DUTCH FLUENCY

Dutch Fluency Grammar

Dutch grammar, one clear rule at a time. 188 rules from A1 to C1.

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Read it online: dutchfluency.com/grammar

About this book

Each rule starts with the answer. Then come the pattern, real examples, why Dutch works this way, the mistakes learners make, a quick check, and one small task for today.

Read one rule at a time. Try the quick check from memory before you look at the answers at the back of the book, and come back to the rule a few days later. Every rule shows its level, so you can stay at your level or look one step ahead.

Not sure which level you are? The free level test takes a few minutes: dutchfluency.com/assessment

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The newest version of every rule, and every rule as Markdown, lives at dutchfluency.com/grammar.

Contents

Start here

A1 How to learn Dutch grammar so it sticks 11
A1 Grammar words you need, in English and Dutch 15
A1 Dutch for English speakers: what is easy and what is hard 19
A2 False friends between Dutch and English 22

Sounds and spelling

A1 The Dutch alphabet and how to spell your name 27
A1 Short and long vowels 30
A1 Why maan becomes manen: open and closed syllables 34
A1 Doubling consonants after a short vowel 38
A1 ui, eu, ij, ei, ou, au, oe, ie 41
A1 The Dutch g and ch 44
A1 Why d sounds like t at the end of a word 47
A2 v and f, z and s: huis and huizen 50
A1 The neutral e and the endings -en, -ig and -lijk 54
A2 The Dutch r 58
A2 Word stress 61
A2 The trema in ë and ï, and the hyphen 65
A1 Capital letters 69
A2 When Dutch uses an apostrophe 73
B1 How sounds blend in fast speech 77
B1 Writing compound words 81

Nouns and de or het

A1 De or het: the two words for "the" 87
A1 Een: the word for "a" 90
A2 When Dutch uses no article 94
A1 Plurals with -en 98

A1 Plurals with -s 101
A2 Irregular plurals 104
A2 Diminutives: -je, -tje, -pje, -etje, -kje 108
B1 What diminutives really mean 112
A2 Clues that a noun is a het-word 116
A2 Clues that a noun is a de-word 120
A2 Compound nouns take the article of the last part 123
A2 How to actually learn de and het 127
A2 Countable and uncountable nouns 131
A2 Showing possession: van, -s and zijn/haar 135
B1 Making nouns from verbs and adjectives 139
B1 Male and female forms: leraar and lerares 143
B1 Group nouns and verb agreement 147
B1 Nouns with two plurals or only a plural 151

Pronouns

A1 Subject pronouns: ik, jij, hij, zij 157
A1 Jij or je? Stressed and unstressed pronouns 160
A1 U or jij: formal and informal you 163
A1 Object pronouns: me, je, hem, haar 167
B1 Hen, hun or ze: them 171
A2 Hij, het or zij for things 175
A1 Possessive pronouns: mijn, jouw, zijn, haar 179
A2 Ons or onze? 183
B1 Mine and yours: van mij and de mijne 187
A2 Reflexive pronouns: me, je, zich 191
A2 Reflexive verbs: zich vergissen, zich voelen 195
B1 Elkaar: each other 199
A1 Deze, die, dit, dat 203
A2 Dit is, dat is, het is 206
B1 Die and dat instead of hij and het in speech 210

B1 Relative pronouns: die and dat 214
B2 Wie, wat and waar- in relative clauses 218
B2 Waarmee, waarover, waaraan 223
A2 Iemand, niemand, iets, niets, alles, iedereen 228
B1 Men, je and ze: people in general 232
A2 Het as an empty subject: het regent 236
A1 Question words: wie, wat, waar, wanneer, hoe, waarom 240
A2 Welk or welke, and wat voor 244
B2 Zo'n, zulk and zulke: such 248

Verbs now

A1 Finding the stem of a verb 253
A1 The present tense: ik werk, jij werkt, wij werken 256
A1 Werk jij? Where the t disappears 260
A1 Zijn and hebben in the present 264
A1 Gaan, doen, komen, willen, kunnen, zullen and mogen 268
A2 D, t or dt: spelling verbs in the present 272
A1 Modal verbs: kunnen, moeten, willen, mogen, zullen 276
A2 Niet hoeven te: you don't have to 280
A2 Kunnen, mogen and durven 284
A1 Separable verbs: opbellen, meenemen 288
A2 Inseparable verbs: be-, ver-, ont-, her-, ge-, er- 291
B1 One verb, two meanings: when stress decides 295
A1 The imperative: Kom binnen! 299
A2 Aan het + infinitive: I am doing it right now 303

Verbs in time

A1 The perfect tense: ik heb gewerkt 309
A1 Regular past participles: ge- plus stem plus t or d 313
A1 't kofschip: choosing t or d 317
A2 Irregular past participles 321

A2 Hebben or zijn in the perfect tense 325
A2 Participles without ge- 329
A2 The simple past of regular verbs: -te and -de 333
A2 The simple past of irregular verbs 337
B1 Patterns in irregular verbs 341
B1 Perfect or simple past: which one when 345
B1 The past perfect: ik had gegeten 349
A1 Talking about the future with gaan 353
B1 Zullen: promises, suggestions and assumptions 357
B1 Zou and zouden: would 361
B1 Infinitives with te 365
B1 Om te: in order to 369
B1 Laten: let, and having something done 373
B1 Worden: become, and the passive 377
B1 The passive with worden 381
B2 The passive in the perfect: is gebouwd 385
B2 Er wordt gedanst: the passive without a subject 389
B1 Verbs with a fixed preposition 393
B2 Verb clusters: heb kunnen komen 397
B2 Zien, horen, voelen plus an infinitive 401
B2 The present participle: lachend, slapend 405
B1 Past participles as adjectives 409
C1 Must have, should have, could have 413
C1 Old verb forms in fixed phrases: Leve de koning! 418

Word order

A1 Verb second: the golden rule 425
A1 Inversion: Morgen ga ik 429
A1 Yes or no questions: the verb comes first 432
A1 Questions with a question word 435
A1 The verb bracket: two verbs, two places 439

A2	Time, manner, place	442
A2	Where does niet go?	446
A1	Geen or niet?	450
A2	En, maar, of, want, dus	454
A2	Subordinate clauses: the verb goes to the end	458
A2	Omdat or want: two ways to say because	462
B1	When the subordinate clause comes first	466
B1	Als, wanneer or toen: when and if	470
A2	Dat clauses: Ik denk dat...	474
B1	Indirect questions: Weet jij of...?	478
B1	Relative clauses inside a sentence	482
B2	The order of verbs at the end	486
A2	Separable verbs in subordinate clauses	490
B1	Two objects and short pronouns	494
B1	The four jobs of er	498
A2	Er is and er zijn: there is, there are	502
B1	Er with numbers: Ik heb er drie	506
B1	Erop, ervan, daarmee: er plus a preposition	510
B2	Splitting er and its preposition	514
B2	Starting with the object for emphasis or contrast	518
B1	Where adverbs go: al, nog, graag, vaak, ook	522
B2	What can come after the final verbs	526
B1	Questions with a preposition	531
B2	Zowel ... als, niet alleen ... maar ook	535
B1	Daarom, toch, dan, daarna: linking words that invert	539
B2	Hoe meer, hoe beter	543
B2	Hoewel, ook al, zelfs als: although and even if	547
B2	Zodat, opdat, zo ... dat	551
B1	Voordat, nadat, terwijl, sinds, totdat, zodra	555
B2	Reporting what someone said	559

C1 Leaving words out in spoken Dutch ... 563

Adjectives and adverbs

A1 Adjective endings: when to add -e ... 568
A2 Spelling changes when an adjective gets -e ... 572
A1 Adjectives after zijn, worden and blijven ... 576
B1 Adjectives that never take -e ... 579
A2 Comparatives: groter, mooier, duurder ... 583
A2 Superlatives: de grootste, het grootst ... 587
A2 Goed, beter, best and other irregulars ... 591
B1 Meer and meest instead of -er and -st ... 595
A2 Adverbs: no -ly needed ... 599
A1 Graag: the Dutch way to say you like doing something ... 603
A2 Heel, erg, echt, best, nogal, vrij ... 607
A1 Altijd, vaak, soms, nooit ... 611
B1 Iets leuks, niets nieuws: the extra -s ... 615
A2 Dan, als and zo ... als ... 619
B1 Adjectives used as nouns ... 623
B1 Ander, andere and anders ... 627
B2 Heel, al and alle: whole and all ... 631
A2 Veel, weinig, een paar, een beetje ... 635

Small words

A1 In, op, aan, bij: where things are ... 640
A2 Naar, uit, door, langs, over ... 644
A1 Om, op, in: talking about time ... 648
A1 Telling the time: half drie means 2:30 ... 652
A1 Numbers: eenentwintig, not twenty-one ... 656
A1 Days, months and dates ... 660
A2 Al, nog, pas, nog niet, niet meer ... 664
A2 Geleden, sinds, al and over ... 668

A2 Even, maar, eens: making requests friendly ... 672
B1 Toch, wel, hoor, nou, gewoon ... 676
B2 Particle combinations: maar even, toch maar, nou eens ... 680
A2 Ja, nee, jawel and toch wel ... 684
B1 Ook, alleen, maar, zelfs: focus words ... 688
B1 Adjectives with a fixed preposition ... 692
A2 Met de trein, op de fiets, te voet ... 696
C1 Ten, ter and te in fixed phrases ... 699
B2 Fixed prepositional phrases ... 703

Style and register

B2 Formal and informal Dutch ... 708
B1 Writing an email in Dutch: openings and closings ... 712
B1 Spoken shortcuts: 't, 'k, m'n, z'n, d'r ... 716
C1 Nominalisation: turning actions into nouns ... 720
B2 When to use the passive, and when not ... 724
B2 Building words with prefixes: on-, her-, mis-, oud- ... 728
B2 Building words with suffixes: -baar, -loos, -achtig, -ig, -lijk ... 732
B2 Linking ideas in writing: bovendien, echter, kortom ... 736
B2 If only: Als ik het had geweten ... 741
C1 Conditions without als: Mocht je vragen hebben ... 746
B2 Wishes with maar: Was het maar vrijdag ... 750
C1 Wiens, wier, hetgeen: formal relatives ... 754
B2 Dutch in the Netherlands and in Flanders ... 758

Back of the book

Answers to every quick check ... 762

Start here

How to learn Dutch grammar so it sticks, and the words you need to talk about it.

- How to learn Dutch grammar so it sticks
- Grammar words you need, in English and Dutch
- Dutch for English speakers: what is easy and what is hard
- False friends between Dutch and English

RULE 1 · LEVEL A1 · START HERE

How to learn Dutch grammar so it sticks

Dutch grammar sticks when you use it, not when you reread it. Learn one pattern at a time, test yourself from memory in short sessions spread over several days, and start with ready-made phrases like **ik wil graag** (I'd like) and **mag ik** (can I, may I). Grammar is there to help you talk to people, so every rule you learn should let you say something real.

The pattern

> **Grammar sticks in a cycle: notice a pattern, understand it, practise pulling it from memory, then use it with real people.**

- Work on one rule at a time.
- Test yourself instead of rereading: cover the Dutch and say it from memory. This is called retrieval practice.
- Spread your practice: short sessions over several days beat one long session. This is called spacing.
- Start with chunks (fixed groups of words you learn as one block), such as **ik wil graag**, **mag ik** and **heb je**.
- Read and listen a lot, so patterns start to sound normal.
- Treat mistakes as data: each one shows you what to practise next.

Examples

Ik wil graag een koffie.	I'd like a coffee.
Ik wil graag een kaartje naar Utrecht.	I'd like a ticket to Utrecht.
Mag ik de rekening?	Can I have the bill?

Mag ik mijn fiets hier zetten?	Can I put my bike here?
Heb je even tijd?	Do you have a minute?
Heb je een pen?	Do you have a pen?
Hoe laat is het?	What time is it?
Ik **heb het koud**.	I'm cold.

Why it works this way

Your memory keeps what it has to fetch. Each time you pull **mag ik** out of your head, the route to it gets stronger. Rereading feels productive because the page looks familiar, yet recognising something is not the same as remembering it.

Spacing works for the same reason. After a day, recall takes a little effort, and that effort is what makes it stick. Ten minutes on six days beats one hour on Sunday.

Chunks are useful on day one, and they quietly carry grammar. Priya said **Ik wil graag een afspraak maken** at the GP for weeks before knowing why **maken** goes at the end. When the rule about two verbs in one sentence finally came, it simply explained something that already sounded right. Lots of reading and listening does the same work on a bigger scale.

Mistakes belong in the cycle too. Tell your neighbour Fatima **Ik ben koud**, hear **O, heb je het koud?** in reply, and you have just found your next chunk. One rule at a time matters because your brain can only juggle a few new things at once.

Along the way you will meet words like verb and subject. The next lesson explains them in plain English.

Remember: a rule is like a path across a field. Reading about the path changes nothing. Walking it a little every day is what makes it.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ik ben koud~~
SAY **Ik heb het koud**
Dutch says you "have it cold", so learn the whole chunk

NOT ~~Mag ik hebben de rekening?~~
SAY **Mag ik de rekening?**
the Dutch chunk needs no extra verb

NOT ~~Wat is de tijd?~~
SAY **Hoe laat is het?**
a fixed question, learn it as one block

NOT ~~Ik wil een koffie graag~~
SAY **Ik wil graag een koffie**
graag comes straight after **wil** here

Quick check

1. Choose the natural sentence: **Ik wil graag een thee.** or **Ik wil een thee graag.**
2. Choose the natural question at the bakery: **Mag ik twee broodjes?** or **Mag ik hebben twee broodjes?**
3. You want to remember **Hoe laat is het?** Which works better: reading your notes again, or covering the Dutch and saying it from memory?
4. You have one hour for Dutch this week. Which plan sticks better: one hour on Sunday, or ten minutes on six different days?

Answers on page 762.

Use it today

Write **Ik wil graag…**, **Mag ik…?** and **Heb je…?** on a small card and use one of them at the supermarket or bakery today. Tomorrow and again in three

days, cover the card and say one new sentence with each chunk from memory.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/how-to-learn-grammar

RULE 2 · LEVEL A1 · START HERE

Grammar words you need, in English and Dutch

Dutch has its own words for grammar, and you will hear them in every NT2 class and textbook: **onderwerp** for subject, **werkwoord** for verb, **bijzin** for subordinate clause. Learn about ten of them, each with its **de** or **het**, and an instruction like **Zet het werkwoord aan het eind van de bijzin** (put the verb at the end of the subordinate clause) suddenly makes sense.

The pattern

> **Learn the Dutch name of each English grammar term together with its article. A few terms, like infinitive, have more than one Dutch name.**

- subject = **het onderwerp** (who or what the verb says something about: who does the action, or who is in a state, like **Bas** in **Bas is ziek**)
- verb = **het werkwoord** (the word for an action or state, like **werken** or **zijn**)
- noun = **het zelfstandig naamwoord** (a word for a person, thing or idea, like **fiets**)
- adjective = **het bijvoeglijk naamwoord** (a describing word, like **groot**)
- article = **het lidwoord** (**de**, **het** or **een**)
- stem = **de stam** (the short form you usually use with **ik**, like **werk** in **ik werk**)
- infinitive = **het hele werkwoord** or **de infinitief** (the dictionary form: **werken**)
- past participle = **het voltooid deelwoord** (the form in **ik heb gewerkt**)

- main clause = **de hoofdzin** (a clause that can stand on its own as a sentence)
- subordinate clause = **de bijzin** (a clause that leans on the main clause, often starting with **dat** or **omdat**)

Examples

Daan fietst naar zijn werk.	Daan cycles to work. (subject)
Fatima **woont** in Rotterdam.	Fatima lives in Rotterdam. (verb)
Ik koop **brood** bij de bakker.	I buy bread at the baker's. (noun)
Ik heb een **nieuwe** fiets.	I have a new bike. (adjective)
De trein heeft vertraging.	The train is delayed. (article)
Ik **werk** in Amsterdam.	I work in Amsterdam. (stem)
Mei wil Nederlands **leren**.	Mei wants to learn Dutch. (infinitive)
Ahmed heeft hard **gewerkt**.	Ahmed has worked hard. (past participle)
Lotte blijft thuis omdat ze ziek is.	Lotte is staying at home because she is ill. (main clause)
Ik weet **dat Yara jarig is**.	I know that it is Yara's birthday. (subordinate clause)

Why it works this way

Many of these terms are Latin terms translated piece by piece into plain Dutch, so they explain themselves. **Onderwerp** is **onder** (under) plus **werpen** (to throw), copied from Latin subiectum, which also gave English the word subject. A **werkwoord** is literally a work word: it does the work in the sentence. **Zelfstandig** means independent, and **bijvoeglijk** comes from **bijvoegen** (to add): the adjective is added to the noun.

A **hoofdzin** is a head sentence, a **bijzin** a side sentence with its own word order (see Subordinate clauses: the verb goes to the end). **Voltooid** means completed. English says "to work", but the Dutch **hele werkwoord** is just **werken**, and its **stam** is **werk** (more in Finding the stem of a verb).

You will also hear **de persoonsvorm**: the verb that changes with the person, like **werkt** in **Daan werkt**. If you speak German, **hoofdzin** and **bijzin** are your Hauptsatz and Nebensatz.

Remember: woord is a het-word, and a compound normally takes the article of its last part, so the terms in this lesson built on **woord** are het-words too: **het werkwoord**, **het lidwoord**, **het voltooid deelwoord**. Terms built on **zin** take **de**: **de hoofdzin**, **de bijzin**. See Compound nouns take the article of the last part.

Watch out

NOT ~~de werkwoord~~
SAY **het werkwoord**
woord is a het-word, so **lidwoord** and **naamwoord** are too

NOT ~~Ik werken in Utrecht.~~
SAY **Ik werk in Utrecht.**
after **ik** comes the **stam werk**, not the **hele werkwoord**

NOT ~~Ik wil koffie drink.~~
SAY **Ik wil koffie drinken.**
after **wil** comes the **hele werkwoord**

NOT ~~Ik blijf thuis omdat ik ben ziek.~~
SAY **Ik blijf thuis omdat ik ziek ben.**
in a **bijzin** the verb goes to the end

Quick check

1. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... lidwoord**
2. What is the **onderwerp** in **Joris fietst naar het station**?
3. Give the **hele werkwoord** of **ik fiets**.
4. Which part of **Ik weet dat Bas ziek is** is the **bijzin**?

Answers on page 762.

Use it today

Take one Dutch sentence from your textbook, a letter from the **gemeente** or a sign at the station. Point out its **onderwerp**, its **werkwoord** and any **lidwoord**, and name each one out loud in Dutch.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/grammar-terms

RULE 3 · LEVEL A1 · START HERE

Dutch for English speakers: what is easy and what is hard

For an English speaker, Dutch starts out friendly: many words look familiar, nouns do not change for subject or object, and verbs have few forms. The hard parts are word order, the two words for "the" (**de** and **het**), and some new sounds.

The pattern

> **Words and endings come easily. Your real effort goes into word order, de or het, and a few sounds.**

- Easy: shared words such as **water**, **hand**, **bed** and **warm**.
- Easy: no case endings (endings that mark subject or object): **de man** stays **de man**.
- Fairly easy: present-tense verbs. Most add **-t** for **jij** and **hij**; the plural is the dictionary form: **ik werk**, **hij werkt**, **wij werken**. When **jij** comes right after the verb, drop the **-t**: **werk jij?**
- Hard: word order. In a statement, the working verb (the one that changes for the person) comes second; a second verb usually goes to the end. Yes-or-no questions and commands normally start with the verb.
- Hard: **de** or **het**, and sounds such as **g**, **ui** and **eu**.

Examples

Het **water** is **warm**.	The water is warm.
Werk jij morgen?	Are you working tomorrow?
Vandaag **werkt** Sanne thuis.	Sanne is working from home today.

Fatima **wil** een fiets **kopen**.	Fatima wants to buy a bike.
Ik zie **de man**. **De man** ziet mij.	I see the man. The man sees me.
De trein is laat en **het** weer is koud.	The train is late and the weather is cold.

Why it works this way

Dutch and English share old roots, and both lost most case endings on nouns long ago. Pronouns still change, as in English: **ik** and **mij** work like I and me.

English keeps a trace of the verb-second rule in "Here comes the bus". Dutch does this all the time: start a statement with **vandaag**, and the subject moves behind the verb.

De and **het** follow no reliable meaning, so learn each noun with its article (more in de and het).

The **g** in **goed** is a rough throat sound, like the "ch" in Scottish "loch" (softer in the south). **Ui** in **huis** and **eu** in **leuk** have no English twin; see vowel pairs. Vowel length changes meaning: **man** is a man, **maan** is the moon.

Remember: in a statement, the working verb sits in seat two, and extra verbs ride at the back.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Vandaag ik werk thuis.**~~
SAY **Vandaag werk ik thuis.**
the verb comes second

NOT ~~**Ik wil kopen een fiets.**~~
SAY **Ik wil een fiets kopen.**
the second verb goes to the end

NOT ~~Hij werk in Amsterdam.~~
SAY **Hij werkt in Amsterdam.**
hij needs **-t**

NOT ~~de huis~~
SAY **het huis**
huis takes **het**

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **werken**: **Lotte … bij de supermarkt.**
2. Choose: **Morgen (ik ga / ga ik) naar de huisarts.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed wil drinken koffie.**
4. Fill in **de** or **het**: **… huis van Priya is klein.**

Answers on page 762.

Use it today

At the supermarket, find three products with English-looking names, like **de melk**, and say them with their article. Then say one sentence about your day that starts with **Vandaag**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/dutch-for-english-speakers

RULE 4 · LEVEL A2 · START HERE

False friends between Dutch and English

Some Dutch words look exactly like English words but mean something else: **slim** means clever, not thin, and **een kind** is a child, not a nice person. These look-alikes are called false friends: words that seem familiar but quietly lead you astray. The way to beat them is to learn each one as a pair, with a short example sentence you can picture.

The pattern

> **A false friend is a Dutch word that looks like an English word but has a different meaning. Learn its real meaning together with the Dutch word for the English meaning.**

- **slim** = clever (English slim is **slank**)
- **eventueel** = possibly, if needed (eventually is **uiteindelijk**)
- **actueel** = current, up to date (actually is usually **eigenlijk**)
- **brutaal** = cheeky, bold in a rude way (brutal is **wreed** or **bruut**)
- **het kind** = child (kind is **aardig**)
- **het monster** = sample (it can also mean a monster)
- **door** = through, or by (a door is **de deur**)
- **bellen** = to phone, to ring a bell (for call meaning give a name, use **noemen**)

Examples

Mei is heel **slim**: ze spreekt vier talen.	Mei is very clever: she speaks four languages.

Yara kan **eventueel** op zaterdag werken.	Yara can work on Saturday if needed.
Is dit telefoonnummer nog **actueel**?	Is this phone number still up to date?
Die meeuw is echt **brutaal**: hij heeft mijn broodje gestolen!	That seagull is really cheeky: it stole my sandwich!
Lotte heeft een **kind** van drie.	Lotte has a three-year-old child.
Ik heb bij de drogist een gratis **monster** gekregen.	I got a free sample at the chemist's.
We fietsen **door** het park naar huis.	We cycle home through the park.
Deze taart is **door** Fatima gemaakt.	This cake was made by Fatima.
Ik **bel** je vanavond even.	I'll give you a quick call tonight.
Er wordt **gebeld**! Doe jij even open?	Someone's at the door! Can you get it?

Why it works this way

Dutch and English are close relatives, so they share hundreds of old words. Over the centuries, some of those words drifted apart. English even borrowed **slim** from Dutch in the 1600s, and then each language took it in a different direction. Dutch **door** is related to English "through", while English "door" is related to Dutch **deur**: same letters, crossed wires. You will meet **door** meaning by again in the passive.

Another group came into Dutch from French. **Eventueel** and **actueel** kept the French meanings: possibly and current. Good news if you speak Spanish or German: Spanish "actual" and German "aktuell" also mean current, and German "eventuell" means possibly. German speakers have their own trap, though: **slim** looks like "schlimm" but means clever, and **brutaal** is much milder than German "brutal".

You will see **eventueel** a lot in letters from the **gemeente**, often as **eventuele**: **Bij eventuele vragen kunt u ons bellen** simply means "If you

have any questions, you can call us." And when the GP asks for **een urinemonster**, relax: it is a sample, nothing scary.

Learning pairs works because the trap and the way out are stored together. How to learn Dutch grammar so it sticks has more ways to make words stay.

Remember: same face, different job. When a Dutch word looks just like an English one, you recognise the face, but check the job before you trust it.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Eventueel heb ik een baan gevonden.**~~
SAY **Uiteindelijk heb ik een baan gevonden.**
eventually, meaning in the end, is **uiteindelijk**

NOT ~~**Actueel wil ik liever thee.**~~
SAY **Eigenlijk wil ik liever thee.**
actually is **eigenlijk**; **actueel** means current

NOT ~~**Kun je de door even dichtdoen?**~~
SAY **Kun je de deur even dichtdoen?**
a door is **de deur**; **door** means through or by

NOT ~~**Iedereen belt me Bas.**~~
SAY **Iedereen noemt me Bas.**
bellen is for phone calls and bells; giving a name is **noemen**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Na drie keer heb ik … mijn rijbewijs gehaald.** (**eventueel** / **uiteindelijk**)

2. What does **Deze brief is door de gemeente gestuurd** mean? (a) This letter was sent to the council. (b) This letter was sent by the council.
3. Fix the verb: **Wij bellen onze hond Max.**
4. What does **Zijn uw gegevens nog actueel?** mean? (a) Are your details actually correct? (b) Are your details still up to date?

Answers on page 762.

Use it today

Make three flashcards, each with one pair and a sentence of your own, for example: **slim** means clever, and English slim is **slank**. Then use one out loud today, perhaps by telling a colleague that the seagulls in town are **brutaal**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/false-friends

Sounds and spelling

How Dutch sounds, and the few rules that explain almost all of its spelling.

- The Dutch alphabet and how to spell your name
- Short and long vowels
- Why maan becomes manen: open and closed syllables
- Doubling consonants after a short vowel
- ui, eu, ij, ei, ou, au, oe, ie
- The Dutch g and ch
- Why d sounds like t at the end of a word
- v and f, z and s: huis and huizen
- The neutral e and the endings -en, -ig and -lijk
- The Dutch r
- Word stress
- The trema in ë and ï, and the hyphen
- Capital letters
- When Dutch uses an apostrophe
- How sounds blend in fast speech
- Writing compound words

RULE 5 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

The Dutch alphabet and how to spell your name

Dutch uses the same 26 letters as English, but many of them have different names. The vowels are named after their long Dutch sound, and a handful of consonants sound nothing like their English names. Learn those few and you can spell your name at the **gemeente**, at the GP or on the phone without a single confused pause.

The pattern

> **Dutch vowel letters are named after their long sound (aa, ee, ie, oo, uu). Most consonant names combine the consonant sound with a vowel: bee, dee, ef, em.**

- Vowels: **aa** (a, like "ah"), **ee** (e, like "ay" in day), **ie** (i, like "ee" in see), **oo** (o), **uu** (u: say "ee" with rounded lips).
- With **aa**: **haa** (h) and **kaa** (k).
- The surprises: **gee** (g, with the rough Dutch g from the back of the throat), **jee** (j, sounds like "yay"), **kuu** (q), **vee** (v), **wee** (w), **iks** (x) and **zet** (z).
- The y is called **ij** in the alphabet. When spelling, people usually say **Griekse ij** ("Greek ij") to avoid confusion. You may also hear **ypsilon**.
- **ij** is officially two letters, but it often acts as one. When a word starting with **ij** needs a capital, both letters get one: **het IJsselmeer**, **IJsland**. Otherwise you write lowercase **ij**, as in **het ijs** (ice).
- On the phone, **lange ij** means i plus j and **korte ei** means e plus i, because the two sound the same. For extra clarity, add a name: **p van Pieter**.

The whole alphabet, out loud: **aa, bee, cee, dee, ee, ef, gee, haa, ie, jee, kaa, el, em, en, oo, pee, kuu, er, es, tee, uu, vee, wee, iks, ij, zet**.

Examples

Kunt u dat **spellen**?	Can you spell that?
Ik heet Daan: **dee, aa, aa, en**.	My name is Daan: D, A, A, N.
Ik heet Priya: **pee, er, ie, Griekse ij, aa**.	My name is Priya: P, R, I, Y, A.
Is dat een **ee** of een **ie**?	Is that an E or an I?
Carlos, met een **cee**, niet met een **kaa**.	Carlos, with a C, not with a K.
Van Dijk, met een **lange ij**.	Van Dijk, spelled with IJ.
Mei, met een **korte ei**.	Mei, spelled with EI.
Met een **p van Pieter**.	With a P, as in Pieter.

Why it works this way

English letter names drifted over the centuries: A became "ay", E became "ee" and I became "eye". Dutch stayed much closer to the old Latin names. So each vowel name is the long Dutch sound of that vowel, and most consonant names are the consonant sound with a vowel attached, after it (**bee**) or before it (**ef**). That turns the alphabet into a free pronunciation lesson: **aa**, **ee**, **ie**, **oo** and **uu** are the same long vowels you hear in **ja**, **twee**, **drie**, **zo** and **nu**. The next lesson, short and long vowels, builds directly on them.

Remember: the Dutch **ee** sounds like an English A, and the Dutch **ie** sounds like an English E. Your English ear will swap them, so trust the Dutch name, not the English echo.

Watch out

NOT ~~Sanne: es, ee, en, en, ie~~
SAY **Sanne: es, aa, en, en, ee**
English A and E sound like Dutch **ee** and **ie**, so this spells Senni

NOT ~~Gijs: jee, lange ij, es~~
SAY **Gijs: gee, lange ij, es**
jee is the letter j; the g is **gee**, with the rough Dutch g

NOT ~~Aziz: aa, zee, ie, zee~~
SAY **Aziz: aa, zet, ie, zet**
de zee means the sea; the letter z is **zet**

NOT ~~Ijsselmeer~~
SAY **IJsselmeer**
when a word starting with **ij** needs a capital, both letters get one

Quick check

1. How do you spell Daan: **dee, aa, aa, en** or **dee, ee, ee, en**?
2. Fill in the gap: Mei is spelled **em, ee, ...**
3. Fix the sentence: **Fatima gaat naar Ijsland.**
4. Which is the Dutch name of the letter j: **gee** or **jee**?

Answers on page 763.

Use it today

Say your name, your street and the two letters of your postcode out loud, letter by letter, in Dutch. Repeat it until it feels boring, so the next time someone at the doctor's or the **gemeente** asks **Kunt u dat spellen?**, you answer without thinking.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/alphabet

RULE 6 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

Short and long vowels

Dutch has five vowels that come in a short and a long version: **a** and **aa**, **e** and **ee**, **i** and **ie**, **o** and **oo**, **u** and **uu**. The short one is quick and sharp; the long one has a slightly different sound and is usually held longer. Swap them and you get another word: **man** is a man, **maan** is the moon.

The pattern

In a stressed syllable (the loud beat of a word) that ends in a consonant, a single vowel letter usually means a short, sharp vowel, as in man. A doubled letter, or ie, mostly means its long partner, as in maan: a different sound that is usually also longer.

- **a** and **aa**: **man** (man, husband) and **maan** (moon)
- **e** and **ee**: **pet** (cap) and **peet** (godparent)
- **i** and **ie**: **zit** (sits) and **ziet** (sees); Dutch writes the long one **ie**, not **ii**
- **o** and **oo**: **bom** (bomb) and **boom** (tree)
- **u** and **uu**: **bus** (bus) and **buur** (neighbour)
- In longer words a long vowel can have just one letter, as in **manen** (moons): see open and closed syllables.

Examples

Mijn **man** werkt in Utrecht.	My husband works in Utrecht.
De **maan** is mooi vanavond.	The moon is beautiful tonight.
Daan draagt de **pet** van zijn **peet**.	Daan is wearing his godparent's cap.
Ik **ben** moe.	I am tired.

Mijn **been** doet pijn.	My leg hurts.
Ahmed **zit** in de trein.	Ahmed is sitting on the train.
Fatima **ziet** de trein.	Fatima sees the train.
De **zon** schijnt.	The sun is shining.
Mijn **zoon** fietst naar school.	My son cycles to school.
De **bus** is **duur**.	The bus is expensive.

Why it works this way

Think of a piano. A short vowel is a quick tap on one key. Its long partner is the key next door, and you usually hold it down. So **maan** is not a stretched **man**: you move to a new key. To Dutch ears, **bom** and **boom** are as different as ship and sheep are to English ears.

Each pair differs like this:

- **a** is dark, nearer the o in American hot than the a in English man; **aa** is brighter and longer, a bit like the a in father.
- **e** is the e in bed, **i** the i in sit; **ee** is close to the ay in day, **ie** is the ee in see.
- **o** is close to the o in British dog; **oo** is close to oh. The English oo sound is a different Dutch vowel, **oe**: see vowel combinations.
- **u** has no English twin: try the vowel of her, short, with rounded lips. **uu** is **ie** said with rounded lips.

Two pairs need an honest footnote: **ie** and **uu** only sound clearly long before **r**, as in **bier** and **muur**. Elsewhere, as in **ziet**, the difference from **zit** is mostly the tighter, clearer sound.

Spanish has no long vowels, so Spanish speakers should exaggerate them at first. German and Arabic speakers already have short and long vowels, which is a head start.

Train your ear with minimal pairs: two words that differ in one sound only, like **pet** and **peet**. Hear them side by side and the line between them becomes clear.

Remember: a long vowel is the key next door, usually held down; change the sound, not just the length.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Mijn nam is Carlos.**~~
SAY **Mijn naam is Carlos.**
naam, name, has a long **aa**; **nam** means took

NOT ~~**Ik been moe.**~~
SAY **Ik ben moe.**
ben has a short **e**; **been** is a leg

NOT ~~**Ik zee de bus.**~~
SAY **Ik zie de bus.**
the sound of English ee is spelled **ie**; **zee** is the sea

NOT ~~**Ik zoek mijn fiets.**~~
SAY **Ik zoek mijn fiets.**
Dutch **oo** sounds like oh; the English oo sound is spelled **oe**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Mijn … werkt bij de gemeente.** (**man** / **maan**)
2. Choose: **Lotte zit onder de … in het park.** (**bom** / **boom**)
3. Fix the sentence: **Mijn zon is drie jaar.**
4. Choose: **Yara … de bus niet.** (**zit** / **ziet**)

Answers on page 763.

Use it today

Say these pairs out loud, slowly and then fast: **man** and **maan**, **pet** and **peet**, **zit** and **ziet**, **bom** and **boom**. Then ask a Dutch colleague or neighbour to say one word from each pair, and guess which one you heard.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/short-long-vowels

RULE 7 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

Why maan becomes manen: open and closed syllables

Maan (moon) becomes **manen** (moons) because Dutch spells a long vowel differently depending on how its syllable ends. A long vowel at the end of a syllable gets one letter (**ma-nen**). A long vowel followed by a consonant (a letter like **n**, **m** or **t**) in the same syllable gets two (**maan**). The sound never changes, and this one idea explains hundreds of plurals, verbs and adjectives.

A syllable is one beat of a word: **ma-nen** has two beats. If long and short vowels are still new to you, start with Short and long vowels.

The pattern

> **A long vowel that ends a syllable is written with one letter: ma-nen. A long vowel in a syllable that ends in a consonant is written with two: maan.**

- Open syllable: it ends in a vowel, like **ma** in **ma-nen**.
- Closed syllable: it ends in a consonant, like **maan** or **boom**.
- In most words, one consonant between two vowels starts the next syllable: **ma-nen**, **bo-men**.
- The same rule covers plurals (**boom**, **bomen**), verbs (**ik loop**, **wij lopen**) and adjectives (**groot**, **een grote tas**).
- This pattern is for long **a**, **e**, **o** and **u**. The spellings **oe**, **eu**, **ui** and **ij** stay the same (**boek, boeken**; **tuin, tuinen**), and **ie** has a few rules of its own (see vowel combinations).

Examples

De **maan** is vanavond heel mooi.	The moon is very beautiful tonight.
Jupiter heeft veel **manen**.	Jupiter has lots of moons.
Voor ons huis staat een **boom**.	There is a tree in front of our house.
In het park staan veel **bomen**.	There are lots of trees in the park.
Ik **loop** elke dag naar mijn werk.	I walk to work every day.
Mei en Bas **lopen** naar het station.	Mei and Bas walk to the station.
Ons huis is niet **groot**.	Our house isn't big.
Ahmed heeft een **grote** tuin.	Ahmed has a big garden.

Why it works this way

Dutch reads a single vowel followed by a consonant in the same syllable as short: **man** (man), **bom** (bomb). So a long vowel that is closed in by a consonant needs a second letter as a signal: **maan**, **boom**.

In an open syllable nothing follows the vowel, and a single **a**, **e**, **o** or **u** there is normally read as long. A second letter would add nothing, so Dutch drops it: **ma-nen**, **bo-men**. An unstressed **e** can also be the neutral sound you hear in **de**, like the last **e** in **gro-te**.

