

Hints for translating sentences into German

Be methodical and use all the tools you have learned to make sure you are creating a logical translation. Even if you get a few of the details wrong, if you follow some simple rules, the overall picture will be good, and your translation should make good sense.

1 Start by creating a word inventory.

Recall from memory or look up the necessary German vocabulary, then jot them down in the margin. Following this order to collect the German words you need:

- Verb*, find the main verb in the English sentence.
- Subject* look for the performer of the action.
- Predicate Nominal* look for any re-namer.
- Direct Object* something or someone being acted on.
- Beneficiary* a person who receives a gift, etc.
- Other Elements* time, place, destination, etc.

No sentence can contain the full list of all the above elements. Just make sure that you account for every element that appears in the English sentence so you leave nothing out of your German translation.

Throw out extraneous English verbs. For example, if you see “is working” your German sentence only needs the verb “work.” And “does ... play” only needs the verb “play.”

2 Determine the sentence type you are dealing with.

Is this a Statement, Yes-No Question or Info Question?
This is important, because it determines German word order.

3 Map out the fields for your German sentence.

Lightly draw boxes on your paper indicating the placement of the various fields.
Fore-field / Conjugated Verb / Sentence Field / etc.

4 Construct your German sentence piece by piece using correct grammar.

Follow this order:

- Always start with the verb, place it in its box and be sure to conjugate it.
Remember, the verb is always the second element except in yes-no questions.
- Then add the subject, you can place this on either side of the verb.
- If the forefield is still open, fill it with one of the remaining elements.
Remember that only one element – no more – goes into the fore-field.
- Be sure to check the case grammar of each noun and pronoun.
Subject takes nominative, Direct Object takes accusative, etc.
Be sure, also, to remember the gender of each noun you use.
- Finally, place all the remaining elements into the sentence field.
In the sentence field, time elements come early and place elements come late.

5 Go back and check your work.

Make sure you have accounted for the case of every noun and pronoun.
Check the grammar endings on everything, especially make sure that you have conjugated the verb.
Take one last look at the spelling of every word in your translation.