Word order – the simple sentence

German word order is often wildly different from English and very much a matter for the advanced student. However, you should be able to cope with simple sentences:

Subject	Verb	Object
Erich	**liest.**	
Erich	**liest**	**(eine) Zeitung.**
Erich	**liest**	**eine deutsche Zeitung.**
Erich	*reads*	*a German newspaper*
Erich	is reading	a German newspaper.

However, when time words are introduced, this order can change. Compare:

Er will Zeitung lesen und nicht ein Buch.
he wants newspaper to-read and not a book
He wants to read a newspaper and not a book.

Heute will er Zeitung lesen.
today wants he newspaper to-read
Today he wants to read a/the newspaper.

Er will heute Zeitung lesen.
he wants today newspaper to-read
He wants to read a/the newspaper today.

In more complicated sentences, many conjunctions "send the verb to the end" of the sentence.

Just by way of a sample:

not:
Sie war traurig, weil er konnte nicht kommen.

but:
Sie war traurig, weil er nicht kommen konnte.
she was sad because he not to-come could
She was sad because he couldn't come.

prefixes & suffixes

Prefixes are words or syllables placed on the front of a word to change that word's meaning, e.g. **pre**determine, **re**construct. English prefixes are very heavily influenced by Latin. German has a highly elaborate system of prefixes and it's not going too far to say that to really get to grips with the language you have to master them. Just look how they change the meaning of the simple verb **kommen**, "to come":

ankommen	to arrive
entkommen	to escape
bekommen	to get
vorkommen	to happen

Suffixes, placed on the end of a word, also tell you a lot about the word's function. The **-en** in **kommen** corresponds to English "to" in "to come". To stay with the example, the "**t**" in

(**er**) **kommt**, “(he) comes”, “is coming”, tells us that this is the 3rd person singular. Other examples will be introduced as appropriate.

the articles: “the”, “a/an”

Compared with German, English is gloriously simple here. German has retained many features which, in our own basically Germanic tongue, died out with the Anglo-Saxons. At this stage we’ll keep it simple: The **indefinite article** “a/an” is **ein** or **eine** (French “un”, “une”); the **definite article** “the” is **der**, **die** or **das** (French “le”, “la”).

German therefore has three genders – masculine, feminine and neuter – whereas French has only two. You’ll be learning more about gender, as well as how to use these articles, elsewhere in the book.

Nouns

As you've just learnt under "Articles", German has three genders: masculine (m), feminine (f) and neuter (n). Two things to note:

First, when learning a noun also learn the correct article with it, i.e. don't just learn **Schiff** (= ship), but **das Schiff** (= the ship).

Second, natural gender will often help you with grammatical gender, e.g. **die Frau** (= the lady), **der Mann** (= the man), but not always – **das Mädchen** (= the girl) is neuter.

By the way, you'll certainly have noticed by now that German nouns are capitalized = **groß geschrieben** ("large-written") and not **klein geschrieben**, ("small-written"), as in English. Some Germans would like to change this. The late **Bertolt Brecht**, the great dramatist, always wrote "small".

Gender

It would go well beyond the scope and aim of this book to give you a whole load of rules on this. If you follow the above advice and learn the article with the noun, you'll soon develop a feel for the right word for "the".

plural

You'll learn more about nouns in the section on grammatical cases.

Apart from exceptions such as "children", "oxen", "sheep" and a few others, all we do to form the plural in English is to add an -s onto the end of the noun. In German, the position is more complicated. Without going into this exhaustively, have a look at the following examples. Note that in the plural, the word for "the" is **die**, i.e. the same as the feminine singular:

das Getränk drink	**die Getränke** drinks
das Zimmer room	**die Zimmer** rooms
das Auto car	**die Autos** cars
das Glas glas	**die Gläser** glasses
die Zigarette cigarette	**die Zigaretten** cigarettes
die Warnung warning	**die Warnungen** warnings
der Stuhl chair	**die Stühle** chairs

Adjectives

In English you can say "blue sky", "a blue sky", "the blue sky", "the sky is blue" and the word "blue" never changes. In German this is not so because the adjective has to "agree" with the noun. This agreement depends not only on the position of, say "blue", but also on the gender of the noun it qualifies. Let's translate the above examples into German:

blauer Himmel
ein blauer Himmel
der blaue Himmel
der Himmel ist blau

Here, you see that with the definite article the masculine noun **Himmel** (= sky, heaven) requires the adjective to take the ending **-e** in the first example, an **-er** with the indefinite article or no article at all. Only when the adjective comes after the noun is usage as in English, with no change in the adjective.

feminine:	neuter:
schöne Frau/	**gutes Bier/**
eine schöne Frau	**ein gutes Bier**
die schöne Frau	**das gute Bier**
die Frau ist schön	**das Bier ist gut**
a/good-looking woman	a/good beer

comparison of adjectives

You'll be relieved to hear that English and German are very similar here although in the latter the comparative forms decline, i.e. "agree", just as do the adjectives:

schön	beautiful, good-looking, nice
schöner	more beautiful, nicer
der/die/das schönste	the most beautiful

die schönste Frau
the most-attractive woman

der schönste Mann
the most-attractive man

As in so many languages, the most frequently used adjectives tend to have irregular comparative forms:

gut	**besser**	**der/die/das beste**
good	better	best
viel	**mehr**	**der/die/das meiste**
much	more	most

Note that in the case of **groß**, *"big", "large", the comparative is not "***großer***" but* **größer**. *Remember,* **ein neuer Wagen** *does not mean "a newer car" but "a new car". "A newer car" is* **ein neuerer Wagen**.

Besides **schönste**, there is a still higher degree of comparison. You can say: **Claudia ist am schönsten** (literally: *"Claudia is at most-attractive"*), meaning "Claudia is the most attractive of them all".

When for comparison purposes we say "than", German uses **als** (it can also mean "as" and "when", depending on the context):

Heute ist es wärmer als gestern.
today is it warmer than yesterday
Today it is warmer than yesterday.

To express "as ... as", German says **so ... wie**.

Heute ist es so warm wie gestern.
today is it so warm as yesterday
Today is/it's as warm as yesterday.

If you want to say it's too warm, then quite simply:

Heute ist es zu warm.
today is it too warm
Today it's too warm.