Compare **de man** (the man) with **de maan** (the moon), and **de mannen** (the men) with **de manen** (the moons). In **man-nen** the double **n** closes the first syllable, which keeps the **a** short. That trick is the next step: Doubling consonants after a short vowel.

The rule also works in reverse. Take **-en** off **lopen** and you get **lop**, a closed syllable, so you write **ik loop**. More in Finding the stem of a verb.

Remember: an open syllable is an open door, and a long vowel can stand there alone. A consonant shuts the door, and the vowel needs a second letter to stay long.

One honest exception: a long **e** at the very end of a word is written **ee**, as in **zee** (sea), **twee** (two) and **thee** (tea). A single **e** there would look like the neutral **e** in **de**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik zie veel boomen.**~~
SAY **Ik zie veel bomen.**
bo ends in a vowel, so one **o** is enough

NOT ~~**Ik lop naar huis.**~~
SAY **Ik loop naar huis.**
the syllable ends in **p**, so the long **o** needs two letters

NOT ~~**Wij woonen in Delft.**~~
SAY **Wij wonen in Delft.**
wo-nen is open

NOT ~~**Ik koop een groote tas.**~~
SAY **Ik koop een grote tas.**
gro-te is open, ending included

Quick check

1. Write the plural: **een raam, twee …**
2. Fill in the gap: **Ik … (slapen) goed.**
3. Choose: **Lotte heeft een (gele / geele) jas.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Yara en Carlos maaken soep.**

Answers on page 763.

Use it today

Next time you are in the supermarket, find three products with a long vowel, like **de peer** or **de tomaat**, and write the plural on your shopping list: **peren**, **tomaten**. Clap the syllables as you write them: **pe-ren**, **to-ma-ten**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/open-closed-syllables

RULE 8 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

Doubling consonants after a short vowel

When a stressed short vowel stays short before an ending that starts with a vowel, Dutch doubles the single consonant after it: **de bal** becomes **de ballen**, and **ik zit** becomes **wij zitten**. The second letter keeps the vowel short. At the end of a word you normally write just one (**bal**, **stop**), and **ch** and **ng** never double.

The pattern

> **When a stressed short vowel stays short, double the single consonant after it before an ending that starts with a vowel. Otherwise, write one.**

- Plurals: **de kat, de katten**
- Verbs: **ik stop, wij stoppen**
- Adjectives: **dik, een dikke jas**
- Before **-t** it stays single: **hij stopt**
- Two different consonants already: no change, **de hond, de honden**
- **ch**, **ng** and **x** never double: **lachen**, **zingen**, **boxen**
- A few words get a long vowel instead and keep one consonant: **de dag, de dagen**, **de weg, de wegen**

Examples

Daan heeft een **bal**, maar Bas heeft drie **ballen**.	Daan has a ball, but Bas has three balls.
Ik **zit** hier en jullie **zitten** daar.	I am sitting here and you are sitting there.

Joris **stopt** bij het stoplicht en wij **stoppen** ook.	Joris stops at the traffic light and we stop too.
Priya koopt een **fles** melk en twee **flessen** water.	Priya buys a bottle of milk and two bottles of water.
Ahmed draagt een **dikke** jas.	Ahmed is wearing a thick coat.
Wij **lachen** en **zingen** voor Lotte, want ze is jarig.	We laugh and sing for Lotte, because it is her birthday.

Why it works this way

One consonant between two vowels starts the next syllable (see open and closed syllables). So **balen** would split as **ba-len**, and the **a** would end an open syllable (one that ends in a vowel), where a stressed single **a**, **e**, **o** or **u** is usually read long. A second **l** closes the syllable: **bal-len**, with a short **a**.

One letter changes the word: **de mannen** (the men), **de manen** (the moons).

In a small group of words the vowel really does become long before the ending: **de dag** has a short **a**, **de dagen** a long one. The spelling of the singular does not warn you, so learn these plurals as you meet them.

English writes ball and will. Dutch writes **bal** and **wil**; only a few loanwords, such as **jazz**, end in a double consonant. The pairs **ch** and **ng** never double, even though the vowel stays short.

The rule is about stressed vowels. Some unstressed last syllables keep one consonant: **de perzik, de perziken**.

Remember: one consonant closes the short vowel, its twin starts the ending. No vowel after it, no twin.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ik will koffie.~~
SAY **Ik wil koffie.**
the verb form **wil** ends in one **l**

NOT ~~Wij ziten in de trein.~~
SAY **Wij zitten in de trein.**
short **i**, so the **t** doubles

NOT ~~twee flesen water~~
SAY **twee flessen water**
short **e**, so the **s** doubles

NOT ~~Hij stoppt hier.~~
SAY **Hij stopt hier.**
-t is not a vowel, so the **p** stays single

Quick check

1. Write the plural: **een bus, twee …**
2. Choose: **Wij (bakken / baken) een taart voor Bas.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Ik stopp om vijf uur.**
4. Fill in the gap: **ik zing, wij …**

Answers on page 763.

Use it today

Write a Dutch shopping list with four plurals, such as **twee flessen melk** or **drie potten jam**, and check every short vowel before **-en**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/double-consonants

RULE 9 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

ui, eu, ij, ei, ou, au, oe, ie

Each of these letter pairs is one sound, not two: a vowel combination, meaning two vowel letters that work as a team. The pairs **ij** and **ei** sound the same, and so do **ou** and **au**. The pair **oe** sounds like the oo in English food and **ie** like the ee in see, while **eu** and **ui** are new sounds you make by rounding your lips.

The pattern

> **Read each pair as one single sound. Two pairs share a sound (ij and ei, ou and au); the other four each have their own.**

- **ij** and **ei**: between English eye and day, in everyday speech usually close to eye: **tijd** (time), **klein** (small).
- **ou** and **au**: close to the ow in now: **oud** (old), **blauw** (blue).
- **oe**: the oo in food, a bit shorter: **goed** (good), **boek** (book).
- **ie**: the ee in see, also shorter: **niet** (not). So **niet** never sounds like night.
- **eu**: no English twin. Say the vowel of **twee** (two), keep your tongue still and round your lips: **neus** (nose), **leuk** (nice). German speakers: this is not the oy of German eu.
- **ui**: the famous one. Start from the vowel in English hut, round your lips and let the sound close a little at the end: **huis** (house), **uit** (out).
- Before **r**, the sounds of **ie**, **oe** and **eu** stretch: **bier** (beer), **boer** (farmer), **deur** (door).

Examples

Het **huis** van Sanne is groot.	Sanne's house is big.
Mei heeft een rode **neus**.	Mei has a red nose.

De **trein** is op **tijd**.	The train is on time.
Daan woont in een **klein** dorp.	Daan lives in a small village.
Mijn fiets is **oud**.	My bike is old.
De lucht is grijs, niet **blauw**.	The sky is grey, not blue.
Het gaat **goed** met Joris.	Joris is doing well.
Yara komt vandaag **niet**.	Yara isn't coming today.
Ik **zie** de zee.	I see the sea.

Why it works this way

Dutch spelling remembers how people spoke centuries ago. Back then **ij** and **ei** were different sounds, and so were **ou** and **au**. In the standard language they merged, but the spelling stayed. English has the same headache with see and sea, so you already know the cure: learn the spelling together with the word.

A useful tendency, not a rule: if the English cousin of a word has an i that sounds like eye, the Dutch word usually has **ij**: **mijn** (my, related to English mine), **wijn** (wine), **ijs** (ice). On the phone you will also hear **met een lange ij** (with a long **ij**) or **met een korte ei** (with a short **ei**) when people spell a name. That describes the shape of the letters, not the sound.

Remember: two letters, one sound. Your mouth makes one vowel; the spelling simply needs two letters to write it down.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Dat is mein fiets.**~~
SAY **Dat is mijn fiets.**
a German habit; this word has **ij**

NOT ~~De lucht is blouw.~~
SAY **De lucht is blauw.**
same sound as **ou**, but this colour uses **au**

NOT ~~Ik zee de trein.~~
SAY **Ik zie de trein.**
the ee of English see is written **ie**; **zee** means sea

NOT ~~Ik ben mu.~~
SAY **Ik ben moe.**
Dutch **u** is another sound; the oo of food is written **oe**

Quick check

1. Fill in **ij** or **ei**: **Ik heb vandaag geen t…d.**
2. Fill in **ou** or **au**: **Het is k…d buiten.**
3. Fill in **ui** or **eu**: **Ahmed is niet th…s.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Priya komt neet.**

Answers on page 763.

Use it today

On your next trip to the station or the supermarket, find one word on a sign for each of the eight pairs and say it out loud, rounding your lips for **eu** and **ui**. Start with **uitgang** (exit): every station has one.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/vowel-combinations

RULE 10 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

The Dutch g and ch

In most of the Netherlands, **g** and **ch** are exactly the same sound: a rasping hiss made at the back of your mouth, close to the ch in Scottish loch. So the **g** in **goed** and the **ch** in **acht** sound identical. In **sch** you say s plus that sound, and the ending **-isch** simply sounds like **ies**.

The pattern

> **North of the big rivers, g and ch are one sound with two spellings: a rasp at the back of your mouth.**

- **g** and **ch** sound the same: **goed**, **dag**, **lachen**, **nacht**.
- In the south and in Flanders, the sound is softer and smoother: the famous **zachte g** (soft g). Both versions are correct; see Dutch in the Netherlands and in Flanders.
- **sch** is s plus that sound: **school**, **schoon**, **schrijven**.
- The ending **-isch** sounds like **ies**: **praktisch**, **logisch**. With an extra **e**, it sounds like **iese**: **praktische**.
- **ng** is a different sound, as in English sing: **lang**, **zingen**.
- Some loanwords (words borrowed from other languages) keep their foreign sound: the second **g** in **garage** sounds like the s in English pleasure, and the **ch** in **chef** and **chocola** sounds like English sh.

Examples

Goedemorgen, Fatima!	Good morning, Fatima!
Het is **acht** uur.	It is eight o'clock.
Bas **zegt** nee.	Bas says no.

Dat is **echt** waar.	That is really true.
Het **regent** vandaag.	It is raining today.
Priya fietst naar **school**.	Priya cycles to school.
Mei **schrijft** een kaart voor Daan.	Mei is writing a card for Daan.
Dat is heel **praktisch**.	That is very practical.
Ahmed heeft een **elektrische** fiets.	Ahmed has an electric bike.
Lotte zet de auto in de **garage**.	Lotte puts the car in the garage.

Why it works this way

Long ago, **g** and **ch** were two sounds: **g** had your voice humming in it, **ch** was just air. Many southern speakers still keep a little of that difference. In the north the two merged, but the spelling stayed. Good news for you: fewer sounds to learn.

The ending **-isch** has its own story. Older spellings such as **visch** became **vis** after the final consonant sound had disappeared from speech. The ending **-isch** in adjectives (describing words) like **praktisch** has a different history: it came in through borrowed words, and Dutch kept the spelling but pronounces it like **ies**. Loanwords such as **garage** and **chocola** simply arrived with their French sounds.

To make the sound, start to say k, but leave a tiny gap between the back of your tongue and the roof of your mouth, and let the air scrape through. Arabic kha, Spanish j as in jamón and German ch as in Bach are very close. Most English accents do not use this sound, so English speakers tend to say k or a hard g. German speakers mainly need to drop their hard g in **goed** and their sh in **sch**.

Remember: one sound, two outfits. If you can say **acht**, you can already say **gaan**.

Watch out

NOT ~~skool~~
SAY **school**
sch is s plus the rasp, never sk or sh

NOT ~~Hij zecht nee.~~
SAY **Hij zegt nee.**
the verb is **zeggen**, so the g stays

NOT ~~Dat is fantasties!~~
SAY **Dat is fantastisch!**
you hear **ies**, but you write **isch**

NOT ~~een praktiese tas~~
SAY **een praktische tas**
it sounds like **iese**, but you still write **isch**

Quick check

1. Fix the spelling: **Joris zecht hallo.**
2. Fix the spelling: **Dat is typies Nederlands.**
3. In **garage**, which **g** sounds like the s in English pleasure: the first or the second?
4. Which word starts with s plus the rasp: **school**, **sjaal** or **snel**?

Answers on page 764.

Use it today

Say **Goedemorgen** or **Goedemiddag** to a neighbour or colleague today, with a full, confident rasp. Then read three words with **g**, **ch** or **sch** aloud from signs at the station or in the supermarket.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/g-and-ch

RULE 11 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

Why d sounds like t at the end of a word

In Dutch, a d at the end of a word is pronounced as t, and a b at the end is pronounced as p. So **hond** (dog) sounds like "hont" and **web** sounds like "wep". You still write d and b, because in some longer forms, such as the plural (the form for more than one) **honden**, the real sound comes back.

The pattern

> **At the end of a word, say d as t and b as p. The spelling stays the same.**

- **hond** sounds like "hont", **bed** like "bet", **web** like "wep".
- Add **-en** or **-e** and the d or b is heard again: **honden**, **bedden**, **webben**, **rode** (red).
- An ending that starts with a consonant does not bring it back: **hondje** (little dog) sounds like "hontje".
- Verbs do it too: **ik heb** sounds like "ik hep", **ik word** like "ik wort".
- A word with a real t has a t everywhere: **kat**, **katten**.

Examples

Sanne heeft een **hond**.	Sanne has a dog.
Daan heeft twee **honden**.	Daan has two dogs.
Lotte heeft een **kat** en een **hond**.	Lotte has a cat and a dog.
Mijn **bed** is te klein.	My bed is too small.
Het hotel heeft tien **bedden**.	The hotel has ten beds.

Er zit een spin in het **web**.	There is a spider in the web.
Ik **heb** een nieuwe fiets.	I have a new bike.
Ik **word** morgen dertig.	I turn thirty tomorrow.
Mijn **hart** klopt **hard**.	My heart is pounding.

Why it works this way

Put your fingers on your throat and say "dddd", then "tttt". With d you feel a buzz: your voice is on. That is why d and b are called voiced sounds, and t and p voiceless. Dutch switches the voice off at the end of a word. For a word said on its own, this is a firm rule, not a tendency.

Why not write **hont**, then? Dutch spelling likes a word to look the same in its different forms, so **hond** and **honden** are clearly one word. The price is that you cannot always hear the spelling: **hart** (heart) and **hard** (hard, loud) sound exactly alike. With v and z, Dutch makes the opposite choice, as you will see in the next lesson.

Verbs follow the same logic. When the infinitive (the basic form in the dictionary) has a d or b just before **-en**, the **ik** form keeps that letter: **worden** gives **ik word**, **vinden** gives **ik vind**, **hebben** gives **ik heb**. You hear a t or p, but you write d or b. With v and z this does not happen: **leven** (to live) gives **ik leef**. This will make d, t or dt much easier later.

If English is your first language, you probably keep the buzz, because English bed and bet are different words. A crisp t at the end of **bed** instantly sounds more Dutch. German speakers have it easy: Hund and Hunde work exactly like **hond** and **honden**.

Remember: the short word hides the letter, the long word tells the truth. If you hear a t at the end and are not sure how to write it, make the word longer with **-en** or **-e**: **honden**, so **hond**; **katten**, so **kat**; **rode**, so **rood**.

Watch out

NOT ~~een hont~~
SAY **een hond**
you hear t, but the plural **honden** shows the d

NOT ~~het bet~~
SAY **het bed**
the plural is **bedden**

NOT ~~ik hep~~
SAY **ik heb**
the verb is **hebben**, so the b stays

NOT ~~ik vint het leuk~~
SAY **ik vind het leuk**
the verb is **vinden**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Yara ziet drie (honten / honden).**
2. Fill in d or t: **Ik ken dat woor... niet.** (Hint: the plural is **woorden**.)
3. Fix the sentence: **Ik wort moe.**
4. You say **web** out loud. Which sound do you hear at the end: b or p?

Answers on page 764.

Use it today

At the bakery or supermarket today, ask for **een brood** and finish **brood** with a clear t. Need two? Say **twee broden** and feel the buzz of the d come back.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/final-devoicing

RULE 12 · LEVEL A2 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

v and f, z and s: huis and huizen

Dutch words almost never end in v or z on paper: you write f or s instead (loanwords like **quiz** and **jazz** are exceptions). When an ending like **-en** or **-e** follows, many of these words switch to v or z: **huis** becomes **huizen**, **brief** becomes **brieven**, **wolf** becomes **wolven**. You can't always predict which words do this, so listen to the plural (the form for more than one) and learn it together with the word.

The pattern

> **At the end of a word, Dutch usually writes f or s, not v or z. When an ending that starts with a vowel follows, many words switch to v or z.**

- Plurals with **-en**: **de brief**, **de brieven**; **de prijs**, **de prijzen**.
- Adjectives (describing words) with **-e**: **lief**, **lieve**; **boos**, **boze**.
- Verbs: **wij geven**, **ik geef**; **wij lezen**, **ik lees**.
- Endings that start with a consonant keep f and s: **hij leest**, **het huisje**, **het briefje**.
- After a short vowel, you usually double the letter instead: **de bus**, **de bussen**; **de les**, **de lessen**.
- Some words never switch: **de mens**, **de mensen**; **de fotograaf**, **de fotografen**.

Examples

Ik woon in een klein **huis**, maar de **huizen** hier zijn duur.	I live in a small house, but the houses here are expensive.

Fatima heeft twee **brieven** van de gemeente gekregen.	Fatima has received two letters from the municipality.
Er lopen veel **duiven** op het perron.	Lots of pigeons are walking around on the platform.
In de supermarkt zijn de **prijzen** weer gestegen.	At the supermarket, prices have gone up again.
Ik **lees** de krant en de kinderen **lezen** een strip.	I read the paper and the children read a comic.
Joris **geeft** Lotte een **lieve** kaart voor haar verjaardag.	Joris gives Lotte a sweet card for her birthday.
Ahmed **verhuist** volgende week en zijn buren **verhuizen** ook.	Ahmed is moving next week and his neighbours are moving too.
Bas en Yara huren een **huisje** aan zee.	Bas and Yara are renting a little house by the sea.
Op de bruiloft waren twee **fotografen**.	There were two photographers at the wedding.

Why it works this way

Put two fingers on your throat and say a long f, then a long v. The v buzzes. So does z, while s doesn't. Sounds with this buzz are called voiced.

At the end of a word, Dutch switches the buzz off, just like with d and t. The difference is spelling: **hond** keeps its d on paper, but pairs like **huis** and **huizen** show the change in their letters, even when your ear barely hears it. Only a few borrowed words, like **de quiz**, end in z.

In words that switch, an ending that starts with a vowel brings the buzz back. That's why **huizen** and **lieve** have it, but **huisje** and **leest** don't. Long vowels follow the open syllable rule at the same time: **de roos**, **de rozen**.

English does this too, in wolf and wolves or leaf and leaves, but only in a handful of words.

The singular (the form for one) won't tell you whether a word switches: **de prijs** gives **de prijzen**, while **de mens** gives **de mensen**. So listen to the plural. In the north and west of the Netherlands, v often sounds close to f and z close to s, so the difference can be small. Southern and Flemish speakers buzz more clearly. If your ear can't decide, check the plural once and learn the pair: **de brief, de brieven**.

Remember: v and z are shy. They hardly ever stand at the end of a word, but in many words they come back out as soon as a vowel ending gives them something to lean on.

Watch out

NOT ~~de huisen~~
SAY **de huizen**
the s turns into z before **-en**

NOT ~~twee briefen~~
SAY **twee brieven**
f becomes v; German speakers often keep the f

NOT ~~Liefe Sanne,~~
SAY **Lieve Sanne,**
the **-e** brings back the v, on every birthday card

NOT ~~Ik reiz graag.~~
SAY **Ik reis graag.**
the ik-form of **reizen** ends in s

NOT ~~de fotograven~~
SAY **de fotografen**
some words keep their f, so check the plural

Quick check

1. Fill in the plural of **brief**: **Ik heb twee … gestuurd.**
2. Choose: **De (huisen / huizen) in Utrecht zijn duur.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Wij lesen elke avond.**
4. Fill in the right form of **verhuizen**: **Sanne … in juni naar Rotterdam.**

Answers on page 764.

Use it today

Pick five nouns ending in f or s from your post, your street or your supermarket receipt, and look up their plurals. Say each pair out loud with two fingers on your throat, like **de brief, de brieven**, and feel where the buzz comes back.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/v-f-z-s

RULE 13 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

The neutral e and the endings -en, -ig and -lijk

In Dutch, an **e** in a weak syllable (one you don't say louder) is usually a quick, relaxed "uh", close to the a in English "about" or the u in "but", so **de** sounds like "duh". The endings **-ig** and **-lijk** shrink to the same sound: **aardig** (nice) sounds like "AAR-duch" and **eigenlijk** (actually) like "EI-gun-luk". Many people also drop the n of **-en**, so **lopen** (to walk) often sounds like "LO-puh".

The pattern

> **An e in a syllable without stress is usually a quick "uh". The unstressed endings -ig and -lijk use the same "uh", even though they are spelled with i and ij.**

- Small words: **de**, **je**, **me** and **te** sound like "duh", "yuh", "muh" and "tuh". **Het** sounds like "ut", and **een** (a) like "un".
- Weak beginnings and endings: the **e** in **bedankt**, **gezellig**, **morgen** and **grote**.
- **-en**: many speakers drop the n, so **lopen** sounds like "LO-puh". In writing, the n always stays.
- **-ig** sounds like "uch", with the rough Dutch **ch** (The Dutch g and ch): **aardig**, **gezellig**, **twintig**.
- **-lijk** sounds like "luk": **eigenlijk**, **natuurlijk**, **moeilijk**.

Examples

De trein naar Utrecht is laat.	The train to Utrecht is late.
Hoe heet **je**?	What's your name?

Priya, kun je **me** helpen?	Priya, can you help me?
Daan en Fatima **wonen** in Leiden.	Daan and Fatima live in Leiden.
Mijn buurman Ahmed is heel **aardig**.	My neighbour Ahmed is very nice.
Bij Sanne is het altijd **gezellig**.	It's always cosy at Sanne's.
Het is vandaag **twintig** graden.	It's twenty degrees today.
Ik ben **eigenlijk** moe.	Actually, I'm tired.
Nederlands is soms **moeilijk**.	Dutch is sometimes difficult.
Ja, **natuurlijk**!	Yes, of course!

Why it works this way

Dutch words with more than one syllable usually have one main stressed syllable, the strong beat. Many unstressed syllables, most of all those spelled with **e**, relax into a quick "uh", called the schwa. It is one of the most frequent sounds in Dutch. English does something similar: in "banana", only the middle a is a full a. Not every unstressed vowel relaxes, though: the o at the end of **auto** stays a clear o. Word stress shows where the strong beat falls.

So why not write "uh"? Because spelling shows how a word is built. **Eigenlijk** is **eigen** (own) plus **-lijk**, and the **-en** of **lopen** is the same ending you write in **wij werken**. A fixed spelling lets readers spot those parts, however fast people talk.

The "uh" belongs to weak syllables: unstressed endings, weak prefixes such as **be-** and **ge-**, and small words such as **de** and **je**. When **lijk** itself is stressed, as in **gelijk** (equal, right), you hear the full **ij** of **wijn**. Dropping the n of **-en** is normal relaxed speech in much of the Netherlands, even on radio and TV. Some speakers keep it, and that is fine too.

If you speak German, don't say **-ig** and **-lijk** like the clear "ich" and "lich" of German "fertig" and "eigentlich". Spanish speakers often give every e a

clear "eh"; here, let it go soft.

Remember: say it lazy, write it in full. A weak **e**, **-ig** and **-lijk** are a small "uh" in your mouth and a fixed spelling on paper.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Wij lope naar huis.**~~
SAY **Wij lopen naar huis.**
drop the n in speech if you like, never in writing

NOT ~~**Mijn buurvrouw is aardug.**~~
SAY **Mijn buurvrouw is aardig.**
you hear "uch", you write **-ig**

NOT ~~**Dat is moeiluk.**~~
SAY **Dat is moeilijk.**
you hear "luk", you write **-lijk**

NOT ~~**Ik heb eigelijk geen tijd.**~~
SAY **Ik heb eigenlijk geen tijd.**
fast speech swallows that n, yet the word is **eigen** plus **-lijk**

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Daan en Mei fietse naar het station.**
2. Fill in the ending that sounds like "luk": **Ja, natuur...!**
3. Fix the spelling: **Ik betaal twintug euro.**
4. Choose: in **Hoe heet je?**, the **e** of **je** sounds like (a) the ay in English "day" or (b) the a in English "about".

Answers on page 764.

Use it today

At the next birthday or **borrel** (drinks), tell the host **Het is heel gezellig!** with a small "uch" at the end. On your bike ride home, say **Ja, natuurlijk!** and **Ik ben eigenlijk moe.** out loud, keeping every ending lazy.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/schwa-and-endings

RULE 14 · LEVEL A2 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

The Dutch r

There is no single correct Dutch r. You can roll it with the tip of your tongue or make it at the back of your throat, and at the end of a syllable many people in the Netherlands use a soft r close to the American English one. Dutch speakers understand all of them, so pick one and stay consistent.

One colleague rolls the r in **Rotterdam**, another makes it in the throat, and your neighbour's **maar** ends almost like English "car". Nobody is doing it wrong.

The pattern

> **Dutch accepts several kinds of r, and all of them are understood. Pick one, use it consistently, and don't leave the r out.**

- **Tongue r**: the tip of your tongue taps once or rolls briefly just behind your top teeth, similar to the r in Spanish, Italian or Arabic.
- **Throaty r**: made at the back of your mouth, roughly where you gargle, similar to a French or German r. Keep it light, or it drifts towards the Dutch g.
- **Soft r**: at the end of a syllable (one beat of a word: **ja-rig** has two), many people in the Netherlands use a soft r close to the American r in "car": **maar**, **deur**, **water**. It is called the **Gooise r**, and you hear it much less in Flanders.
- **A common combination**: tongue r or throaty r at the start of a syllable, soft r at the end. That is consistent too.
- **Syllables decide**: **deur** can end in a soft r, but in **deuren** (**deu-ren**) the r starts a syllable, so most speakers switch to their tongue r or throaty r.

Examples

Yara koopt **rode rozen** voor haar buurvrouw.	Yara is buying red roses for her neighbour.
Mag ik twee **broodjes** kaas?	Can I have two cheese rolls?
Carlos is vandaag **jarig**.	It's Carlos's birthday today.
Ik heb mijn **kaart** thuis vergeten.	I left my card at home.
Het **weer** is vandaag **raar**.	The weather is strange today.
Joris **werkt vier** dagen per week.	Joris works four days a week.
Mijn **moeder** belt de huisarts.	My mother is calling the GP.
Ik koop **kaas** en een **kaars**.	I'm buying cheese and a candle.

Why it works this way

No two Dutch words are told apart by the kind of r: **rood** means red whether you roll the r or make it in your throat. A missing r is a different story. **Kaas** (cheese) and **kaars** (candle), **mee** (along) and **meer** (more), **gaan** (to go) and **graan** (grain) are different words.

Think of your r as handwriting. It can look different from your neighbour's, as long as it is always there and always looks like yours. Swapping styles from word to word is not wrong, but it makes your accent sound unsettled.

Which one should you choose? If you can already roll an r, keep it. If you speak French or German, use your throaty r. If neither comes easily, try one quick tap of the tongue tip, like the "tt" in American "better". Avoid the English r at the start of a syllable: it is understood, but it sounds very English.

Speakers of British English and German often let a final r melt into a vowel. In Dutch it stays, also in endings with the neutral e like **lekker**.

Remember: choose your r, keep your r, never drop your r.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Het is mooi wee vandaag.**~~
SAY **Het is mooi weer vandaag.**
a final r stays, even when it is soft

NOT ~~**Steek jij de kaasjes op de taart aan?**~~
SAY **Steek jij de kaarsjes op de taart aan?**
keep the r before a consonant, or you light cheese

NOT ~~**De taart is lekke.**~~
SAY **De taart is lekker.**
keep the r in **-er**; **lekke** belongs to a flat tyre, **een lekke band**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Bas fietst naar de bakker voor …** (**boot** or **brood**)
2. Choose the word in which a soft r is possible: **rood**, **deur** or **deuren**.
3. Fix the sentence: **Mijn kopje is leeg. Ik wil mee koffie.**
4. Lotte uses a throaty r at the start of words. Can she use a soft r at the end of **maar**? Choose yes or no.

Answers on page 764.

Use it today

At the bakery or supermarket, order something with an r in it, like **drie broodjes** or **een rode paprika**, using the r you have chosen. On the way home, say **Het weer is vandaag raar** three times and check that every r is still there.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/the-dutch-r

RULE 15 · LEVEL A2 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

Word stress

Most Dutch words put the stress on the first syllable of the root: **WERken**, **TAfel**, **FIETsen**. The prefixes **be-**, **ge-**, **ont-** and **ver-** are unstressed, while separable prefixes like **op-** take the stress, and many French loanwords and a few endings move it towards the end of the word. Get the stress right and people will understand you even before your vowels are perfect.

The pattern

> **Stress the first syllable of the root, skipping unstressed prefixes like be-, ge-, ont- and ver-. Separable prefixes, many French loanwords and a few endings take the stress themselves.**

- Root first: **WERken**, **TAfel**, **BOODschappen**, **KINderen**. Endings like **-en** and **-e** stay quiet.
- The inseparable prefixes **be-**, **ge-**, **ont-** and **ver-** are unstressed, so the stress moves to the root: **beGINnen**, **verTAlen**, **ontBIJten**, **geWERKT**.
- The prefix **her-** is usually unstressed too: **herHAlen**, **herKENnen**. In some words where it clearly means 'again', it takes the stress: **HERindelen** (to redraw, for example the borders of a **gemeente**), **HERbenoemen** (to reappoint).
- Separable prefixes, the ones that split off as in **Ik bel je op**, are stressed: **OPbellen**, **MEEnemen**, **AFwassen**. This stays true with **ge-** inside: **OPgebeld**. See separable verbs.
- Many French loanwords stress the last syllable: **restauRANT**, **caDEAU**, **staTION**, **toiLET**.
- Some endings take the stress: **-ij** (**bakkeRIJ**), **-in** (**vrienDIN**), **-es** (**leraRES**), **-teit** (**universiTEIT**) and the verb ending **-eren** (**stuDEren**).

In the running text, capitals show the stressed syllable. In the examples below, it is in bold.

Examples

Op maandag **wer**ken we niet.	We don't work on Mondays.
De sleutels liggen op **ta**fel.	The keys are on the table.
Fatima ver**taalt** een brief voor haar buurman.	Fatima is translating a letter for her neighbour.
De cursus be**gint** om negen uur.	The course starts at nine o'clock.
Ahmed heeft de huisarts **op**gebeld.	Ahmed called the GP.
Bas heeft zijn lunch **mee**genomen.	Bas brought his lunch.
We eten vanavond in een restau**rant**.	We are eating in a restaurant tonight.
Yara heeft een ca**deau** voor Joris gekocht.	Yara bought a present for Joris.
De bakke**rij** op de hoek is dicht.	The bakery on the corner is closed.
Lotte is mijn beste vrien**din**.	Lotte is my best friend.

Why it works this way

Dutch is a Germanic language, like English and German. These languages tend to put the weight on the part of the word that carries the meaning. In **WERken** that part is **werk**, and the **-en** is only grammar.

The prefixes **be-**, **ge-**, **ont-** and **ver-** never stand on their own. They are glued to the root, so they stay small. In **be-**, **ge-** and **ver-** the vowel even shrinks to the neutral e. If you speak German, this will feel familiar. The prefix **her-** is usually just as quiet, but in some words with a clear 'again' meaning, like **HERindelen**, it takes the stress.

A separable prefix is a real little word (**op**, **mee**, **af**) that can walk away from the verb: **Ik bel je straks op.** A word that can stand alone keeps its own stress. That is why stress can even change meaning: **Dat komt vaak VOOR** (that happens a lot) but **Zo voorKOM je problemen** (that is how you prevent problems). There is more on this in One verb, two meanings.

Many French words came into Dutch with their stress at the end, and Dutch kept it there. Not all of them did, so listen carefully when you meet a new one. The stressed endings have no deep logic. There are only a few of them, so learn them as a set.

Careful with words that only look like they have a prefix. In **GEven**, **BEter** and **VERder**, the first syllable belongs to the root, so the normal rule applies.

Remember: a prefix that can walk away is loud, a prefix that is glued on is usually quiet, and many French guests keep their accent at the end.

Watch out

NOT ~~STAtion~~
SAY **staTION**
this French loanword is stressed at the end, unlike in English

NOT ~~uniVERsiteit~~
SAY **universiTEIT**
the ending **-teit** takes the stress

NOT ~~TElefoon~~
SAY **teleFOON**
stress at the end, not where English puts it

NOT ~~VERtalen~~
SAY **verTAlen**
ver- is unstressed

NOT ~~opBELlen~~
SAY **OPbellen**
separable prefixes take the stress

Quick check

1. Which syllable is stressed in **vertellen**: **ver**, **tel** or **len**?
2. Choose the correct stress: **UITnodigen** or **uitNOdigen**?
3. Which syllable is stressed in **bakkerij**: **bak**, **ke** or **rij**?
4. Fix the stress: **Ik heb een CAdeau voor Emma.**

Answers on page 765.

Use it today

On your next train trip, listen to the announcements and quietly repeat **staTION**, **verTREKT** and **verTRAging** with the same stress. Then write down five words from your day with the stressed syllable in capitals, and say each one out loud three times.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/word-stress

RULE 16 · LEVEL A2 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

The trema in ë and ï, and the hyphen

The two dots on **ë** and **ï** are called a trema (**het trema**), and they have one job: they tell you that a new syllable (a beat in a word) starts at that vowel. So **België** is **Bel-gi-ë**, not **Bel-gie**. In a compound (a word built from two words), a hyphen does the same job when two vowels meet, as in **zee-egel**. Neither mark changes how the letter itself sounds.

The pattern

> **Put a trema on a vowel when it starts a new syllable and would otherwise melt with the vowel before it into one sound. Where two words of a compound meet, use a hyphen instead.**

- The dots go on the vowel that starts the new syllable: **ruïne**, **patiënt**, **geïnteresseerd**. In **ideeën** and **zeeën**, that is the third **e**.
- Many plurals and numbers have one: **ideeën**, **zeeën**, **knieën**, **tweeëntwintig**.
- Prefixes such as **ge-** and **be-** are not words on their own, so words that start with them use a trema: **geëmigreerd**, **beëindigen**.
- In a compound, use a hyphen if the vowels where the two words meet could be read as one sound: **zee-egel**, **auto-ongeluk**, **mee-eten**. Otherwise, write the compound as one word: **schoolboek**, **politieagent**.
- No risk of melting, no mark: **piano**, **radio**, **ideaal**, **Italiaans**.

Examples

Mijn buren gaan elk jaar naar **België**.	My neighbours go to Belgium every year.

Sanne heeft goede **ideeën** voor het feest.	Sanne has good ideas for the party.
Ben je **geïnteresseerd** in de cursus?	Are you interested in the course?
De **patiënt** zit in de wachtkamer.	The patient is sitting in the waiting room.
Daan wordt morgen **tweeëntwintig**.	Daan turns twenty-two tomorrow.
Yara heeft in Limburg een oude **ruïne** bezocht.	Yara visited an old ruin in Limburg.
Bas heeft een **auto-ongeluk** gezien.	Bas saw a car accident.
Carlos is tijdens zijn vakantie op een **zee-egel** gestapt.	Carlos stepped on a sea urchin during his holiday.
Wil je vanavond **mee-eten**?	Would you like to eat with us tonight?

Why it works this way

Dutch reads vowel letters in teams. When you see **ie**, **ei**, **ui** or **ee**, you say one sound, as in **drie**, **klein**, **huis** and **twee** (more in vowel combinations). That is efficient, until two vowels meet by accident at the border between two syllables. Without dots, **geinteresseerd** would start like **klein**, and **ruine** would get the **ui** of **huis**. The trema says: these two are not a team.

Inside one word, two small dots are enough. When two complete words are glued together and their vowels could form a team, a hyphen is clearer, because you see both words at a glance: **auto** plus **ongeluk**. If the vowels cannot form a team, as in **politieagent**, the compound is simply written as one word. See writing compound words for the bigger picture.

As for the sound: it stays exactly what it would be without the dots. The **ï** in **ruïne** sounds like the **i** in **piano**; the **ï** in **geïnteresseerd** is the short **i** of **in**. The **ë** at the end of **België** and **ideeën** is the weak **e** of **lopen** (see the neutral e).

If you know German, forget the umlaut: German "ü" is a different sound from "u", but Dutch **ë** is just an **e** with a signal on top. English speakers have seen the same idea in naïve.

