

# German Conjunctions (Konjunktionen): A Complete Guide

- “This dress is so pretty, **but** it’s just a little bit too short.”
- “I had to go home **because** I wasn’t feeling well.”
- “He didn’t study very hard **and therefore** he failed his classes.”

What do all these sentences have in common? If you take a closer look at the way these statements are structured, you will see that all of these are held together by words like **but**, **because**, **and** or **therefore**.

These words allow us to construct long and complicated sentences instead of only communicating with short and simple ones like “I like drawing. I like painting.”

So what are those magic words that let us link together two different statements or explain causalities?

The answer is: Conjunctions.

And just like in any other language, **German conjunctions** are a vital part of the German language.

In this post, we’re going to have a closer look at the magic that is German conjunctions!

## Types of German Conjunctions

There are two types of German conjunctions: **coordinating conjunctions** and **subordinating conjunctions**.

**Subordinating conjunctions** affect the structure of the sentence by changing the position of the verb while **coordinating conjunctions** leave the position of the verb unchanged.

Let’s have a closer look at these two types of German conjunctions!

### Coordinating conjunctions in German

As already stated, **coordinating conjunctions** in the German language **do not affect the verb** (or its position).

If you encounter the following expressions, you can be sure that you are dealing with a coordinating conjunction.

<b>und</b>	and
<b>aber</b>	but
<b>denn</b>	because
<b>oder</b>	or
<b>sondern</b>	but (as in <i>but rather</i> )
<b>beziehungsweise</b>	or, or more precisely
<b>doch</b>	but, however
<b>jedoch</b>	but, however
<b>allein</b> ( <u>rare expression</u> )	but unfortunately

If you stumble upon the words listed above in a sentence, you know that these coordinating conjunctions link two sentences of equal importance together.

Because conjunctions (coordinating as well as subordinating) explain correlations between two sentences and/or determine relations between two (or more) statements, it is very important that you familiarize yourself with the meaning of each specific conjunction.

Let me give you some examples of German coordinating conjunctions!

### Examples:

→ **und, aber oder, sondern, denn**

Andy ist sehr intelligent, **aber** er hat einfach keinen Ehrgeiz. — *Andy is very intelligent, but he just doesn't have any ambition.*

Sie ist nicht nur Mutter von drei Kindern, **sondern** [*sie*] schreibt auch Kinderbücher. — *She is not only a mom of three, but she writes children's books as well.*  
(In this case, the word “sie” is put in parentheses since you can technically leave it out)

Er wurde nach Hause geschickt, **denn** er war krank. — *He was sent home because he was sick.*

Ich mag es, zu zeichnen **und** zu malen. — *I like drawing and painting.*

**Fun fact:** The Linguistic Society of America at the University of Michigan suggests that in order to memorize some of the German coordinating conjunctions, you can **sing them** to the music of “**Stayin’ Alive**” by the Bee Gees.

(I can guarantee you it is very effective. Also, you will have the song stuck in your head for the rest of the day. But whatever helps, right?)

Let me show you:

**und denn son- dern aber – oder aber – oder**

**ah ha ha ha stayin' alive stayin' alive**

Building this kind of memory hooks is essential—especially when learning German conjunctions.

After a coordinating conjunction, you will continue with the same word order as in the previous sentence. This means that both parts of the coordinated sentence act as independent sentences (which have been linked together) and their structure is not affected.

When it comes to the position of the conjugated verb in a coordinating conjunction, the verb will be in the second position:

**“Sie ist nicht nur Mutter von drei Kindern, sondern schreibt auch Kinderbücher.”**

Here the conjugated verb (“schreiben” — “sie schreibt”) is in position two, meaning in the second “slot” of the sentence linked to the first one with a coordinating conjunction.

### **A few other helpful tips on German coordinating conjunctions:**

- The phrase “**nicht nur**” is always followed by “**sondern auch**”.
- The difference between the words “**sondern**” and “**aber**” is that you use “**sondern**” where you’d use “but rather” (meaning: *instead*) in English.
- The word “**sondern**” must be preceded by a negation.
- “**Aber**” can be preceded by a negation, but it doesn’t have to be.
- “**Denn**” vs. “**weil**”: both words explain a causality and provide a reason, but there is one significant difference between them — they require a different word order. A “**denn**”-**clause can never be at the beginning of a sentence**. If you want to start a sentence explaining a reason you have to use “**weil**”.
- “**Jedoch**” is generally a stronger word than “**doch**” and can be used to add emphasis. The emphasis of the word can change depending on what position it occupies in the sentence:  
→ Er war verärgert, **jedoch** zeigte er es nicht. — *He was angered, but he didn’t show it.*  
→ Er war verärgert, er zeigte es **jedoch** nicht. — *He was angered, but he didn’t show it.*  
In the first sentence, the position of the word “**jedoch**” puts much more emphasis on the control he has over his anger.

