

Episode 037 – Grammar

1. Reflexive verbs

Reflexive verbs are verbs whose object is the same as the subject. The object is called a reflexive pronoun.

Example:


*Er wäscht **sich** nicht mehr.*

Many verbs can be used reflexively or non-reflexively with an accusative object. In German these are called "unecht" or "false" reflexive verbs.

Examples:

*Er wäscht **sich** nicht mehr. – Er wäscht **die Hände** nicht mehr.*
*Er kämmt **sich** nicht mehr. – Er kämmt **seine Haare** nicht mehr.*

Other verbs, however, are exclusively reflexive. Such verbs cannot be used without the reflexive pronoun. Nor can the reflexive pronoun be replaced by another pronoun or noun. In German these are called "echt", or "true", reflexive verbs.

Examples:

*Beeil **dich**!*
*Ich beeile **mich**.*

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2. Reflexive pronouns in the accusative and dative cases

German reflexive pronouns are a category of pronouns that always refer back to the subject. Truly reflexive verbs cannot be used without their reflexive pronouns, which are usually in the accusative. Other verbs can be used in a reflexive and non-reflexive way, so the reflexive pronoun requires the dative and is replaced by an accusative object.

The reflexive pronouns take the same forms as personal pronouns. The only exception is in the 3rd person singular and plural, which has its own form: "sich".

	Accusative		Dative	
<i>Ich wasche</i>	<i>mich.</i>	<i>Ich wasche</i>	<i>mir</i>	<i>die Hände.</i>
<i>Du wäschst</i>	<i>dich.</i>	<i>Du wäschst</i>	<i>dir</i>	<i>die Hände.</i>
<i>Er/Sie/Es wäscht</i>	<i>sich.</i>	<i>Er/Sie/Es wäscht</i>	<i>sich</i>	<i>die Hände.</i>
<i>Wir waschen</i>	<i>uns.</i>	<i>Wir waschen</i>	<i>uns</i>	<i>die Hände.</i>
<i>Ihr wascht</i>	<i>euch.</i>	<i>Ihr wascht</i>	<i>euch</i>	<i>die Hände.</i>
<i>Sie waschen</i>	<i>sich.</i>	<i>Sie waschen</i>	<i>sich</i>	<i>die Hände.</i>

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3. Compounds

In German, two or more nouns can be combined to create compound nouns. German is full of them!

To form a compound noun, the base noun comes at the end. The preceding nouns provide more information about it. The base noun at the end determines the gender of the whole word.

Description word

der Termin
die Polizei
das Gewitter
der Regen
das Auto

Base word

der Kalender
das Auto
die Wolke
der Schirm
der Unfall

Compound noun

der Termin**kalender**
das Polizei**auto**
die Gewitter**wolke**
der Regen**schirm**
der Auto**unfall**

Description word

die Zeit
der Kopf

Description word

die Schleifen
der Schmerz

Base word

der Experte
die Tablette

Compound noun

der Zeitschleifen**experte**
die Kopf**schmerz**tablette

The inserted -s

Many compound words in German are simply composed by stringing the words next to one another. But sometimes an extra sound is inserted between them. Usually an **–s** is inserted, and sometimes **–es**, **–ens**, **–n**, **–er**. There are no clear-cut rules about when to use such insertions and when not to use them.

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Description word

die Universität
das Leben
die Tomate

Base word

der Professor
der Gefährte
der Saft

Compound noun with insertion

***der Universitäts*professor**
***der Lebens*gefährte**
***der Tomaten*saft**

More:

Nouns aren't the only types of words that can be used to form compounds. In these cases, too, the base word determines the part of speech of the entire compound word.

		Description word	Base word	Compound	
Adjektiv	+ noun	schwarz	+ der Wald	der Schwarzwald	= noun
Verb	+ noun	sprechen	+ Zeit	die Sprechzeit	= verb
Adjektiv	+ Adjective	hell	+ braun	hellbraun	= adjective
Substantiv	+ Adjective	Preis	+ wert	preiswert	= adjective