

Understanding the Imperative Category of the Verb in German Language

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In German, **imperatives** are usually followed by an exclamation mark, when giving orders and instructions. However, they do not require an exclamation mark if they are not being used to give an order or instruction. For example, they can also be used where we might say *Can you...* or *Could you ...* in English.

Lass ihn in Ruhe! Leave him alone! *Sagen Sie mir bitte, wie spät es ist.* Can you tell me what time it is please?

There are three main forms of the imperative that are used to give instructions or orders to someone. These correspond to the three different ways of saying you: **du**, **ihr** and **Sie**. However, it is only in the **Sie** form of the imperative that the pronoun usually appears – in the **du** and **ihr** forms, the pronoun is generally dropped, leaving only the verb.

Hör zu! Listen! *Hören Sie zu!* Listen!

Most weak, strong and mixed verbs form the present tense imperative in the following way:

Pronoun	Form of Imperative	Verb Example	Meaning
du (singular)	verb stem (+ e)	hol(e)!	fetch!
ihr (plural)	verb stem + t	holt!	fetch!
Sie (polite singular and plural)	verb stem + en + Sie	holen Sie!	fetch!

Note that the **-e** of the **du** form is often dropped, but NOT where the verb stem ends, for example, in **chn-**, **fn-**, or **tm-**. In such cases, the **-e** is kept to make the imperative easier to pronounce.

Hör zu! Listen! *Hol es!* Fetch it! *BUT: Öffne die Tür!* Open the door! *Atme richtig durch!* Take a deep breath! *Rechne nochmal nach!* Do your sums again!

Weak verbs ending in **-eln** or **-ern** also retain this **-e**, but the other **-e** in the stem itself is often dropped in spoken German.

Verb	Meaning	Imperative	Meaning
wandern	to walk	wand(e)re!	walk!
handeln	to act	hand(e)le!	act!

Any vowel change in the present tense of a strong verb also occurs in the **du** form of its imperative and the **-e** mentioned above is generally not added. However, if this vowel change in the present tense involves adding an umlaut, this umlaut is NOT added to the **du** form of the imperative.

Verb	Meaning	2nd Person Singular	Meaning	2nd Person Singular Imperative	Meaning
nehmen	to take	du nimmst	you take	nimm!	take!
helfen	to help	du hilfst	you help	hilf!	help!
laufen	to run	du läufst	you run	lauf(e)!	run!
stoßen	to push	du stößt	you push	stoß(e)!	push!

Note also that the verb **sein** (meaning *to be*) is a strong, irregular verb. Its imperative forms are also irregular and the **du**, **Sie** and less common **wir** forms are not the same as the present tense forms of the verb.

Sei ruhig! Be quiet! Seid ruhig! Be quiet! Seien Sie ruhig! Be quiet!

Trust form (du and ihr)

Of particular interest is the first form (du - you). You take du kommst - you come and take away the personal ending -st. It turns out Komm! - Come!

But, you say, wouldn't it be easier to just take the Infinitiv (indefinite form - kommen) and remove the -en? It can be so, just remember that we have several verbs that in personal forms you and he change the root vowel:

- geben (give) – du gibst (you give) – gib! (give!)
- sehen (to look) – du siehst (you look) – sieh mal! (check this out!)

And what happens to the verbs that in the forms you and he get Umlaut?

- fahren (go) – du fährst (you go) – fahr! (go!)
- laufen (run) – du läufst (you run) – lauf! (run!)

As you can see, Umlaut evaporates in the imperative.

Given all of the above, we recommend that you repeat what strong German verbs are and learn (or remind yourself) their forms: Infinitiv - Präteritum - Partizip II.

The imperative mood (Imperative) is used in cases where we need:

- ask for something (bring, call),
- order (shut up),
- prohibit (do not go without a hat),
- give advice (tackle problems as they come up).

As in Russian, the German imperative has only the second person singular (du, Sie) and plural (ihr, Sie) forms, or can be expressed as an infinitive.

Let's look at some examples:

- Franz, komm (mal) her! - Come (-ka) here (du - you)!
- Jens und Petra, kommt mal her! - Come here (ihr - you)!
- Herr und Frau Schmidt, kommen Sie her! - Come here (Sie - you)!
- Handys ausmachen! – Turn off mobile phones (infinitive)!