### **Two-part coordinating conjunctions in German**

German wouldn’t be German if there wasn’t some “special case” for every instance. Lucky for you, this one is pretty simple: I’m talking about **two-part coordinating conjunctions**.

With two-part coordinations it is pretty much the same thing as with regular coordinating conjunctions: they leave the verb in the same position as in the preceding sentence.

<b>entweder ... oder</b>	either ... or
<b>sowohl ... als auch</b>	both ... and

<b>weder ... noch</b>	neither ... nor
<b>einerseits, ... andererseits</b>	on the one hand ... on the other hand
<b>mal ... mal</b>	sometimes ... sometimes
<b>teils ... teils</b>	partly ... partly

### Examples:

**Entweder** wir gehen heute ins Kino **oder** wir gehen morgen. — *We can either go to the cinema today or we'll go tomorrow.*

Ich mag **sowohl** Richard Wagner **als auch** Richard Strauss. — *I like both Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss.*

Es ist **weder** eine besonders schöne Stadt **noch** sind ihre Bewohner freundlich. — *It is neither a nice city nor are its inhabitants particularly friendly.*

**Einerseits** würde ich wirklich gerne auf die Party gehen, **andererseits** bin ich sehr müde. — *On the one hand I would love to go to the party, on the other hand I am very tired.*

**Mal** kann ihr Hund sehr ruhig sein, **mal** ist er sehr anstrengend. — *Sometimes her dog is very calm, sometimes he's very exhausting.*

Der Film war **teils** sehr schön, **teils** etwas langweilig. — *The movie was partly very beautiful, [and] partly somewhat boring.*

## Subordinating conjunctions in German

Unlike coordinating conjunctions, German subordinating conjunctions change the position of the verb in the sentence. When encountering a subordinating conjunction, you will see that the verb is moved to the end of the sentence.

How to spot a subordinating conjunction, you may wonder?

These words indicate you're dealing with one:

<b>bevor</b>	before
<b>nachdem</b>	after
<b>ehe</b>	before
<b>seit, seitdem</b>	since (indicating time, not a causality)
<b>während</b>	while, during, whereas
<b>als</b>	when (in describing past events)
<b>wenn</b>	when (describing present and future), if, whenever
<b>wann</b>	when (for questions only)

<b>bis</b>	until, by
<b>obwohl</b>	although
<b>als ob, als wenn, als</b>	as if
<b>sooft</b>	as often as (whenever)
<b>sobald</b>	as soon as
<b>solange</b>	as long as
<b>da</b>	because
<b>indem</b>	by ... -ing
<b>weil</b>	because
<b>ob</b>	whether*, if (*only use when you could say “whether” in English as well)
<b>falls</b>	in case, if
<b>wenn</b>	if, when
<b>um ... zu</b>	in order to
<b>dass</b>	that
<b>sodass</b>	so that
<b>damit</b>	so that

I'll admit: compared to the coordinating conjunctions, this is quite the bigger list.

Unfortunately, I also do not have a catchy memory hook to offer this time — but I'm sure you'll have the key **subordinating conjunctions** down in no time!

### When to use “wenn” and “als”?

If you are referring to an event in the past that has been completed, you will have to use the word “als”:

- **Als** ich ein Kind war, mochte ich keinen Brokkoli. — *When I was a child, I didn't like broccoli.*

The word “**wenn**” can be used to describe a repeated event:

- [Immer] **wenn** ich nach Heidelberg gehe, schaue ich mir das Schloss an. — *[Whenever/] When I go to Heidelberg, I visit the castle.*

As you can see, the word “**wenn**” can mean both “when” and “whenever”.

### The difference between “wenn” and “ob”

Both “**wenn**” and “**ob**” translate to “*if*”, but they cannot be used interchangeably. The memory hook here is pretty easy: if you can use “whether” in English, you will have to use “**ob**” in German.

- **Ob** es stimmt, weiß ich nicht. — *Whether it's true I don't know.*
- **Wenn** das wahr ist, will ich mir die Konsequenzen nicht ausmalen. — *If this is true, I don't want to imagine the consequences.*

Instead of using “**wenn**” to indicate a possibility, you can also use “**falls**”:

- **Falls** das wahr ist, will ich mir die Konsequenzen nicht ausmalen. — *If this is true, I don't want to imagine the consequences.*

### Using “wann”

As stated above, “**wann**” is only used for questions.

