

A1 EINHEITEN 1&2 GRAMMAR

Because so little grammar is presented in unit 1 and since the grammar introduced in unit 2 employs the grammar from unit 1, I am combining the explanations as if they were one unit.

Verb endings change depending on the subject. Because the endings change less in English than in other languages, we are less aware of this fact than people who speak other languages. It is extremely important that you be aware of this fact, understand it, accept it, and master the verb endings in German.

Because it is so automatic, you probably don't even realize that we do make a change to the verb in English based on the subject. Take, for example, the verb *to play*. (By the way, when refer to a verb or ask the meaning of a verb, you use the infinitive. In English the infinitive is always expressed as *to* plus the verb without an ending. Thus you have *to play*, *to eat*, *to sleep* or whatever verb you select. In German, the infinitive is just one word and it ends in *(e)n*. English verbs add an *s* when the subject is 3rd person singular. That means if the subject is *he*, *she*, *it*, or any singular noun, e.g., *man*, *woman*, *cat*, the verb ends in *s*. *he plays*, *she eats*, *it sleeps*.

In German, the change to the infinitive is not limited to the 3rd person singular. In unit 2, you learn the verb endings for singular subjects *ich*–I, *du*–you, *er*, *sie*, *es* (and any singular noun) *he*, *she*, *it*.

In class you will repeatedly here me yell, sing, and chant *icke, icke, dust, dust*, if *sie* is she end in *t* it must (or if *sie* is she it ends in *t*) and what's good for the goose is good for the gander. This is just a way to help you remember the singular verb endings. As I stated above, German infinitives end in *(e)n*. *To play* in German is *spielen*. When *spielen* is the verb in your sentence, if you want to use it correctly, you must ask yourself what the subject is. This is so you can give the verb its correct ending – Just like the “s” in English when “he” is the subject.

*In German, you start with the infinitive – spielen – and drop the en. This leaves you with the stem – spiel. To the stem, you add your endings. Those are the same endings used in my little chant. When the subject is ich the verb ends in e- ich spiele. When the subject is du the verb ends in st- du spielst. Whenever there is a 3rd person singular subject *er*, *sie*, *es* (or any singular noun) the verb ends in t- er spielt, sie spielt, die Frau spielt. (Sie can also mean they. However, when sie means they the verb ends in en. Hence, if sie is she end in t it must. What's good for the goose is good for the gander means that when the feminine sie is the subject the verb ends in t, this is also true for the masculine er. Just like with sie-she, when er is the subject the verb ends in t.*

The entire discussion above applies to the present tense. It is extremely important to note that, unlike English, there are no helping verbs in the present tense in German. Failure to come to grips with or to grasp this fact results in many mistakes. Let's consider one of the examples we used above:

Ich spiele Tennis means, *ōI play tennis.ō* It also means, *ōI am playing tennisō* or *ōI do play tennis.ō* It could even mean, *ōI am going to (gonna) play tennis.ō* Its meaning depends on the situation and there is never confusion about what it means. Let's say I asked, *Was machst du?*- What are you doing? and I answered, *Ich spiele Tennis*, clearly that means, *ōI am playing tennis.ō* What if I asked, *Was machst du in deiner Freizeit?*-What do you do in your free time? and I answered, *Ich spiele Tennis* the meaning would now clearly be, *ōI play tennis.ō* The absence of a helping verb never causes a problem.

Although it is not specifically dealt with in the first two units, it is important to know and practice the fundamental rule of German word order *ō verb 2nd element.* I want you to be aware of what I am talking about when I am constantly correcting this mistake. Let's consider the sentence, *Ich spiele Tennis in meiner Freizeit.* *ō I play tennis in my free time.* If we were to start the sentence in English with, *ōIn my free timeō* the rest of the sentence would be *ōI play tennis.ō* *ō In my free time I play tennis.* Remember, in German the verb must be the second element (not necessarily second word). Consequently, the correct sentence in German would be, *In meiner Freizeit spiele ich Tennis.* This is difficult for our students because they think in English. It is natural to want to say, *In meiner Freizeit ich spiele Tennis* because that's the word order we use in English. Big mistake!

There is a group of verbs commonly used in Germanic languages *ō like German and English - that don't play by the normal rules governing verbs.* These are called modal auxiliaries *ō Modalverben.* They express likelihood, ability, permission, or obligation. They are usually used in conjunction with other verbs and are very irregular in the singular *ō especially in German.* In units one and two you come across two of these verbs *ō mögen (to like) and können (to be able to (can)).* When it comes to these verbs, the rules outlined earlier governing endings don't apply. They live in their own world. Their singular forms must be memorized. *Mögen* *ō ich mag, du magst, er, sie, es mag & können – ich kann, du kannst, er, sie, es kann.* These verbs are usually used in conjunction with another verb. The other verb is always in its infinitive form and in English, the other verb comes right after the modal, *ōI can play tennis.ō* In German, the modal verb is in the 2nd element position and the infinitive is at the end of the sentence *ō Ich kann Tennis spielen.*

The final point of grammar that comes to the fore in unit two is questions. It is fortunate for us that German and English form questions in the same way *ō by starting the sentence with a question word and, when no question word is used, by beginning the sentence with the verb.* Remember this, however. English often uses a helping verb in the present tense. German never does. Except when your main verb is the verb to be (*ōisō and* *ōareō*) when asking a question in English without a question word you begin the sentence with the helping verb. Because there is no helping verb in German, you begin with the main verb.

Are you playing tennis today? - *Spielst du heute Tennis?*

Finally, the question words for which you are responsible are *wie* *ōhow, wo - where, woher - where from, wer* *ō who, and was* *ō what.*

Please note: Sometimes words don't translate the way you might anticipate or the way you learned them. Translating sentences literally often doesn't work. If a German wants to know your name he will ask, *Wie heißt du?* This means, *ōhow are you called?ō* It is easy to see the logic. However, no one would ever say that in English. We would ask, *ōWhat's your name?ō* Because that is what we say, that's how you translate it. This does not mean, however, that *wie* means *ōwhat.ō* You're not really translating *wie* as *ōhow.ō* You're translating *Wie heißt du* as *ōWhat's your name?ō*