Remember: think of the two dots as a tiny pair of scissors. They cut the word at that vowel, and they never touch the sound.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben geinteresseerd.**~~
SAY **Ik ben geïnteresseerd.**
without dots, **ei** sounds like **klein**

NOT ~~**twee ideeen**~~
SAY **twee ideeën**
three e's in a row need a signal where the new syllable starts

NOT ~~**de patient**~~
SAY **de patiënt**
English spelling habit; without dots, **ie** sounds like **drie**

NOT ~~**een autoongeluk**~~
SAY **een auto-ongeluk**
oo would melt into one sound, so the compound gets a hyphen

NOT ~~**een zeeëgel**~~
SAY **een zee-egel**
the vowels meet where two words of a compound join: hyphen, not dots

Quick check

1. Write the plural of the word in brackets: **Mei heeft drie goede (idee).**
2. Choose: **Ahmed is erg (geinteresseerd / geïnteresseerd) in voetbal.**

3. Fix the sentence: **Joris heeft gisteren een autoongeluk gehad.**
4. One of these words needs a trema. Which one? **piano**, **radio**, **Belgie**

Answers on page 765.

Use it today

Send a friend a short Dutch message about your weekend that uses three trema words, for example **België**, **ideeën** and **geïnteresseerd**. On a phone or a Mac, hold down the e or i key to find the letter with dots.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/trema-and-hyphen

RULE 17 · LEVEL A1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

Capital letters

In Dutch, days and months get a small letter (**maandag**, **januari**), but languages and nationalities get a capital (**Nederlands**, **een Spanjaard**). Names of people, places and institutions are capitalised, the polite **u** is not, and when a word starting with **ij** needs a capital, both letters go up: **IJsland**.

The pattern

> **A capital letter starts a sentence or a name. Languages, nationalities and adjectives from place names count as names; days, months and the polite u do not.**

- Small: days and months, such as **dinsdag**, **zaterdag**, **maart**, **oktober**.
- Capital: languages, nationalities and adjectives made from countries and places: **Engels**, **Arabisch**, **een Nederlander**, **Spaanse wijn**.
- Capital: names of people, places, streets and institutions: **Fatima**, **Rotterdam**, **de Kalverstraat**, **de Belastingdienst**. Holidays are names too: **Koningsdag**, **Pasen**.
- Small: ordinary nouns, even important ones: **de gemeente**, **de huisarts**.
- **IJ**: when **ij** starts a name or a sentence, both letters go up: **IJmuiden**.
- Small: the polite **u** (formal "you"), and **ik** (I) inside a sentence.

Examples

Mijn verjaardag is in **juli**.	My birthday is in July.
Op **woensdag** gaat Sanne naar de markt.	On Wednesday Sanne goes to the market.

Priya spreekt **Engels** en een beetje **Nederlands**.	Priya speaks English and a little Dutch.
Carlos is een **Spanjaard**.	Carlos is a Spaniard.
Joris eet graag **Nederlandse** kaas.	Joris likes eating Dutch cheese.
IJs is lekker in de zomer.	Ice cream is lovely in summer.
Yara woont in **IJmuiden**.	Yara lives in IJmuiden.
Goedemiddag, kunt **u** mij helpen?	Good afternoon, can you help me?
Daan werkt bij de **Belastingdienst** in **Utrecht**.	Daan works for the tax office in Utrecht.

Why it works this way

A capital in Dutch says: this is a name, one specific person, place or organisation.

- **de stad** (any city) versus **Utrecht** (one city)
- **de universiteit** (any university) versus **de Universiteit Utrecht** (one institution)

Languages, nationalities and adjectives like **Nederlandse** belong to a place on the map: **Nederlands** goes with **Nederland**, **Spaans** and **Spanjaard** with **Spanje**. That link earns them the capital.

Days and months have no such link. Dutch files them with ordinary time words like **ochtend** (morning) and **zomer** (summer). English already writes morning and summer small; Dutch simply adds Monday and January to the same drawer. More in Days, months and dates.

The pair **ij** behaves almost like one letter (see ui, eu, ij, ei, ou, au, oe, ie), so it goes up as a pair. The water behind Amsterdam's central station is even called **het IJ**.

The polite **u** shows respect through the word itself, not through a capital. You may see **U** in prayers or very old-fashioned letters, but your email to

the **gemeente** uses **u**. See U or jij for when to use it.

Remember: a capital marks the start of a sentence, a name, or a word tied to a place on the map. Days and months stay small.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Tot Maandag!**~~
SAY **Tot maandag!**
days are lowercase

NOT ~~**Ik spreek een beetje nederlands.**~~
SAY **Ik spreek een beetje Nederlands.**
languages always take a capital, unlike in Spanish or French

NOT ~~**Ijsland**~~
SAY **IJsland**
ij is capitalised as a pair

NOT ~~**Kunt U mij helpen?**~~
SAY **Kunt u mij helpen?**
the polite **u** is lowercase in everyday writing

NOT ~~**Ik heb een nieuwe Fiets.**~~
SAY **Ik heb een nieuwe fiets.**
ordinary nouns are lowercase, unlike in German

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Het is vaak koud in Februari.**
2. Choose: **Mei komt uit China. Ze spreekt …** (**chinees** or **Chinees**)
3. Choose: **Bas gaat in augustus naar …** (**Ijsland** or **IJsland**)
4. Fix the sentence: **Kunt U de Huisarts bellen?**

Answers on page 765.

Use it today

Write a short message to a neighbour or colleague in Dutch with three facts: where you come from, which languages you speak and which day you are free this week. Then check every capital: does it start a sentence, or is it a name, a language, a nationality or an adjective from a place name like **Nederlandse**? If not, make it small, and make sure every language and nationality does have its capital.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/capital-letters

RULE 18 · LEVEL A2 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

When Dutch uses an apostrophe

Dutch uses an apostrophe mainly to protect a vowel. You write **auto's**, **foto's** and **menu's** because without the apostrophe the last vowel would look short. You also see it in abbreviations (**cd's**), after names like **Anna** (**Anna's fiets**) and in a few time words (**'s avonds**), but never in **Peters fiets**.

The pattern

> **Use an apostrophe before -s when a word or name ends in one vowel letter (a, i, o, u, or y after a consonant), and before the plural ending of abbreviations you say letter by letter. After vowel combinations and after é, add a plain -s: cadeaus, cafés.**

- Plurals: **auto's**, **foto's**, **menu's**, **taxi's**, **baby's**
- After vowel combinations or **é**, no apostrophe: **cadeaus**, **essays**, **cowboys**, **cafés**
- Abbreviations said letter by letter: **cd's**, **tv's**, **wc's**
- Names ending in one of these vowels: **Anna's fiets**, **Yara's jas**
- Most other names get only **-s**: **Peters fiets**, **Daans jas**, **Sannes tas**
- Names ending in an s sound get only an apostrophe: **Joris' fiets**
- Fixed time words: **'s morgens**, **'s middags**, **'s avonds**, **'s nachts**

Examples

Ik heb twee **foto's** van de kat gemaakt.	I took two photos of the cat.
Er staan veel **auto's** voor het huis.	There are a lot of cars in front of the house.
Het café heeft nieuwe **menu's**.	The café has new menus.

Bij het station wachten drie **taxi's**.	Three taxis are waiting at the station.
De buren hebben net twee **baby's** gekregen.	The neighbours have just had two babies.
Lotte krijgt veel **cadeaus** voor haar verjaardag.	Lotte gets lots of presents for her birthday.
Ik heb mijn oude **cd's** verkocht.	I sold my old CDs.
Fatima's moeder werkt bij de gemeente.	Fatima's mother works for the council.
Daans moeder werkt bij de huisarts.	Daan's mother works at the GP's practice.
's Morgens neemt Bas de trein naar Utrecht.	In the morning Bas takes the train to Utrecht.

Why it works this way

Dutch spelling thinks in syllables. In **au-to**, the **o** ends its syllable, so it sounds long, as in **zo**. Write **autos** and a reader splits it into **au-tos**: now the **s** closes the syllable, and a single vowel in a closed syllable is normally short, as in **bos**. The apostrophe says: the word ends here, the **s** is just an add-on. See open and closed syllables for the full logic.

With two vowel letters there is nothing to protect. Nobody misreads the **eau** in **cadeau** or the **ay** in **essay**, so you write **cadeaus** and **essays**. That is also why **baby's** gets an apostrophe (consonant before the **y**) but **cowboys** does not. An accent does the same job: the **é** in **café** already shows how to say it, so the plural is **cafés**.

Names follow the same idea. **Annas** would look like it ends in a short **a**, so you write **Anna's**. **Peter** and **Daan** end in a consonant, so there is nothing to protect: **Peters fiets**, **Daans jas**. A final unstressed **e** is the neutral sound, not a long vowel, so **Sanne** becomes **Sannes**, just like **tante** becomes **tantes**. Names ending in an s sound, like **Joris** or **Carlos**, take

only the apostrophe: **Joris' fiets**, **Carlos' tas**. More ways to show ownership are in possession.

Abbreviations that you say letter by letter get an apostrophe before the plural ending, so you can see where the abbreviation stops: **tv's**, **cd's**, **pc's**. An abbreviation that you say as an ordinary word and write entirely in small letters follows the normal plural spelling rules: **vips**, but **havo's**, because **havo** ends in a single **o**. If it is written with a capital letter, it gets an apostrophe before the plural ending: **vips**, but **VIP's**.

The time words are fossils. The **'s** is short for the old word **des** ("of the"), so **'s avonds** once meant "of the evening". Today it simply means "in the evening" or "in the evenings". Learn **'s morgens**, **'s middags**, **'s avonds** and **'s nachts** as fixed words. At the start of a sentence, the capital goes on the next word (see capital letters).

You will also meet apostrophes in informal short forms like **m'n** and **'t**. Those are a different story, told in spoken shortcuts.

Remember: the apostrophe is a doorstop. It holds the syllable open so the last vowel can stay long.

Watch out

NOT ~~twee autos~~
SAY **twee auto's**
without the apostrophe the o reads as short

NOT ~~Peter's fiets~~
SAY **Peters fiets**
Peter ends in a consonant, so just add -s

NOT ~~Sanne's verjaardag~~
SAY **Sannes verjaardag**
an unstressed e at the end needs no apostrophe

NOT ~~twee café's~~
SAY **twee cafés**
the accent already shows how to say the é, so add a plain -s

NOT ~~'S avonds fiets ik naar huis.~~
SAY **'s Avonds fiets ik naar huis.**
the capital goes on the word after 's

Quick check

1. Fill in the plural of **mango**: **Ik koop drie … op de markt.**
2. Choose: **Dit is (Daan's / Daans) laptop.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Ik sport savonds.**
4. Fix the sentence: **We hebben thuis twee tvs.**

Answers on page 765.

Use it today

Next time you are in the supermarket, find three plurals with an apostrophe on signs or price tags, like **kiwi's**, **avocado's** or **pizza's**. Then write one sentence about your day with **'s morgens** or **'s avonds**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/apostrophe

RULE 19 · LEVEL B1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

How sounds blend in fast speech

In fast Dutch, sounds change to suit their neighbours, and short words melt into each other. **Zakdoek** sounds like **zagdoek** (with the g of English go), **op de** like **ob de**, and **heb je** can come out as **heppie**. The spelling stays the same, and your main job is to recognise these blends when you hear them, not to copy them.

The pattern

> **Neighbouring sounds adjust to each other, and short unstressed words melt onto the word before them. You hear the blend, but you write the normal spelling.**

- Before **b** or **d**, a sound like **p**, **t**, **k**, **f** or **s** often starts to buzz: **op de** sounds like **ob de**, **is dat** like **iz dat**.
- A **k** that buzzes becomes the hard g of English go, not the Dutch **g** sound: **zakdoek** sounds like **zagdoek**. In the sound spellings in this lesson, **g** means that English g.
- After **p**, **t** or **k**, the sounds **v** and **z** usually lose their buzz: **op vakantie** sounds like **op fakantie**, **ik zie** like **ik sie**.
- Short unstressed words such as **je**, **hij** and **het** shrink and stick to the word before them: **heb je** can sound like **heppie**, **heeft hij** like **heeftie**. **Niet** often loses its **t**.
- The faster and more relaxed the speech, the more blending you hear.

Examples

Waar is mijn **zakdoek** (zagdoek)?	Where is my handkerchief?
Je fiets staat **op de** (ob de) stoep.	Your bike is on the pavement.

Is dat (iz dat) jouw fiets?	Is that your bike?
We gaan in mei **op vakantie** (op fakantie).	We're going on holiday in May.
Ik zie (ik sie) je morgen op het werk.	I'll see you at work tomorrow.
Heb je (heppie) de trein van acht uur gehaald?	Did you catch the eight o'clock train?
Heeft hij (heeftie) de huur al betaald?	Has he paid the rent yet?
Sorry, **ik weet het niet** ('k weet 't nie).	Sorry, I don't know.

Why it works this way

Put your fingers on your throat and say **zzz**, then **sss**. You feel a buzz with **z** but not with **s**. Sounds with that buzz are called voiced (the vocal cords vibrate).

Switching the buzz on and off in the middle of a word is extra work, so neighbours agree. Picture **b** and **d** as bossy: they make the sound before them buzz too. The letters **v** and **z** are pushovers: after **p**, **t** or **k** they give up their own buzz. So **op de** gets a **b** sound, while **op vakantie** gets an **f**. A buzzing **k** turns into the g of English go, because that is simply a **k** with the buzz switched on. The Dutch **g** is a different, rougher sound, so it does not appear here.

Melting is simpler. Unstressed words like **je**, **het** and **hij** carry little information, so speakers spend little effort on them, just as English turns "did you" into "didja". The **b** of **heb** already sounds like **p** (see why d sounds like t at the end of a word), and **je** glues on. The shortcuts **'t** and **'k** come from the same habit (see spoken shortcuts).

Recognising blends helps your listening far more than producing them helps your speaking. Clear pronunciation sounds perfectly natural, the voicing in **zakdoek** tends to appear by itself as you speed up, and **heppie** is very casual, so save it for friends.

Formal speech blends less. Newsreaders and people giving a presentation shorten small words less often and less strongly, so you hear the **t** of **niet** more often. They still blend some, though: the **b** sound in **op de** is normal even on the news. Speakers and regions differ, so treat all this as a strong tendency, not a strict rule.

Remember: hear the blend, write the word. Your ears get **heppie**, your pen gets **heb je**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Heppie even tijd?**~~
SAY **Heb je even tijd?**
heppie is only how it sounds

NOT ~~**Waar is mijn zagdoek?**~~
SAY **Waar is mijn zakdoek?**
before **d** the **k** can sound like the g of English go, but you write **k**

NOT ~~**Dat zal wel opfallen.**~~
SAY **Dat zal wel opvallen.**
after **p** the **v** sounds like **f**, but the spelling keeps **v**

NOT ~~**Sorry, ik kan vanavond nie.**~~
SAY **Sorry, ik kan vanavond niet.**
the **t** often disappears in speech, never in writing

Quick check

1. A colleague asks: **Heppie mijn mail gelezen?** Write the first two words in normal spelling.
2. Your neighbour says: **Heeftie zijn fiets al terug?** Who is it about: **jij**, **hij** or **het**?

3. Fix the spelling: **Ik leg de sleutel ob de tafel.**
4. Where will you hear the least blending: a chat at a birthday party, the evening news on TV, or a quick question at the supermarket checkout?

Answers on page 766.

Use it today

On the train or in the supermarket queue today, listen to people chatting and catch three melted chunks, such as **heppie**, **heeftie** or **'k weet 't nie**. Write each one down in its normal spelling.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/sound-blending

RULE 20 · LEVEL B1 · SOUNDS AND SPELLING

Writing compound words

In Dutch, a compound (a noun built from two or more words) is written as one word: **voetbalveld**, **fietsenstalling**, **huisartsenpost**. Sometimes a small linking sound glues the parts together, written **-s-** or **-en-**. A hyphen is the exception: the main cases are two vowels that would run into each other, as in **auto-ongeluk**, many place names like **Noord-Holland**, and compounds with letters, digits or most abbreviations, like **tv-programma**.

The pattern

> **A compound noun is one word. You may need a linking -s- or -en- between the parts, and a hyphen mainly where two vowels clash, in many place names and next to letters, digits or most abbreviations.**

- **One thing, one word: het voetbalveld**, **de klantenservice**. The last part says what it is, the first part says which kind.
- **Linking -s-:** write it when you hear it: **het dorpsplein**, **het verjaardagsfeest**. No s in your mouth, no s on paper: **het stadhuis**, **het fietspad**.
- **Linking -en-:** if you hear a neutral e between the parts and the first part has a plural ending only in **-en**, write **-en-**: **de boekenkast** (**boeken**), **de pannenkoek** (**pannen**). A few words keep just **-e-**, such as **de zonnebril**, because there is only one sun.
- **Hyphen for clashing vowels:** when the end of the first part and the start of the second could be read as one vowel sound: **het auto-ongeluk**, **de zee-egel**.
- **Hyphen in place names:** a direction word in front of the name of a region or country: **Noord-Holland**, **Zuid-Afrika**, **Oost-Europa**. **Zee** is not

a name, so **de Noordzee** is one word.

- **Hyphen with letters, digits and abbreviations: het T-shirt**, **het 06-nummer**, **het tv-programma**. An abbreviation you say letter by letter takes a hyphen. One you say as a word joins up if it is written in lowercase, like **de pincode**, but keeps the hyphen if it has capitals: **een NAVO-land**.

Examples

Carlos staat elke zaterdag langs het **voetbalveld** omdat zijn zoon een wedstrijd heeft.	Carlos stands by the football pitch every Saturday because his son has a match.
Daan zet zijn fiets in de **fietsenstalling** bij het station.	Daan puts his bike in the bicycle parking at the station.
's Ochtends is het druk op het **fietspad** langs het kanaal.	In the morning the cycle path along the canal is busy.
Er is vanavond een markt op het **dorpsplein**, dus ik ga even kijken.	There is a market on the village square tonight, so I'm going to have a look.
Bas vraagt of je zaterdag op zijn **verjaardagsfeest** komt.	Bas is asking if you're coming to his birthday party on Saturday.
Fatima bakt **pannenkoeken** omdat haar dochter jarig is.	Fatima is making pancakes because it's her daughter's birthday.
Sanne heeft een nieuwe **boekenkast** gekocht, maar die past niet door de deur.	Sanne bought a new bookcase, but it doesn't fit through the door.
In het weekend bel je de **huisartsenpost**, want de praktijk is dan dicht.	At the weekend you call the out-of-hours GP service, because the practice is closed then.
Ahmed was te laat omdat er een **auto-ongeluk** op de snelweg was.	Ahmed was late because there was a car accident on the motorway.

Priya woont in Haarlem, de hoofdstad van **Noord-Holland**.	Priya lives in Haarlem, the capital of North Holland.

Why it works this way

Think of a compound as a label for one thing. The last part is the main word, and everything in front narrows it down: a **boekenkast** is a kind of **kast**. That is also why the whole word takes the article of its last part: **het voetbalveld**, because of **het veld** (see Compound nouns take the article of the last part).

English often leaves a space (football pitch, birthday party). In Dutch, a space breaks the label in two, and readers stumble. The mistake is so common that Dutch has a name for it: **de Engelse ziekte**, the English disease.

The linking letters are glue, not meaning. The **-en-** looks like a plural, but a **pannenkoek** is baked in one pan, and many speakers do not even pronounce the n. The spelling simply borrows the plural (see Plurals with -en) so you can work it out on paper. The **-s-** goes back to an old possessive ending and today simply follows the sound. There is no complete rule, but words ending in **-heid** almost always take one: **het gezondheidscentrum**.

The hyphen is a small fence. Without it, **autoongeluk** shows **oo**, and your eye reads one long vowel. The same fence keeps letters and digits readable: **tvprogramma** is hard to decode. Within a word that is not a compound, such as a plural, Dutch uses a trema instead: **zeeën** (more in The trema in ë and ï, and the hyphen).

Remember: one thing, one word. Then ask four quick questions: do I hear an **s**, does the first part have a plural in **-en**, would two vowels bump into each other, and is there a letter, digit or abbreviation?

Watch out

NOT ~~het voetbal veld~~
SAY **het voetbalveld**
a compound is one word, whatever English does

NOT ~~de pannekoek~~
SAY **de pannenkoek**
the plural is **pannen**, so write the n even if you don't say it

NOT ~~het verjaardagfeest~~
SAY **het verjaardagsfeest**
you hear an s, so you write one

NOT ~~het autoongeluk~~
SAY **het auto-ongeluk**
the two o's would merge into one long vowel

NOT ~~Noord Holland~~
SAY **Noord-Holland**
a direction word before a region name gets a hyphen

Quick check

1. Fill in nothing, **-e-** or **-en-**: **Yara koopt een nieuwe hond...mand.**
2. Fix the sentence: **We hebben morgen om tien uur een team vergadering.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Joris werkt bij een radioomroep in Hilversum.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed werkt in Eindhoven, in Noord Brabant.**

Answers on page 766.

Use it today

Collect three compound words from signs at the station, in the supermarket or on the website of your **gemeente**, for example **vertrektijden** or **statiegeldautomaat**. Split each one into its parts and note the glue: nothing, **-s-**, **-en-** or a hyphen.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/compound-spelling

Nouns and de or het

Articles, plurals, diminutives, and a calm way to deal with de and het.

- De or het: the two words for "the"
- Een: the word for "a"
- When Dutch uses no article
- Plurals with -en
- Plurals with -s
- Irregular plurals
- Diminutives: -je, -tje, -pje, -etje, -kje
- What diminutives really mean
- Clues that a noun is a het-word
- Clues that a noun is a de-word
- Compound nouns take the article of the last part
- How to actually learn de and het
- Countable and uncountable nouns
- Showing possession: van, -s and zijn/haar
- Making nouns from verbs and adjectives
- Male and female forms: leraar and lerares
- Group nouns and verb agreement
- Nouns with two plurals or only a plural

RULE 21 · LEVEL A1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

De or het: the two words for "the"

Dutch has two definite articles, two words for "the": **de** and **het**. Most nouns (words for people, things and places) take **de**, a smaller group takes **het**, and every plural (more than one of something) takes **de**. So you never learn just **huis**: you learn **het huis** (the house), just as you learn **de fiets** (the bike).

The pattern

> **A singular noun (just one) takes de or het, and you learn which one together with the noun. A plural noun always takes de.**

- **de** is for common-gender nouns (once masculine or feminine), the big group: **de man**, **de vrouw**, **de trein**, **de fiets**.
- **het** is for neuter nouns (neither masculine nor feminine), a smaller group: **het huis**, **het boek**, **het water**, **het station**.
- In the plural the difference disappears: **het huis** becomes **de huizen**, **het kind** becomes **de kinderen**.
- Every singular diminutive (a "small" form of a noun, ending in **-je**) takes **het**: **het meisje**, **het kopje**. In the plural they take **de**, like every plural: **de meisjes**, **de kopjes**.

Examples

Het huis is oud.	The house is old.
De huizen zijn oud.	The houses are old.
Het kind speelt buiten.	The child is playing outside.
De kinderen spelen buiten.	The children are playing outside.

De trein is te laat.	The train is late.
Het weer is mooi vandaag.	The weather is nice today.
De melk staat in **de** koelkast.	The milk is in the fridge.
Waar is **het** station?	Where is the station?
Het meisje heet Yara.	The girl is called Yara.

Why it works this way

Dutch once had three genders (grammar groups for nouns): masculine, feminine and neuter, a bit like German still has. Masculine and feminine nouns use the same article, **de**, and in the Netherlands the difference between them has mostly faded. That shared group is called common gender. Neuter nouns kept their own article, **het**.

So the article belongs to the word, not to its meaning. A girl is clearly female, yet it is **het meisje**, because **meisje** is a diminutive, and singular diminutives take **het**. A table has no gender at all, yet it is **de tafel**.

A useful way to think of it: the article is the noun's surname. You would not learn a new colleague's first name and forget the family name, so don't learn **huis** without **het**. The word for "a" will not help you remember, because it is **een** for every noun: **een huis**, **een fiets** (see Een: the word for "a"). There are some clues that a noun is a het-word, but for most nouns you simply learn the article, and How to actually learn de and het shows how to make that stick. If you have to guess, guess **de**: you will be right more often than not.

Remember: you don't learn **huis**, you learn **het huis**. And more than one is always **de**.

Watch out

NOT ~~de huis~~
SAY **het huis**
huis is a **het**-word; English has only one "the"

NOT ~~het huizen~~
SAY **de huizen**
every plural takes **de**

NOT ~~de meisje~~
SAY **het meisje**
singular diminutives always take **het**, whatever they mean

NOT ~~het auto~~
SAY **de auto**
German das Auto is neuter, but the Dutch word is not

Quick check

1. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... huizen in Amsterdam zijn duur.**
2. Choose the right word: **(De / Het) broodje is lekker.**
3. Fix the sentence: **De water is koud.**
4. Fill in **de** or **het**: **Ahmed fietst naar ... station.**

Answers on page 766.

Use it today

Open your fridge, pick five things and look up each word with its article in a dictionary, for example **de kaas** or **het brood**. Write them on sticky notes with the article and say them out loud whenever you grab one.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/de-and-het

RULE 22 · LEVEL A1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Een: the word for "a"

The Dutch word for "a" and "an" is **een**. You put it before any singular countable noun (one thing you can count), whether that noun takes **de** or **het**: **een fiets** (a bike), **een huis** (a house). It sounds like a quick "un" and has no plural. The number one is also **een**, but said with a long vowel, and written **één** when the meaning could otherwise be unclear.

The pattern

> **Use een for "a" or "an" before any singular countable noun. It stays the same for nouns with de and nouns with het.**

- **de fiets** (the bike) becomes **een fiets** (a bike).
- **het huis** (the house) becomes **een huis** (a house).
- Say **een** (a) as a short, weak "un", not like "een" in English "seen". It is the neutral vowel from The neutral e and the endings -en, -ig and -lijk.
- The number one has a long vowel, like "ane" in "lane". It is often spelled **een** too, but you write **één**, with accents, when a reader might otherwise read "a".
- More than one? Drop **een**: **een boek** (a book), **boeken** (books). See Plurals with -en.

Examples

Ik heb **een fiets**.	I have a bike.
Priya woont in **een huis** bij het park.	Priya lives in a house near the park.
Joris eet **een appel**.	Joris is eating an apple.

Lotte heeft **een kat** en **een konijn**.	Lotte has a cat and a rabbit.
Mei leest **een boek**.	Mei is reading a book.
Mei leest **boeken**.	Mei reads books.
Ahmed heeft **een zoon**.	Ahmed has a son.
Ahmed heeft **één zoon**, niet twee.	Ahmed has one son, not two.
Het is **één uur**.	It is one o'clock.

Why it works this way

The word **een** started out as the number one. People used it so often and so lightly that it wore down into a small, unstressed word meaning "a". English did the same: "an" comes from an old word for "one".

That history explains the pattern. "A" means one thing, so it has no plural. And this little word never changes for **de** or **het**, so you can say "a" correctly before you know a noun's article. If you speak German or Spanish, enjoy it: no "ein/eine", no "un/una". Still learn each noun with **de** or **het**, because adjectives will need it later: **een groot huis**, **een grote fiets**.

Nouns you cannot count, like **geld** (money) or **melk** (milk), normally take no **een**; see Countable and uncountable nouns. In a café, **een koffie** is fine, because you mean one cup. Dutch also drops **een** in some places where English keeps "a", as in **Ik ben docent** (I am a teacher): more in When Dutch uses no article.

Remember: een is a lazy **één**. Say it weak and it means "a"; say it long and you are counting. The accents are just a signal for readers when the meaning could be unclear.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik koop een appels**~~
SAY **Ik koop appels**
een has no plural

NOT ~~**Ik heb fiets**~~
SAY **Ik heb een fiets**
one countable thing needs a word in front; easy to forget if your language, like Arabic, has no separate word for "a"

NOT ~~**Ik heb een geld**~~
SAY **Ik heb geld**
geld cannot be counted

NOT ~~**Het kost maar eén euro**~~
SAY **Het kost maar één euro**
the number gets an accent on both letters e

Quick check

1. Choose the correct sentence: **Ik koop een appels** or **Ik koop appels**?
2. What does **Daan heeft één broer** mean: "Daan has a brother" or "Daan has one brother"?
3. Fix the sentence: **Bas heeft fiets.** (Bas has a bike.)
4. **het raam** means "the window". How do you say "a window"?

Answers on page 766.

Use it today

At the supermarket, name five things in your basket under your breath with **een**: **een brood**, **een komkommer**, **een pak melk**. Then name one thing you bought more than one of, without **een**: **appels**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/een

RULE 23 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

When Dutch uses no article

Dutch often uses no article (the little word for "the" or "a": **de**, **het**, **een**), sometimes where English needs one. To say "I am a nurse", you usually say **Ik ben verpleegkundige**, with no **een**. You also skip the article for plural or uncountable things in general (**Katten zijn slim**, **Ik drink geen koffie**) and in fixed phrases such as **naar huis** and **op kantoor**.

The pattern

> **Dutch usually uses no article before a plain job or nationality after zijn, worden or werken als, before plural or uncountable nouns used in general, and in a set of fixed phrases.**

- Job or nationality: **Ik ben kok. Hij is Nederlander.** (or simply **Hij is Nederlands.**)
- Add a describing adjective such as **goed** or **aardig** and een comes back: **Zij is een goede kok.**
- Uncountable nouns in general (stuff you cannot count, like coffee or bread): **Melk is gezond.**
- Plural nouns in general: **Fietsen zijn hier duur.**
- Fixed phrases (word combinations you learn as one block): **naar huis**, **naar school**, **naar bed**, **op kantoor**, **met vakantie**.
- Outside these patterns, one countable thing (one dog, one bike) usually still needs an article, even when you mean no particular one: **Ik wil een fiets kopen.**
- In the negative, use **geen** before a job or a noun without an article (**Ik ben geen kok. Ik drink geen koffie.**) and **niet** with the fixed phrases (**Ik ga niet naar huis.**). More in Geen or niet?

Examples

Ik ben **verpleegkundige**.	I am a nurse.
Carlos is **Spanjaard**, maar hij woont al tien jaar in Utrecht.	Carlos is a Spaniard, but he has lived in Utrecht for ten years.
Daan wil **leraar** worden.	Daan wants to become a teacher.
Fatima is **een goede tandarts**.	Fatima is a good dentist.
Ik drink geen **koffie**, alleen **thee**.	I don't drink coffee, only tea.
Katten zijn slim.	Cats are clever.
Yara gaat om acht uur **naar school**.	Yara goes to school at eight.
Joris is vandaag niet **op kantoor**.	Joris isn't at the office today.
Lotte en Bas zijn **met vakantie** in Frankrijk.	Lotte and Bas are on holiday in France.
Ahmed fietst **naar huis**.	Ahmed cycles home.

Why it works this way

Articles are not only for particular things: **een** happily introduces a bike you have not even chosen yet. What decides is the kind of noun and the construction it sits in.

A plain job or nationality after **zijn** works like a label, much like an adjective. Compare **Ik ben moe** and **Ik ben kok**: same shape, no article in either. **Ik ben een kok** is grammatical, but it is not the normal way to answer **Wat doe je voor werk?** Add a describing adjective and you are saying what kind of cook someone is, so **een** returns. Job titles that contain an adjective, such as **zelfstandig ondernemer** (self-employed), are an exception: **Ik ben zelfstandig ondernemer.** German and Spanish also leave out the article before jobs, so this trap is mainly an English one.

Remember: on a form from the **gemeente**, you fill in the box **Beroep** (job) with **verpleegkundige**, not **een verpleegkundige**. Say your job the same way: **Ik ben verpleegkundige.** Use this hook for jobs only, because forms leave out many words that full sentences need.

For things in general, Dutch works like English: "cats are clever", not "the cats are clever". Spanish, French and Arabic put an article here, so speakers of those languages need to watch it. In ordinary sentences this works with plural and uncountable nouns, not with one single countable thing: **Een hond is een zoogdier.** (A dog is a mammal.) Dropping that **een** is typical for speakers of Arabic, Russian or Polish, which have no word like "a". For coffee, rice and other stuff, see Countable and uncountable nouns. These pairs show the difference:

- **Ik drink koffie.** (coffee in general) and **De koffie is koud.** (the coffee in front of me)
- **Katten zijn slim.** (cats in general) and **De katten van Sanne zijn slim.** (Sanne's cats)
- **Ik ga naar huis.** (home) and **Ik ga naar het huis van Priya.** (Priya's house)

Fixed phrases are habits, not logic, and they match English only partly. **Op kantoor** is "at the office", while "at work" is **op mijn werk** or **op het werk**, and "into town" is **naar de stad**. **Op vakantie** is just as correct as **met vakantie**. Learn each one as a block, like the phrases in Fixed prepositional phrases.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Mei is goede arts.**~~
SAY **Mei is een goede arts.**
a describing adjective brings **een** back

NOT ~~**Ik wil fiets kopen.**~~
SAY **Ik wil een fiets kopen.**
one countable thing needs **een**, even if any bike will do

NOT ~~**Ik ben op werk.**~~
SAY **Ik ben op mijn werk.**
English "at work" has no article, standard Dutch needs **mijn** or **het**

Quick check

1. Fill in **een** or nothing: **Sanne is … aardige huisarts.**
2. Choose the sentence about dogs in general: **De honden zijn trouw.** or **Honden zijn trouw.**
3. Fill in **de**, **het** or nothing: **Ik ben moe. Ik ga vroeg naar … bed.**
4. Fill in **geen** or **niet**: **Emma werkt vandaag thuis, dus ze is … op kantoor.**

Answers on page 767.

Use it today

Say three sentences about yourself out loud with no article: your job, your nationality and something you never eat or drink (**Ik ben ingenieur. Ik ben Braziliaans. Ik eet geen vlees.**). Use them at the next birthday party when someone asks **Wat doe je voor werk?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/no-article

RULE 24 · LEVEL A1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Plurals with -en

For most Dutch nouns, you make the plural (more than one) by adding **-en** to the singular (one): **een boek**, **twee boeken**. Sometimes the spelling changes a little, as in **boom** and **bomen**, **kat** and **katten**, **huis** and **huizen**. The stress (the strong beat) stays where it was.

The pattern

Add -en to the singular. Change the spelling only where needed, usually to keep the vowel sounding the same.

- A double **aa**, **ee**, **oo** or **uu** before one final consonant loses a letter: **de boom**, **bomen**. Before two consonants it stays: **het feest**, **feesten**.
- After a short vowel in a stressed last syllable, a single final consonant letter is normally doubled: **de kat**, **katten**.
- A final **s** or **f** often becomes **z** or **v**: **het huis**, **huizen**; **de brief**, **brieven**.
- Every plural takes **de**: **het huis**, **de huizen**.
- Many nouns ending in unstressed **-el**, **-er** or **-je** take -s instead.

Examples

De **fietsen** staan bij het station.	The bikes are at the station.
In onze straat staan veel **bomen**.	There are a lot of trees in our street.
Emma heeft drie **katten**.	Emma has three cats.
De **huizen** in Utrecht zijn duur.	The houses in Utrecht are expensive.
Priya schrijft twee **brieven** aan de gemeente.	Priya writes two letters to the municipality.

De **tomaten** zijn vandaag goedkoop. The tomatoes are cheap today.

Why it works this way

The ending **-en** adds a syllable, and Dutch spelling follows one deal: a vowel that ends its syllable usually sounds long, even written once. So **bo-men** needs only one **o**, while **kat** needs a second **t** to close the syllable and keep the **a** short: **kat-ten**. More in open and closed syllables.

Dutch words almost never end in a written **z** or **v**, so the **z** of **huizen** and the **v** of **brieven** appear as **s** and **f** in the singular.

The new syllable is weak, so the stress stays put: **pro-BLEEM**, **pro-BLE-men**. A few words in **-or** shift it: **de MO-tor**, **mo-TO-ren**. Some common nouns also change their vowel, such as **dag**, **dagen** and **schip**, **schepen**: learn those one by one.

Remember: the plural is the singular plus a soft extra syllable, spelled so the vowel usually keeps its sound.

Watch out

NOT ~~twee boomen~~
SAY **twee bomen**
one **o** is enough in **bo-men**

NOT ~~twee busen~~
SAY **twee bussen**
the double **s** keeps the **u** short

NOT ~~de huisen~~
SAY **de huizen**
the **s** becomes **z** after **ui**

NOT ~~vier boeks~~
SAY **vier boeken**
the plural of **boek** is **boeken**

Quick check

1. Fill in the plural: **Daan kent alle … in Leiden.** (**de straat**)
2. Fill in the plural: **Op maandag heb ik twee …** (**de les**)
3. Choose: **De … in deze supermarkt zijn laag.** (**prijsen** or **prijzen**)
4. Fix the sentence: **Fatima gaat dit weekend naar twee festen.**

Answers on page 767.

Use it today

Write your next shopping list with numbers: **twee broden**, **zes tomaten**, **drie citroenen**. Say each plural aloud, with the stress where the singular has it.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/plural-en

RULE 25 · LEVEL A1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Plurals with -s

Many Dutch nouns form their plural (the form for more than one) with **-s**. This is usual for nouns ending in an unstressed (said without emphasis) **-el**, **-em**, **-en** or **-er**, for diminutives (small forms) in **-je**, and for many borrowed words: **tafels**, **meisjes**, **films**. After a single final a, i, o or u, write **'s**: **auto's**.

