

German word order – Part I

1. Declarative sentence

The German sentence **must** contain a verb; there is no complete German sentence without a verb – unlike in Malay:

[Ich_[I]]¹ [bin_[am]]² [Lehrer_[teacher]]³.
 [Saya_[I]]¹ [guru_[teacher]]².

In declarative sentences, the verb occupies the **second position** as it can be seen above. It is usually preceded by a noun (personal pronoun or a name) (i.e. the subject) and other parts of the sentence come after the verb:

[Ich_[I]]¹ [lerne_[have been learning]]² [Deutsch_[German] seit_[since] zwei_[two] Jahren_[years]]^{rest}.

However, in case we would like to emphasize something, we can move it to the first position, and the subject becomes the third with everything else after it:

[Deutsch]¹ [lerne]² [ich]³ [seit zwei Jahren]^{rest}.

(I have been learning *German* for two years [and, let us say, Italian for three years].)

We can also move a complete phrase (i.e. one logical unit) to the first place; then the subject becomes the third with everything else after it again:

[Vor der Garage_[in front of the garage]]¹ [steht_[stands]]² [das Auto_[the car]]³.

(The car is *in front of the garage* [and, let us say, not in the garage].)

2. Interrogative sentence

Basically, there are two types of interrogative sentences:

a) Wh-question

This type of interrogative sentence starts with a question word like *was* (what), *wie* (how), *warum* (why), *wohin* (to where), *woher* (from where), *wo* (where), *wann* (when), *welch-* (which one), *wessen* (whose), etc., the verb remains the second followed by the subject and the rest of the sentence:

[Warum_[why]]¹ [fahren_[travel]]² [Sie_[you]]³ [nach Deutschland_[to Germany]]^{rest}.

b) Yes-no question

To this type of interrogative sentence we can answer by saying 'yes' or 'no'. In this case, the verb occupies the first position, followed by the subject in the second and the rest of the sentence after them:

[Fahren_[to travel]]¹ [Sie_[you]]² [nach Deutschland_[to Germany]]^{rest?}

Exercise: Form sentences with the words given below!

1. Kinder – Apfel – essen – und – die – Schokolade

2. mein – Vater – arbeiten – im – gern – Garten

3. Sie – sprechen – Englisch – ?

4. was – Studenten – die – der – in – Bibliothek – lesen – ?

5. du – kochen – ?

6. ihr – die – Niederlande – morgen – in – fahren

7. Herr – Deutschlehrer – Balazs – sein – unser

8. ihr – die – Niederlande – morgen – in – fahren – ?

9. das – kosten – Auto – viel – leider

10. ich – müde – sein

Key:

1. Kinder – Apfel – essen – und – die – Schokolade

Die Kinder essen Apfel und Schokolade.

2. mein – Vater – arbeiten – im – gern – Garten

Mein Vater arbeitet gern im Garten.

3. Sie – sprechen – Englisch – ?

Sprechen Sie Englisch?

4. was – Studenten – die – der – in – Bibliothek – lesen – ?

Was lesen die Studenten in der Bibliothek?

5. du – kochen – ?

Kochst du?

6. ihr – die – Niederlande – morgen – in – fahren

Ihr fahrt morgen in die Niederlande.

7. Herr – Deutschlehrer – Balazs – sein – unser

Herr Balazs ist unser Deutschlehrer.

8. ihr – die – Niederlande – morgen – in – fahren – ?

Fahrt ihr morgen in die Niederlande?

9. das – kosten – Auto – viel – leider

Das Auto kostet leider viel.

10. ich – müde – sein

Ich bin müde.