n) The sound are M R M N — This applies both to the “der” and “ein” words.

Chart of the Sounds of the Dative Endings

masc	fem	neut	plur
-m	-r	-m	-n

Examples of “der” words in Dative — Pay particular attention to the final sounds of each word.

masculine (-M)	feminine (-R)	neuter (-M)	plural (-N)	
dem	der	dem	den	<i>the / the one / this one</i>
diesem	dieser	diesem	diesen	<i>this / that / these / those</i>
welchem	welcher	welchem	welchen	<i>which? / what?</i>

Examples of “ein” words in Dative — Pay particular attention to the final sounds of each word.

masculine (-M)	feminine (-R)	neuter (-M)	plural (-N)	
einem	einer	einem		<i>a / an (no plural)</i>
keinem	keiner	keinem	keinen	<i>no / not a / not any</i>
meinem	meiner	meinem	meinen	<i>my</i>
deinem	deiner	deinem	deinen	<i>your</i>
seinem	seiner	seinem	seinen	<i>his</i>

Personal Pronouns in the Dative Case (The nominative form is given in parentheses.)

mir	(ich)	to me / for me	uns	(wir)	to us / for us
dir	(du)	to you / for you	euch	(ihr)	to you all / for you all
ihm	(er)	to him / for him			
ihr	(sie)	to her / for her	Ihnen	(Sie)	to YOU / for YOU
ihm	(es)	to it / for it	ihnen	(sie)	to them / for them

Comparison of Case Endings — The endings on the “der” words parallel some of those on personal pronouns.

<i>der word</i>	dem	der	dem	den
<i>prounoun</i>	ihm	ihr	ihm	ihnen
<i>dative ending</i>	— M	— R	— M	— N

Declensional Endings on Nouns in the Dative Case

Schwaches Maskulinum – Weak nouns take an additional “N” ending in the dative. The declensional ending “N” is the same declensional ending as in the accusative with these nouns. Compare the nominative to the accusative and dative forms of the following nouns.

<i>nominative</i>	<i>accusative</i>	<i>dative</i>
der Student	den Studenten	dem Studenten
der Herr	den Herrn	dem Herrn
der Präsident	den Präsidenten	dem Präsidenten
der Elefant	den Elefanten	dem Elefanten

Dative Plural – Nouns in dative plural take the declensional ending “N” if they don’t already end in an “n.” Observe and contemplate the following examples comparing the nominative plural with the dative plural.

<i>nom sing</i>	<i>nom plur</i>	<i>dat plur</i>	
das Kind	die Kinder	den Kindern	<i>the child</i>
der Mann	die Männer	den Männern	<i>the husband, man</i>
<i>(no singular)</i>	die Leute	den Leuten	<i>the people</i>
der Freund	die Freunde	den Freunden	<i>the friend, boyfriend</i>

Exception to Dative Plural “N” – No additional dative plural “n” is added to plural nouns ending in “s” or “n.” If the plural form of a noun ends in “s” or “n,” then no additional dative “n” is added in the dative plural.

<i>nom sing</i>	<i>nom plur</i>	<i>dat plur</i>	
das Auto	die Autos	den Autos	<i>car(s) – plural ends in “s” / no additional “n” in dat plur</i>
das Radio	die Radios	den Radios	<i>radio(s) – plural ends in “s” / no additional “n” in dat plur</i>
der Garten	die Gärten	den Gärten	<i>garden(s) – plural ends in “n” / no additional “n” in dat plur</i>
die Frau	die Frauen	den Frauen	<i>wife, woman (s) – plur ends in “n” / no addt. “n” in dat plur</i>

General Meanings conveyed by the Dative Case

The dative case often includes the meaning *to* or *for*.

Example: The German word *mir* typically means *to me* or *for me*.

English often uses the prepositions *to* or *for*, where German normally prefers the dative case without a preposition.

Look at the following examples and compare the English against the German.

Ich bereite *ihnen* das Essen vor.

I am preparing the food *for them*.

Sie zeigt *ihm* ihre Bilder.

She is showing her pictures *to him*.

Die Kinder erzählen *uns* eine Geschichte.

The children are telling a story *to us*.

Common uses for the Dative Case in German

Review the following examples and contemplate the usage of dative compared to their meanings in English.

beneficiary

Der Mann gibt seinem Sohn einen Wagen.

The man is giving his son a car.

The man is giving a car to his son.

object of certain prepositions

Wir gehen zur Post. (zu der Post)

We are going to the post office.

dative of loss

Ich soll ihm etwas Geld stehlen.

I should steal some money from him.

location (as opposed to destination)

Er wartet im Bahnhof. (in dem Bahnhof)

He is waiting inside the train station.

(as opposed to: He is going into the station.)

dative experiencer

Der Kaffee schmeckt mir gut.

The coffee tastes good to me.

certain time expressions

Wir machen am Montag eine Fete. (an + dem → am)

We are giving a party on Monday.

Es ist im Winter immer sehr kalt.

It is always very cold in the winter. (in + dem → im)

dative of possession

Die Handtasche gehört meiner Schwester.

The handbag belongs to my sister.

Ich habe mir den Arm gebrochen.

I broke my arm.

occasions/meals

zum Geburtstag (zu + dem → zum)

on one's birthday / for one's birthday

zum Abendessen · zum Kaffee

for (at) supper · for (at) coffee

certain idioms

zu mir / zu ihm

over to my place / over to his place

bei ihr / bei uns

at her place / at our place

nach Hause / zu Hause

(toward) home / (at) home

object of dative verb

Der Junge will dem Mann helfen.

The boy wants to help the man.

Der Schüler antwortet der Lehrerin nie.

The pupil never answers the (fem) teacher.