The pattern

Most nouns with an unstressed -el, -em, -en or -er at the end, all diminutives and many loanwords take -s. After a single final a, i, o or u, or a y after a consonant, the -s becomes 's.

- Weak endings: **de tafel**, **tafels**; **de bezem**, **bezems** (brooms); **de jongen**, **jongens**; **de kamer**, **kamers**.
- Diminutives: **het meisje**, **meisjes**; **het broodje**, **broodjes** (bread rolls).
- Loanwords (borrowed words): **de computer**, **computers**; **de film**, **films**; **het hotel**, **hotels**.
- With **'s**: **de auto**, **auto's**; **de taxi**, **taxi's**; **de baby**, **baby's**.
- No apostrophe after a vowel combination: **het cadeau**, **cadeaus** (presents); **het essay**, **essays**.

Examples

In de keuken staan twee **tafels**.	There are two tables in the kitchen.
De **jongens** fietsen naar school.	The boys cycle to school.
Fatima koopt zes **broodjes**.	Fatima buys six bread rolls.
Daan kijkt graag **films**.	Daan likes watching films.

Voor het huis staan drie **auto's**.	There are three cars in front of the house.
In de trein huilen twee **baby's**.	Two babies are crying on the train.
Sanne krijgt veel **cadeaus**.	Sanne gets a lot of presents.

Why it works this way

Word stress (which part of a word you say loudest) helps explain the weak endings. **De bel** (doorbell) is one stressed beat and gets the usual ending from Plurals with -en: **bellen**. In **tafel** the last beat is already a soft "uh". A second soft beat would drag, so **tafels** just adds a quick **-s**. Many loanwords take **-s** even with stress at the end: **hotels**.

This is a strong tendency, not an iron law: a few nouns with a weak ending take **-en**, such as **de engel**, **engelen** (angel). Learn each noun with its plural, and find the real rebels in Irregular plurals.

Remember: the apostrophe is a small fence around a single vowel letter at the end, so nobody reads **autos** with a short o, as in **bos**. A vowel combination needs no fence: **cadeaus**.

Watch out

NOT ~~drie kameren~~
SAY **drie kamers**
weak last syllable, so just **-s**

NOT ~~de autos~~
SAY **de auto's**
the apostrophe keeps the o long

NOT ~~twee cadeau's~~
SAY **twee cadeaus**
no apostrophe after a vowel combination

NOT ~~veel boeks~~
SAY **veel boeken**
English habit: **boek** takes **-en**

Quick check

1. Fill in the plural: Joris heeft twee … . (sleutel)
2. Choose: Mei bestelt twee (pizzas / pizza's / pizzaën).
3. Fill in the plural: Carlos koopt vier … . (broodje)
4. Fix the sentence: Ahmed werkt met drie laptop's.

Answers on page 767.

Use it today

Write your next shopping list in Dutch with at least four s-plurals, such as **zes broodjes**, **twee pizza's** and **vier appels**. Say each item out loud in the supermarket.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/plural-s

RULE 26 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Irregular plurals

Most Dutch nouns form the plural (the form for more than one) with **-en** or **-s**, but a small group of everyday words does its own thing: **stad** becomes **steden**, **kind** becomes **kinderen** and **koe** becomes **koeien**. No rule predicts most of these, so learn each one as a pair: singular (one) and plural together. The good news is that the list is short, and you will use most of these words every week.

The pattern

> **A few common nouns have an irregular plural: one that does not follow the usual -en or -s rules. Learn the singular and plural as one pair.**

- Vowel change: **stad, steden** (city); **schip, schepen** (ship); **lid, leden** (member). The short a or i becomes a long e.
- Extra **-eren**: **kind, kinderen** (child); **ei, eieren** (egg); **lied, liederen** (song).
- A one-off: **koe, koeien** (cow).
- Words ending in **-heid** get **-heden**: **mogelijkheid, mogelijkheden** (possibility).
- Some Latin loanwords (words borrowed from Latin) have two plurals: **museum** gives **musea** or **museums**, **centrum** gives **centra** or **centrums**.
- As with every plural, the article is **de**: **het kind**, **de kinderen**.

Examples

Amsterdam en Rotterdam zijn grote **steden**.	Amsterdam and Rotterdam are big cities.

In de haven liggen twee **schepen**.	There are two ships in the harbour.
Sanne en Daan zijn **leden** van de tennisclub.	Sanne and Daan are members of the tennis club.
Fatima heeft drie **kinderen**.	Fatima has three children.
Ik heb in de supermarkt zes **eieren** gekocht.	I bought six eggs at the supermarket.
Naast het fietspad staan veel **koeien**.	There are lots of cows next to the cycle path.
Joris heeft twee **mogelijkheden**: de trein of de bus.	Joris has two options: the train or the bus.
Priya heeft dit weekend twee **musea** bezocht.	Priya visited two museums this weekend.
Den Haag heeft veel **museums**.	The Hague has lots of museums.

Why it works this way

These are old words that people have used every day for centuries, and words used that often resist change. Over time, Dutch moved most nouns over to the regular plurals with -en and **-s**, but the most frequent ones kept their old forms. English did the same: you say men and feet, not mans and foots.

The vowel change comes from an old sound shift: when a syllable was added, a short vowel often became long. Usually you only hear this. **Dag** has a short a, but **dagen** has a long one, just like **bad, baden**. In **schip** and **lid** the vowel also changed colour, so you see it in the spelling too. The lesson on open and closed syllables explains why **dagen** needs only one a.

The **-eren** words are double plurals. Long ago **kinder** already meant children, and later speakers added **-en** on top. Handy detail: the common **-eren** words are all het-words in the singular: **het kind**, **het ei**, **het lied**.

Remember: kinderen and children are twins. Both are an old plural with a second plural stuck on top: child, childer, children, and **kind**, **kinder**, **kinderen**.

The **-heid** group is the one real rule in this lesson: every countable **-heid** word gets **-heden**, such as **gelegenheid, gelegenheden** (occasion). Words like **gezondheid** (health) simply have no plural.

Latin already had the plural **musea**, and Dutch kept it next to the regular **museums**. Both are correct and you will hear both. The lesson on nouns with two plurals has more of these.

Watch out

NOT ~~twee stadden~~
SAY **twee steden**
the vowel changes, and the d is not doubled

NOT ~~drie kinder~~
SAY **drie kinderen**
Dutch adds **-en** to the old **-er**, unlike German

NOT ~~veel koes~~
SAY **veel koeien**
no English-style **-s** here

NOT ~~twee mogelijkheiden~~
SAY **twee mogelijkheden**
-heid always becomes **-heden**

NOT ~~zes eien~~
SAY **zes eieren**
ei takes **-eren**, just like **kind**

Quick check

1. Fill in the plural of **stad**: **Utrecht en Leiden zijn mooie oude (...).**
2. Choose: **Mijn buren hebben vier (kinds / kinderen / kinden).**
3. Fix the sentence: **Er zijn veel mogelijkheiden.**
4. Fill in the plural of **koe**: **Op de boerderij van Bas staan twintig (...).**

Answers on page 767.

Use it today

Next time you do your shopping or take the train, name what you see in the plural, out loud or in your head: **eieren** in the supermarket, **koeien** from the train window, **kinderen** on their bikes. Saying the pair, **kind, kinderen**, a few times a day is how these forms start to feel normal.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/irregular-plurals

RULE 27 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Diminutives: -je, -tje, -pje, -etje, -kje

A diminutive is the "small" form of a noun, and you usually make it by adding **-je**: **huis** becomes **huisje**. Depending on the last sound of the word, the ending can also be **-tje**, **-pje**, **-etje** or **-kje**. In the singular, every diminutive is a **het** word, and the plural ends in **-s**. You will hear them all day, from **een kopje koffie** to **een broodje kaas**.

The pattern

> **Add -je to most nouns, unless the last sound asks for -tje, -pje, -etje or -kje. In the singular, the result always takes het.**

- **-je** after most consonants, such as k, s or t: **boek**, **boekje**; **huis**, **huisje**; **kat**, **katje**.
- **-tje** after a vowel. A single final a, o or u is written double: **oma**, **omaatje**; **auto**, **autootje**; **paraplu**, **parapluutje**. A final i usually becomes **ie** (**taxi**, **taxietje**). A final y after a consonant gets an apostrophe (**baby**, **baby'tje**), while after a vowel it simply takes **-tje** (**spray**, **spraytje**). Two vowels stay as they are (**thee**, **theetje**).
- **-tje** after l, n, r or w when the vowel before is long, a diphthong (two vowels in one sound, like **ui** or **ou**), or in an unstressed syllable (one said without extra force, like the **-el** in **tafel**): **stoeltje**, **deurtje**, **vrouwtje**, **tafeltje**.
- **-pje** after m in the same situations: **boompje**, **bezempje**.
- **-etje** after a short stressed vowel plus l, m, n, ng or r. Double the l, m, n or r, but leave ng as it is: **balletje**, **kammetje**, **mannetje**, **ringetje**.
- **-kje** after unstressed **-ing** when the syllable just before it is stressed: **koninkje**, **kettinkje**. Otherwise **-ing** usually takes **-etje**: **wandeling**, **wandelingetje**.

- The plural adds **-s** and, like every plural, takes **de**: **de stoeltjes**, **de balletjes**.

Examples

Ik neem een **kopje** thee.	I'll have a cup of tea.
Sanne woont in een klein **huisje** in Utrecht.	Sanne lives in a small house in Utrecht.
Daan zet zijn tas op het **stoeltje** bij de deur.	Daan puts his bag on the little chair by the door.
Mijn oma heeft een rood **autootje**.	My grandma has a little red car.
In onze tuin staat een **boompje**.	There is a little tree in our garden.
Ahmed heeft een **biertje** besteld.	Ahmed ordered a beer.
De kinderen spelen met een **balletje**.	The children are playing with a little ball.
Priya draagt een zilveren **ringetje**.	Priya wears a little silver ring.
Mei heeft een **kettinkje** gekregen voor haar verjaardag.	Mei got a little necklace for her birthday.
Joris koopt twee **broodjes** kaas.	Joris buys two cheese rolls.

Why it works this way

The ending follows your mouth. Say **boomtje** quickly: your lips are already closed for the m, so a p slips in on its own, and Dutch simply writes what you hear: **boompje**. In **koning** the back of your tongue is already in place for a k sound, so **koningtje** turns into **koninkje**.

A short stressed vowel before l, m, n, ng or r gets the fuller ending **-etje**, and a doubled l, m, n or r keeps that vowel short, just as in the plural **ballen** (see doubling consonants). Compare:

- **man**, **mannetje** and **maan**, **maantje** (short or long vowel)

- **kam**, **kammetje** and **boom**, **boompje** (short or long vowel)
- **bal**, **balletje** and **tafel**, **tafeltje** (stressed or unstressed, see word stress)
- **ring**, **ringetje** and **koning**, **koninkje** (stressed or unstressed)

Remember: with l, m, n, ng or r at the end, a short stressed vowel gets the long ending. **Bal** gets **-etje**, while **stoel** and **tafel** only get **-tje**.

As for **het**: the diminutive ending decides the article, not the original noun, so **de man** becomes **het mannetje**. If you speak German, this works just like -chen.

A few common words go their own way. Some short words lengthen the vowel: **glas**, **glaasje**; **schip**, **scheepje**. **Jongen** becomes **jongetje**. After lm and rm you also get **-pje**: **filmpje**, **armpje**. And some words ending in another consonant take **-etje**: **vlag**, **vlaggetje**; **brug**, **bruggetje**. What all these small forms actually mean is the topic of the next lesson.

Watch out

NOT ~~de stoeltje~~
SAY **het stoeltje**
every singular diminutive takes **het**, even if the noun takes **de**

NOT ~~een kleine huisje~~
SAY **een klein huisje**
a **het** word after **een** gets no **-e** on the adjective

NOT ~~het autotje~~
SAY **het autootje**
the final o of **auto** is doubled before **-tje**

NOT ~~het boomtje~~
SAY **het boompje**
after a long vowel plus m, the ending is **-pje**

NOT ~~het baltje~~
SAY **het balletje**
short stressed vowel plus l: double it and add **-etje**

Quick check

1. Write the diminutive with its article: **de boom**
2. Choose the right word: **Emma tekent een (stertje / sterretje) op de kaart.**
3. Fix the sentence, keeping **tafeltje**: **Ik heb mijn telefoon op de tafeltje gelegd.**
4. Fill in the plural diminutive of **auto**: **Bas speelt met drie … op de vloer.**

Answers on page 768.

Use it today

Find five things around you with a diminutive name, such as **een kopje**, **een lepeltje** or **een tasje**, and say each one aloud with **het**. Then order **een broodje** or **een kopje koffie** today and listen for every **-je** around you.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/diminutives

RULE 28 · LEVEL B1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

What diminutives really mean

A diminutive (a noun with a "small" ending such as **-je** or **-tje**, which you met in the previous lesson) is often not about size at all. **Een biertje** is a normal beer offered in a relaxed way, and **een momentje** can easily take five minutes. Diminutives make things sound friendly, casual or modest, and a few, like **een kopje** (a cup), are simply the everyday word.

The pattern

> **A diminutive tells the listener how you feel about something more than how big it is: small, but also friendly, casual, modest or easy.**

- **Small: een huisje** (a little house), **een katje** (a kitten).
- **Casual and sociable: een biertje**, **een wijntje**, **een dagje uit** (a day out), **een rondje** (a walk or ride around, or a round of drinks: **Ik geef een rondje!**).
- **Modest, playing it down: een vraagje**, **een probleempje**, **een momentje**.
- **Softer requests: Heb je even een minuutje?**
- **A word of its own: een kopje** (a cup), **een broodje** (a roll or sandwich), **een bonnetje** (a receipt), **een toetje** (a dessert), **een meisje** (a girl).
- **Always a het-word: het biertje**, **het meisje**, whatever the base word is.

Examples

Zullen we na het werk nog een **biertje** drinken?	Shall we grab a beer after work?

Een momentje, ik zoek het even voor u op.	One moment, I'll just look it up for you.
Ik heb een **vraag** over mijn huurcontract.	I have a question about my rental contract.
Ik heb een **vraagje** over mijn huurcontract.	I have a quick question about my rental contract.
Er is een **probleempje** met je rooster, kun je even langskomen?	There's a small issue with your schedule, can you pop by?
Wil je een **kopje** koffie of thee?	Would you like a cup of coffee or tea?
Wilt u het **bonnetje**?	Would you like the receipt?
Priya en Ahmed fietsen elke zondag een **rondje** om het meer.	Priya and Ahmed cycle around the lake every Sunday.
Omdat Yara een nieuwe baan heeft, geeft ze zaterdag een **etentje**.	Because Yara has a new job, she's having people over for dinner on Saturday.
Kun je me even een **handje** helpen met deze kast?	Can you give me a hand with this cupboard?

Why it works this way

Think of a diminutive as turning the volume down. A small thing is easy to ask for and easy to say yes to, so Dutch speakers shrink a word to shrink the weight of what they say. **Een vraagje** promises it will be quick. **Een probleempje** tells your manager not to panic. **Een biertje** says: nothing serious, just a drink together.

Compare:

- **Ik heb een probleem.** Something is wrong and we need to talk.
- **Ik heb een probleempje.** Something small, nothing to worry about.
- **Hij heeft een bedrijf.** He owns a company.

- **Hij heeft een bedrijfje.** He has a small business, or, said with a smirk, one you do not take very seriously. So be careful with diminutives for other people's work.

English softens with other tools: a quick question, a bit of a problem, a cuppa. Dutch builds the softness into the noun and often adds **even** on top, as in **Heb je even een minuutje?** (see Even, maar, eens).

Some diminutives have become ordinary words. **Een kopje koffie** is just a cup of coffee, and **een meisje** is a girl of any height. A few have drifted further: **een kaart** is a card or a map, but **een kaartje** is often a ticket for the train or the cinema.

All this belongs mostly to spoken Dutch: at the bakery, at birthday parties, at the coffee machine. In formal writing, such as a letter from **de gemeente**, you will see far fewer, apart from the fixed words. That is a strong tendency, not a hard rule.

Remember: shrink the word, shrink the pressure. **Een vraagje** is easy to answer, **een biertje** is easy to say yes to, and **een momentje** is over before you know it (in theory).

Watch out

NOT ~~de biertje~~
SAY **het biertje**
every diminutive is a het-word

NOT ~~een lekkere biertje~~
SAY **een lekker biertje**
a het-word after **een** takes no **-e**

NOT ~~het meisje die naast ons woont~~
SAY **het meisje dat naast ons woont**
meisje is a het-word, so use **dat**

NOT ~~een kopje van koffie~~

SAY **een kopje koffie**

no **van** between a container and its contents, unlike English "of" or Spanish "de"

Quick check

1. In a café, Bas calls out **Ik geef een rondje!** What does he mean? (a) He is going for a short walk. (b) He is buying everyone a drink.
2. Fill in the correct form of **leuk**: **Lotte heeft een … etentje georganiseerd.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Mag ik een kopje van thee?**
4. You phone the GP's assistant and want to signal that your question will only take a minute. Which fits best? (a) **Ik heb een vraag.** (b) **Ik heb een vraagje.**

Answers on page 768.

Use it today

Next time you order in a café or need a colleague's help, use a diminutive on purpose: **Mag ik een kopje thee?** or **Heb je even een momentje?** Then count how many words ending in **-je** you hear before lunch.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/diminutive-meaning

RULE 29 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Clues that a noun is a het-word

Most Dutch nouns are de-words, but some kinds of noun point clearly to **het**. A singular diminutive (the small form ending in **-je**) is always a het-word, and so is a verb used as a noun: **het huisje**, **het zwemmen**. Many words starting with **ge-**, **be-**, **ver-** or **ont-**, most words ending in **-isme**, **-ment** or **-um**, and the names of languages and metals are het-words too, but those are strong tendencies, not laws.

The pattern

> **In the singular, diminutives and verbs used as nouns are always het-words. Some beginnings, endings and word groups make het very likely.**

- Diminutives, always in the singular: **het huisje**, **het kopje**, even from a de-word (**de tafel**, **het tafeltje**). In the plural they take **de**, like every plural: **de huisjes**. See how to make them.
- Infinitives (the full dictionary form of a verb) used as nouns, always: **het eten**, **het zwemmen**, **het wachten**.
- The prefixes (unstressed word starts) **ge-**, **be-**, **ver-** and **ont-**, often, especially in short nouns: **het gesprek**, **het gevoel**, **het begin**, **het verhaal**, **het ontbijt**. Common exceptions: **de gemeente**, **de gedachte**, **de gewoonte**, **de verkoop**.
- The endings **-isme** and **-ment**, nearly always: **het toerisme**, **het moment**, **het appartement**.
- The ending **-um**, mostly: **het museum**, **het centrum**, **het visum**. The big exception is **de datum**.

- Names of languages and metals: **het Nederlands**, **het Engels**, **het goud**, **het ijzer**.

Examples

Het huisje van Daan staat naast het station.	Daan's little house is next to the station.
Het meisje van de buren heet Yara.	The girl next door is called Yara.
Het eten staat al op tafel.	The food is already on the table.
Het zwemmen begint om half acht.	Swimming starts at half past seven.
Sanne heeft morgen **het gesprek** met haar manager.	Sanne has the talk with her manager tomorrow.
Het ontbijt bij Priya is altijd gezellig.	Breakfast at Priya's is always cosy.
Emma zit **op dit moment** in de trein.	Emma is on the train at the moment.
Fatima gaat zondag naar **het museum**.	Fatima is going to the museum on Sunday.
Het Nederlands van Carlos wordt steeds beter.	Carlos's Dutch keeps getting better.
Is **het goud** van deze ring echt?	Is the gold in this ring real?

Why it works this way

The article belongs to the word, not to the thing it names. A table and a house are both objects, yet it is **de tafel** and **het huis**. One and the same girl is **het meisje** and **de dochter**. So meaning will not tell you the article. The form of the word often will.

Here is the model: the end of a noun is the boss. A diminutive ending makes a singular noun a het-word, even when it refers to a person: **het meisje**. You can still refer to the girl with **zij**. Endings such as **-isme**, **-ment**

and **-um** usually bring **het** as well. A whole infinitive used as a noun is a het-word: **het fietsen**.

When there is no telling ending, look at the start. A real prefix is one you don't stress: **geSPREK**, **verHAAL**. In **de bezem** (the broom) you stress **be**, so it is not a prefix and gives no clue. If a word has both a prefix and a de-ending, the ending wins: **het verhaal** but **de vergadering**, **het bezoek** but **de bestelling**.

The same idea explains compound nouns: the last part decides. The de-word clues come in the next lesson.

Remember: the end of a word beats the beginning. A singular diminutive means **het**, even in **het meisje**, and **-ing** means **de**, even in **de vergadering**.

Watch out

NOT ~~de meisje~~
SAY **het meisje**
every singular diminutive is het, even for a person

NOT ~~de tafeltje~~
SAY **het tafeltje**
the **-tje** decides, not **de tafel**

NOT ~~het vergadering~~
SAY **de vergadering**
-ing beats **ver-**

NOT ~~op deze moment~~
SAY **op dit moment**
moment is a het-word, so **dit**

NOT ~~het datum~~
SAY **de datum**
the best-known **-um** exception

Quick check

1. Fill in **de** or **het**: **… kopje koffie is nog warm.**
2. Fill in **de** or **het**: **… gesprek met de huisarts duurt tien minuten.**
3. Fix the sentence: **De museum is op maandag dicht.**
4. Choose **de** or **het**: **Wat is … datum van de vergadering?**

Answers on page 768.

Use it today

In the supermarket today, find three products with a diminutive name, like **een broodje** or **een koekje**, and say them out loud with **het**. Then pick one word starting with **ge-**, **be-**, **ver-** or **ont-** from a sign or letter, guess its article, and check it in a dictionary.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/het-word-patterns

RULE 30 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Clues that a noun is a de-word

Most Dutch nouns (words for people, things and ideas) take **de**, so **de** is the normal case and **het** the special one. Most words for people, all plurals (forms for more than one) and nouns built with **-ing**, **-heid**, **-teit** or **-tie** take **de**. When no clue helps, guess **de**.

The pattern

> **Most words for people, all plurals and nouns built with -ing, -heid, -teit or -tie take de. If no clue helps, guess de.**

- People, usually: **de man**, **de leraar** (the teacher). Two everyday exceptions: **het kind** (the child) and **het meisje** (the girl).
- The four endings: **de woning** (the home), **de vrijheid** (freedom), **de universiteit**, **de informatie**. The ending must be a real suffix (a word-building ending): **het ding** (the thing) only looks like one.
- Usually **de**: nouns ending in **-ij** (**de bakkerij**, the bakery, but **het schilderij**, the painting) or **-nis** (**de kennis**, knowledge, but **het vonnis**, the verdict).
- Mostly **de**: trees, fruits and rivers, such as **de eik** (the oak), **de appel**, **de Rijn**.
- All plurals: **het huis** becomes **de huizen**.

Examples

De buurman heeft een nieuwe fiets.	The neighbour has a new bike.
Het kind van Sanne is vandaag jarig.	Sanne's child has a birthday today.
De kinderen spelen buiten in de regen.	The children are playing outside in the rain.

Priya studeert aan **de universiteit** in Utrecht.	Priya studies at the university in Utrecht.
Heb je **de informatie** van de gemeente al gelezen?	Have you read the information from the municipality yet?
De bakkerij op de hoek gaat om zeven uur open.	The bakery on the corner opens at seven.
We fietsen langs **de Amstel** naar huis.	We cycle home along the Amstel.

Why it works this way

Dutch once had three genders (grammar groups for nouns): masculine, feminine and neuter. Masculine and feminine merged into **de**, while neuter kept **het**, so roughly two out of three nouns take **de**. Most of the endings above once built feminine nouns. German speakers will recognise -ung, -heit, -tät and -tion.

Kind simply inherited the neuter group: a noun's article does not have to match a person's sex. **Meisje** is a diminutive (a small form), and singular diminutives always take **het**, as Diminutives explains. Their plurals take **de**: **de meisjes**.

English speakers often treat **het** as "it" for objects, but most objects are **de**: **de fiets**, **de trein**. Compound nouns (two nouns joined into one word) take the article of their last part: **de huisarts**, although **het huis**. See Compound nouns take the article of the last part.

Remember: de is the big tent for people, plurals and the main endings. **Het** is the smaller room for diminutives, the groups in Clues that a noun is a het-word, and some stubborn others.

Watch out

NOT ~~Het kinderen spelen in de tuin.~~
SAY **De kinderen spelen in de tuin.**
every plural takes **de**, even when the singular is **het**

NOT ~~De meisje van Sanne is jarig.~~
SAY **Het meisje van Sanne is jarig.**
singular diminutives take **het**, even when they refer to people

NOT ~~Ik vind de schilderij mooi.~~
SAY **Ik vind het schilderij mooi.**
a well-known exception to the **-ij** clue

NOT ~~De fruit is vandaag vers.~~
SAY **Het fruit is vandaag vers.**
single fruits take **de**, but the word **fruit** itself takes **het**

Quick check

1. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... vergadering begint om tien uur.**
2. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... meisje van de buren heet Emma.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Het boeken van Mei liggen op tafel.**
4. Choose: **Ahmed vertelt altijd de / het waarheid.**

Answers on page 768.

Use it today

At the supermarket, read the signs and the names on the fruit shelf. Say five nouns out loud with **de**, for example **de aanbieding** (the special offer) and **de mandarijn**, and look up any you are unsure about.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/de-word-patterns

RULE 31 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Compound nouns take the article of the last part

When two words join into one noun, the last part almost always decides between **de** and **het**. **Het huis** plus **de deur** gives **de huisdeur**, and **de fiets** plus **het pad** gives **het fietspad**. So you usually do not need to learn the article of a compound separately: if you know the last part and its meaning, you can work it out, apart from a few exceptions that you simply learn.

The pattern

> **In a compound noun (one noun made of two or more words glued together), the article almost always comes from the last part. Check the head word, not the first word.**

- The head word is the last part: it says what the thing actually is. A **fietspad** is a path, not a bicycle.
- The head gives the article: **het pad**, so **het fietspad**.
- The first part only describes. It does not even have to be a noun: **slapen** + **de kamer** = **de slaapkamer**.
- Long compounds follow the same rule: **de voet** + **de bal** + **het veld** = **het voetbalveld**.
- An extra **s** in the middle (**het verjaardagsfeest**) changes nothing. See Writing compound words.

Examples

Het huis is oud, maar **de huisdeur** is nieuw.	The house is old, but the front door is new.

Ik fiets elke dag over **het fietspad** langs het kanaal.	I cycle along the canal on the cycle path every day.
Sanne heeft **het treinkaartje** al gekocht.	Sanne has already bought the train ticket.
Wat is **het telefoonnummer** van de huisarts?	What is the GP's phone number?
Mei moet morgen naar **het gemeentehuis**.	Mei has to go to the town hall tomorrow.
Het verjaardagsfeest van Yara begint om acht uur.	Yara's birthday party starts at eight.
Lotte is **het boodschappenlijstje** vergeten.	Lotte has forgotten the shopping list.
De werkplek van Carlos is bij het raam.	Carlos's workspace is by the window.
Heb jij **de weersverwachting** voor morgen al gezien?	Have you already seen the weather forecast for tomorrow?

Why it works this way

Think of a compound as a noun with a label stuck on the front. The label says which kind, but the noun says what it is: a **telefoonnummer** is a number, a **gemeentehuis** is a kind of **huis**. English also puts the main noun last (a bike path is a path), so the logic is familiar. Dutch simply lets that main noun bring its article along.

This helps enormously. Dutch builds thousands of nouns from a much smaller set of basic words. Learn **het nummer** once and you also get **het huisnummer** and **het telefoonnummer**. Learn **de kaart** and you get **de landkaart** and **de verjaardagskaart**. The small-thing ending from Clues that a noun is a het-word works the same way: **-je** always comes last, so **de fiets** becomes **het fietsje**. That leaves far fewer words to memorise, and How to actually learn de and het deals with the rest.

The trap is your eye. You often know the first part best (**de fiets** is a first-week word), so it jumps out at you. If you speak Spanish or Arabic, your instinct may look at the front, because those languages usually put the main noun first (the door of the house). German has the same last-part rule, but German genders often differ from Dutch ones, so check the Dutch article.

This is about as close to a real rule as Dutch gets. A rare exception is **het ogenblik** (the moment), even though **de blik** means "the look". And when the last part looks like two different words with different articles, you need the right word: **het fietspad** (path), but **de schildpad** (turtle, built on **de pad**, toad).

Remember: the last part is the boss. Find the boss, and use the boss's article.

Watch out

NOT ~~het huisdeur~~
SAY **de huisdeur**
the head is **de deur**, not **het huis**

NOT ~~de fietspad~~
SAY **het fietspad**
de fiets only describes, **het pad** decides

NOT ~~de telefoonnummer~~
SAY **het telefoonnummer**
het nummer is the head, whatever your own language says

NOT ~~een nieuwe fietspad~~
SAY **een nieuw fietspad**
a het-word, so no **-e** after **een**

Quick check

1. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... treinstation** (from **de trein** + **het station**).
2. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... waterfles** (from **het water** + **de fles**).
3. Choose: **De boeken staan in (de / het) boekenkast.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Emma zwemt elke zaterdag in de zwembad.**

Answers on page 768.

Use it today

Next time you are at the station or in the supermarket, collect five compound nouns from signs, such as **de fietsenstalling** or **het winkelwagentje**. Split each one, check only the article of the last part, and say the whole word aloud with that article.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/compound-gender

RULE 32 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

How to actually learn de and het

No rule tells you whether every Dutch noun takes **de** or **het**, so the method that works is this: learn the article (**de** or **het**, the two words for "the") together with every noun (a word for a person, thing or idea), as if they were one word. Then help your memory with colour, spaced flashcards, a few reliable patterns and lots of reading and listening. And relax: a wrong article almost never stops people from understanding you.

The pattern

> **Never learn a noun on its own: learn de fiets and het huis, not fiets and huis. The article is part of the word.**

- Write every new noun with its article: **de vergadering**, **het formulier**, never just **formulier**.
- Use two colours, for example blue for de-words and red for het-words. Later you will remember "the red one" even when your ear hesitates.
- Review with spaced flashcards: the English word on the front, the Dutch noun with its article on the back. Spaced means the gaps grow (tomorrow, in three days, next week), so each card comes back just before you forget it.
- Group nouns by the patterns you know: all plurals (more than one) take **de**; a singular diminutive (a small form with **-je**, **-tje**, **-pje**, **-etje** or **-kje**) takes **het**, so **het kopje**, but **de kopjes**; nouns made with **-ing** or **-heid** take **de** (**de woning**, **de gezondheid**); and a compound (one word built from two) takes the article of its last part. More clues: het-words and de-words.
- Read and listen every day, so the right article starts to sound right.

Examples

Sanne zet **de fiets** voor **het huis**.	Sanne puts the bike in front of the house.
Priya heeft **de trein** gemist.	Priya missed the train.
Het weer is vandaag slecht.	The weather is bad today.
Lotte heeft **het formulier** van de gemeente ingevuld.	Lotte filled in the form from the municipality.
Het boek ligt op tafel.	The book is on the table.
De boeken liggen op tafel.	The books are on the table.
Mei heeft **het kopje** in de kast gezet.	Mei put the cup in the cupboard.
De vergadering begint om negen uur.	The meeting starts at nine.
Het fietspad is nat van de regen.	The cycle path is wet from the rain.

Why it works this way

Dutch once had three genders (grammatical classes of nouns, nothing to do with men and women). Over time two of them merged into the de-words, and the third became the het-words. So for most nouns the article is a leftover from history, not something you can work out from the meaning. That is why **het meisje** takes **het**: the word is a diminutive in form, and singular diminutives take **het**, even when they refer to a person.

What you can build is a feeling. Your brain stores word pairs it meets often as chunks. After you have heard **het weer** a hundred times in chats about rain, **de weer** simply sounds off. That feeling grows from input, so every podcast, news item and chat with the neighbours counts.

If you have no clue at all, guess **de**: roughly two out of three nouns are de-words, and every plural takes **de**.

Relax about mistakes, too. Say **de station** at the ticket desk and you will still get your ticket. A few nouns change meaning with the article, like **het pad** (the path) and **de pad** (the toad), but context almost always saves you.

Remember: in your head, **de fiets** is one word with a space in the middle. You would never learn half a word.

Watch out

NOT ~~de meisje~~
SAY **het meisje**
singular diminutives take **het**, even when they refer to people

NOT ~~het boeken~~
SAY **de boeken**
every plural takes **de**

NOT ~~de fietspad~~
SAY **het fietspad**
the last part decides: **het pad**

NOT ~~het auto~~
SAY **de auto**
German speakers, careful: "das Auto" does not carry over

Quick check

1. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... huisje van Emma is klein.**
2. Fill in **de** or **het**: **... bakfiets van Bas is rood.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Het vergaderingen beginnen om negen uur.**
4. Choose the correct sentence: (a) **Het woning van Yara heeft drie kamers.** (b) **De woning van Yara heeft drie kamers.**

Answers on page 769.

Use it today

In the supermarket today, name ten products quietly to yourself with their article, like **de melk** and **het brood**. At home, check the ones you doubted and add them to your flashcards in the right colour.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/learning-de-het

RULE 33 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Countable and uncountable nouns

Some Dutch nouns are countable (you can put a number in front: **een fiets, twee fietsen**), others are uncountable (you measure them instead: **geld, water, tijd**). Uncountable nouns take no **een** and no plural, so you say **Ik heb geld nodig**. To count them, put a measure word straight in front, without **van**: **een glas water, een stuk kaas**.

The pattern

> **Uncountable nouns take no een and no plural. To give an amount, put a measure word (a word for an amount, a container or a piece) directly before the noun, with no van in between.**

- Typical uncountable nouns: **geld, water, melk, kaas, tijd, werk, informatie, nieuws, huiswerk**. They often have no article at all: **Ik drink water.** More in When Dutch uses no article.
- In the negative, use **geen**, just like with countable nouns: **Ik heb geen tijd.** See Geen or niet?
- Measure word plus noun: **een glas water, een kilo appels, een stuk kaas, een pak melk**.
- Units such as **kilo, liter, gram** and **euro** normally stay singular after a number: **twee kilo appels**. Containers and pieces do get a plural: **twee glazen water, drie stukken kaas**.
- **Veel** and **weinig** work with both kinds: **veel geld, veel fietsen**.
- Use **van** when you mean part of a whole thing, such as **een stuk van de taart** (a piece of the cake), or when you give a size: **een fles van een liter** (a one-litre bottle).

Examples

Ik heb **geld** nodig.	I need money.
Mag ik **een glas water**?	Can I have a glass of water?
Daan koopt **een kilo appels** op de markt.	Daan buys a kilo of apples at the market.
Ik wil graag **een stuk kaas**.	I would like a piece of cheese.
Sanne drinkt **twee kopjes koffie** per dag.	Sanne drinks two cups of coffee a day.
Mei heeft **veel werk** en **weinig tijd**.	Mei has a lot of work and little time.
Er staan **veel fietsen** bij het station.	There are a lot of bikes at the station.
De huisarts heeft me **twee adviezen** gegeven.	The GP gave me two pieces of advice.
Yara zoekt **informatie** over de taalcursus.	Yara is looking for information about the language course.
De kinderen van Bas hebben **veel speelgoed**.	Bas's children have a lot of toys.

Why it works this way

Think of it as things versus stuff. Things come in units: a bike, a neighbour, an apple. Stuff is a mass: water, money, cheese, time. Stuff has no natural unit, so you count a container or a piece instead: **twee glazen water**. English and Spanish speakers are tempted to add **van** here, but Dutch glues the measure word and the noun together as one block.

Remember: English already says a dozen eggs and a million people, never a dozen of eggs. Dutch treats measure words like dozen: **een kilo appels, een kopje thee**.

English has to choose between much and many, little and few, less and fewer. Dutch does not care: **veel, weinig, meer** and **minder** work with both kinds. For small amounts, see Veel, weinig, een paar, een beetje.

Countability is a habit of the language, not a fact about the world. A chair is easy to count, yet English calls chairs and tables furniture. Dutch usually says **meubels**: **een meubel, twee meubels**. Advice works the same way: you can give **een advies** or **twee adviezen**. At the bakery, **een brood** is simply a loaf.

It also works the other way round. **Speelgoed** (toys) and **snoep** (sweets) are uncountable in Dutch: one toy is **een stuk speelgoed**, one sweet is **een snoepje**. And **informatie** never has a plural, even if it does in your own language. Food words can get a plural when you mean kinds, just like in English: **Nederlandse kazen** (Dutch cheeses).

Watch out

NOT ~~een glas van water~~
SAY **een glas water**
no **van** between a container and what is in it

NOT ~~Ik wil een beetje van melk in mijn thee.~~
SAY **Ik wil een beetje melk in mijn thee.**
een beetje works like a measure word, so no **van**

NOT ~~Ik zoek informaties.~~
SAY **Ik zoek informatie.**
informatie has no plural

NOT ~~veel speelgoeden~~
SAY **veel speelgoed**
toys, but uncountable in Dutch

NOT ~~**Ik heb een goed nieuws.**~~
SAY **Ik heb goed nieuws.**
nieuws is uncountable, so no **een**

Quick check

1. Fill in **een** or leave the gap empty: **Joris heeft … geld nodig voor de markt.**
2. Fix the sentence: **Mag ik een glas van water?**
3. Choose: **De huisarts heeft Priya twee (advies / adviezen) gegeven.**
4. Choose: **Op de website van de gemeente staat veel (informatie / informaties).**

Answers on page 769.

