

Episode 074 – Grammar

1. Adverbials

Most German sentences contain at least one conjugated verb and one component in the nominative - a subject. There may also be other components that accompany the verbs, such as objects.

Adverbials are words or groups of words that provide more information about the circumstances surrounding the action or condition described in the sentence. Adverbials can relate to location, time, manner or reason.

Words

*Was machen wir **hier**?* (location)

*Wir müssen Ostrowski **schnell** finden.* (manner)

Groups of words

*Sie könnten **bei den Pinguinen** sein* (location)

*Ein Elefant frisst **jeden Tag** 150 Kilo Gras.* (time)

Compulsory and non-compulsory adverbials

Adverbials can be compulsory components or non-compulsory additions in a German sentence. That depends on the predicate (conjugated verb + (if present) the participle/infinitive, etc.). If the verb requires an object, then that's known as a compulsory component. Without it, the sentence would make no sense. Non-compulsory adverbials can be omitted. They provide additional information.

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Compulsory adverbials

*Ostrowski wohnt **in Bochum**.*

*Er wollte **in den Zoo** gehen.*

Non-compulsory adverbials

*Siehst du **irgendwo** Ostrowski und seine Kinder?
Möglich: *Siehst du Ostrowski und seine Kinder?**

*Ich muss **jetzt** die Elefanten füttern.
Möglich: *Ich muss die Elefanten füttern.**

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2. The placement of adverbials in a sentence

Compulsory adverbials are usually at the end of the sentence. With compound verbs, the adverbial directly precedes the second part of the predicate, in other words the participle or infinitive.

Examples:

*Ostrowski **wohnt in Bochum**.*

*Er **wollte in den Zoo gehen**.*

*Ich **habe das Gras ins Elefantengehege gelegt**.*

For non-compulsory adverbials, the word order can vary. A basic rule of thumb is:

1. Non-compulsory adverbials usually precede compulsory adverbials.

*Er wollte **gerne** **in den Zoo** gehen.*
(non-compulsory) (compulsory)

2. For non-compulsory adverbials, the order is usually time-reason-place-manner.

*Wir sehen **zuerst** **bei den Elefanten** nach.*
(time) (place)

*Harry wurde **gestern** **aus wissenschaftlichen Gründen** **in Leipzig** **durch eine Operation** getötet.*
(time) (reason/cause) (place) (manner)

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But often there are deviations from this when a sentence contains several non-compulsory adverbials.

For extra emphasis, all adverbials can be placed at the beginning of the sentence.

Examples:

Zuerst sehen wir **bei den Elefanten** nach.

Bei den Elefanten sehen wir **zuerst** nach.