

Word Order in Statements and Questions

Word order in statements

In English, the word order in a statement is usually:
subject – verb – complement

subject	verb	complement
Lee	studies	chemistry.

When you add another word or expression to the beginning of the sentence, the word order does not change.

	subject	verb	complement
This term,	Lee	studies	chemistry.

In German, in contrast, the verb is always in second position.

I	II	III
subject	verb	complement
<i>Lee</i>	<i>studiert</i>	<i>Chemie.</i>

If you start the sentence with something other than the subject, **the subject follows the verb and moves into position III**. We also call this an “inverted word order”.

I	II	III	IV
	verb	subject	complement
<i>Dieses Semester</i>	<i>studiert</i>	<i>Lee</i>	<i>Chemie.</i>

Examples of inverted or regular word order:

Im Sommer studiere ich nicht. [or] Ich studiere im Sommer nicht.

Dieses Semester habe ich um 10 Uhr Deutsch. [or] Ich habe dieses Semester um 10 Uhr Deutsch.

Jeden Abend arbeite ich von 17 bis 22 Uhr. [or] Ich arbeite jeden Abend von 17 bis 22 Uhr.

ACHTUNG: there is no comma after the expression at the beginning of an inverted word order sentence in German.

Word order in questions

In questions that begin with a **question word**, the verb follows the question word and is in second position. The subject follows in third position (unless the question word is the subject, as in *wer*). Anything else follows in position four.

wann - when

was - what

wer - who

wie - how

um wie viel Uhr - (at) what time

wo - where

woher - from where

wohin - to where

welch- - which

We will learn more about the question word “*welch-*” in *Einheit 3.6*.

I	II	III	IV
question word	verb	subject	complement
<i>Wie</i> <i>Wie alt</i> <i>Um wie viel Uhr</i>	<i>heißt</i> <i>sind</i> <i>ist</i>	<i>du?</i> <i>Sie?</i> <i>der Deutschkurs?</i>	
<i>Was</i> <i>Was</i>	<i>machst</i> <i>ist</i>	<i>du</i> <i>Ihr Hauptfach?</i>	<i>um 11 Uhr?</i>
<i>Wo</i>	<i>wohnen</i>	<i>Sie?</i>	
<i>Wohin</i>	<i>gehst</i>	<i>du?</i>	
<i>Woher</i>	<i>kommst</i>	<i>du?</i>	
<i>Wann</i> <i>Wann</i>	<i>kommt</i> <i>hast</i>	<i>ihr</i> <i>du</i>	<i>nach Hause?</i> <i>Deutsch?</i>
<i>Wer</i> <i>Wer</i>	<i>bist</i> <i>studiert</i>	<i>du?</i> <i>Musik?</i>	
<i>Welche Kurse</i>	<i>haben</i>	<i>Sie</i>	<i>dieses Semester?</i>

In questions that ask for a **yes/no answer**, the verb is in first position, followed by the subject in second position, and anything else follows that.

I	II	III	IV
verb	subject	complement	complement
<i>Kommen</i>	<i>Sie</i>	<i>aus Deutschland?</i>	
<i>Machst</i>	<i>du</i>	<i>heute Abend</i>	<i>Hausaufgaben?</i>
<i>Heißt</i>	<i>dein Freund</i>	<i>Paul?</i>	
<i>Sprecht</i>	<i>ihr</i>	<i>Deutsch?</i>	
<i>Studierst</i>	<i>du</i>	<i>Biologie?</i>	