Use it today

At the market or the cheese counter, ask for something with a measure word and no **van**, for example **Mag ik een stuk jonge kaas?** or **Ik wil graag een kilo mandarijnen.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/uncountable-nouns

RULE 34 · LEVEL A2 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Showing possession: van, -s and zijn/haar

The safest way to show whose something is in Dutch is to put **van** after the thing: **het boek van Sara** (Sara's book). With names you can also put the owner first and add **-s**, as in **Peters fiets**. In conversation you will hear **Peter z'n fiets** or **Anna d'r tas**. The big trap for English speakers is the apostrophe, because Dutch uses it far less than English does.

The pattern

> **Put van + the owner after the thing: that works with every owner. With names, you can also put the owner first and add the possessive -s (an ending that shows who owns something).**

- **van** fits people, places and things: **de fiets van Peter**, **de tas van mijn collega**, **het dak van het station**.
- Name ending in a consonant that is not an s-sound: add **-s**: **Peters fiets**, **Daans jas**.
- Name ending in an s-sound (such as s, x or z): add only an apostrophe: **Thomas' fiets**, **Max' auto**.
- Name ending in a vowel written with one letter (a, i, o, u or y): add **'s**: **Anna's fiets**, **Otto's hond**.
- Name ending in an unstressed **e** (the "uh" sound), in a vowel written with two letters, or in **é**: just add **-s**: **Lottes fiets**, **Maries tas**, **Renés boek**.
- The **-s** form is most common with names and family words: **oma's verjaardag**, **papa's auto**. You may also see it with other words for people (**mijn buurmans hond**), but that sounds formal. With ordinary nouns, **van** is the safe choice.

- In speech: owner + **z'n** (his) or **d'r** (her) + thing: **Peter z'n fiets**, **Anna d'r tas**.

Examples

Dit is **het boek van Sara**.	This is Sara's book.
De fiets van mijn buurman staat voor de deur.	My neighbour's bike is outside the front door.
Daans fiets is kapot.	Daan's bike is broken.
Zaterdag vieren we **Priya's verjaardag**.	On Saturday we are celebrating Priya's birthday.
Joris' moeder werkt bij de gemeente.	Joris's mother works for the municipality.
Heb jij **Lottes sleutels** gezien?	Have you seen Lotte's keys?
Ahmed z'n auto staat bij het station.	Ahmed's car is parked at the station.
Fatima d'r tas ligt nog in de trein.	Fatima's bag is still on the train.
Ik heb **de hond van de buren** uitgelaten.	I walked the neighbours' dog.
Is dit **de jas van Mei**?	Is this Mei's coat?

Why it works this way

Think of **van** as "of" or "from": the book belongs on Sara's side. Older Dutch had case endings, rather like German, and the **-s** on names is one of the few that survived. Because it is a leftover, it mostly sticks to names and family words, while most other nouns use **van**.

In Dutch, the apostrophe is not a sign of ownership. It is a spelling helper. In **Anna's** it keeps the last a long, the same trick as in **auto's** (see Plurals with -s). **Maries** needs no help, because **ie** stays long anyway. In **Thomas'** the apostrophe stands in for an extra s you would not hear: **Thomas'**

sounds exactly like **Thomas**. There is more in When Dutch uses an apostrophe.

z'n and **d'r** are spoken forms of **zijn** and **haar** from Possessive pronouns. **Peter z'n fiets** literally says "Peter his bike". They follow the owner, not the thing: a man gets **z'n** and a woman gets **d'r**. If your language uses one word for both, like Spanish "su", check this twice. Use these forms when talking or texting friends, not in an email to the **gemeente**.

One meaning, three styles: **de tas van Yara** (always fine), **Yara's tas** (shorter, fine in writing), **Yara d'r tas** (spoken).

Remember: van is your safety net. Unsure about the **-s** or the apostrophe? Say **de fiets van Thomas** and you cannot go wrong.

Watch out

NOT ~~Peter's fiets~~
SAY **Peters fiets**
after a consonant, Dutch adds no apostrophe

NOT ~~Thomas's fiets~~
SAY **Thomas' fiets**
after an s-sound, write only the apostrophe

NOT ~~Yaras tas~~
SAY **Yara's tas**
after a final a, the apostrophe keeps the vowel long

NOT ~~de buurman's hond~~
SAY **de hond van de buurman**
Dutch has no English-style 's; after **de** + noun, **van** is the normal choice

NOT ~~Fatima z'n jas~~
SAY **Fatima d'r jas**
Fatima is a woman, so it is her coat

Quick check

1. Use the -s form of Daan: **... broer woont in Utrecht.**
2. Choose the right spelling: **Dat is (Emmas / Emma's) telefoon.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Bas's fiets staat buiten.**
4. Spoken Dutch, fill in **z'n** or **d'r**: **Sanne is een vriendin van mij. Sanne ... moeder werkt in het ziekenhuis.**

Answers on page 769.

Use it today

Pick three things around you at work or at home that belong to someone else, and name each one twice: once with **van** (**de mok van Priya**) and once with **-s** (**Priya's mok**). If you live with someone, try the spoken version at dinner: **Daan z'n telefoon ligt nog in de keuken.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/possession

RULE 35 · LEVEL B1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Making nouns from verbs and adjectives

Dutch turns verbs and adjectives into nouns in a few regular ways. You can use a verb as it is (**het lezen**, reading), or add an ending: **-ing**, **-heid**, **-te** or **-er**. Even better, the ending tells you the article: a bare verb always takes **het**, and the four endings in this lesson always take **de**.

The pattern

> **A bare infinitive used as a noun takes het; a noun made with -ing, -heid, -te or -er takes de.**

- **Infinitive** (the dictionary form of a verb): **lezen** gives **het lezen**, the activity of reading.
- **Verb plus -ing**: **opleiden** gives **de opleiding** (training course), **betalen** gives **de betaling** (payment).
- **Adjective plus -heid**: **vrij** gives **de vrijheid** (freedom). The plural ends in **-heden**.
- **Adjective plus -te**, mostly for measures: **lang** gives **de lengte**, **breed** gives **de breedte**, **hoog** gives **de hoogte**.
- **Verb plus -er** for a person: **bakken** gives **de bakker**. For most nouns in **-ing** and **-er**, you drop the **-en** of the infinitive and add the ending: **lezen** gives **de lezer**, **wonen** gives **de woning**.
- **-aar instead of -er**: verbs ending in an unstressed **-eren**, **-elen** or **-enen** usually take **-aar**: **luisteren** (stress on **luis**) gives **de luisteraar**, **wandelen** gives **de wandelaar**.
- **-der instead of -er**: when a long vowel comes before **-ren**, you usually add **-der** to the **ik**-form: **huren** (**ik huur**) gives **de huurder**, **parkeren** (**ik**

parkeer) gives **de parkeerder**. A well-known exception is **leren**, which gives **de leraar**. When a form is new to you, check a dictionary.

Examples

Daan merkt dat **het lezen** van Nederlandse kranten steeds makkelijker gaat.	Daan notices that reading Dutch newspapers is getting easier.
Het betalen bij de zelfscankassa gaat heel snel.	Paying at the self-checkout is very quick.
De betaling is mislukt, dus Emma probeert het nog een keer.	The payment failed, so Emma tries again.
Sanne volgt een **opleiding** tot verpleegkundige.	Sanne is training to become a nurse.
Sinds Yara kan fietsen, geniet ze van **de vrijheid** om overal zelf naartoe te gaan.	Since Yara learned to cycle, she enjoys the freedom to go anywhere on her own.
Bij de huisarts hebben ze **mijn lengte** en mijn gewicht gemeten.	At the GP's, they measured my height and my weight.
Joris werkt al twintig jaar als **bakker** in Utrecht.	Joris has worked as a baker in Utrecht for twenty years.
Ahmed is een snelle **lezer**, maar een langzame **schrijver**.	Ahmed is a fast reader but a slow writer.

Why it works this way

Think of the ending as the boss of the word. Just as the last part of a compound decides the article, the ending decides here. A bare infinitive adds nothing, and Dutch treats verbs used as nouns as neuter, so they take **het**.

The infinitive names the activity, like English reading or paying. The **-ing** noun usually names something more fixed: an event, a result or an object. Compare **het betalen** (the act of paying) with **de betaling** (the payment), or **het verwarmen** (heating something) with **de verwarming** (the heating in your house). Only the infinitive works for almost every verb. The other endings make fixed words, so **zwemming** and **fietsing** do not exist. When in doubt, use the infinitive with **het**.

-heid turns a quality into a thing, a bit like English -ness: **gezond** (healthy) gives **de gezondheid** (health). German speakers: it ends in d, not t.

-te copies a pattern English has too: length, width, depth, height. Of these four measure words, only **lang** changes its vowel, and **de lengte** is also the normal word for how tall a person is. **-er** is as easy as English baker; the female forms come in the next lesson.

Remember: bare verb, **het**. Verb or adjective plus an ending, **de**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De koken voor tien mensen kost veel tijd.**~~
SAY **Het koken voor tien mensen kost veel tijd.**
an infinitive used as a noun always takes **het**

NOT ~~**Ik hou van zwemming.**~~
SAY **Ik hou van zwemmen.**
English -ing becomes a Dutch infinitive

NOT ~~**De grote van de kamer is prima.**~~
SAY **De grootte van de kamer is prima.**
groot plus **-te** gives two t's

NOT ~~Er zijn twee mogelijkheids.~~
SAY **Er zijn twee mogelijkheden.**
the plural of **-heid** is **-heden**

NOT ~~Bas is een goede luisterer.~~
SAY **Bas is een goede luisteraar.**
an unstressed **-eren** verb usually takes **-aar**

Quick check

1. Fill in **de** or **het**: **… wandelen in het bos is goed voor je.**
2. Make a noun from **veilig**: **De gemeente wil de … op dit fietspad verbeteren.**
3. Choose: **Op het bord staat de (diepheid / diepte) van het zwembad: 1,80 meter.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Carlos is een snelle fietsing.**

Answers on page 769.

Use it today

Take one letter or email you received in Dutch this week, perhaps from your energy company or **de gemeente**, and underline every noun ending in **-ing** or **-heid**. Say each one aloud with **de**, then name the verb or adjective hiding inside it.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/nouns-from-verbs

RULE 36 · LEVEL B1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Male and female forms: leraar and lerares

To talk about a woman, Dutch often adds an ending to the general word: **leraar** becomes **lerares**, **vriend** becomes **vriendin**. For jobs, though, many people now use one word for everyone, so **Zij is leraar** is perfectly normal. Both forms take **de**: **de leraar**, **de lerares**.

The pattern

> **A woman can get her own word with -es, -in, -ster or -e, but for jobs many people now use one form for everyone. Both forms take de.**

- **-es**: **leraar** / **lerares**, **zanger** / **zangeres**, **prins** / **prinses**
- **-in**: **vriend** / **vriendin**, **boer** / **boerin**, **koning** / **koningin**
- **-ster**: mainly for **-er** words made from a verb (see Making nouns from verbs and adjectives). Add **-ster** to the verb stem (the **ik** form): **schrijver** / **schrijfster**, **verkoper** / **verkoopster**, **kapper** / **kapster**. Many verb words do this, but not all: **zanger** takes **-es**.
- **-e**: mainly words ending in **-ent** or **-aat**: **student** / **studente**, **assistent** / **assistente**, **kandidaat** / **kandidate**
- Some pairs are separate words or come from French: **buurman** / **buurvrouw**, **acteur** / **actrice**, **directeur** / **directrice**
- Plurals follow the normal rules: **leraressen**, **vriendinnen**, **schrijfsters**, **studentes**
- The female forms with these endings take **de**: **de lerares**, **de vriendin**, **de schrijfster**, **de studente**

The ending is not fully predictable, so learn the female form together with the word, just as you learn its article.

Examples

Mijn **lerares** Nederlands vraagt altijd hoe mijn weekend was.	My Dutch teacher always asks how my weekend was.
Fatima is **leraar** op een basisschool, net als haar moeder.	Fatima is a teacher at a primary school, just like her mother.
Mei gaat zaterdag met een **vriendin** naar de markt.	Mei is going to the market with a friend on Saturday.
De **schrijfster** van dat boek woont bij ons in de straat.	The author of that book lives in our street.
Toen Priya **studente** was, woonde ze op kamers in Groningen.	When Priya was a student, she rented a room in Groningen.
De **verkoopster** vroeg of ik een tasje nodig had.	The shop assistant asked if I needed a bag.
Onze **buurvrouw** geeft de kat eten als wij op vakantie zijn.	Our neighbour feeds the cat when we are on holiday.
Sanne is net gekozen tot **voorzitter** van de voetbalclub.	Sanne has just been elected chair of the football club.
Yara wil **huisarts** worden, omdat ze graag met mensen werkt.	Yara wants to become a GP because she likes working with people.

Why it works this way

Think of the general word as the name of the job, and the ending as a small label that adds: this person is a woman. When that does not matter, many speakers leave the label off. So **Fatima is lerares** and **Fatima is leraar** are both correct and mean the same. Both are common in everyday speech; the general form is especially common in job ads, contracts and the news. With **burgemeester**, **hoogleraar** or **huisarts**, the general form is the normal word for women anyway.

Outside work, the female form is usually the normal choice: a female friend is normally **een vriendin**, and a female monarch is **de koningin**. Some neutral words do exist, such as **de buur** for a neighbour of any gender, but most people in the Netherlands still say **buurman** or **buurvrouw**. And the general form covers mixed groups: **de leraren** can be men, women or both.

English has the same idea: waitress, actress, and spinster, which first meant a woman who spins. That **-ster** is the same old ending as in **schrijfster**. English has mostly dropped these endings for jobs, and Dutch is heading the same way, just more slowly.

Why **de**? In older Dutch, most words for people were masculine or feminine, and in modern Dutch both of those genders use **de**. So most words for people are **de**-words, but not all. The main exceptions are **het kind**, **het lid** and diminutives (the small forms with **-je**) such as **het meisje**, because a singular diminutive always takes **het**. More in De or het: the two words for "the".

Remember: the female ending changes the person, not the article: **de leraar**, **de lerares**. A diminutive ending does change it: **de vriendin**, but **het vriendinnetje**.

Watch out

NOT ~~de studentin~~
SAY **de studente**
-in is the German habit; **student** takes **-e**

NOT ~~de schrijveres~~
SAY **de schrijfster**
schrijver takes **-ster** on the stem **schrijf**, not **-es**

NOT ~~Mijn broer is verpleegster.~~
SAY **Mijn broer is verpleegkundige.**
verpleegster is only for women; **verpleegkundige** is for everyone

NOT ~~twee leraresen~~
SAY **twee leraressen**
the stressed short **e** of **-es** needs a double **s** before **-en**

Quick check

1. Fill in the female form: **Mijn tante schrijft kinderboeken. Ze is een bekende … (schrijver).**
2. Fill in the female form: **Op de bruiloft zong een … (zanger) uit Suriname.**
3. Choose **de** or **het**: **… nieuwe verkoopster helpt me altijd bij de zelfscankassa.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ik ga vanavond met twee vriendinen naar de film.**

Answers on page 770.

Use it today

Think of three women you deal with this week, such as your GP, a colleague or your neighbour, and describe each one in a Dutch sentence: **Mijn buurvrouw is kapster.** For each job, decide whether you would use the female form or the general form, and say the word aloud with **de**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/male-female-forms

RULE 37 · LEVEL B1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Group nouns and verb agreement

In Dutch, a singular word for a group of people takes a singular verb (the verb form you use for one person or thing): **de politie is**, **het team speelt**, **het publiek klapt**. It does not matter how many people are in the group, because the noun itself is singular. **Mensen** is different: it is a real plural, so you say **de mensen zijn**.

The pattern

> **A group noun in the singular (a word for a group, like de politie or het team) takes a singular verb, however many people it refers to. Mensen is the plural of mens, so its verb is plural.**

- Use the same verb form as after **hij** or **het**: **het team speelt**, just like **het speelt** (see the present tense).
- Common group nouns: **de politie**, **de familie**, **de regering**, **de gemeente**, **de klas**, **de jury**, **het team**, **het publiek**, **het personeel**, **het gezin**.
- More than one group? Make the noun plural and the verb follows: **de teams spelen**, **de klassen gaan**.
- Words that are already plural take a plural verb: **de mensen zijn**, **de ouders zijn**, **de buren zijn**.

Examples

De politie is er al, dus je hoeft niet meer te bellen.	The police are already there, so you don't need to call anymore.
Het team speelt veel beter sinds Bas de nieuwe trainer is.	The team has been playing much better since Bas became the new coach.

Het publiek klapt zo hard dat Yara nog een liedje zingt.	The audience claps so loudly that Yara sings one more song.
De mensen zijn blij omdat de zon eindelijk weer schijnt.	People are happy because the sun is finally shining again.
Het personeel krijgt in december een cadeaubon van de directie.	The staff get a gift voucher from the management in December.
Mijn familie komt zondag, want Fatima is jarig.	My family is coming on Sunday, because it's Fatima's birthday.
De gemeente zegt dat de nieuwe fietsenstalling in mei opengaat.	The municipality says that the new bike parking opens in May.
Priya hoopt dat **de jury** vanavond niet te streng **is**.	Priya hopes that the jury won't be too strict tonight.
Beide teams spelen zaterdag thuis.	Both teams play at home on Saturday.

Why it works this way

Politie is grammatically singular, even when it refers to many officers, so **de politie** takes a singular verb. Dutch follows the grammatical number of the noun, not the picture in your head: if forty officers turn up at your door, **de politie is er**. If you mean several groups, you need a plural noun: **de teams**, **de families**.

Mensen is simply the plural of **een mens** (a human being), just like **ouders** and **buren** are plurals (see plurals with -en). That is why it takes **zijn** and not **is**.

English is looser. British English often says "the team are" or "the staff are", and everyone says "the police are". German works like Dutch ("die Polizei ist"), so German speakers rarely struggle here. Spanish speakers need the opposite reminder: "la gente" is singular, but **mensen** is plural.

In relaxed conversation you will sometimes hear a plural slip in, as in **Mijn familie komen ook**, usually when the speaker is thinking of the individual

people. It is not standard, so in writing and careful speech, stick to the singular.

There is one grey zone: a group word followed by a plural noun. With **een aantal**, both forms are correct: **Een aantal collega's is ziek** and **Een aantal collega's zijn ziek**. With **een groep**, as in **een groep toeristen**, you will also hear a plural verb, but the singular is the safe choice in careful speech and writing: **Een groep toeristen staat voor het station.**

Remember: follow the grammar, not the headcount. A singular group noun such as **het team** or **het publiek** normally takes a singular verb, whether it means five players or fifty thousand fans.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De politie zijn er al.**~~
SAY **De politie is er al.**
English says "the police are", but Dutch treats **politie** as singular

NOT ~~**Het personeel hebben morgen vrij.**~~
SAY **Het personeel heeft morgen vrij.**
one group, one singular verb

NOT ~~**Mijn familie wonen in Marokko.**~~
SAY **Mijn familie woont in Marokko.**
a big family is still one **familie**

NOT ~~**De mensen is erg vriendelijk.**~~
SAY **De mensen zijn erg vriendelijk.**
mensen is a plural, just like "people"

Quick check

1. Choose **is** or **zijn**: **Het publiek ... heel enthousiast.**

2. Choose **is** or **zijn**: **De mensen in de trein … moe na een lange dag.**
3. Fix the sentence: **De klas gaan morgen naar Utrecht.**
4. Fill in the correct form of **hebben**: **Ahmed zegt dat het team de wedstrijd gewonnen …**

Answers on page 770.

Use it today

Read one Dutch news headline or a letter from your **gemeente**, find a group word such as **de politie**, **de regering** or **het kabinet**, and check that its verb is singular. Then say one true sentence about a group in your own life, for example **Mijn team werkt vandaag thuis**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/collective-nouns

RULE 38 · LEVEL B1 · NOUNS AND DE OR HET

Nouns with two plurals or only a plural

A few Dutch nouns have two plurals, and the plural you pick usually signals the meaning: **bladen** are magazines, **bladeren** are leaves; **benen** are legs, **beenderen** are bones. Other nouns work the other way round. Words like **de kosten** (costs) and **de hersenen** (brain) are normally used in the plural, so they take a plural verb, even where English uses a singular.

The pattern

> **Some nouns have two plurals that usually differ in meaning; others have two plurals with the same meaning. A few nouns are normally used in the plural, and they take a plural verb.**

- **het blad**: **de bladeren** are leaves (you may also hear **blaren**), **de bladen** are magazines, and trays in **de dienbladen**
- **het been**: **de benen** are legs, **de beenderen** are bones
- The singular does not tell you which meaning you have: **een blad** can be a leaf or a magazine. The plural usually does. The long forms are not used for magazines or legs, but the short forms **bladen** and **benen** sometimes also mean leaves and bones.
- Some nouns have two plurals with the same meaning, like **zoons** and **zonen**. Both are correct, so you cannot go wrong there.
- Normally plural: **de kosten** (costs), **de hersenen** (brain), **de notulen** (minutes of a meeting), **de gegevens** (personal details, data)
- **de ouders** (parents): you hear the plural far more often, but the singular is normal when you mean one parent, as in **een alleenstaande ouder** (a single parent).

- Plural noun, plural verb: **De kosten zijn hoog.** Group nouns like **de familie** work differently, see Group nouns and verb agreement.

Examples

In de herfst liggen er overal **bladeren** op het fietspad.	In autumn there are leaves all over the cycle path.
Bij de kapper liggen altijd oude **bladen** op tafel.	At the hairdresser's there are always old magazines on the table.
Lotte had zo lang gefietst dat haar **benen** trilden.	Lotte had cycled for so long that her legs were shaking.
In het museum zie je de **beenderen** van een mammoet.	In the museum you can see the bones of a mammoth.
De **kosten** van de cursus **zijn** hoger dan Carlos dacht.	The cost of the course is higher than Carlos thought.
Als je slecht slaapt, **werken** je **hersenen** minder goed.	If you sleep badly, your brain works less well.
Fatima's **ouders komen** in juni uit Marokko op bezoek.	Fatima's parents are coming over from Morocco in June.
Wilt u controleren of uw **gegevens** nog **kloppen**?	Could you check whether your details are still correct?
Mei zoekt haar **bril**, maar die **zit** gewoon op haar hoofd.	Mei is looking for her glasses, but they're right there on her head.

Why it works this way

Centuries ago, a group of **het**-words made their plural with **-er**, as German still does. Later, Dutch added **-en** on top, which is why you say **kinderen**, **eieren** and **liederen** (see Irregular plurals). **Blad** and **been** belonged to that group, and they also got an ordinary plural. Over time, the two plurals became linked to different meanings, although the split is not absolute. A

handy way to see it: the long **-eren** form goes with the oldest meaning. Leaves came long before magazines, and **been** first meant bone (compare English bone).

In everyday speech, bones are usually **botten** these days: **Daan heeft een bot gebroken. Beenderen** sounds more formal, the word of museums and news reports.

Mostly plural nouns have no deep logic: each language decides for itself what counts as a collection. Dutch says **de kosten zijn** where English says the cost is, and **je hersenen werken** where English says your brain works. Informally you also hear **hersens**. **De ouders** is simply a very frequent plural: the singular **de ouder** is common whenever you mean one parent. English makes the opposite choice with trousers, scissors and glasses: **de broek**, **de schaar** and **de bril** are singular.

Remember: the long plural belongs on the forest floor. Fallen **bladeren** and old **beenderen** end up on the ground; **bladen** lie on the coffee table and **benen** get you to the station.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De kosten is te hoog.**~~
SAY **De kosten zijn te hoog.**
kosten is plural, so the verb is plural too

NOT ~~**Mijn hersenen werkt vandaag niet.**~~
SAY **Mijn hersenen werken vandaag niet.**
English says brain, Dutch counts it as plural

NOT ~~**Ik lees graag bladeren over koken.**~~
SAY **Ik lees graag bladen over koken.**
magazines are **bladen**, **bladeren** grow on trees

NOT ~~**Mijn broek zijn nat van de regen.**~~
SAY **Mijn broek is nat van de regen.**
one pair of trousers is one **broek**

NOT ~~**Mijn beenen doen pijn.**~~
SAY **Mijn benen doen pijn.**
open syllable, so one e

Quick check

1. Choose: **In de wachtkamer van de huisarts liggen stapels oude (bladen / bladeren).**
2. Fill in the present tense of **zijn**: **De kosten van onze verhuizing … hoger dan we hadden gedacht.**
3. Choose: **Na een lange fietstocht legt Emma thuis haar (benen / beenderen) omhoog op de bank.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Mijn bril zijn weer zoek.**

Answers on page 770.

Use it today

Next time you sit in a waiting room or on the train, describe what is lying around in one Dutch sentence, such as **Er liggen bladen op tafel** or, in autumn, **Er liggen bladeren op het perron**. Then pick one bill this week and say out loud what it costs, starting with **De kosten zijn …**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/two-plurals

Pronouns

Ik, jij, hem, ons, die and dat: the small words that do the most work.

- Subject pronouns: ik, jij, hij, zij
- Jij or je? Stressed and unstressed pronouns
- U or jij: formal and informal you
- Object pronouns: me, je, hem, haar
- Hen, hun or ze: them
- Hij, het or zij for things
- Possessive pronouns: mijn, jouw, zijn, haar
- Ons or onze?
- Mine and yours: van mij and de mijne
- Reflexive pronouns: me, je, zich
- Reflexive verbs: zich vergissen, zich voelen
- Elkaar: each other
- Deze, die, dit, dat
- Dit is, dat is, het is
- Die and dat instead of hij and het in speech
- Relative pronouns: die and dat
- Wie, wat and waar- in relative clauses
- Waarmee, waarover, waaraan

- Iemand, niemand, iets, niets, alles, iedereen
- Men, je and ze: people in general
- Het as an empty subject: het regent
- Question words: wie, wat, waar, wanneer, hoe, waarom
- Welk or welke, and wat voor
- Zo'n, zulk and zulke: such

RULE 39 · LEVEL A1 · PRONOUNS

Subject pronouns: ik, jij, hij, zij

Dutch has nine subject pronouns, the words for I, you, he, she, it, we and they: **ik**, **jij** (or **je**), **u**, **hij**, **zij** (or **ze**), **het**, **wij** (or **we**), **jullie** and **zij** (or **ze**). Yes, **zij** appears twice: it means both she and they. The verb tells you which one: **zij is** means she is, **zij zijn** means they are.

The pattern

> **Every person has its own pronoun, and three have a short form. Zij means she with a singular verb (for one person) and they with a plural verb (for more than one).**

- **ik**: I
- **jij** or **je**: you (one person, informal)
- **u**: you (polite, one person or more)
- **hij**: he
- **zij** or **ze**: she
- **het**: it
- **wij** or **we**: we
- **jullie**: you (two or more people)
- **zij** or **ze**: they

The long forms **jij**, **zij** and **wij** add emphasis. In everyday speech you mostly hear **je**, **ze** and **we** (more in Jij or je?). **U** is the polite you for strangers and official situations, like at the GP (U or jij). For things, Dutch often uses **hij** instead of **het**: see Hij, het or zij for things.

Examples

Ik ben Daan. Ben **jij** Priya?	I'm Daan. Are you Priya?
Heeft **u** een afspraak?	Do you have an appointment?
Hij fietst naar zijn werk.	He cycles to work.
Zij is mijn buurvrouw.	She is my neighbour.
Zij zijn mijn buren.	They are my neighbours.
Ze werkt bij de gemeente.	She works for the municipality.
Ze werken bij de gemeente.	They work for the municipality.
Het is koud vandaag.	It is cold today.
We gaan naar de supermarkt.	We are going to the supermarket.
Komen **jullie** ook?	Are you all coming too?

Why it works this way

Dutch verbs change their ending to fit the subject, much like English is and are. With she, the verb gets a **-t** or a singular form: **ze werkt**, **ze is**, **ze heeft**. With they, it gets **-en** or a plural form: **ze werken**, **ze zijn**, **ze hebben**. The verb already carries the information, so one pronoun can do two jobs. Context helps too: if you were just talking about Fatima, **ze** is almost certainly her.

Jullie follows the plural pattern (**jullie werken**), while **u** takes a singular verb form, even when you speak to a group (**u werkt**, **u bent**). You will find all the endings in The present tense.

Remember: zij alone is a riddle, and the verb is the answer. A **-t** or **is** means she; **-en** or **zijn** means they.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ahmed? Is vandaag ziek.~~
SAY **Ahmed? Hij is vandaag ziek.**
unlike Spanish or Arabic, Dutch needs the subject

NOT ~~Daan en Ik wonen in Utrecht.~~
SAY **Daan en ik wonen in Utrecht.**
ik only gets a capital at the start of a sentence

NOT ~~Sanne en Bas, jij bent te laat!~~
SAY **Sanne en Bas, jullie zijn te laat!**
English you covers both; Dutch uses **jullie** for a group

NOT ~~Fatima? Zij zijn mijn collega.~~
SAY **Fatima? Zij is mijn collega.**
one person, so **is**; **zij zijn** means they are

Quick check

1. You are talking to Sanne and Bas. Fill in: **Waar wonen ...?**
2. Choose: **Lotte is ziek. Ze (is / zijn) thuis.**
3. Choose: **Joris en Yara? Ze (fietst / fietsen) naar het station.**
4. Fill in the polite word for you: **Werkt ... ook op vrijdag?**

Answers on page 770.

Use it today

On the train or in the supermarket, describe three people around you in your head: one sentence with **hij**, one with **ze is** and one with **ze zijn**, such as **Ze zijn moe.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/subject-pronouns

RULE 40 · LEVEL A1 · PRONOUNS

Jij or je? Stressed and unstressed pronouns

Most of the time, choose **je**. Many Dutch pronouns (short words for people, such as I, you and we) come in two forms: a stressed one that you say with extra weight, like **jij**, and an unstressed one that slips by quietly, like **je**. The short form is your everyday default. The long form is mainly for contrast or emphasis.

The pattern

> **Use the short, unstressed form by default. Use the long, stressed form especially when you want to contrast or highlight that person.**

- **jij** / **je**: you as the subject (the one who does something)
- **jou** / **je**: you as the object (the one something happens to)
- **wij** / **we**: we
- **zij** / **ze**: she, and also they
- **mij** / **me**: me
- **ik**, **hij**, **jullie** and the polite **u** have no separate short form in standard writing (more on **u** in U or jij).

Examples

Je woont in Utrecht, toch?	You live in Utrecht, right?
Jij woont in Utrecht, en Daan woont in Delft.	You live in Utrecht, and Daan lives in Delft.
We gaan met de trein.	We are going by train.

Wij nemen de trein, jullie fietsen.	We are taking the train, you are cycling.
Sanne belt **me** morgen.	Sanne is calling me tomorrow.
Sanne belt **mij**, niet Bas.	Sanne is calling me, not Bas.
Ze werkt bij de gemeente.	She works for the municipality.
Zij werkt bij de gemeente, hij werkt thuis.	She works for the municipality, he works from home.
Ik zie **je** zaterdag!	I'll see you on Saturday!
Ik zie **jou**, maar ik zie Yara niet.	I see you, but I don't see Yara.

Why it works this way

Think of the long form as a pointing finger. In **Jij hebt gelijk, niet ik**, you point at the other person and away from yourself. In **Je hebt gelijk**, nobody points: you simply agree.

English shows this with the voice alone: YOU are right. Dutch also swaps the word, because a short form like **je** or **we** cannot carry stress. So a pronoun that stands on its own, as in **En jij?**, is always the long form. If you speak Spanish or Arabic, this will feel familiar: there you often leave the pronoun out and add it mainly for emphasis or contrast.

In writing, nobody hears your voice, so the word itself shows the stress. Write **jij** and the reader hears extra weight. That is why **je** is usually the right choice in messages and emails. This is a strong tendency, not an iron law: people do write **Heb jij zin?** to sound a little more personal.

One more clue for **ze**: when it is the subject, the verb tells you if it means she or they. **Ze werkt** is she, **ze werken** is they.

Remember: if you would not point at the person, use the short form.

Watch out

NOT ~~Je hebt gelijk, niet ik.~~
SAY **Jij hebt gelijk, niet ik.**
contrast needs the stressed form

NOT ~~Ik zie jij morgen.~~
SAY **Ik zie je morgen.**
the object form is **je** or **jou**

NOT ~~Goed, en met je?~~
SAY **Goed, en met jou?**
the pronoun carries the stress here

NOT ~~Dit is me fiets.~~
SAY **Dit is mijn fiets.**
mijn is my; its spoken short form is written **m'n**, not **me**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Ik heb honger. En (jij / je)?**
2. Choose: **Ik bel (jij / je) morgen, oké?**
3. Fix the sentence: **Geef het aan me, niet aan Joris.**
4. In **Ze fietsen naar de supermarkt**, does **ze** mean she or they?

Answers on page 770.

Use it today

Send a short Dutch message to a friend, neighbour or colleague with the short form, for example **Heb je morgen tijd?** Then add one contrast with the long form, like **Ik neem de trein. En jij?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/stressed-unstressed

RULE 41 · LEVEL A1 · PRONOUNS

U or jij: formal and informal you

Dutch has a formal and an informal way to say "you". **U** is formal (polite, with some distance): use it with strangers, older people and in official settings like the town hall. **Jij** or its short form **je** is informal, and the Dutch switch to it quickly, even at most workplaces, so when in doubt, start with **u** and follow the other person.

The pattern

> **Use u to be polite and jij or je to be friendly. U takes the verb form that jij takes in a statement, and it can mean one person or a whole group.**

- **U**: strangers, older people, anyone in an official role.
- **Jij** or **je**: friends, family, children, people your age, most colleagues.
- Same verb as **jij**: **jij werkt**, **u werkt**; **jij bent**, **u bent**. With **hebben**, both **u hebt** and **u heeft** are correct.
- In questions, **u** keeps the **t**: **Werkt u?** When the subject **jij** or **je** comes right after the verb, the **t** drops: **Werk jij?** (more in Werk jij? Where the t disappears).
- **U** is singular and plural. The informal plural is **jullie**.
- The word for "your" follows the same split: **uw** goes with **u**, **jouw** or **je** with **jij**.

Examples

Bent u mevrouw De Vries?	Are you Mrs De Vries?

Heeft u een afspraak bij de huisarts?	Do you have an appointment with the GP?
Kunt u hier tekenen?	Can you sign here?
Dames en heren, **hebt u** allemaal een kaartje?	Ladies and gentlemen, do you all have a ticket?
Sanne, **heb jij** mijn sleutels?	Sanne, have you got my keys?
Daan, **kom je** ook op mijn verjaardag?	Daan, are you coming to my birthday too?
Pardon, **werkt u** hier?	Excuse me, do you work here?
Mei, **werk jij** hier ook?	Mei, do you work here too?

Why it works this way

Think of **u** as a polite coat. You keep it on with people you do not know, and you take it off when someone says **zeg maar jij** (feel free to say **jij**). That often happens fast: many Dutch people say that being called **u** makes them feel old. At work the coat usually comes off on day one, even with your manager. Once you have switched, going back to **u** feels cold.

Why is **u heeft** also fine? **U** probably grew out of an old polite title, a bit like "Your Honour", and titles take the **hij** verb. For most verbs the **jij** and **hij** forms are the same anyway (**werkt**, **woont**), so you rarely notice. With **zijn**, only **u bent** is normal today.

Remember: when in doubt, wear the coat. Taking **u** off is easy and friendly; putting it back on is awkward.

Watch out

NOT ~~Zijn u klaar?~~
SAY **Bent u klaar?**
u takes the **jij** form, even for a group

NOT ~~Heb u een afspraak?~~
SAY **Heeft u een afspraak?**
with **u** the final **t** stays; it drops only when the subject **jij** or **je** comes right after the verb

NOT ~~Wat is u naam?~~
SAY **Wat is uw naam?**
the formal word for "your" is **uw**, with a **w**

NOT ~~Dank U wel.~~
SAY **Dank u wel.**
in everyday writing **u** has a small letter, unlike German Sie

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **zijn**: **Mevrouw, u … aan de beurt.**
2. Choose **u** or **jij**: **Woont … hier?**
3. Fill in the right form of **komen**, speaking to an older couple: **Waar … u vandaan?**
4. Fix the sentence: **Wilt U koffie?**

Answers on page 771.

