

Der Genitiv

The genitive case is used in German to express either:

- possession, ownership, belonging to or with:

Hier ist **das Auto meines Vaters**.
Hast du **die Freunde meiner Schwester** gesehen?

*Here is my father's car.
Did you see my sister's friends?*

- "of" in English, when referring to a part or component of something else:

Am **Anfang des Kurses** haben wir viel gelernt.
Manche **Seiten des Buches** fehlen.

*We learned a lot at the beginning of the course.
Some pages of the book are missing.*

- in addition, there are a handful of prepositions that require the genitive case:

anstatt (statt) -- *instead of*:

Anstatt eines Wagens haben sie ein Motorrad gekauft. *Instead of a car they bought a motorcycle.*

außerhalb -- *outside of*:

Der Park liegt **außerhalb der Stadt**. *The park is outside of the city.*

innerhalb -- *inside of, within*:

Sie sind **innerhalb eines Tages** angekommen. *They arrived within a day.*

trotz -- *in spite of*:

Ich gehe zur Party **trotz meiner Erkältung**. *I'm going to the party in spite of my cold.*

während -- *during, in the course of*:

Während der Party habe ich mich sehr schlecht gefühlt. *During the party I felt very ill.*

wegen -- *because of*:

Wir sind **wegen des Wetters** zu Hause geblieben. *We stayed at home because of the weather.*

You may occasionally see other genitive prepositions, such as *diesseits* (on this side of), *jenseits* (on that side of) or *dank* (thanks to, due to), but in general the most common genitive prepositions -- and the only ones you're responsible for knowing -- are listed above.

The formation of the article in the genitive is fairly simple, as there are only two different endings (-es for masculine and neuter, -er for feminine and plural). However, the genitive case is unusual in German because it adds an ending not only to the articles, but to masculine and neuter **nouns** as well. This ending is -es for single-syllable masculine and neuter nouns. When the noun is more than one syllable long, the ending is usually just -s.

masc	des Mannes	neut	des Buches	fem	der Frau	pl	der Blumen
	meines Mannes		meines Buches		meiner Frau		meiner Blumen

The adjective endings for the genitive case are extremely easy: masculine and neuter are always -en, feminine and plural are either -en (if there's an article) or -er (with no article):

	with article	without article (rare!)
masc	die Frau des alten Mannes	der Geschmack kalten Kaffees
fem	der Sohn meiner jungen Schwester	anstatt heißer Suppe
neut	ein Zimmer innerhalb des großen Gebäudes	trotz schlechten Wetters
pl	die Augen der schwarzen Katzen	wegen langer Tage

In addition, you may see the question word **wessen**: this is merely the genitive form of *wer*, and means "whose". It never has any other form or endings:

Wessen Auto ist das?
Wessen Bücher liegen hier?

Whose car is that?
Whose books are lying here?

Word of warning:

Your impulse may be to simply put an -s before a noun to indicate the possessive, as we do in English (*my father's car*). However, saying "mein Vaters Wagen" is not only incorrect in German, it is incomprehensible and makes no sense at all. You must rephrase: "der Wagen meines Vaters". If it helps to think of it as "the car of my father," that's fine, since the meaning is the same as English "my father's car."

Remember that with personal names, you can simply add an -s to indicate the possessive. But when referring to a common noun rather than a proper name, the genitive formation must be used:

Marias Freund heißt Thomas.
Hans' Mutter ist nett.
Wisconsins Hauptstadt ist Madison.

Der Freund **meiner Schwester** heißt Thomas.
Die Mutter **meines Freundes** ist nett.
Die Hauptstadt **dieses Bundeslands** ist Madison.

Alternate method:

The genitive case has been disappearing in German for some time now. It's not 'dead' yet, but you won't often hear it in informal situations -- it's mostly reserved for formal writing or elevated styles of speech. Instead of the genitive to indicate possession, you will often hear the dative used with the preposition 'von':

das Haus meines Freundes	=	das Haus von meinem Freund
der Onkel meiner Mutter	=	der Onkel von meiner Mutter
die Namen der Kinder	=	die Namen von den Kindern