

Nominative and Accusative Cases

German has four cases: *nominative*, *accusative*, *dative* and *genitive*. A 'case' marks the role of a noun inside of a sentence.

For example, in English we say "He loves me" – the word "me" is different than the word "I", because "me" is the direct object of the sentence. We cannot say "He loves I" because "I" is only for subjects. Technically, "me" is in the accusative case in English.

In English, only pronouns (like "I" and "me") have cases. English nouns don't change cases, but German nouns do. The articles that you have learned – der, die and das – will change in some German cases to show what role the nouns are playing.

You already know the nominative case, because you've been learning the gender articles in the nominative case already. Masculine 'der', feminine 'die', neuter 'das' and plural 'die' are the nominative case articles.

Whenever you use any form of the verb "sein" (to be), you will use the nominative case. For example:

- ① Der Computer ist neu. 'ist' is the singular form of 'sein'
- ② Das ist der Computer. 'ist' is the singular form of 'sein'
- ③ Die Studenten sind freundlich. 'sind' is the plural form of 'sein'

In the first sentence, "der Computer" is the subject, so it uses the subject case, which is nominative. In the second sentence, even though the computer comes after the verb, it is the verb "sein" and uses the nominative case. The third sentence is a plural form, but still in the nominative case.

Now we need to learn the accusative case in German. When a noun is the direct object of a sentence, you will need to make sure you say the article in the accusative case form. Luckily for us, only the masculine article changes its form in the accusative case: 'der' becomes 'den' when the noun is the direct object of a sentence. The feminine, plural and neuter articles ('die' and 'das') do not change in the accusative case.

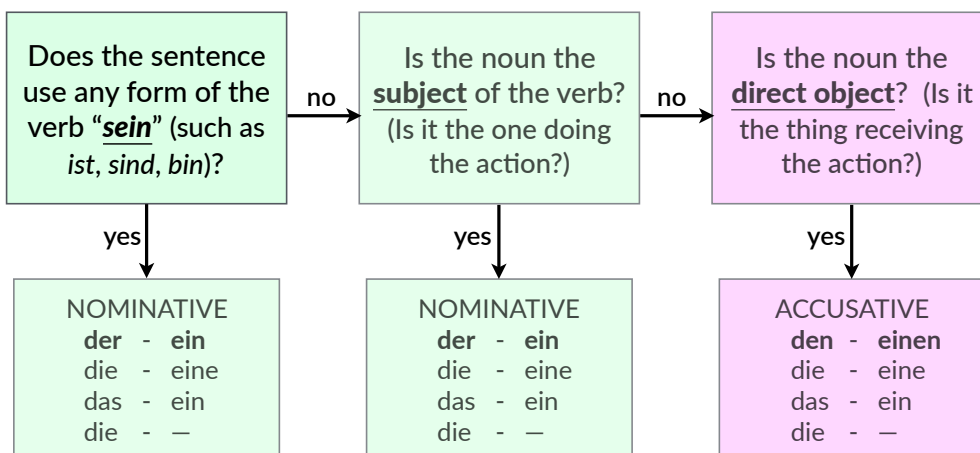
	<u>masculine</u>	<u>feminine</u>	<u>neuter</u>	<u>plural</u>	
NOMINATIVE	der	die	das	die	('the')
ACCUSATIVE	den	die	das	die	('the')
NOMINATIVE	ein	eine	ein	—	('a')
ACCUSATIVE	einen	eine	ein	—	('a')

What does this mean? It means that when you use a noun as a direct object with any verb except 'sein', you need to say "den" if the noun is masculine. But you continue to use the nominative "der" form if the noun is the subject of the sentence. Compare these sentences:

- ① Der Computer ist neu. ② Ich habe den Computer.
 ③ Das ist ein Computer. ④ Er hat einen Computer.

In the first sentence, the computer is the subject, so it uses the nominative "der". But in the second sentence, the computer is the direct object — it comes after the verb 'habe' — so it uses the accusative form "den". The third sentence uses 'sein' (nominative) but the fourth sentence has the direct object after 'hat'.

The clue here is to look for the verb 'sein'. If any form of 'sein' is in the sentence, then the nouns are nominative. But if the verb 'haben' (or other verbs we will learn soon) is in the sentence, then the subject of the sentence is nominative, while the direct object — the thing that comes after the verb — is in the accusative case. You can use the following flow chart to help:



Try a few example sentences to make sure you understand which nouns are nominative, and which are accusative. Remember that only masculine nouns actually change their articles!

1. Der Tisch ist braun.
2. Das ist der Professor.
3. Das ist die Professorin.
4. Ich habe einen Rucksack.
5. Ich habe eine Schwester.
6. Der Junge hat eine Schwester.
7. Ist das der Student?
8. Ich habe ein Buch.
9. Der Mann hat einen Computer.
10. Ein Student hat eine Frage.

For the current chapter, we will only be using sentences with the verbs "sein" and "haben". But in future chapters, nearly all verbs except for "sein" will take the accusative case for direct objects, so it is important to get used to using the 'den' and 'einen' forms quickly.

Now let's form some sentences using both nominative and accusative articles. Translate the sentences below using what you've learned: pay attention to the articles (der-die-das-den / ein-eine-einen)!

1. That is the calendar. _____
2. I have the calendar. _____
3. Do you have a calendar? _____
4. The textbook is good. _____
5. Do you have the textbook? _____
6. He is a friend. _____
7. She has a boyfriend. _____
8. We have the dog. _____
9. Is the dog young? _____
10. Is that the professor? _____
11. The professor is nice. _____
12. Does he have a computer? _____

We will practice the accusative case with 'haben' often, but if you still have questions, make sure to ask, as it will be very important in the future!