Use it today

Ask one stranger a question with **u** today, for example at the bakery: **Heeft u ook bruin brood?** If a neighbour or colleague answers with **je**, or says **zeg maar jij**, switch to **jij** straight away.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/u-or-jij

RULE 42 · LEVEL A1 · PRONOUNS

Object pronouns: me, je, hem, haar

Dutch uses object pronouns (words like me, him and us, for the person who receives the action) where English does: **Ik zie hem** means I see him. You also use them for people after a preposition (a small word such as with or for), so you say **met mij** and **voor hem**. One surprise: **hem** also means it for most things that are de-words (nouns that take **de**): **Waar is de sleutel? Ik zie hem niet.**

The pattern

> **If a pronoun receives the action, or refers to a person after a preposition, use the object form: mij, jou, hem, haar, ons.**

- **ik** gives **mij** or **me**, and **jij** gives **jou** or **je**. The short forms are the everyday ones.
- **hij** gives **hem**, **zij** (she) gives **haar**, and **wij** gives **ons**.
- **u** and **jullie** stay the same.
- **zij** (they) gives **ze** in most sentences, and **hen** after a preposition (**met hen**). For **hen** versus **hun**, see Hen, hun or ze: them.
- Things as a direct object: usually **hem** for a de-word, **het** for a het-word, **ze** for plurals.
- Things after a preposition: Dutch usually uses **er** plus the preposition, such as **ermee** (with it) and **ervoor** (for it), never **met het**. More in Erop, ervan, daarmee.

Examples

Sanne belt **me** elke avond.	Sanne calls me every evening.
Ik zie **je** morgen op het werk.	I'll see you tomorrow at work.

Kan ik **u** helpen?	Can I help you?
Daan is ziek. Deze soep is **voor hem**.	Daan is ill. This soup is for him.
Waar is de sleutel? Ik zie **hem** niet.	Where is the key? I can't see it.
Waar is het boek? Ik zie **het** niet.	Where is the book? I can't see it.
Fatima is jarig. Ik bel **haar** vanavond.	It's Fatima's birthday. I'm calling her tonight.
Carlos fietst **met ons** naar het werk.	Carlos cycles to work with us.
Ik wacht **op jullie** bij het station.	I'm waiting for you at the station.
Mei en Bas? Ik zie **ze** vaak in de supermarkt.	Mei and Bas? I often see them in the supermarket.

Why it works this way

English already switches from I to me and from we to us. Dutch does the same: **ik** becomes **mij**, **wij** becomes **ons**. It even changes **jij** to **jou**, where English keeps you. Good news for German speakers: there is no "mich" versus "mir" split, because **mij** does both jobs.

The short forms **me** and **je** are the light, everyday ones. Put stress on the word and you need **mij** or **jou**: **Hij belt mij, niet jou.** After a preposition, you can use **mij** and **jou**. When the pronoun is unstressed, **me** and **je** are also standard there, in speech and in writing: **voor me**, **op je**. See Jij or je? Stressed and unstressed pronouns.

Things copy the people pattern when they are the object. In the Netherlands, most de-words for things count as a **hij** in everyday Dutch, so as an object they become **hem**. Some de-words, mostly abstract ones ending in **-ing** or **-heid**, can also take **zij** and **haar**, especially in writing. A het-word stays **het**. More in Hij, het or zij for things.

Remember: to Dutch ears, your key is a he. If **de sleutel** is a **hij**, you look for **hem**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De sleutel? Ik zie het niet.**~~
SAY **De sleutel? Ik zie hem niet.**
de sleutel is a de-word for a thing, so **hem**

NOT ~~**Dit is voor jij.**~~
SAY **Dit is voor jou.**
after a preposition, use the object form

NOT ~~**Ik bel zij vanavond.**~~
SAY **Ik bel haar vanavond.**
zij does the action, **haar** receives it

NOT ~~**Mij en Daan gaan fietsen.**~~
SAY **Daan en ik gaan fietsen.**
the doer needs **ik**, and **ik** usually goes last

NOT ~~**De appels? Ik neem het.**~~
SAY **De appels? Ik neem ze.**
for plural things, use **ze**

Quick check

1. Fill in: **Waar is mijn fiets? Ik zie ... niet.**
2. Choose: **Deze bloemen zijn voor (jij / jou).**
3. Fill in the form of **wij**: **Kom je zaterdag bij ... eten?**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed is mijn buurman. Ik zie hij elke dag.**

Answers on page 771.

Use it today

At the supermarket today, comment on three things as you pick them up: one de-word, one het-word and one plural. For example: **De kaas? Ik neem hem. Het brood? Ik neem het. De tomaten? Ik neem ze.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/object-pronouns

RULE 43 · LEVEL B1 · PRONOUNS

Hen, hun or ze: them

Dutch has three ways to say "them". In careful, standard Dutch you use **hen** for the direct object and after a preposition (**Ik zie hen**, **met hen**), and **hun** for the indirect object, which usually means "to them" (**Ik geef hun een boek**). In everyday speech most people simply say **ze**, which works in almost every object position and saves you the headache.

The pattern

> **In standard Dutch, "them" is hen as a direct object or after a preposition, and hun as an indirect object. In everyday speech, ze does both jobs.**

- Direct object, the person the action is done to: **Ik zie hen. Ik bel hen morgen.**
- After any preposition: **met hen, voor hen, bij hen, aan hen.**
- Indirect object, usually the person who receives something (English can often add "to" or "for"): **Ik geef hun een boek. Ik stuur hun een mail.**
- Spoken Dutch, unstressed: **Ik zie ze. Ik geef ze een boek.**
- As the subject, "they" is **zij** or **ze**. **Hun hebben** is common in speech but not standard.
- **Hen** and **hun** refer to people. For things, use **ze** (more in Hij, het or zij for things).

Examples

Daan en Sanne? Ik zie **hen** elke ochtend op het station.	Daan and Sanne? I see them at the station every morning.

Als mijn ouders in december komen, ga ik **met hen** naar Maastricht.	When my parents come in December, I'll go to Maastricht with them.
De buren hebben op mijn kat gepast, dus ik geef **hun** een fles wijn.	The neighbours looked after my cat, so I'm giving them a bottle of wine.
Kun je **hun** even vertellen dat de vergadering om tien uur begint?	Could you tell them that the meeting starts at ten?
Ik heb **ze** net in de supermarkt gezien.	I just saw them in the supermarket.
Heb je **ze** al een appje gestuurd over vrijdag?	Have you sent them a message about Friday yet?
Ik heb **hen** uitgenodigd, niet jullie.	I invited them, not you.
Priya en Joris zijn ziek, dus **zij** komen vandaag niet.	Priya and Joris are ill, so they aren't coming today.

Why it works this way

Think of **hun** as "them" with an invisible "to" or "for" built in. Most of the time it marks the receivers: the people who get something, are told something or have something done for them. You can usually say the same thing with **aan** or **voor**, and as soon as that preposition appears, you switch back to **hen**:

- **Ik geef hun de sleutel.** / **Ik geef de sleutel aan hen.**
- **Mei bakt hun een taart.** / **Mei bakt een taart voor hen.**
- **Ik bel hen.** (they do not receive anything, so **hen**)

Remember: hun is usually a receiver that has swallowed its **aan** or **voor**. Once you can see a preposition, write **hen**.

The hook does not work in reverse. Many verbs come with a fixed preposition that you can never drop, such as **denken aan** or **wachten op**: **Ik denk aan hen** never becomes **Ik denk hun**. The real rule is simpler: **hun**

is the indirect object without a preposition. That is most often a receiver, with verbs like **geven**, **sturen**, **vertellen** or **laten zien**, but a few common verbs use **hun** for the people something happens to: **Dat lukt hun niet** (they won't manage that), **Het nieuwe huis bevalt hun goed** (they like the new house). Keep the preposition wherever the verb needs it (see Verbs with a fixed preposition).

If the rule feels artificial, that is because it is. Grammarians introduced the split in the seventeenth century, and it never fully reached everyday speech. Native speakers mix up **hen** and **hun** too, even in writing. So the spoken language uses **ze**: short, unstressed and fine as both a direct and an indirect object.

Ze has limits, though. It is the unstressed form (see Jij or je?), so it cannot carry emphasis: in **Ik heb hen uitgenodigd, niet jullie** you need **hen**. After a preposition, **met ze** is heard in casual speech but looks sloppy in writing.

Hun as a subject (**Hun hebben gewonnen**) is very common in casual speech in the Netherlands, but it is not standard Dutch and many listeners hear it as uneducated. In writing, at work and in exams, use **zij** or **ze**. The possessive **hun** (their, as in **hun fietsen**) is perfectly correct; only the subject use is a problem.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Hun hebben de trein gemist.**~~
SAY **Ze hebben de trein gemist.**
hun is never a subject in standard Dutch

NOT ~~**Ik ga met hun naar de markt.**~~
SAY **Ik ga met hen naar de markt.**
after any preposition: **hen**, even where German has "ihnen"

NOT ~~**Ik help hun zaterdag met verhuizen.**~~
SAY **Ik help hen zaterdag met verhuizen.**
helpen takes a direct object, unlike German "helfen"

NOT ~~**De sleutels? Ik zie hen nergens.**~~
SAY **De sleutels? Ik zie ze nergens.**
hen and **hun** are for people, not things

NOT ~~**Ik heb hen een kaartje gestuurd.**~~
SAY **Ik heb hun een kaartje gestuurd.**
a card to them, so **hun** in careful Dutch

Quick check

1. Choose: **Ahmed en Yara? Ik heb gisteren met … gegeten.** (**hen** / **hun**)
2. Choose: **Kun jij … het nieuwe rooster mailen?** (**hen** / **hun**)
3. Choose: **Lotte en Carlos hebben ons enorm geholpen. Ik wil … graag bedanken.** (**hen** / **hun**)
4. Choose: **Mijn handschoenen? Ik heb … in de trein laten liggen.** (**hen** / **ze**)

Answers on page 771.

Use it today

Think of two people you will see this week, such as your neighbours or two colleagues. Write three sentences about them: one with **hen** (**Ik zie hen morgen**), one with a preposition (**Ik lunch met hen**) and one with **hun** (**Ik stuur hun een berichtje**). Then say all three out loud with **ze**, the way you would in a casual conversation.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/hen-hun-ze

RULE 44 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Hij, het or zij for things

To say "it" about a thing in Dutch, look at the article: a het-word gets **het** (**Het boek? Het ligt daar.**), and in the Netherlands a de-word usually gets **hij**, even when it is a train (**De trein? Hij is te laat.**). At the start of a sentence, many people say **die** instead: **Die is te laat.**

The pattern

> **For things, the article chooses the pronoun (the short word that replaces a noun): het-words get het, and de-words usually get hij.**

- Het-words: **het** as subject (the one doing something) and as object (the one something happens to). **Het boek? Ik lees het.**
- De-words: **hij** as subject, **hem** as object. **De fiets? Hij staat buiten. Ik pak hem.**
- At the start of a sentence, **die** (de-words) and **dat** (het-words) are very common in speech: **Die is te laat.**
- More than one thing: **ze** (or **die** at the start), whatever the article. **De sleutels? Ze liggen op tafel.**
- In Flanders and in formal writing, feminine de-words can get **zij** or **ze**.

Examples

Het boek? **Het** ligt daar.	The book? It's over there.
De trein? **Hij** is te laat.	The train? It's late.
De trein? **Die** is te laat.	The train? It's late.
Waar is mijn fiets? Ik zie **hem** niet.	Where's my bike? I can't see it.

Mijn telefoon is kapot, en ik heb **hem** net gekocht!	My phone is broken, and I only just bought it!
Het pakket is er. Fatima heeft **het** voor je aangenomen.	The parcel has arrived. Fatima took it in for you.
Is er nog melk? Ja, **die** staat in de koelkast.	Is there any milk left? Yes, it's in the fridge.
Het raam? **Dat** staat open.	The window? It's open.
De schoenen van Bas? **Ze** staan bij de deur.	Bas's shoes? They're by the door.
De gemeente schrijft dat **zij** de brug in mei repareert.	The municipality writes that it will repair the bridge in May.

Why it works this way

Dutch once had three genders (groups of nouns): masculine, feminine and neuter. The neuter nouns became today's het-words, and they kept **het**. Masculine and feminine nouns now share the article **de**, and in everyday speech in the Netherlands, people mostly use the masculine **hij** for a de-word that names a single thing. So in **De trein? Hij is te laat**, **hij** does not mean "he". It means "it, for a de-word". Nobody thinks the train is a man.

This is why English speakers who say **het** for everything go wrong, and why speakers of German, Spanish or Arabic sometimes say **zij** for a word that is feminine in their own language. Check the Dutch article instead. If you are unsure of it, see De or het.

Substances are a bit looser. With de-words like **melk** or **koffie**, **die** is very common, and you will also hear **het**: **Is er nog melk? Nee, het is op.**

Feminine **zij** has not disappeared. Flanders kept more of the old system: there, a feminine noun like **de deur** often gets **ze**: **De deur? Ze staat open.** Formal writing in the Netherlands does something similar, mainly with organisations and abstract words ending in **-ing**, **-heid** or **-ie**: **de regering**, **de gemeente**, **de organisatie**. This is a tendency in careful writing, not

something you need in everyday speech. More in Dutch in the Netherlands and in Flanders.

Die and **dat** are pointing words (demonstratives, like English "that one"). When you pick up something that was just mentioned, putting **die** or **dat** first sounds relaxed and natural. More in Die and dat instead of hij and het in speech.

With people, meaning can win over the article: about **het meisje**, many people say **ze**.

Remember: het boek stays **het**, **de trein** becomes **hij**. At the start of a sentence: **die** for de, **dat** for het.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De trein? Het heeft vertraging.**~~
SAY **De trein? Hij heeft vertraging.**
trein is a de-word

NOT ~~**Waar is mijn sleutel? Ik zie het niet.**~~
SAY **Waar is mijn sleutel? Ik zie hem niet.**
de sleutel, and the object form of **hij** is **hem**

NOT ~~**Is er nog brood? Nee, hij is op.**~~
SAY **Is er nog brood? Nee, het is op.**
brood is a het-word, so it stays **het**

NOT ~~**Het raam? Die staat open.**~~
SAY **Het raam? Dat staat open.**
die is for de-words, **dat** for het-words

Quick check

1. Choose **hij** or **het**: **De bus? ... komt om tien over acht.**

2. Choose **hem** or **het**: **Het cadeautje? Mei heeft … al opengemaakt.**
3. Fix the pronoun: **Mijn laptop is oud. Ik verkoop het.**
4. Choose **die** or **dat**: **Kijk, het nieuwe station! … is mooi, hè?**

Answers on page 771.

Use it today

Pick three things in your bag or on your desk and check their article. Then say one sentence about each out loud, like **De pen? Hij is leeg.** or **Mijn telefoon? Die ligt in mijn tas.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/it-for-things

RULE 45 · LEVEL A1 · PRONOUNS

Possessive pronouns: mijn, jouw, zijn, haar

To say whose something is, you put a possessive pronoun (a word that shows who owns something, like my or your) in front of the noun: **mijn fiets**, **jouw jas**, **haar huis**. Most of them line up neatly with English. The two surprises: **je** is the everyday short form of both **jouw** and **jullie**, and **zijn** means both his and its.

The pattern

> **Put the possessive pronoun before the noun and choose it by the owner, not by the thing. In everyday Dutch it keeps the same form, except ons, which becomes onze before de-words and plurals.**

- **ik**: **mijn** (my)
- **jij**: **jouw**, or unstressed **je** (your, one person, informal)
- **u**: **uw** (your, polite)
- **hij** and **het**: **zijn** (his, its)
- **zij** (she): **haar** (her)
- **wij**: **ons** or **onze** (our; see Ons or onze?)
- **jullie**: **jullie**, or **je** (your, more than one person)
- **zij** (they): **hun** (their)

Examples

Dit is **mijn** fiets.	This is my bike.
Wat is **je** telefoonnummer?	What is your phone number?
Is dat **jouw** tas of **mijn** tas?	Is that your bag or my bag?

Mag ik **uw** paspoort zien?	May I see your passport?
Daan zoekt **zijn** sleutels.	Daan is looking for his keys.
De hond wil **zijn** eten.	The dog wants its food.
Fatima belt **haar** moeder.	Fatima calls her mother.
Onze buren zijn heel aardig.	Our neighbours are very nice.
Hebben jullie **je** kaartjes?	Do you all have your tickets?
De kinderen fietsen met **hun** vader naar school.	The children cycle to school with their father.

Why it works this way

Each possessive grows out of a subject pronoun you already know, so learn them in pairs: **ik** and **mijn**, **jij** and **jouw**, **wij** and **ons**. In Hij, het or zij for things you saw that most things are **hij** or **het**. Both share one possessive, **zijn**, so Dutch has no separate word for its: **de hond en zijn bal**, **het huis en zijn tuin**.

Choose by the owner. Spanish **su** can mean his, her or their, and German **ihr** can mean her or their. Dutch keeps them apart: **Fatima belt haar moeder** (her own mother), **Daan belt zijn moeder**, **Daan en Sanne bellen hun moeder** (the mother of both).

The pair **jouw** and **je** behaves like **jij** and **je** (see Jij or je?). The light form **je** is what you hear all day: **Hoe gaat het met je moeder?** Use **jouw** when you want to stress whose something is, usually in a contrast. For a group, **jullie** is the full form, and when **jullie** is already the subject, Dutch speakers often switch to **je** to avoid saying it twice.

The polite **uw** belongs to **u**. At the **gemeente** or the GP you will often hear **uw naam** and **uw adres**.

One formal detail: in official writing, **haar** can also mean its for feminine de-words such as **de gemeente**: **de gemeente en haar inwoners**. In

everyday speech many people use **zijn** here too, so for now you only need to recognise this **haar**.

Remember: je is your default. Switch to **jouw** when you want to stress whose it is, as in **jouw tas of mijn tas**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Dit is ons fiets.**~~
SAY **Dit is onze fiets.**
fiets is a de-word, so **onze**

NOT ~~**Is dit jou jas?**~~
SAY **Is dit jouw jas?**
jou is the object form, meaning you; your is **jouw**, with a w

NOT ~~**Wat is u naam?**~~
SAY **Wat is uw naam?**
u means you; before a noun you need **uw**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **De hond zoekt … bal.** (its)
2. Fill in the gap with the polite form: **Mevrouw, mag ik … paspoort zien?**
3. Fix the sentence: **Dat is onze huis.**
4. Fill in the gap: **Joris en Mei fietsen met … kinderen naar het park.** (their)

Answers on page 771.

Use it today

Next time you lock your bike, say **Dit is mijn fiets** to yourself. Then ask a colleague or neighbour one question with **je**, such as **Hoe was je**

weekend?, and listen for **mijn** in the answer.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/possessive-pronouns

RULE 46 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Ons or onze?

Use **ons** (our) before a singular het-word, which is a noun that takes **het** for "the": **ons huis**. Use **onze** before a de-word and before every plural (more than one): **onze auto**, **onze huizen**. In short, **ons** and **onze** copy the split between **het** and **de**.

The pattern

> **Ons goes where het goes, and onze goes where de goes. Every plural takes de, so every plural takes onze.**

- Singular het-word: **het huis**, so **ons huis**.
- Singular de-word: **de auto**, so **onze auto**.
- Any plural: **de huizen**, **de auto's**, so **onze huizen**, **onze auto's**.
- Singular diminutives (the small form of a noun, such as **hondje** or **meisje**) are het-words: **ons hondje**, **ons meisje**. Their plurals take **onze**: **onze hondjes**.
- When it means "us" on its own, it is always **ons**: **Ze bellen ons morgen.**

Examples

Ons huis heeft een kleine tuin.	Our house has a small garden.
Onze straat is erg rustig.	Our street is very quiet.
Ons kind is vandaag ziek, dus we bellen de huisarts.	Our child is ill today, so we are calling the GP.
Onze kinderen fietsen elke dag naar school.	Our children cycle to school every day.

We hebben **ons appartement** zelf geschilderd.	We painted our flat ourselves.
Onze buurvrouw Yara heeft **ons pakket** aangenomen.	Our neighbour Yara took in our parcel.
Priya is nieuw in **ons team**.	Priya is new in our team.
Daan heeft **onze hond** uitgelaten.	Daan walked our dog.
Ons hondje slaapt in de keuken.	Our little dog sleeps in the kitchen.
Onze trein heeft weer vertraging.	Our train is delayed again.

Why it works this way

Dutch nouns come in two groups, de-words and het-words (see De or het). All plurals join the de group. **Ons** simply follows that split, so the test is easy: say the noun with its article first. **Het pakket**, so **ons pakket**. **De trein**, so **onze trein**.

The extra **-e** on **onze** is a familiar Dutch habit. You see the same pattern after **een**: **een klein huis** against **een kleine auto**, and **kleine huizen** in the plural. The singular het-word is the odd one out, without the **-e**.

The good news: **ons** is the only possessive that changes. **Mijn**, **jouw**, **zijn**, **haar**, **jullie** and **hun** stay the same before every noun (see Possessive pronouns).

English has one word, "our", so the risk is forgetting to choose at all. German speakers have "unser" and "unsere", but German gender often differs from Dutch: German says "das Auto", Dutch says **de auto**. Spanish speakers can set masculine and feminine aside here. Dutch only asks de or het, which is why a girl is **ons meisje**.

Remember: say the noun with **het** or **de** first, then swap. **Het** becomes **ons**, **de** becomes **onze**.

If you are unsure whether a noun is de or het, **onze** is the safer guess, because most Dutch nouns are de-words. That is a bet, not a rule, so check the word when you can (How to actually learn de and het). To say "ours" without a noun, see Mine and yours.

Watch out

NOT ~~**onze huis**~~
SAY **ons huis**
it is **het huis**, so no **-e**

NOT ~~**ons kinderen**~~
SAY **onze kinderen**
every plural takes **onze**, even though it is **het kind**

NOT ~~**ons auto**~~
SAY **onze auto**
auto is a de-word in Dutch, whatever German says

NOT ~~**ons nieuw huis**~~
SAY **ons nieuwe huis**
after **ons**, the adjective gets **-e**

NOT ~~**Ze helpen onze**~~
SAY **Ze helpen ons**
meaning "us", it is always **ons**

Quick check

1. Fill in **ons** or **onze**: **Dit is ... buurman, Joris.**
2. Fill in **ons** or **onze**: **... bedrijf heeft een nieuw kantoor.**
3. Choose: **Gisteren zijn (ons / onze) vrienden op bezoek geweest.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Onze meisje is vandaag jarig.**

Answers on page 772.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your home for a new neighbour: one with **ons huis** or **ons appartement**, one with **onze straat**, and one with a plural such as **onze buren**. Say each noun with **de** or **het** first, then swap in **ons** or **onze**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/ons-or-onze

RULE 47 · LEVEL B1 · PRONOUNS

Mine and yours: van mij and de mijne

To say "mine", "yours" or "his" in Dutch, you normally use **van** plus a pronoun: **Die fiets is van mij.** To replace a noun you have just mentioned, say **die van mij**, or use **de mijne** or **het mijne**, which take the same article (the word for "the") as that noun: **Is dit jouw jas? Nee, de mijne hangt daar.**

The pattern

To say who something belongs to, use van plus a pronoun: Die fiets is van mij. To replace a noun, use die van mij or de mijne, with the same article as the noun.

- After **is** and **zijn**: **van mij**, **van jou**, **van hem**, **van haar**, **van ons**, **van u**, **van jullie**, **van hen**. These are object pronouns, the forms you also use after words like **met** and **voor**.
- To replace a noun in everyday speech: **die van mij** for nouns with **de** and for all plurals, **dat van mij** for nouns with **het**. This also works with names: **die van Bas**.
- The shorter stand-in: **de mijne** for nouns with **de** and for plurals, **het mijne** for nouns with **het**. The other forms follow the same pattern: **de jouwe**, **de zijne**, **de hare**, **de onze**, **de uwe**, **de hunne**.
- **Jullie** has no such form, so you say **die van jullie**.

Examples

Die blauwe fiets is **van mij**.	That blue bike is mine.
Pardon, is deze handschoen **van u**?	Excuse me, is this glove yours?

De sleutels op tafel zijn **van hem**, niet **van haar**.	The keys on the table are his, not hers.
Mijn telefoon is leeg. Mag ik **die van jou** even gebruiken?	My phone is dead. Can I use yours for a minute?
Ons huis is klein, maar **dat van Yara** heeft een tuin.	Our house is small, but Yara's has a garden.
Is dit jouw jas? Nee, **de mijne** hangt daar.	Is this your coat? No, mine is hanging over there.
Omdat mijn buurman zijn paraplu vergeten was, heb ik hem **de mijne** geleend.	Because my neighbour had forgotten his umbrella, I lent him mine.
Fatima en Carlos vinden hun huis te klein, maar **het onze** is nog kleiner.	Fatima and Carlos think their house is too small, but ours is even smaller.
Onze kinderen fietsen naar school. Gaan **de jouwe** met de bus?	Our kids cycle to school. Do yours take the bus?

Why it works this way

Mijn, **jouw** and **zijn** are like English "my", "your" and "his": they cannot stand alone, a noun has to follow (see possessive pronouns). English switches to a second set of words when the noun disappears. Everyday Dutch simply reuses **van**, the same word it uses with names. If you can say **Deze fiets is van Daan**, you can say **Deze fiets is van mij**.

De mijne works differently: the noun drops out, but its article stays behind to show which noun you mean. Compare these two answers:

- **Is dat jouw boek? Nee, het mijne ligt thuis.** (**het boek**)
- **Is dat jouw tas? Nee, de mijne ligt thuis.** (**de tas**)

Remember: de mijne behaves like **de blauwe**. Ask **Welke jas?** and you can answer **De blauwe** or **De mijne**: the noun disappears, the article stays, and the word gets an **-e**, just like adjectives used as nouns.

Both **die van mij** and **de mijne** are good standard Dutch. **Die van mij** is the most common in relaxed conversation, while **de mijne** is shorter and sounds a little more careful. After **is**, stay with **van mij**: **Deze jas is de mijne** is correct, but it sounds like a line from a costume drama. In speech you will often hear **die is van hun**; in writing, **van hen** is the standard form (more in hen, hun or ze).

Watch out

NOT ~~**Die fiets is mijn.**~~
SAY **Die fiets is van mij.**
mijn needs a noun after it, like "my"

NOT ~~**Sanne is een collega van mijn.**~~
SAY **Sanne is een collega van mij.**
"a colleague of mine" still uses **mij** after **van**

NOT ~~**Is dit jouw jas? Nee, het mijne hangt daar.**~~
SAY **Nee, de mijne hangt daar.**
it replaces **de jas**

NOT ~~**Jouw huis is groter dan die van mij.**~~
SAY **Jouw huis is groter dan dat van mij.**
it replaces **het huis**

NOT ~~**Ik ben de mijn vergeten.**~~
SAY **Ik ben de mijne vergeten.**
this stand-in always ends in **-e**

Quick check

1. Fill in the pronoun: **Is die laptop van je zus? Ja, die is van …**
2. Choose: **Mijn fiets staat bij het station. Waar staat (de jouwe / het jouwe)?**
3. Choose: **Ons huis heeft geen balkon, maar (die / dat) van Sanne wel.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Lotte is een goede vriendin van mijn.**

Answers on page 772.

Use it today

Next time mugs, coats or chargers get mixed up at work or at home, ask **Is deze van jou?** Then answer at least once with **Nee, de mijne is blauw** or **Die van mij ligt daar**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/mine-and-yours

RULE 48 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Reflexive pronouns: me, je, zich

A reflexive pronoun points back to the subject (the person doing the action), like myself or herself in English. Dutch uses **me**, **je** and **ons**, which you already know as object pronouns, plus one special word, **zich**, for **hij**, **zij**, **het** and plural **zij**. The longer forms with **-zelf** (**mezelf**, **zichzelf**) add emphasis, and you need them with verbs that normally aim at someone else and often after a preposition: **Hij praat tegen zichzelf**.

The pattern

> **When the action goes back to the subject, use a reflexive pronoun: me, je and ons look like the object pronouns, jullie takes je, and hij, zij, het and plural zij take zich.**

- **ik**: **me** (also **mij**, which sounds a bit more formal)
- **jij** / **je**: **je**
- **u**: **u** or **zich** (both are correct)
- **hij**, **zij**, **het**: **zich**
- **wij** / **we**: **ons**
- **jullie**: **je**
- **zij** / **ze** (they): **zich**
- Long forms: **mezelf**, **jezelf**, **uzelf**, **zichzelf**, **onszelf** (for emphasis, after many prepositions, and with verbs like **kennen**)

Examples

Ik scheer **me** elke ochtend voor het ontbijt.	I shave every morning before breakfast.

Waarom haast je **je** zo?	Why are you in such a hurry?
Joris stelt **zich** voor aan de nieuwe buren.	Joris introduces himself to the new neighbours.
Joris stelt **hem** voor aan de nieuwe buren.	Joris introduces him (a friend) to the new neighbours.
Hebben jullie **je** al aangekleed?	Have you all got dressed yet?
We hebben **ons** goed vermaakt op het feest van Lotte.	We had a great time at Lotte's party.
Mei en Carlos hebben **zich** goed voorbereid op het examen.	Mei and Carlos have prepared well for the exam.
U kunt **zich** hier omkleden.	You can get changed here.
Ahmed praat in de auto tegen **zichzelf**.	Ahmed talks to himself in the car.
Ik ken **mezelf**: ik eet altijd de hele zak chips op.	I know myself: I always eat the whole bag of crisps.

Why it works this way

Think of **zich** as a mirror. With **ik**, **jij** and **wij** there is no confusion: in **Ik scheer me**, **me** can only refer to the speaker, **ik**. So Dutch simply reuses the object pronouns, even twice in a row. In **Waarom haast je je zo?** the first **je** is the subject and the second one points back to it.

With **hij** and **zij**, the pronoun could mean millions of other people. **Daan wast hem** means Daan washes someone else, maybe his little son. **Daan wast zich** means Daan washes Daan. The mirror word removes all doubt. (In everyday Flemish you may hear **hem** used as a mirror word, but in the Netherlands and in standard writing it is **zich**.)

English often has no pronoun here at all: I shave, we had fun, they got dressed. Dutch keeps it: **Ik scheer me**, **We hebben ons vermaakt**, **Ze**

hebben zich aangekleed. Some verbs always need one, which is the topic of the next lesson.

With **u** you can choose: **U kunt u hier omkleden** and **U kunt zich hier omkleden** are both correct. In a question like **Heeft u zich al gemeld?** most people pick **zich**, which also avoids **u u**.

Short or long? The short form is the normal choice with verbs where the action naturally turns back to yourself: **zich wassen**, **zich aankleden**, **zich haasten**. Some of these, like **zich vergissen** (to be mistaken), never take **-zelf**: **Ik vergis me**. With verbs where the action normally goes to someone else, like **kennen** or **bewonderen**, you need the long form to point back to the subject: **Fatima kent zichzelf goed**, **Bas bewondert zichzelf**. The long form is also usual after many prepositions (**Hij praat tegen zichzelf**), though not after all of them (**Hij heeft geen geld bij zich**). Where both forms are possible, **-zelf** adds contrast: **Ik kleed eerst de kinderen aan en dan mezelf**.

Remember: zich is the mirror. If **hem** or **haar** would mean somebody else but you mean the subject itself, you normally need a mirror word: short **zich** when the action naturally bounces back (washing, hurrying, making a mistake), long **zichzelf** when the action normally aims at others (knowing, admiring).

Watch out

NOT ~~**Sanne schaamt haar een beetje.**~~
SAY **Sanne schaamt zich een beetje.**
to be ashamed is **zich schamen**; after **zij** the mirror word is **zich**

NOT ~~**Jij moet jou nog aankleden.**~~
SAY **Jij moet je nog aankleden.**
the reflexive form for **jij** is **je**

NOT ~~**Ik vergis mezelf.**~~
SAY **Ik vergis me.**
zich vergissen never takes **-zelf**

NOT ~~**Fatima kent zich goed.**~~
SAY **Fatima kent zichzelf goed.**
kennen normally aims at someone else, so it needs the long form

NOT ~~**Ik heb de taart mezelf gebakken.**~~
SAY **Ik heb de taart zelf gebakken.**
without help is just **zelf**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Heb jij (jou / je) weer verslapen?** (Did you oversleep again?)
2. Fill in the gap: **We hebben … in de datum van het feest vergist.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Daan voelt hem vandaag niet zo lekker.**
4. Choose: **Lotte kijkt in de spiegel naar (zich / zichzelf).**

Answers on page 772.

Use it today

The next time you meet a new neighbour or colleague, start with **Ik stel me even voor** and say your name. Afterwards, tell someone at home about it with **zich**: **Mijn nieuwe buurvrouw heeft zich ook voorgesteld.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/reflexive-pronouns

RULE 49 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Reflexive verbs: zich vergissen, zich voelen

Some Dutch verbs come with a small pronoun that points back to the subject: **Ik vergis me** (I'm mistaken), **Ik voel me goed** (I feel good). These are reflexive verbs (the action reflects back on the subject, like a mirror), and some of them, like **zich vergissen** and **zich herinneren**, need that pronoun every time, even where English has none. In a main clause, the pronoun comes right after the conjugated verb: **Ik heb me vergist**.

The pattern

A reflexive verb uses a reflexive pronoun (such as me, je, zich or ons) to point back to the subject. In a simple main clause, this pronoun usually comes right after the conjugated verb (the form that matches the subject), or right after the subject when the subject comes after the verb.

- Always reflexive: **zich vergissen** (be mistaken), **zich herinneren** (remember), **zich schamen** (be ashamed), **zich haasten** (hurry), **zich verslapen** (oversleep).
- English usually has no pronoun here: I'm mistaken is **Ik vergis me**, I remember is **Ik herinner me**.
- Sometimes reflexive: **wassen**, **voelen**, **aankleden**. **Ik voel me moe** (I feel tired), but **Ik voel de regen** (I feel the rain).
- Main clause: **Ik voel me goed**, **Vandaag voel ik me goed**, **Ik heb me vergist**, **Ik moet me haasten**.
- Subordinate clause (a side clause that starts with a word like **omdat** or **dat**): the verb goes to the end, and the pronoun normally comes right after the subject: **omdat ik me vergis**. See subordinate clauses.

- The perfect tense uses **hebben**: **Ik heb me verslapen** (see Hebben or zijn).

Examples

Sorry, ik **vergis me**: de afspraak is morgen.	Sorry, I'm mistaken: the appointment is tomorrow.
Ik **heb me** in de datum **vergist**.	I got the date wrong.
Herinner je je Joris nog?	Do you still remember Joris?
Ahmed **schaamt zich** voor zijn fout.	Ahmed is ashamed of his mistake.
We **moeten ons haasten**, want de trein vertrekt over vijf minuten.	We have to hurry, because the train leaves in five minutes.
Ik **heb me verslapen**, dus ik kom iets later.	I overslept, so I'll be a bit late.
Priya belt de huisarts, omdat ze **zich** niet lekker **voelt**.	Priya is calling the GP because she isn't feeling well.
Vandaag **voel ik me** een stuk beter.	Today I feel a lot better.
De kat **wast zich** in de zon.	The cat is washing itself in the sun.
Carlos **wast** de hond.	Carlos is washing the dog.

Why it works this way

English has a few verbs like this: in "behave yourself", the "yourself" adds nothing new, it simply comes with the verb. Dutch has many more (and **zich gedragen** means, fittingly, to behave). So don't translate word by word. Learn **zich vergissen** as one verb in two pieces.

The pronoun is short and unstressed, and Dutch likes those words early in the sentence, close to the subject. The participle (the form like **vergist**) or the infinitive (the basic form like **haasten**) moves to the end as usual, see

the verb bracket, but the pronoun stays up front: **Ik heb me gisteren vergist.**

Two honest extras. **Herinneren** without a pronoun does exist, but then it means remind: **Ik herinner je aan de afspraak.** And **Herinner je je Joris nog?** is not a typo: the first **je** is you, the second is the reflexive pronoun.

Remember: the pronoun is the subject's shadow. It stays close to the subject, and when an infinitive or participle closes the sentence, the pronoun normally comes before it: **Ik moet me haasten**, **Ik heb me vergist**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben vergist**~~
SAY **Ik vergis me**
Dutch uses the reflexive verb, not "be" plus an adjective

NOT ~~**Ik herinner zijn naam niet**~~
SAY **Ik herinner me zijn naam niet**
to remember, you need the pronoun

NOT ~~**Ik voel goed**~~
SAY **Ik voel me goed**
for how you feel, Dutch needs the pronoun

NOT ~~**Ik me voel moe**~~
SAY **Ik voel me moe**
in a main clause the pronoun follows the verb, a common slip for Spanish speakers

NOT ~~Ik heb vergist me~~
SAY **Ik heb me vergist**
the pronoun goes before the participle, not after it

Quick check

1. Fill in the pronoun: **Mijn buren voelen … hier helemaal thuis.**
2. Fill in **heeft** or **is**: **Fatima … zich verslapen.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Wij moeten haasten ons, de trein vertrekt zo.**
4. Choose the correct sentence: **Lotte herinnert de afspraak niet.** or **Lotte herinnert zich de afspraak niet.**

Answers on page 772.

