

haben - to have

In the song “Wir haben Hunger” the German verb “haben” is front and center. It is the German equivalent of “to have” and, as such, is a very important verb in the German language. It also happens to be a slightly irregular verb, which means that if you are used to conjugating other verbs in the German present tense, this one may throw you for a loop. I have included the conjugation of the verb below.

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
ich habe - I have	wir haben - we have
*du hast - you have (singular, informal)	**ihr habt - you have (plural, informal)
er, sie, es hat - he, she, it has	sie, ***Sie haben - they, you have

* **du** - used when the person to whom you are speaking is familiar to you. This includes: friends, family members, children, and pets.

****ihr** - used in the same instances as “du”, but you are addressing more than one person.

*****Sie** - used to address a person or more than one person who is not familiar to you. This includes: strangers, employees of a business, police, and teachers. Sie can be singular or plural.

Nominative vs Accusative

The verb “haben” also requires the use of a direct object. This is the thing that the subject “has” in the sentence. For example: Wir haben Hunger. - We have Hunger. In that sentence, the person who has something is “wir/we” and the thing that we have is “Hunger”. In German this means that the object is used in the accusative case. This is the second case that most German learners encounter. The only difference between the nominative case (the one listed in the dictionary and considered the “standard” form for nouns) and the accusative case (the one used for direct objects and objects of certain prepositions) is that the masculine articles must change.

In the chart below, you will see a side-by-side comparison of the German words for “the” in the nominative and accusative cases. While it isn’t really necessary to memorize a chart like this, it is a good way to visualize the difference between the nominative and accusative cases. The only thing that changes is that “der” becomes “den”. This is one of the reasons that the accusative case is considered to be the easiest of the cases to learn after the nominative case.

Definite Articles (words for “the”)

	<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Feminine</u>	<u>Neuter</u>	<u>Plural</u>
<u>Nominative</u>	der	die	das	die
<u>Accusative</u>	den	die	das	die

In the next chart, you will see the same type of chart for the German words for “a/an” called indefinite articles. Again, the masculine version changes from “ein” to “einen”. Since it doesn’t really make sense to say “a books”, I have included the word “keine” in the plural form. This is a negative word that allows you to say things like “no books” (keine Bücher). While it is only listed in the plural in the chart, it can actually be used with any of the forms below. Simply add “k” in front of an indefinite article in order to change from “a/an” to “not a” or “no”.

Indefinite Articles (words for “a/an”)

	<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Feminine</u>	<u>Neuter</u>	<u>Plural</u>
<u>Nominative</u>	ein	eine	ein	keine
<u>Accusative</u>	einen	eine	ein	keine

Examples

Der Mann hat einen Sohn. - The man has a son.

- Both “der Mann” and “der Sohn” are masculine. “Der Mann” indicates that the man is a masculine noun and that he is the one that has something in this sentence. “einen Sohn” indicates that this noun is the object of the sentence. It is what is being acted upon. This means that the “son” is in the accusative case.

Die Frau hat eine Katze. - The woman has a cat.

- Both “die Frau” and “die Katze” are feminine nouns. Since they are both feminine, there is no way to tell which one is nominative and which one is accusative. We have to use word order and a bit of logic to tell which is which. Obviously, it is the woman that has a cat, not a cat that has the woman.

Das Kind hat ein Spielzeug. - The child has a toy.

- Both “das Kind” and “das Spielzeug” are neuter nouns. As with the previous example, there is no way to tell which is nominative and which is accusative. We use the same word order rules and logic as before to determine which noun has which. Obviously, the child has a toy and not the other way around.

Ein Kreis hat keine Ecken. - A circle has no corners.

- “Der Kreis” is a masculine noun, but when we use an indefinite article, we don’t need to add any extra letters to indicate this, when it is the subject of the sentence. “Die Ecken” is the plural form of “die Ecke”. In order to indicate that there are no corners, I chose the word “kein” and added an “e” to the end of it to show that the noun is plural.

Practice: Now it is time to try it out for yourself. Take the parts given for each number and make your own sentence out of it. Pay attention to the conjugation of “haben” and the use of the accusative case. The punctuation at the end shows you what kind of sentence you are writing.

1. haben / ich / ein Kopf .

2. haben / ich / ein Kind .

3. haben / eine Hand / fünf Finger .

4. haben / die Leute / keine Zeit / warum ?

5. haben / das Kind / kein Geld .

6. haben / die Frau / ein Vogel .

7. haben / du / keine Arbeit / heute ?

8. haben / ein Jahr / zwölf Monate .

9. haben / die Welt / ein Ende ?

10. haben / die Straße / kein Name . (Name requires an “n” in the accusative)

11. haben / die Geschichte / ein Ende .

12. haben / ihr / kein Vater ?

13. haben / kein Haus / der Mann .

14. haben / wir / ein Problem ?

15. haben / meine Schwester / einen Freund .