Formation of the form Imperativ in German can be divided into three cases: addressing one person (du), addressing several people (ihr) and polite form (Sie).

We also have verbs that, for ease of pronunciation, inserted -e- before personal endings -st, -t. In Imperative, this -e- is retained.

- arbeiten (to work) – du arbeitest (you work) – arbeite! (Work!)
- öffnen (to open) – du öffnest (you open) – öffne! (open!)

And also for verbs in –eln, –ern:

- lächeln (smile) – lächle! (smile!),
- ändern (change) - ändere! (change, change!)

And finally, one more such case:

- entschuldigen (excuse) - du entschuldigst (you're sorry) - entschuldige! (sorry!)

The fact is that -ig at the end of the word is pronounced as [ih]. Therefore, to preserve the pronunciation [ig], -e is added.

In general, before all verbs were added -e (except those that change -e- to -i- in the root). So you can also find more "old-fashioned" forms: Komme! Laufe!

The second form is when we address several interlocutors, but at the same time we communicate with each of them on "you". In this case, the imperative is formed as follows: we start from the declarative sentence and simply remove the personal pronoun ihr (you). For example:

- Ihr spielt.- you play. Spielt! – Play!
- Ihr macht. - You doing. Macht! - Do it!
- Ihr sagt. - you speak. Sagt! – Speak!

With strong verbs in this case, everything remains unchanged, because. and the root vowel after ihr does not change.

- Ihr gebt! - you're giving. Gebt! - Give!
- Ihr nehmt! - you are taking. Nehmt! - Take it!

Auxiliary verbs have special forms in Imperativ. Compare:

- Du bist vorsichtig. - You are careful.
- Sei vorsichtig! - Be careful!
- Sie sind sparsam. - You are frugal.
- Seien Sie nicht so sparsam! Don't be so economical!
- Seien Sie bitte so nett... – Please be so kind (nice)...

Ihr seid keeps the form:

- Kinder, seid ruhig, bitte! - Children, be quiet! ("Keep calm!")
- Du hast Angst. - You are afraid (have fear).
- Hab keine Angst! - Do not be afraid!
- Du wirst böse. - You will be angry (you will become, you will be angry).
- Werd(e) nur nicht böse. - Don't get angry!

Polite form

In the polite form of the imperative in German, we simply use reversed word order. Please note: you need to say not just come, but you come (do not forget Sie).

- Sie spielen. - Spielen Sie! – Play!
- Sie machen. - Machen Sie! - Do it!
- Sie geben. - Geben Sie! - Give!

- Sie nehmen. - Nehmen Sie! - Take it!

In this case, as you have already noticed, the subject and predicate change places and from the declarative sentence, we get the imperative. By the way, we have a separate article about word order in a German sentence.

A particularly polite request is expressed in the form *würden* + Infinitiv, where the auxiliary verb *würden*, as it were, corresponds to the Russian particle *by*:

- *Würden Sie bitte bis morgen alle Formalitäten erledigen.* - Settle (would you settle), please, all the formalities before tomorrow.

The verb *werden* also plays an important role in the formation of Konjunktiv 2, see our earlier article for details.

Special cases

Imperativ can also be directed to the form *we*, when we need to express an appeal or proposal, then the following options are possible

- *(Los!) Tanzen wir!* - (Let's Dance!
- *Wollen wir tanzen!* - Let's dance! (literally: We want to dance!)
- *Lass uns tanzen!* - Let's dance! (Give us, let us dance!)

Sometimes, as in Russian, the Imperative can also be expressed in an indefinite form:

- *Einsteigen bitte!* – Please, sit down! (to transport).
- *Nicht öffnen, bevor der Zug hält!* – Do not open until the train has stopped.
- *Nothing store!* - Do not interfere!
- *Karten hier entwerten.* - Here to validate (literally: depreciate) tickets.

We hope that our article has helped you understand how the imperative mood is formed in German, and you will be able to use it freely in speech. However, please do not forget that the imperative form often sounds rather categorical and should be used with caution.

Reference

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