Use it today

The next time you get a time, a name or a platform wrong, say **Sorry, ik vergis me** out loud. Tonight, tell someone (or your houseplant) how your day was with **Ik voel me…** plus one word, such as **moe**, **blij** or **goed**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/reflexive-verbs

RULE 50 · LEVEL B1 · PRONOUNS

Elkaar: each other

Elkaar means each other. You use it when two or more people do something to one another: **Sanne en Daan kennen elkaar** (Sanne and Daan know each other). It has one form for everyone, and with a preposition you simply put the preposition in front: **met elkaar**, **naast elkaar**.

The pattern

When an action goes from one person to the other and back, use elkaar. It never changes form for the subject and stands where any other object stands.

- It refers to two or more people or things, usually the subject: **we**, **jullie**, **ze**, two or more names, or a group word such as **de hele familie**.
- One form for all: **we helpen elkaar**, **jullie helpen elkaar**, **ze helpen elkaar**.
- With a preposition, the preposition goes first: **met elkaar** (with each other), **bij elkaar** (together), **naast elkaar** (next to each other). If the verb has a fixed preposition, keep it: **wachten op elkaar**.
- Without a preposition, **elkaar** normally comes before the final verb, like other objects: **We hebben elkaar gisteren gezien.** A phrase with a preposition can also follow the final verb, especially in speech: **We hebben lang gepraat met elkaar.**
- In relaxed speech many people say **mekaar**. Same meaning, but keep it for friends and chats, not for formal situations.

Examples

Sanne en Daan **kennen elkaar** van de universiteit.	Sanne and Daan know each other from university.
Mijn buren en ik **helpen elkaar** met de boodschappen als iemand ziek is.	My neighbours and I help each other with the shopping when someone is ill.
Fatima en Priya **bellen elkaar** elke zondagavond.	Fatima and Priya call each other every Sunday evening.
In de trein zaten Mei en Ahmed **naast elkaar**.	On the train, Mei and Ahmed sat next to each other.
Op een verjaardag zit de hele familie **bij elkaar** in een kring.	At a birthday party, the whole family sits together in a circle.
Op het werk hebben we **met elkaar** afgesproken dat niemand na zes uur nog mailt.	At work we agreed with each other that nobody sends emails after six.
Joris en Lotte wachten bij de ingang **op elkaar**.	Joris and Lotte are waiting for each other at the entrance.
Carlos en Emma zijn vorig jaar **uit elkaar** gegaan.	Carlos and Emma split up last year.
Zien we **mekaar** zaterdag bij Yara?	Will we see each other at Yara's on Saturday?

Why it works this way

Elkaar grew out of **elk ander**, literally each other, so both sides of the action are built into the word. The grammar term is reciprocal pronoun: a pronoun for an action that goes both ways.

In the lesson on reflexive verbs you met **zich**, a reflexive pronoun (a word that points back at the subject itself). Picture arrows. With **zich**, every arrow curves back to the same person. With **elkaar**, the arrows cross over to the other person:

- **Bas en Yara verdedigen zich.** They each defend themselves.
- **Bas en Yara verdedigen elkaar.** They defend each other.
- **De buren praten over zichzelf.** The neighbours talk about themselves.
- **De buren praten over elkaar.** The neighbours talk about each other.

If you speak German or Spanish, take care here: German sich and Spanish se can mean both themselves and each other. Standard Dutch keeps the two apart, so for each other you use **elkaar**: **Wij kennen elkaar al jaren.**

This also explains why **elkaar** never changes with the subject. **Zich**, **ons** and **je** have to match the subject because they point back at it. **Elkaar** always means the other people in the group, so there is nothing to match. One related form you will need is the possessive **elkaars** (each other's): **Ze lenen elkaars fietsen.**

A few combinations have become fixed expressions: **uit elkaar gaan** (to split up), **drie dagen achter elkaar** (three days in a row) and **door elkaar halen** (to mix up), as in **Ik haal die twee woorden altijd door elkaar.**

Remember: zich is a mirror, **elkaar** is a handshake.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Lotte en Bas zijn verliefd met elkaar.**~~
SAY **Lotte en Bas zijn verliefd op elkaar.**
English says in love with, Dutch says **verliefd op**

NOT ~~**We wachten voor elkaar.**~~
SAY **We wachten op elkaar.**
English says wait for, Dutch says **wachten op**

NOT ~~**We hebben gisteren gezien elkaar.**~~
SAY **We hebben elkaar gisteren gezien.**
without a preposition, **elkaar** comes before the final verb

NOT ~~We kennen elkaar's familie niet.~~
SAY **We kennen elkaars familie niet.**
no apostrophe, unlike English each other's

Quick check

1. Choose: **Fatima en Ahmed kennen (zich / elkaar) al tien jaar.** (They have known each other for ten years.)
2. Choose: **Jullie zien (jullie / je / elkaar) morgen op het werk, toch?** (You will see each other at work tomorrow, right?)
3. Fix the sentence: **Mijn ouders houden na veertig jaar nog steeds elkaar.** (After forty years, my parents still love each other.)
4. Choose for an email to your manager: **Ik hoop dat we (elkaar / mekaar) volgende week kunnen spreken.**

Answers on page 773.

Use it today

Write three true sentences with **elkaar** about people around you: two neighbours, two colleagues, two friends. For example: **Mijn buurvrouw en ik groeten elkaar elke ochtend bij de fietsenstalling.** Then say them out loud once with **elkaar** and once with **mekaar**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/each-other

RULE 51 · LEVEL A1 · PRONOUNS

Deze, die, dit, dat

Dutch has four words for this, that, these and those: **deze**, **die**, **dit** and **dat**. Use **deze** (this) and **die** (that) with de-words and with every plural. Use **dit** (this) and **dat** (that) with het-words, so you say **deze fiets** and **dit huis**, but **deze fietsen** and **deze huizen**.

The pattern

Deze and dit point to something close, die and dat to something further away. Choose the pair that matches the noun: deze and die for de-words and plurals, dit and dat for het-words.

- **de stoel**, close: **deze stoel** (this chair)
- **de stoel**, far: **die stoel** (that chair)
- **het raam**, close: **dit raam** (this window)
- **het raam**, far: **dat raam** (that window)
- plural, close: **deze stoelen**, **deze ramen** (these)
- plural, far: **die stoelen**, **die ramen** (those)

Examples

Deze fiets is nieuw.	This bike is new.
Gaat **die** trein naar Utrecht?	Does that train go to Utrecht?
Dit brood is lekker.	This bread is tasty.
Werkt Daan in **dat** gebouw?	Does Daan work in that building?
Deze appels zijn heel zoet.	These apples are very sweet.
Ik neem **die** schoenen.	I'll take those shoes.

Zijn **deze** boeken van Priya?	Are these books Priya's?
Dat meisje is de dochter van Ahmed.	That girl is Ahmed's daughter.
Deze week is Sanne jarig.	It is Sanne's birthday this week.

Why it works this way

The grammar term for these words is demonstratives: pointing words. A demonstrative takes the place of **de** or **het**, so it has to match the noun in the same way. Compare **de tafel**, **deze tafel** with **het bord**, **dit bord**. In the plural every noun uses **de** (see De or het), so **de borden** gives **deze borden** and **die borden**.

Remember: het ends in t, and so do **dit** and **dat**. **De** ends in e, and so do **deze** and **die**.

English only changes for number: this book, these books. Dutch also changes for **de** or **het**, but that difference disappears in the plural. If you speak German or Spanish, the idea will feel familiar.

This means you can only pick the right word if you know the article, so always learn a noun together with **de** or **het** (How to actually learn de and het).

Close and far also work for time: **deze week** means this week, and **die avond** means that evening.

When **dit** or **dat** stands alone, as in **Dit is Mei**, the rule is different. That is the next lesson: Dit is, dat is, het is.

Watch out

NOT ~~**dit fiets**~~
SAY **deze fiets**
it is **de fiets**, so **deze**

NOT ~~die huis~~
SAY **dat huis**
it is **het huis**, so **dat**

NOT ~~dat boeken~~
SAY **die boeken**
plurals always take **deze** or **die**, even though it is **het boek**

NOT ~~deze meisje~~
SAY **dit meisje**
singular diminutives, such as **meisje**, are always het-words

NOT ~~Ik neem dat trein.~~
SAY **Ik neem die trein.**
dat looks like English that, but it is **de trein**, so **die**

Quick check

1. You are holding a cup of coffee (**de koffie**). Fill in **deze** or **dit**: **... koffie is te heet.**
2. You point at a house across the street. Fill in the gap: **... huis is mooi.**
3. Choose **deze** or **dit**: **... tomaten zijn rijp.**
4. Fix the sentence without changing its meaning: **Die kopje is van Bas.**

Answers on page 773.

Use it today

In the supermarket, pick three things and name them in your head with the right word, for example **deze appels**, **dat brood** and **die kaas**. If you are unsure about **de** or **het**, guess first and check at home.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/demonstratives

RULE 52 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Dit is, dat is, het is

To introduce someone or point at something, say **dit is** or **dat is**, even when the noun is a de-word: **Dit is mijn zus.** For more than one, only the verb changes: **Dit zijn mijn kinderen.** To describe a situation, say **het is** (**Het is laat.**), and to react to something someone just said, say **dat is** (**Dat is een goed plan.**).

The pattern

> **To introduce or identify someone or something, use dit is or dat is, for de-words and het-words alike. To describe the situation itself, use het is.**

- **dit is** or **dat is** + one person or thing: **Dit is mijn zus. Dat is het station.**
- **dit zijn** or **dat zijn** + more than one: **Dit zijn mijn kinderen.**
- **dit** is close to you, **dat** is farther away or already mentioned.
- **het is** + time, weather or a description of the moment: **Het is laat. Het is koud.**
- **dat is** + your reaction to a whole idea: **Dat is een goed plan.**

Examples

Dit is mijn zus Sanne.	This is my sister Sanne.
Dat is onze nieuwe buurman.	That's our new neighbour.
Dit is het gemeentehuis.	This is the town hall.
Dit zijn mijn kinderen, Yara en Daan.	These are my children, Yara and Daan.

Dat zijn de nieuwe collega's van Carlos.	Those are Carlos's new colleagues.
Het is laat, ik ga naar huis.	It's late, I'm going home.
Het is koud en het regent.	It's cold and it's raining.
Het is vandaag druk in de trein.	It's busy on the train today.
Je hebt een nieuwe baan? **Dat is** fantastisch!	You've got a new job? That's fantastic!
Zaterdag fietsen? **Dat is** een goed plan!	Cycling on Saturday? That's a good plan!

Why it works this way

In Deze, die, dit, dat you put these words right before a noun: **deze fiets**, **dit huis**. Here, **dit** and **dat** stand on their own. At that moment you are not naming the thing yet, you are only pointing at it, so Dutch uses the neutral forms **dit** and **dat**. The noun comes after the verb, and it decides just one thing: **is** for one, **zijn** for more.

Deze and **die** can also stand alone, but then they mean "this one" or "that one" for a de-word or a plural that you and your listener already have in mind: **Welke jas koop je? Deze is mooi.** So the rule of thumb is: to introduce or identify someone or something, normally use **dit** or **dat**. When a de-word is already clear and you mean "this one" or "that one", **deze** or **die** is possible too, even with a noun after the verb.

Het is works differently. There is nothing to point at: you describe the whole scene. The time, the weather and how busy or quiet it is all take **het**: **Het is tien uur. Het is druk op het station.** More on this in Het as an empty subject. You will also hear **het is** for someone you cannot see yet: **Wie is het? Het is de postbode.** When the person is right in front of you, **dit** or **dat** is the natural choice.

Finally, **dat** can point back at a whole sentence, just like English "that". When Fatima says **Ik ben geslaagd!** (I passed!), you answer **Dat is geweldig!** Your **dat** points at the whole piece of news. Everyday reactions such as **dat klopt** (that's right), **dat is jammer** (that's a pity) and **dat maakt niet uit** (it doesn't matter) work the same way. With a suggestion, **Dat is een goed plan!** is the usual reply. **Het is een goed plan** is also correct, just less common as a quick reaction.

Remember: dit and **dat** are your finger, **het** is your camera. Point at a person, a thing or someone's words with **dit** or **dat**; describe the scene with **het**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Deze is mijn zus.**~~
SAY **Dit is mijn zus.**
when you introduce someone, use **dit**, even for a de-word

NOT ~~**Deze zijn mijn kinderen.**~~
SAY **Dit zijn mijn kinderen.**
when you introduce, English "these are" becomes **dit zijn**

NOT ~~**Dit is mijn ouders.**~~
SAY **Dit zijn mijn ouders.**
a plural noun after the verb needs **zijn**

NOT ~~**Is koud vandaag.**~~
SAY **Het is koud vandaag.**
a full Dutch statement needs a subject, here the empty **het**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Daan, (deze / dit) is mijn collega Priya.**

2. Fill in the gap: **Dit … mijn kinderen, Emma en Joris.**
3. Choose: **(Het / Dit) is al elf uur. Ik ga naar bed.**
4. Choose. Mei says: **Ik heb mijn rijbewijs gehaald!** Ahmed answers: **(Dat / Die) is geweldig!**

Answers on page 773.

Use it today

Show a friend or colleague three photos on your phone and introduce what is on them with **Dit is…** or **Dit zijn…**. Then look outside and describe the weather in one sentence that starts with **Het is…**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/dit-is-dat-is

RULE 53 · LEVEL B1 · PRONOUNS

Die and dat instead of hij and het in speech

In spoken Dutch, people often start a sentence with **die** or **dat** where English uses he, she, it or they: **Ken je Tom? Die woont in Utrecht.** Use **die** for people, de-words and plurals, and **dat** for het-words and whole ideas. It sounds natural, and it spares you the question whether a thing is **hij** or **zij**.

The pattern

> **To refer back to someone or something just mentioned, you can start the next sentence with die or dat instead of a personal pronoun (a word like hij, zij or het that stands in for a noun). The verb comes straight after it.**

- **die**: a person (**mijn collega**, **de huisarts**), a de-word (a noun with **de**, like **de bus**) or any plural you refer back to (**Mijn buren? Die zijn aardige mensen.**)
- **dat**: a het-word (**het huis**, **het rooster**) or a whole idea, event or situation (**Het regent alweer. Dat is jammer.**)
- It works for the subject (**Die woont hier.**) and for the object (**Die ken ik niet.**)
- A different pattern: when you point something out and name it, **dat** is the usual choice even with a plural noun (**Dat zijn mijn sleutels.**), as in Dit is, dat is, het is
- It belongs to speech and chatty messages; in emails and formal texts, **hij**, **zij**, **het** and **ze** are more neutral

Examples

Ken je Joris? **Die** werkt ook bij de gemeente.	Do you know Joris? He works at the municipality too.
Fatima komt vanavond ook. **Die** neemt altijd zelfgebakken taart mee.	Fatima is coming tonight too. She always brings homemade cake.
Waar is de kaasschaaf? **Die** ligt in de vaatwasser.	Where is the cheese slicer? It's in the dishwasher.
Heb je mijn nieuwe fiets gezien? **Die** heb ik tweedehands gekocht.	Have you seen my new bike? I bought it second hand.
Ken je dat nieuwe café bij het station? **Dat** is pas sinds maandag open.	Do you know that new café near the station? It has only been open since Monday.
Mijn buren? **Die** zijn deze week op vakantie.	My neighbours? They're on holiday this week.
De trein had weer vertraging. **Dat** gebeurt vaak op deze lijn.	The train was delayed again. That happens a lot on this line.
Het wordt morgen droog. **Dat** zei de weerman tenminste.	It will be dry tomorrow. At least, that's what the weatherman said.

Why it works this way

Die and **dat** are pointing words (demonstratives), the same ones you know from **die man** and **dat huis**. Here they point backwards at what was just said and pull it to the front. Dutch likes to open with what the listener already knows and keep the new information for later, so this fits naturally.

They also solve a real problem. For things, the choice between **hij** and **zij** depends on old grammatical gender, which many Dutch speakers no longer feel themselves (more in Hij, het or zij for things). **Die** only needs to know **de** or **het**. So in **De vergadering? Die is verplaatst.** nobody has to decide whether a meeting is a he or a she.

With people, **die** is completely normal in everyday speech, and many speakers use it even after a het-word for a person: **Dat meisje? Die zit bij mij op voetbal.** It can sound a little cool when the person is standing right next to you, so then use their name or **hij** or **zij**. That is a tendency, not a rule.

Compare speech and writing:

- To a neighbour: **Mijn zoon heeft koorts. Die ligt de hele dag op de bank.**
- In an email to school: **Mijn zoon heeft koorts. Hij kan vandaag niet komen.**

One more contrast: these are not the **die** and **dat** that join two clauses (**de man die hier woont**). Those send the verb to the end, see Relative pronouns: die and dat. Here, **die** or **dat** starts a new sentence, so the verb comes second.

Remember: die and **dat** are a hook. They catch the last thing someone said and hang it at the front of your next sentence, with the verb right behind.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Mijn paraplu? Het staat bij de deur.**~~
SAY **Mijn paraplu? Die staat bij de deur.**
het cannot point back to a de-word

NOT ~~**Ik heb een nieuw huis. Die is groot.**~~
SAY **Ik heb een nieuw huis. Dat is groot.**
huis is a het-word

NOT ~~**Mijn sleutels? Dat liggen op tafel.**~~
SAY **Mijn sleutels? Die liggen op tafel.**
plurals you refer back to take **die**

NOT ~~**Die ik ken niet.**~~
SAY **Die ken ik niet.**
the verb comes straight after **die**

Quick check

1. Fill in **die** or **dat**: **Waar is de afstandsbediening? … ligt op de bank.**
2. Fill in **die** or **dat**: **Ken je Ahmed en Yara? … wonen naast ons.**
3. Fill in **die** or **dat**: **Heb je het nieuwe rooster al gezien? … hangt bij de koffieautomaat.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ik moet morgen om zes uur beginnen. Die is vervelend.**

Answers on page 773.

Use it today

Pick three people you know here and describe each in two short sentences, starting the second one with **die**: **Ken je Carlos? Die woont bij mij om de hoek.** Then react to the next piece of news you hear with **Dat is leuk** or **Dat is jammer**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/die-and-dat-in-speech

RULE 54 · LEVEL B1 · PRONOUNS

Relative pronouns: die and dat

When you want to say "the man who..." or "the house that..." in Dutch, you use **die** or **dat**. Use **dat** after a singular het-word and **die** after everything else: de-words and all plurals. The verb goes to the end of that part of the sentence, and unlike English, you can never leave **die** or **dat** out.

The pattern

> **Use die after de-words and plurals, and dat after singular het-words. The conjugated verb goes to the end of the relative clause.**

- A relative pronoun is a linking word like English who, which or that. It works the same for people and things. The extra information it introduces is the relative clause.
- De-word: **de man die daar staat**
- Singular het-word: **het huis dat ik koop**
- Plural: always **die**, even for het-words: **de huizen die ik bekijk**
- Diminutives are het-words, so they take **dat**: **het kopje dat op tafel staat**
- The conjugated verb (the one that matches the subject) moves to the end. Any other verbs join it there.
- In writing, a comma often closes the relative clause when the main verb follows right after it.

Examples

De man **die** daar bij de bushalte **staat**, is mijn buurman.	The man who is standing at the bus stop over there is my neighbour.

Het meisje **dat** achter de kassa **zit**, is de dochter van Fatima.	The girl who is sitting at the till is Fatima's daughter.
De fiets **die** Daan **wil kopen**, is tweedehands.	The bike Daan wants to buy is second-hand.
Het huis **dat** ik **koop**, ligt vlak bij het station.	The house I'm buying is very close to the station.
De huizen **die** we **bekeken**, waren allemaal te klein.	The houses we looked at were all too small.
Het boek **dat** Priya me **gaf**, is echt spannend.	The book Priya gave me is really gripping.
Mei heeft een collega **die** drie talen **spreekt**.	Mei has a colleague who speaks three languages.
De trein **die** om acht uur **vertrekt**, is weer vertraagd.	The train that leaves at eight is delayed again.
Is dit het formulier **dat** ik bij de gemeente **moet inleveren**?	Is this the form I have to hand in at the town hall?

Why it works this way

Die and **dat** are old friends: they are the same words you use to point at things, as in **die fiets** and **dat huis**. In a relative clause they point back at the noun you just mentioned, so they follow its article. Compare **de fiets die ik koop**, **het huis dat ik koop** and **de huizen die ik koop**. Every plural takes **de**, so every plural takes **die**. If you are unsure about a noun, see De or het.

Remember: de ends in e, and so does **die**. **Het** ends in t, and so does **dat**.

The verb goes to the end because a relative clause is a subordinate clause: a part of the sentence that cannot stand alone. Dutch sends the conjugated

verb to the end of every subordinate clause, just as after **omdat** (see Subordinate clauses).

English happily says "the book I read", but Dutch has no such shortcut. A useful way to see it: **die** or **dat** is the flag that says "extra information coming, verb at the end". Without the flag, the listener loses the thread.

In relaxed speech you will hear **het meisje die** or **het bedrijf die**. It is common, but in writing and in exams it counts as a mistake, so stick to **dat**. After a preposition, as in "the man I spoke to", Dutch uses other words: that is the topic of the next lesson.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De jas ik gisteren kocht, is te klein.**~~
SAY **De jas die ik gisteren kocht, is te klein.**
Dutch never drops **die** or **dat**

NOT ~~**de man die staat daar**~~
SAY **de man die daar staat**
the verb goes to the end

NOT ~~**het huis die ik koop**~~
SAY **het huis dat ik koop**
huis is a het-word

NOT ~~**de buurvrouw wie ik ken**~~
SAY **de buurvrouw die ik ken**
without a preposition, who is **die**

NOT ~~**de collega die ik hem gisteren belde**~~
SAY **de collega die ik gisteren belde**
die already stands for the person, so no extra **hem**

Quick check

1. Fill in **die** or **dat**: **Waar is het pakketje … gisteren is bezorgd?**
2. Choose: **De treinen (die / dat) naar Amsterdam rijden, zijn vandaag vol.**
3. Fix the sentence: **De film ik gisteren zag, was saai.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Lotte heeft een baan die is heel leuk.**

Answers on page 774.

Use it today

Think of three people you see this week, like a neighbour, a colleague or your GP, and describe each one in a sentence with **die**: **Bas is de buurman die altijd zijn fiets voor mijn deur zet.** Then pick one het-word around you, such as **het café** or **het station**, and write one sentence with **dat**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/relative-die-dat

RULE 55 · LEVEL B2 · PRONOUNS

Wie, wat and waar- in relative clauses

In a relative clause (a mini-sentence that describes a noun), Dutch drops **die** and **dat** after a preposition such as **met** or **op**. People get **wie** (**de collega met wie ik werk**) and things get **waar** plus the preposition (**de pen waarmee ik schrijf**). Use **wat** after **alles**, **iets**, **niets** and **het enige**, after a superlative (the "most" or "best" form) with no noun after it, and to refer back to a whole sentence.

The default words **die** and **dat** are covered in Relative pronouns: die and dat. This lesson is about the moments when they step aside.

The pattern

After a preposition, use wie for people and waar plus the preposition for things. Use wat after alles, iets, niets, veel, weinig and het enige, after a superlative with no noun, and for a whole sentence.

- People: **de buurvrouw van wie ik een sleutel heb**
- Things: **de app waarmee ik betaal** (**met** becomes **mee**, **tot** becomes **toe**)
- After **alles**, **iets**, **niets**, **veel**, **weinig** and **het enige**: **alles wat ik weet**
- Words for people keep **die**: **iemand die ik ken**, **iedereen die meedoet**
- After a superlative with no noun: **het mooiste wat ik ken**, but **het mooiste dorp dat ik ken**
- A whole sentence, after a comma: **Hij kwam te laat, wat ik vervelend vond.**

Examples

De collega **met wie** ik aan dit project werk, gaat volgende week met verlof.	The colleague I'm working on this project with is going on leave next week.
Is dat de buurman **van wie** je de ladder hebt geleend?	Is that the neighbour you borrowed the ladder from?
Dit is de fiets **waarmee** ik elke dag naar mijn werk ga.	This is the bike I ride to work every day.
De brief **waarop** ik wacht, komt van de gemeente.	The letter I'm waiting for is coming from the council.
Alles wat je in de vergadering zegt, komt in het verslag.	Everything you say in the meeting goes into the minutes.
Het internet is **het enige wat** ik na de verhuizing nog moet regelen.	The internet is the only thing I still have to sort out after the move.
Die fietstocht langs de kust was **het mooiste wat** we deze zomer hebben gedaan.	That bike ride along the coast was the loveliest thing we did this summer.
Er was een storing bij Utrecht, **wat** betekende dat Priya een uur te laat was.	There was a fault near Utrecht, which meant that Priya was an hour late.
Joris heeft na het feest alles afgewassen, **wat** ik heel attent vond.	Joris did all the washing-up after the party, which I thought was very thoughtful.

Why it works this way

Die and **dat** are pointers: they aim at one specific noun and copy its gender, as in **de fiets die** and **het huis dat**. Two situations call for a different word.

The first is a preposition. Standard Dutch does not put **die** or **dat** straight after a preposition in a relative clause, so it borrows its question words

instead. People get **wie**, much like English "with whom". Things get a **waar-** compound, built the same way as **daarmee** and **ermee** (see er plus a preposition).

> **Remember:** ask the question first. **Met wie werk je?** gives **de collega met wie ik werk**, and **Waarmee betaal je?** gives **de app waarmee ik betaal**.

The second is a vague word for a thing, or a whole sentence. **Alles**, **iets**, **niets** and **het mooiste** have no **de** or **het** noun behind them, and neither does a sentence, so Dutch uses **wat**, the question word for things. This applies to things only: words for people, such as **iemand**, **niemand**, **iedereen** and **degene**, take **die**. Compare:

- **de buurvrouw die ik help** and **de buurvrouw met wie ik praat**
- **de pen die ik zoek** and **de pen waarmee ik schrijf**
- **iets wat ik zoek** and **iemand die ik zoek**
- **het mooiste dorp dat ik ken** and **het mooiste wat ik ken**
- **Hij kwam te laat. Dat vond ik vervelend.** and **Hij kwam te laat, wat ik vervelend vond.**

Spoken Dutch is looser. Many people say **de collega waar ik mee werk**, splitting the **waar-** word and using it for a person. That is normal in conversation; in a formal email, **met wie** is the safer choice. After **iets**, **het enige** and superlatives you will also see **dat**. That is accepted, but **wat** is more common and never wrong. After **alles**, stick to **wat**. The next lesson covers all the **waar-** words.

If you think in English, the trap is "which": English uses it for a thing and for a whole sentence, while Dutch splits the job between **die** or **dat** and **wat**. German speakers often say **met die**, copying "mit dem".

Watch out

NOT ~~de collega met die ik werk~~
SAY **de collega met wie ik werk**
after a preposition, a person gets **wie**

NOT ~~de vrouw wie ik gisteren sprak~~
SAY **de vrouw die ik gisteren sprak**
no preposition, so **die**; **wie** is not English "whom"

NOT ~~de pen met wat ik schrijf~~
SAY **de pen waarmee ik schrijf**
a thing after a preposition becomes **waar** plus the preposition

NOT ~~het boek wat ik lees~~
SAY **het boek dat ik lees**
after a real noun, use **die** or **dat**; this **wat** is common in speech but counts as an error in writing

NOT ~~Hij kwam te laat, die ik vervelend vond.~~
SAY **Hij kwam te laat, wat ik vervelend vond.**
a whole sentence is picked up with **wat**

Quick check

1. Fill in one word: **Is dat de huisarts bij … je sinds kort ingeschreven staat?**
2. Fill in one word (the verb is **denken aan**): **Het cadeau … ik dacht, was al uitverkocht.**
3. Choose **die**, **dat** or **wat**: **Daan heeft zijn rijexamen in één keer gehaald, … niemand had verwacht.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Dat is de beste pizza wat ik ooit heb gegeten.**

Answers on page 774.

Use it today

Tonight, send a friend or colleague three sentences about your week: one with **met wie** or **van wie**, one with a **waar-** word such as **waarmee** or **waarop**, and one that comments on something with **wat ik … vond**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/relative-wie-wat-waar

RULE 56 · LEVEL B2 · PRONOUNS

Waarmee, waarover, waaraan

In ordinary Dutch questions about a thing, you join **waar** to the preposition instead of using **wat**: you ask **Waarmee schrijf je?** (What are you writing with?) rather than **Met wat schrijf je?**, which only turns up in casual speech. In everyday speech the two parts often split up, as in **Waar denk je aan?** (What are you thinking about?). When the answer is a person, you keep the preposition and use **wie**: **Aan wie denk je?**

The pattern

> **For things, Dutch normally replaces a preposition plus wat with waar plus that preposition: waarmee, waarover, waaraan. For people, it keeps the preposition and adds wie: met wie, over wie, aan wie.**

- Most prepositions simply attach: **waarover**, **waaraan**, **waarop**, **waarin**, **waarvoor**, **waarvan**, **waarnaar**, **waardoor**.
- Two change shape: **met** becomes **mee** (**waarmee**) and **tot** becomes **toe** (**waartoe**). This also happens when the parts split: **Waar betaal je mee?**
- You can keep the two parts together at the start, or split them: **waar** goes first and the preposition goes to the end, before any infinitive or past participle: **Waar heb je op gewacht?**
- The split version is the everyday spoken choice. The joined version tends to sound a little more careful and is common in writing.
- In standard Dutch, **wie** stays next to its preposition: **Op wie wacht je?**
- The preposition usually comes from the verb or adjective: **denken aan**, **wachten op**, **bang zijn voor**. See verbs with a fixed preposition.

Examples

Waarmee betaal je hier, met je pinpas of met je telefoon?	What do you pay with here, your debit card or your phone?
Waar gaat de vergadering van morgen **over**?	What is tomorrow's meeting about?
Waarover wilt u de huisarts spreken?	What would you like to see the GP about?
Waar denk je **aan**, Sanne? Je kijkt zo serieus.	What are you thinking about, Sanne? You look so serious.
Waar wacht je nog **op**? De trein vertrekt zo.	What are you still waiting for? The train is about to leave.
Waardoor is de verwarming uitgevallen?	What made the heating stop working?
Waar heeft Ahmed zich zo **over** opgewonden?	What did Ahmed get so worked up about?
Aan wie heb je de reservesleutel gegeven?	Who did you give the spare key to?
Met wie fiets je morgen naar je werk?	Who are you cycling to work with tomorrow?
Op wie wachten jullie nog, op Daan of op Priya?	Who are you still waiting for, Daan or Priya?

Why it works this way

Dutch has a whole family of these words. A preposition does not like to stand in front of **het**, **dit**, **dat** or **wat** when they refer to a thing, so it hooks onto a small place word instead:

- **ermee**: with it
- **hiermee**: with this

- **daarmee**: with that
- **waarmee**: with what

If you know er plus a preposition, **waar-** is simply the question member of the same family, and it splits in the same way. English once had this system too, and traces survive in words like therefore, herewith, whereby and whereupon. Dutch just kept using it.

Splitting feels natural to English speakers, because English also leaves the preposition at the end: What are you waiting for? The trap is people. English happily says Who are you waiting for?, but standard Dutch does not split **wie**. Compare:

- **Waar wacht je op?** (the bus, a parcel)
- **Op wie wacht je?** (Joris, your sister)
- **Waarmee ga je naar Utrecht?** (the train, the car)
- **Met wie ga je naar Utrecht?** (Mei, your colleagues)

Spanish and Arabic speakers often translate word for word and produce **met wat**. German speakers will recognise the system from their own wo- forms, so the only surprise is **mee**.

To be honest about real speech: you will hear **met wat** or **over wat** in quick, casual Dutch, and when someone missed a word and asks back with stress: **Met wát?** In ordinary questions, and in anything you write, use **waar-**. The same split also turns up in relative clauses and indirect questions: **Ik weet niet waar ze het over hadden.**

Remember: a thing gets **waar-**, a person gets **wie**. If the answer could be a name, put the preposition in front of **wie** and keep them together.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Wat denk je aan?**~~
SAY **Waar denk je aan?**
only **waar** can leave its preposition at the end

NOT ~~**Waarmet open je dit blik?**~~
SAY **Waarmee open je dit blik?**
met becomes **mee**

NOT ~~**Waarover gaat het artikel over?**~~
SAY **Waar gaat het artikel over?**
the preposition appears only once

NOT ~~**Wie lijk je op, je vader of je moeder?**~~
SAY **Op wie lijk je, je vader of je moeder?**
wie stays with its preposition

NOT ~~**Waar heb je gewacht op?**~~
SAY **Waar heb je op gewacht?**
the preposition comes before the final verb

Quick check

1. Fill in one word: **... is die tas gemaakt? Van oude spijkerbroeken.**
2. Choose **Op wie** or **Waarop**: **... wacht je? Op Lotte, die is altijd te laat.**
3. Rewrite in the usual form, with **waar** first and the preposition at the end: **Over wat heeft Bas het steeds?**
4. Fill in the missing preposition: **Waar ben je de hele ochtend al ... bezig? Met mijn belastingaangifte.**

Answers on page 774.

Use it today

Ask one split question about a thing and one question about a person today, for example **Waar ben je nu mee bezig?** to a colleague and **Met wie ga je naar die verjaardag?** to a friend or neighbour.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/waar-plus-preposition

RULE 57 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Iemand, niemand, iets, niets, alles, iedereen

Dutch has six handy words for people and things you do not name: **iemand** (someone), **niemand** (no one), **iedereen** (everyone), **iets** (something), **niets** or **niks** (nothing) and **alles** (everything). As a subject, **iedereen** and **alles** take a singular verb, just like English everyone and everything: **Iedereen is er.** And after **iets** or **niets**, an adjective usually gets an extra **-s**: **iets leuks** means something nice.

The pattern

> **Iemand, niemand and iedereen are about people; iets, niets and alles are about things. As a subject, all six take a singular verb, and an adjective after iets or niets usually gets an extra -s.**

- Grammar calls these indefinite pronouns: words that stand for a person or thing without saying exactly who or what.
- People: **iemand** (someone, or anyone in a question), **niemand** (no one, not anyone), **iedereen** (everyone).
- Things: **iets** (something, or anything in a question), **niets** (nothing, not anything), **alles** (everything).
- **Niks** means the same as **niets**. It is everyday speech; in a formal email, write **niets**.
- The verb is singular, the form you use for one person or thing: **Iedereen is moe. Alles is klaar.**
- English "not ... anything" and "not ... anyone" usually become one Dutch word, with no extra **niet**: **Ik heb niets gegeten** (I haven't eaten anything), **Ik zie niemand** (I don't see anyone). Spanish speakers, take

care: **Ik zie niet niemand** means something else, namely "it is not true that I see no one".

- **Iets** or **niets** plus adjective plus **-s**: **iets leuks**, **niets nieuws**. An adjective that already ends in **-s** stays as it is: **iets fris** (something fresh or refreshing). Informal **wat** (something) works the same way: **wat lekkers**. More in Iets leuks, niets nieuws.

Examples

Er staat **iemand** voor de deur.	Someone is standing at the door.
Heeft **iemand** mijn paraplu gezien?	Has anyone seen my umbrella?
Er zit **niemand** in de wachtkamer.	There is no one in the waiting room.
Wil je **iets** drinken?	Would you like something to drink?
Ik heb vandaag nog **niets** gegeten.	I haven't eaten anything yet today.
Fatima heeft **niks** gezegd.	Fatima didn't say anything.
Iedereen is welkom op mijn verjaardag.	Everyone is welcome at my birthday party.
Alles is zo duur in de supermarkt.	Everything is so expensive at the supermarket.
Daan heeft **iets leuks** voor Sanne gekocht.	Daan has bought something nice for Sanne.
De huisarts heeft **niets ernstigs** gevonden.	The GP didn't find anything serious.

Why it works this way

Look inside the words and they explain themselves. **Iedereen** is **ieder** (every) plus **een** (one): every single one. Like English everyone, it counts people one at a time, so the verb stays singular even when forty colleagues are at the Friday **borrel** (drinks). **Alles** packs everything into one big

bundle, so it is singular too. If you really want a plural, use **allemaal** (all of us, all of them): **We zijn er allemaal.**

The **-s** after **iets** and **niets** is left over from an old ending that meant roughly "of". **Iets leuks** is a bit like "something of the nice kind". English has a similar idea in "something of interest"; Dutch just fits the "of" into one letter.

Remember: iets and **niets** end in **-s**, and they lend that **-s** to the adjective after them, unless it already has one: **iets leuks**, **niets nieuws**, but **iets fris**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Iedereen zijn er.**~~
SAY **Iedereen is er.**
iedereen means every single person, so the verb is singular

NOT ~~**Ik heb iets leuk gekocht.**~~
SAY **Ik heb iets leuks gekocht.**
an adjective after **iets** gets **-s**

NOT ~~**Ik heb gezien niemand.**~~
SAY **Ik heb niemand gezien.**
the participle **gezien** goes to the end, after **niemand**; see The verb bracket

NOT ~~**Alle is goed.**~~
SAY **Alles is goed.**
on its own it is **alles**; **alle** needs a noun after it, as in **alle kinderen**

Quick check

1. Fill in the present tense of **zijn**: **Iedereen ... blij met het mooie weer.**
2. Fill in the right form of **lekker**: **Mei heeft iets ... gekookt.**

3. Choose: **Lotte heeft (alles / iedereen) uitgenodigd voor haar verjaardag.**
4. Remove one word so the sentence means "I don't know anyone in this street": **Ik ken niet niemand in deze straat.**

Answers on page 774.