- **Wann** gehst du nach Stuttgart? — *When are you going to Stuttgart?*

### “Nach” and “nachdem”

There is a simple rule you can follow when it comes to using “**nach**” and “**nachdem**”:

“**Nachdem**” is used with actions, whereas “**nach**” is used with nouns.

- Wir haben uns **nach** der Arbeit getroffen. — *We met up **after** work. (Die Arbeit = noun)*
- Mir ging es nicht gut, **nachdem** ich zu viel Kuchen gegessen hatte. — *I didn't feel well **after** eating too much cake. (Essen = verb/action).*

### “Seit” and “seitdem”

The usage of “**seit**” and “**seitdem**” is similar to “**nach**” and “**nachdem**”: you can use “**seit**” and “**seitdem**” both with actions and nouns, but when encountering nouns, you can only use “**seit**”.

- **Seitdem** er mit seiner neuen Freundin zusammen ist, hat er sich sehr verändert. — *Since he got together with his new girlfriend, he has changed a lot.*
- Er schläft **seit** Beginn des Films. — *He's been sleeping **since** the beginning of the movie.*

### Differences between “da” and “weil”

There are no differences between the two words, with one exception: “**da**” is more formal than “**weil**” (both mean *because*). So if you're writing a formal letter or you are in a situation that requires less informal language, choosing “**da**” over “**weil**” is probably the more suitable decision.

### “Bevor” und “ehe”

Same as above: “**ehe**” is more formal than “**bevor**”. It is to note though that “**bevor**” is used with actions, but the shorter form “**vor**” can only be used with nouns.

- Wir sollten uns treffen, **bevor** es dunkel wird. — *We should meet up **before** it gets dark.* (Dunkel werden = action)
- Wir treffen uns **vor** dem Theater. — *We're meeting up in front of the theater.* (Theater = noun)

### Während

“Während” can mean “during” or also “whereas”:

- **Während** des Vortrages ist er eingeschlafen. — ***During** the lecture, he fell asleep.*
- Er hat blonde Haare, **während** sein Bruder rote Haare hat. — *He has blond hair, **whereas** his brother has red hair.*

### Bis

- Er hat **bis** um acht Uhr geschlafen. — *He slept **until** eight o'clock.*
- **Bis** er das merkt werden Stunden vergangen sein. — ***By** the time he realizes that, hours will have passed.*

### Obwohl

- **Obwohl** er nur zwölf Jahre alt ist, ist er ein begnadeter Schlagzeuger. — ***Although** he is only twelve years old, he is a very talented drummer.*

### Um ... zu

- **Um** ihr eine Freude **zu** machen, hat er ihr Blumen gekauft. — *In order to make her happy, he bought her flowers.*

### Dass

Just like the English translation “that”, “**dass**” can be omitted in a sentence:

- Er glaubt, **dass** die Erde eine Scheibe sei. — *He believes **that** the Earth is a disc.*
- Er glaubt, die Erde sei eine Scheibe. — *He believes the Earth is a disc.*

### Sodass

- Er behauptete, eine Erkältung zu haben, **sodass** er seinen Aufsatz nicht vor der Klasse vorlesen musste. — *He claimed to have a cold **so that** he didn't have to read his essay in front of the class.*

### Indem

- Hans sicherte sich eine gute Note, **indem** er sich beim Lehrer einschleimte. — ***By** brown-nosing the teacher, Hans made sure he got a good grade.*

### Sooft, sobald, solange

- **Sooft** er sich auch bemühte, seine Französischkenntnisse wurden nicht besser. — *As often as he tried, his French skills didn't get better.*
- **Sobald** wir genug Geld gespart haben, wollen wir nach Bali reisen. — *As soon as we have enough money saved up, we want to travel to Bali.*
- **Solange** sie ihre Einstellung nicht ändert, wird sie keinen Erfolg haben. — *As long as she doesn't change her attitude, she won't be successful.*

### Als wenn, als ob, als

- Er hat die Prüfung bestanden, **als ob** es nichts wäre. — *He passed his exam as if it was nothing.*
- Er tat so, **als ob** er davon noch nie gehört hatte. — *He pretended as if he never had heard of it before.*
- Dieser Grashüpfer sieht so aus **als** wäre er ein Zweig. — *This grasshopper looks like as if it was a twig.*

### Damit

- Er stellte er sich zwei Wecker, damit er nicht verschlief. — *He set two alarms, so that he wouldn't oversleep.*

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This was — admittedly — a lot of info for one single blog post. German conjunctions (as you can see) is a pretty broad field that is full of irregularities and words that change meaning depending on *how* they're used.

So don't stress if you don't have them down in an instant — it is something that even some Germans do struggle with!