Use it today

Tonight, tell someone at home or at work about your day with **iets** or **niets** plus an adjective: **Ik heb vandaag iets leuks gedaan** or **Ik heb vandaag niets bijzonders gedaan**. Then ask back: **En jij? Heb jij iets leuks gedaan?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/someone-nothing-everyone

RULE 58 · LEVEL B1 · PRONOUNS

Men, je and ze: people in general

To talk about people in general, everyday Dutch uses **je**: **Je moet hier betalen** means that anyone, you included, has to pay here. **Men** means the same but sounds formal, so you mostly meet it in writing. And **ze** is the vague "they", the people in charge whom nobody bothers to name: **Ze gaan de weg repareren**.

The pattern

> **Use je for people in general in everyday Dutch, men in formal writing, and ze for an unnamed group that makes decisions.**

- **je**: spoken Dutch and most written Dutch. It includes everyone, the listener and the speaker too. It is always unstressed, so never **jij** in this meaning. Its -self word and its possessive are also **je**: **Je moet je fiets op slot zetten** (see Reflexive pronouns).
- **men**: official texts, news, signs. It takes a singular verb like **hij**: **men zegt**, **men kan**. Its -self word is **zich**. It can only be the subject (the one doing the action).
- **ze**: "they" for people you do not name, such as the **gemeente**, the government, the railway, or just people who spread news: **Ze zeggen dat…** It takes a plural verb and is unstressed, so not **zij**.

Examples

Je moet hier eerst een kaartje kopen.	You have to buy a ticket here first.
Als **je** in Nederland woont, heb **je** echt een fiets nodig.	If you live in the Netherlands, you really need a bike.

Bij de huisarts moet **je** meestal eerst bellen voor een afspraak.	At the GP you usually have to call for an appointment first.
Een warme douche geeft **je** meteen een beter gevoel.	A warm shower makes you feel better straight away.
Men verwacht dat de huizenprijzen volgend jaar verder stijgen.	It is expected that house prices will rise further next year.
Men dient zich bij de balie te melden.	One is required to report to the desk.
Ze gaan volgende week de weg repareren.	They are going to repair the road next week.
Ze hebben de treinkaartjes weer duurder gemaakt.	They have made train tickets more expensive again.
Ze zeggen dat het morgen gaat sneeuwen.	They say it is going to snow tomorrow.

Why it works this way

Think of three camera positions. With **je**, you hold the camera yourself: you step into the situation and picture doing it. That is why **je** feels warm and natural, and why Dutch uses it for instructions, advice and explaining how things work. With **men**, the camera sits on a tall tripod and nobody is in the picture, so it sounds official and distant. With **ze**, the camera points across the street at a faceless group that decides things for you: the **gemeente**, the railway company, your landlord.

Compare these pairs:

- **Je moet hier betalen.** A colleague explains the canteen.
- **Men wordt verzocht hier te betalen.** A printed sign.
- **Ze gaan de weg repareren.** Some authority, no names.
- **Zij gaan de weg repareren, niet wij.** Those specific people, with stress.

In modern official writing, **men** is slowly giving way to **u** or the passive: **U dient zich te melden**, **Er wordt verwacht dat…** (see The passive with worden). Generic **je** can also be heard as the listener personally, just like English "you". Context usually makes it clear. If you really mean the listener, say **Jij moet betalen** with stress on **jij** (more in Jij or je?).

Remember: je is you in the situation, **men** is nobody in particular on paper, and **ze** is the people with the clipboards.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Man moet hier betalen.**~~
SAY **Je moet hier betalen.**
man is German; in Dutch **man** only means a man

NOT ~~**Men zeggen dat de huren stijgen.**~~
SAY **Men zegt dat de huren stijgen.**
men takes a singular verb, like **hij**

NOT ~~**Je moet zich hier aanmelden.**~~
SAY **Je moet je hier aanmelden.**
with **je** the -self word is also **je**; **zich** goes with **men**

NOT ~~**Ze gaat de weg repareren.**~~
SAY **Ze gaan de weg repareren.**
plural verb for "they"; **ze gaat** means "she is going"

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Men zeggen dat de economie dit jaar groeit.**
2. Fill in **je** or **zich**: **Men moet … bij de receptie melden.**
3. Choose the form that means "they": **Ze bouwt / Ze bouwen een nieuwe fietsenstalling bij het station.**

4. Fill in **je** or **men**: **Een wandeling in het bos geeft … nieuwe energie.**

Answers on page 774.

Use it today

Explain to a new neighbour or colleague, in three sentences with **je**, how something works where you live, such as recycling glass or checking in at the station. Then add one sentence with **ze** about something the **gemeente** is changing in your street.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/people-in-general

RULE 59 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Het as an empty subject: het regent

Dutch uses **het** as an empty subject for the weather and the time: **het regent** (it's raining), **het is half acht** (it's half past seven). The subject is the word the verb goes with, and this **het** refers to nothing at all, just like English "it". You also find it in fixed phrases like **het spijt me** (I'm sorry) and in statements like **het is belangrijk dat...** (it's important that...).

The pattern

> **Dutch uses het as an empty subject for weather and time, in some fixed phrases, and in statements like het is belangrijk dat... The verb takes the same form as with hij.**

- Weather: **het regent**, **het sneeuwt**, **het waait** (it's windy), **het is koud**
- Time and days: **het is half acht** (see Telling the time), **het is maandag**
- Fixed phrases: **het spijt me** (I'm sorry), **het gaat goed** (things are going well), **het lukt** (it works out), **het geeft niet** (never mind)
- Impersonal statements: **het is belangrijk dat...**, **het is leuk om te...**
- If the sentence starts with another word, **het** moves behind the verb: **Vandaag regent het.**

Examples

Het regent al de hele dag.	It has been raining all day.
Neem een jas mee, **het waait** hard.	Take a coat, it's very windy.
Vandaag **sneeuwt het** in Groningen.	It's snowing in Groningen today.

Kom op, Lotte, **het is** al half acht!	Come on, Lotte, it's already half past seven!
Het spijt me dat ik te laat ben, Priya.	I'm sorry I'm late, Priya.
Hoe gaat het met Ahmed? **Het gaat** veel beter.	How is Ahmed doing? He's doing a lot better.
Het is belangrijk dat je je paspoort meeneemt.	It's important that you bring your passport.
Het is leuk om je buren te leren kennen.	It's nice to get to know your neighbours.
Het is jammer dat Emma niet op je verjaardag komt.	It's a pity Emma isn't coming to your birthday.

Why it works this way

In **Daan werkt thuis**, the subject **Daan** is a real person. In **het regent**, there is nobody to point to, but a normal Dutch statement still needs a subject. So **het** takes the seat and means nothing.

English does the same with "it", and German with "es": **het spijt me** works like "es tut mir leid". In Spanish, Italian or Arabic, "rains" alone can be a full sentence, so if you speak one of these, train yourself to say the **het** every time.

In **het spijt me**, **het** is the subject and **me** is the person who feels sorry, so you also say **het spijt hem** and **het spijt ons**. What you regret can follow in a **dat** part.

In impersonal statements, the real news sits in the **dat** part or the **om te** part. Dutch likes to put **het** up front and the long part at the end. Inside the **dat** part, the verb goes to the end (see Dat clauses).

Compare **Het is druk in de trein** (it's busy on the train) with **Er zijn veel mensen in de trein** (there are many people on the train). **Het** describes the situation, while **er** says that something is there (see Er is and er zijn).

Remember: het here is like a bag on the empty train seat next to you. It holds the place, but nobody is sitting there.

Watch out

NOT ~~Vandaag regent.~~
SAY **Vandaag regent het.**
in a weather statement **het** is required; after **Vandaag** it follows the verb

NOT ~~Ik ben sorry.~~
SAY **Het spijt me.**
the standard phrase: **het** is the subject, **me** is the person who feels sorry

NOT ~~Hoe ben je?~~
SAY **Hoe gaat het?**
as a greeting, Dutch asks how "it" is going

NOT ~~Het geeft hier veel fietsen.~~
SAY **Er zijn hier veel fietsen.**
German "es gibt" is **er is** or **er zijn** in Dutch

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Neem een paraplu mee, ... regent.**
2. This sentence is about the weather. Fix it by adding one word: **Vandaag is erg koud.**
3. Choose **Ik**, **Het** or **Er**: **... spijt me dat ik je verjaardag ben vergeten.**
4. Fix the word order: **Het is jammer dat Bas komt niet.**

Answers on page 775.

Use it today

The next time a neighbour, colleague or cashier mentions the weather, answer with a full sentence with **het**, like **Ja, het waait echt hard vandaag!** Then ask **Hoe gaat het?** and listen for the **het** in their answer.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/dummy-het

RULE 60 · LEVEL A1 · PRONOUNS

Question words: wie, wat, waar, wanneer, hoe, waarom

To ask an open question in Dutch, start with a question word: **wie** (who), **wat** (what), **waar** (where), **wanneer** (when), **hoe** (how), **waarom** (why), **hoeveel** (how much, how many) or **welk** and **welke** (which). Put the verb (the action word) straight after it. Then comes the subject (the person or thing doing it), unless the question word is the subject itself. So "Where do you live?" is **Waar woon je?**, with no extra word for "do".

The pattern

> **The question word, or a phrase with it like welke bus, comes first, and the verb comes second. The subject follows the verb, unless the question word or phrase is itself the subject.**

- **wie** (who): **Wie is dat?**
- **wat** (what): **Wat drink je?**
- **waar** (where): **Waar is het station?**
- **wanneer** (when): **Wanneer kom je?**
- **hoe** (how): **Hoe gaat het?**
- **waarom** (why): **Waarom lach je?**
- **hoeveel** (how much, how many): **Hoeveel kost het?**
- **welke** (which) with **de** words and all plurals, **welk** with singular **het** words: **welke trein**, **welk huis** (more in Welk or welke)

When the question word or phrase is the subject, there is no separate subject after the verb: **Wie heeft een pen?**, **Welke bus gaat naar het centrum?**

When **je** or **jij** is the subject and comes after a present-tense verb, leave off the -t ending: **Waar woon jij?** When **je** means your, the -t stays: **Waar woont je broer?** See Werk jij? Where the t disappears.

Examples

Wie heeft een pen?	Who has a pen?
Wat eet je vanavond, Priya?	What are you eating tonight, Priya?
Waar woont Mei?	Where does Mei live?
Wanneer is je verjaardag, Daan?	When is your birthday, Daan?
Hoe gaat het met Lotte?	How is Lotte doing?
Waarom ben je zo laat, Ahmed?	Why are you so late, Ahmed?
Hoeveel kost een kilo appels?	How much does a kilo of apples cost?
Hoeveel kinderen heeft Fatima?	How many children does Fatima have?
Welke bus gaat naar het centrum?	Which bus goes to the centre?
Welk boek lees je?	Which book are you reading?

Why it works this way

Dutch main sentences have one firm habit: the verb sits in second place (see verb second). In a question, the question word or phrase takes first place, so the verb follows at once and the subject, if there is a separate one, waits behind it.

English does this too, but only with small verbs like is and can: "Where is Sanne?", "What can you do?" With most other verbs, English adds "do". Dutch does not. The real verb simply moves forward: **Waar werkt Sanne?** is literally "Where works Sanne?"

The good news: **wie**, **wat** and **waar** look a lot like who, what and where. A word worth learning well is **hoe** (how), because it comes back in **hoeveel**

(how much) and **hoe laat** (what time).

Remember: picture two front seats. The question word or phrase takes seat one, the verb takes seat two, and everyone else sits behind them.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Waar jij woont?**~~
SAY **Waar woon jij?**
the verb comes straight after the question word

NOT ~~**Wat drinkt jij?**~~
SAY **Wat drink jij?**
no -t ending when the subject **jij** follows the verb

NOT ~~**Wat tijd is het?**~~
SAY **Hoe laat is het?**
for clock time, Dutch asks "how late"

NOT ~~**Wie heet je?**~~
SAY **Hoe heet je?**
wie means who; the German "wie" is Dutch **hoe**

NOT ~~**Welke boek lees je?**~~
SAY **Welk boek lees je?**
boek is a singular **het** word

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **... broers heeft Yara?** The reply is: **Twee.**
2. Choose **welk** or **welke**: **... fiets is van Emma?** (It is **de fiets**.)
3. Fix the sentence: **Waar Sanne werkt?**

4. Fill in the gap: **… ben je zo blij, Joris?** The reply is: **Omdat het vrijdag is!**

Answers on page 775.

Use it today

At the supermarket or the station today, ask one real question with a question word, such as **Waar is de melk?** or **Hoe laat vertrekt de trein?** Check that your verb comes right after the question word.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/question-words

RULE 61 · LEVEL A2 · PRONOUNS

Welk or welke, and wat voor

Dutch has two words for which: **welk** and **welke**. Use **welk** before a singular het-word (one thing whose word for the is **het**), as in **welk huis**, and **welke** before a de-word or any plural: **welke trein**, **welke huizen**. To ask what kind of thing something is, use **wat voor** or **wat voor een**: **Wat voor auto heb je?**

The pattern

> **Welk goes before one het-word, and welke goes before all other nouns. Wat voor (een) asks what kind, not which one.**

- **welk** + singular het-word: **welk huis**, **welk formulier**, **welk broodje**
- **welke** + singular de-word: **welke trein**, **welke huisarts**
- **welke** + any plural, from de-words and het-words alike: **welke treinen**, **welke huizen**
- **wat voor** + plural or uncountable noun (stuff you don't count, like coffee): **wat voor schoenen**, **wat voor koffie**
- **wat voor** or **wat voor een** + singular countable noun, both correct: **wat voor (een) fiets**
- **wat voor** does not change for de or het: **wat voor huis**, **wat voor trein**

Examples

Welk huis is van Daan?	Which house is Daan's?
Van **welk spoor** vertrekt de trein naar Utrecht?	Which platform does the train to Utrecht leave from?
Welke trein moet ik naar Schiphol nemen?	Which train do I take to Schiphol?

Welke huizen zijn nog te koop?	Which houses are still for sale?
Welk formulier moet Fatima bij de gemeente invullen?	Which form does Fatima have to fill in at the municipality?
Welk broodje neem jij, Mei?	Which sandwich are you having, Mei?
Wat voor werk doe je?	What kind of work do you do?
Wat voor een auto heeft Joris gekocht?	What kind of car did Joris buy?
Wat voor weer wordt het morgen?	What will the weather be like tomorrow?
Wat voor schoenen zoekt u?	What kind of shoes are you looking for?

Why it works this way

Welke carries the extra -e that many Dutch words get, and Dutch drops that -e in one spot: before a singular het-word. You see the same pattern in **elk huis** (every house) and **elke trein** (every train), and again in zulk and zulke. So the real question is whether the noun is a de-word or a het-word. Diminutives, the small forms like **broodje** and **huisje**, are het-words in the singular: **welk broodje**, but **welke broodjes**.

The meaning split is simple. **Welk** and **welke** ask you to pick one from a group you can see or know about. **Wat voor** asks for a description:

- **Welke auto is van jou? Die blauwe daar.** You point.
- **Wat voor auto heb je? Een kleine elektrische.** You describe.
- **Welk boek lees je nu?** The answer is a title.
- **Wat voor boeken lees je graag? Thrillers.** The answer is a kind.

In everyday speech the line is not perfectly sharp, and you will hear **Welke auto heb je?** when someone means the brand. Pointing versus describing is still your best guide.

English uses what for both jobs (what bus, what kind of bus), and Spanish speakers have the same habit with "qué". Dutch does not put **wat** straight before a noun to mean which, so what bus is **welke bus**. Also, **wat voor** looks like what for, but it means what kind of. What for is **waarvoor**. German speakers have it easy: **wat voor een** works like "was für ein", and **welk** has just two forms.

In speech, **wat** and **voor** often split up: **Wat heb jij voor werk? Wat is dat voor hond?** Both sound completely natural.

Remember: welk points, **wat voor** describes. For the form, start from **welke** and drop the -e only for one het-word.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Welke huis is van jou?**~~
SAY **Welk huis is van jou?**
huis is a singular het-word

NOT ~~**Welk trein gaat naar Utrecht?**~~
SAY **Welke trein gaat naar Utrecht?**
trein is a de-word

NOT ~~**Welk boeken heb je gelezen?**~~
SAY **Welke boeken heb je gelezen?**
plurals take **welke**, even when the singular is **het boek**

NOT ~~**Wat bus gaat naar het ziekenhuis?**~~
SAY **Welke bus gaat naar het ziekenhuis?**
English what before a noun is **welke** or **welk** in Dutch

Quick check

1. Choose **welk** or **welke**: **Bij ... huisarts zit jij, Priya?**

2. Choose **welk** or **welke**: **Ahmed, … broodje wil jij?**
3. Choose **welk** or **welke**: **… kinderen hebben de taart opgegeten?**
4. Your neighbour Yara has a new dog, and you have no idea what breed it is. Choose **welke** or **wat voor**: **… hond is het?**

Answers on page 775.

Use it today

At the supermarket or the market, ask one question of each kind, for example **Welke kaas is in de aanbieding?** and **Wat voor brood heeft u nog?** Before you say **welk** or **welke**, quickly check the article of the noun in your head.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/welk-or-welke

RULE 62 · LEVEL B2 · PRONOUNS

Zo'n, zulk and zulke: such

Dutch has three words for "such", and the noun after it decides which one you need. Use **zo'n** before one countable thing (**zo'n mooie dag**), **zulk** before a het-word you cannot count (**zulk mooi weer**), and **zulke** before plurals and uncountable de-words (**zulke mensen**, **zulke onzin**). Quick test: if **een** fits, **zo'n** fits.

The pattern

> **Use zo'n wherever you could use een: before one countable thing. Where een is impossible, use zulke, or zulk before an uncountable het-word.**

- **zo'n** + singular countable noun, de or het: **zo'n fiets**, **zo'n huis**, **zo'n mooie dag**
- **zulk** + uncountable het-word: **zulk weer**, **zulk lekker brood**, **zulk goed nieuws**
- **zulke** + plural: **zulke mensen**, **zulke mooie foto's**
- **zulke** + uncountable de-word: **zulke onzin**, **zulke informatie**
- Adjectives follow the **een** rule: no -e before a singular het-word (**zo'n groot huis**, **zulk koud weer**), -e everywhere else (**zo'n mooie dag**, **zulke grote huizen**). More in Adjective endings.
- Before a number, **zo'n** means about: **zo'n twintig euro**

You need these words constantly in small talk: grumbling about the weather, praising a colleague's presentation, or pointing at a neighbour's bike because you want one too. **Zo'n** covers both "such a" and "a ... like that": **Ik wil ook zo'n fiets** means I want a bike like that too.

Examples

Het is vandaag **zo'n mooie dag**, laten we buiten lunchen.	It's such a lovely day today, let's have lunch outside.
Daan heeft **zo'n elektrische bakfiets** gekocht.	Daan has bought one of those electric cargo bikes.
Fatima kreeg voor haar verjaardag **zo'n leuk cadeau** dat ze bijna moest huilen.	Fatima got such a lovely birthday present that she nearly cried.
Met **zulk slecht weer** neem ik liever de trein dan de fiets.	In weather this bad I'd rather take the train than my bike.
Zulk lekker brood vind je alleen bij de bakker op de hoek.	You only find bread this good at the baker's on the corner.
Ik heb nog nooit **zulke behulpzame buren** gehad.	I've never had such helpful neighbours.
Wie verzint nou **zulke onzin**?	Who on earth comes up with nonsense like that?
Bij **zulke drukte** op het station kun je beter een latere trein nemen.	With crowds like these at the station, you're better off taking a later train.
Er stonden **zo'n veertig mensen** in de rij bij het gemeentehuis.	About forty people were queuing at the town hall.

Why it works this way

Zo'n is short for **zo een**, and the apostrophe marks the letters that disappeared (see When Dutch uses an apostrophe). Always write it, because **zon** is the sun. Once you see the hidden **een**, the rule makes sense: **zo'n** can only go where **een** can go. You say **een dag** and **een huis**, so **zo'n dag** and **zo'n huis** are fine. You cannot say **een mensen** or **een informatie**, so those need a different word.

That word is **zulke**, which takes endings just like **welke** in Welk or welke, and wat voor: it ends in -e, except before a singular het-word. Countable het-words like **huis** are already taken by **zo'n**, so plain **zulk** is left with a small group: uncountable het-words such as **weer**, **brood**, **geld**, **werk**, **verkeer** and **nieuws**. If you are unsure what counts as uncountable, see Countable and uncountable nouns.

English gives you a head start. Where English says "such a", Dutch says **zo'n**; where English says plain "such", Dutch says **zulk** or **zulke**. This works most of the time, because both languages usually agree on what you can count. A classic mismatch is advice: uncountable in English, but Dutch happily says **een advies**, so "such good advice" is **zo'n goed advies**.

In relaxed speech many native speakers use **zo'n** before plurals and uncountable nouns too (**zo'n schoenen**, **zo'n mooi weer**). In writing and careful speech this is not standard, so stick to **zulke** and **zulk**. With weather there is also a safe shortcut: **Het is zo mooi weer** is perfectly correct, because **zo** simply goes with the adjective.

Remember: zo'n is **zo een** in disguise. If **een** fits, use **zo'n**; if it does not, use **zulke**, and drop the -e only before a het-word.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Het was zo mooie dag.**~~
SAY **Het was zo'n mooie dag.**
one countable day needs the **een** hidden in **zo'n**

NOT ~~**Ik wil ook zulk huis.**~~
SAY **Ik wil ook zo'n huis.**
huis is a het-word, but you can count it

NOT ~~Zo'n mensen vertrouw ik niet.~~
SAY **Zulke mensen vertrouw ik niet.**
een never goes before a plural, so neither does **zo'n**

NOT ~~Ik heb nog nooit zulk onzin gehoord.~~
SAY **Ik heb nog nooit zulke onzin gehoord.**
onzin is a de-word, so it takes the -e

NOT ~~Het is zo'n mooi weer vandaag.~~
SAY **Het is zulk mooi weer vandaag.**
you cannot count **weer**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap with **zo'n**, **zulk** or **zulke**: **... informatie mag je niet zomaar met klanten delen.**
2. Choose: **Met (zo'n / zulk / zulke) collega's is een maandag best te doen.**
3. Choose: **We hebben al twee weken (zo'n / zulk / zulke) koud weer.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed woont in zulk mooi dorp.**

Answers on page 775.

Use it today

Next time you chat with a colleague or neighbour, comment on the weather with **zulk** (**Het is zulk koud weer vandaag**) and compliment something they own with **Ik wil ook zo'n ...**. Afterwards, check whether the **een** test picked the right word.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/zon-zulk-zulke

Verbs now

The present tense, modal verbs, separable verbs and the imperative.

- Finding the stem of a verb
- The present tense: ik werk, jij werkt, wij werken
- Werk jij? Where the t disappears
- Zijn and hebben in the present
- Gaan, doen, komen, willen, kunnen, zullen and mogen
- D, t or dt: spelling verbs in the present
- Modal verbs: kunnen, moeten, willen, mogen, zullen
- Niet hoeven te: you don't have to
- Kunnen, mogen and durven
- Separable verbs: opbellen, meenemen
- Inseparable verbs: be-, ver-, ont-, her-, ge-, er-
- One verb, two meanings: when stress decides
- The imperative: Kom binnen!
- Aan het + infinitive: I am doing it right now

RULE 63 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

Finding the stem of a verb

To find the stem of a Dutch verb, take the infinitive (the dictionary form, like **werken**, to work) and drop **-en**: **werken** becomes **werk**. For most verbs, this stem (the core of the verb) is exactly what you say after **ik**: **ik werk**, I work. Sometimes the end of the stem needs a small spelling repair.

The pattern

> **The stem is the infinitive minus -en. Sometimes the end of the stem needs a spelling repair.**

- No repair: **werken**, **werk**; **fietsen**, **fiets**.
- A stressed (strongly pronounced) **a**, **e**, **o** or **u** followed by one consonant letter and **-en** is long, so the stem writes it twice: **lopen**, **loop**; **maken**, **maak**; **parkeren**, **parkeer**.
- A double consonant becomes single: **zitten**, **zit**; **bellen**, **bel**; **hebben**, **heb**.
- A **v** or **z** at the end becomes **f** or **s**: **leven**, **leef**; **reizen**, **reis**; **lezen**, **lees**.
- Other letters stay as they are. A **d** stays **d**, even though it sounds like **t**: **worden**, **ik word**.

Examples

Ik **werk** in Rotterdam.	I work in Rotterdam.
Ik **loop** naar het station.	I walk to the station.
Ik **maak** een boterham.	I'm making a sandwich.
Ik **zit** in de trein.	I'm sitting on the train.

Ik **bel** de huisarts.	I'm calling the GP.
Ik **geef** Daan een cadeau.	I'm giving Daan a present.
Ik **reis** elke dag naar Utrecht.	I travel to Utrecht every day.
Ik **lees** de krant.	I read the newspaper.

Why it works this way

The stem keeps the sound of the infinitive. The spelling changes to show that sound.

- In **lo-pen**, the **o** ends an open syllable (one ending in a vowel), so one letter sounds long. In **loop**, the **p** closes the syllable, and a single **o** would sound short, as in **op**. See open and closed syllables.
- In **zit-ten**, the double **t** keeps the **i** short before **-en**. At the end of a word, one **t** does that job alone.
- Dutch speakers pronounce a final **v** or **z** as **f** or **s**, and for these two letters the spelling follows the sound. More in v and f, z and s.

The vowel repair needs stress. In **o-pe-nen** and **te-ke-nen**, the **e** in front of **-nen** is weak and unstressed, so it stays single: **open**, **teken**.

This is a strong pattern, not a law. A few very common verbs go their own way, such as **komen** (**ik kom**), **gaan** (**ik ga**) and **zijn** (**ik ben**); see the irregular present. Some English loan verbs keep their English look: **updaten**, **ik update**.

Remember: chop and tidy. Chop off **-en**, then tidy the end: a long vowel gets two letters, a double letter loses one, and **v** and **z** become **f** and **s**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik werken in Utrecht.**~~
SAY **Ik werk in Utrecht.**
after **ik** comes the stem; in English "work" does both jobs, in Dutch it does not

NOT ~~**Ik lop naar de bus.**~~
SAY **Ik loop naar de bus.**
the long **o** needs two letters in a closed syllable

NOT ~~**Ik zitt in de trein.**~~
SAY **Ik zit in de trein.**
one **t** is enough at the end of a word

NOT ~~**Ik reiz met de bus naar Leiden.**~~
SAY **Ik reis met de bus naar Leiden.**
z becomes **s** at the end

Quick check

1. Fill in the stem of **wonen**: **Ik … in Amersfoort.**
2. Fill in the stem of **bellen**: **Ik … morgen de gemeente.**
3. Choose **verhuiz** or **verhuis**: **Ik … in juni naar Groningen.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ik schrijv een kaart voor Bas.**

Answers on page 775.

Use it today

Write five sentences about your weekday, each starting with **ik**, such as **ik fiets naar mijn werk** or **ik eet een boterham**. Check every stem against its infinitive. Then continue with the present tense, where you build the other forms on this stem.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/verb-stem

RULE 64 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

The present tense: ik werk, jij werkt, wij werken

Dutch builds the present tense from the stem, the core of the verb (**werk** from **werken**). For most verbs, **ik** takes the bare stem (**ik werk**), **jij**, **u**, **hij**, **zij** and **het** take the stem plus **t** (**jij werkt**), and **wij**, **jullie** and **zij** (they) take the infinitive, the dictionary form (**wij werken**). This one tense covers "I work", "I'm working" and often the future too.

The pattern

> **The subject (who does it) decides the form: the bare stem for ik, the stem plus t for other singular subjects (just one), and the infinitive for plural subjects (more than one).**

- **ik**: **ik werk**, **ik woon**
- **jij**, **u**, **hij**, **zij**, **het**: **jij werkt**, **u woont**, **het regent**
- **wij**, **jullie**, **zij** (they): **wij werken**, **zij wonen**
- Stem already ends in **t**? Add nothing: **jij zit**, **hij zit**, **Sanne praat**
- Names and singular nouns work like **hij** or **zij**: **Daan werkt**, **de trein vertrekt**

This covers most verbs. A few very common ones, like **zijn** and **hebben**, have their own forms (Zijn and hebben in the present). And when **jij** or **je** comes after the verb, the added **t** drops (Werk jij? Where the t disappears).

Examples

Ik **werk** bij de gemeente.	I work for the municipality.
Jij **woont** naast Lotte.	You live next to Lotte.

U **betaalt** bij de kassa.	You pay at the checkout.
Ahmed **fietst** elke dag naar zijn werk.	Ahmed cycles to work every day.
Het **regent** weer.	It's raining again.
Bas **zit** in de trein.	Bas is on the train.
Yara **eet** vanavond bij de buren.	Yara is eating at the neighbours' tonight.
Wij **wonen** in Utrecht.	We live in Utrecht.
Jullie **werken** morgen thuis.	You're working from home tomorrow.
Mei en Carlos **wachten** op de bus.	Mei and Carlos are waiting for the bus.

Why it works this way

In the English present, most verbs change only for he, she and it: she works. Dutch is a little busier. Think of the **t** as a tag meaning "one person or thing, not me": it goes on **hij werkt** and **zij werkt**, and also on **jij werkt** and **u werkt**. If the stem already ends in **t**, the tag is already there, so you add nothing. Plurals are free: they use the dictionary form you already know.

- **ik werk**, **jij werkt**, **wij werken**: three subjects, three forms
- **hij werkt**, **hij zit**: both end in **t**, but only **werk** needed one

The same tense covers more than English does. **Ik wacht op de bus** is the normal way to say "I'm waiting for the bus", with no **ben**. With a time word like **morgen**, it often covers the future: **Ik werk morgen thuis**, "I'm working from home tomorrow". To stress "busy with it right now", Dutch also has **Ik ben aan het werken** (Aan het + infinitive).

Remember: ik travels light, with just the stem. The other singular forms end in **t**. A group gets the whole infinitive.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik werken bij de gemeente.**~~
SAY **Ik werk bij de gemeente.**
ik takes the bare stem, not the infinitive

NOT ~~**Fatima werk vandaag thuis.**~~
SAY **Fatima werkt vandaag thuis.**
one person who isn't **ik** needs the stem plus **t**

NOT ~~**Sanne en Daan woont in Delft.**~~
SAY **Sanne en Daan wonen in Delft.**
two people are a group, so use the infinitive

NOT ~~**Hij vind de trein te duur.**~~
SAY **Hij vindt de trein te duur.**
the stem **vind** ends in **d**, not **t**, so you still add **t**

Quick check

1. Fill in the present tense of **werken**: **Ik … vandaag thuis.**
2. Fill in the present tense of **zitten**: **Joris … in de trein.**
3. Choose the right form: **Mei en ik … in Rotterdam.** (**woon**, **woont** or **wonen**)
4. Fix the verb: **Jij fiets elke dag naar je werk.**

Answers on page 776.

Use it today

Tonight, say three sentences about tomorrow out loud: one about yourself (**Ik werk morgen tot vijf uur**), one about a neighbour (**Lotte fietst morgen naar Leiden**) and one about your household (**Wij eten om zes uur**). Check the ending on every verb.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/present-tense

RULE 65 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

Werk jij? Where the t disappears

When **jij** or **je** is the subject (the person doing the action) and comes right after the verb, the verb loses its **-t** ending. You say **jij werkt**, but **Werk jij morgen?** and **Morgen werk je thuis**. With **hij** and **u** the **-t** stays: **Werkt hij? Werkt u?**

The pattern

If jij or je is the subject and follows the verb directly, drop the -t ending. For most verbs this gives the same form as after ik: ik werk, so Werk jij?

- Yes or no questions: **Werk jij morgen?**
- Questions with a question word: **Waar woon je?**
- Inversion, which means the verb and the subject swap places because the sentence starts with something else, such as a time: **Morgen werk je thuis.** More in Inversion.
- When **jij** or **je** comes before the verb, the **-t** is back: **Jij werkt morgen.**
- With **hij**, **zij** (she), **u**, names and words like **je zus** (your sister), the **-t** stays: **Werkt hij? Werkt u? Werkt Sanne?**
- If the stem itself ends in t, that t stays: **eten**, **ik eet**, **Eet jij vis?**

Examples

Jij **werkt** bij de gemeente, toch?	You work for the municipality, right?
Fatima, **werk jij** morgen?	Fatima, are you working tomorrow?
Morgen **werk je** thuis.	Tomorrow you are working from home.

Waar **woon je**, Mei?	Where do you live, Mei?
Fiets jij naar je werk?	Do you cycle to work?
Hoe laat **begin je** vandaag?	What time do you start today?
Eet jij vis, Ahmed?	Do you eat fish, Ahmed?
Werkt hij vandaag?	Is he working today?
Mevrouw De Vries, **woont u** hier?	Mrs De Vries, do you live here?
Werkt je zus ook in Utrecht?	Does your sister work in Utrecht too?

Why it works this way

In English, a question with an ordinary verb such as "work" needs "do": Do you work? Dutch does not use a helper like that here. You simply put the verb first, as in Yes or no questions, and the verb changes shape a little.

A handy picture: the **-t** is something the verb wears only when **jij** stands in front of it. As soon as the verb jumps ahead of **jij** or **je**, it takes the **-t** off and goes back to the plain form you know from the present tense. So the question and the answer use the same verb form: **Werk jij morgen? Ja, ik werk morgen.**

The same happens with other common verbs: **jij gaat**, but **Ga jij ook naar het feest?** And **jij hebt**, but **Heb jij tijd?** You will practise **hebben** and **zijn** in the next lesson.

If you speak German, take care: German keeps the ending in Arbeitest du?, so the **-t** easily sneaks back in.

Remember: verb first, then **jij** or **je**? Drop the **-t** ending, and you usually land on the **ik** form.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Werkt jij morgen?**~~
SAY **Werk jij morgen?**
jij comes right after the verb, so no **-t**

NOT ~~**Morgen werkt je thuis.**~~
SAY **Morgen werk je thuis.**
the sentence starts with a time, so **je** follows the verb

NOT ~~**Woon u in Utrecht?**~~
SAY **Woont u in Utrecht?**
only **jij** and **je** drop the **-t**, **u** keeps it

NOT ~~**Spreek hij Nederlands?**~~
SAY **Spreekt hij Nederlands?**
hij keeps the **-t**

NOT ~~**Werk je broer vandaag?**~~
SAY **Werkt je broer vandaag?**
here **je** means "your", and the subject is **je broer**, like **hij**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap with **werken**: **... jij vandaag op kantoor?**
2. Choose **fiets** or **fietst**: **Morgen ... Sanne naar het station.**
3. Fill in the gap with **wonen**: **... u in Rotterdam?**
4. Fix the sentence: **Waar woont je?**

Answers on page 776.

Use it today

Think of a new colleague or neighbour and write three questions for them, such as **Waar woon je?**, **Werk je morgen?** and **Fiets je naar je werk?** Read

them aloud, check that no **-t** sneaks in, and ask one of them for real this week.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/jij-inversion

RULE 66 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

Zijn and hebben in the present

In the present tense (the verb form for now), **zijn** (to be) goes **ik ben**, **jij bent**, **hij is**, **wij zijn**, and **hebben** (to have) goes **ik heb**, **jij hebt**, **hij heeft**, **wij hebben**. These are the two most frequent verbs in Dutch, so learn them before any other. When **jij** comes after the verb, the **t** disappears: **Ben jij thuis? Heb jij tijd?**

The pattern

> **Zijn and hebben have their own forms, which you learn by heart. When jij or je comes after the verb, drop the t: ben jij, heb je.**

- **zijn**: **ik ben**, **jij bent**, **u bent**, **hij is**, **zij is**, **het is**, **wij zijn**, **jullie zijn**, **zij zijn**
- **hebben**: **ik heb**, **jij hebt**, **u hebt** or **u heeft**, **hij heeft**, **zij heeft**, **het heeft**, **wij hebben**, **jullie hebben**, **zij hebben**
- With **u**, nothing drops in a question: **Bent u klaar?**, **Heeft u een vraag?**

Examples

Ik **ben** Priya.	I am Priya.
Ben jij de nieuwe collega?	Are you the new colleague?
Daan **is** vandaag ziek.	Daan is ill today.
Bent u mevrouw Jansen?	Are you Mrs Jansen?
Jullie **zijn** te laat.	You are late.
Ik **heb** twee kinderen.	I have two children.
Fatima **heeft** een nieuwe fiets.	Fatima has a new bike.

Heb jij een pen?	Do you have a pen?
Heeft u een afspraak?	Do you have an appointment?
Wij **hebben** honger.	We are hungry.

Why it works this way

In many languages the most used verbs are the most irregular, because frequent words tend to keep old forms that rarer words lose. English does it too: I am, you are, he is. Dutch **zijn** is just as wild, and **hij is** even matches he is.

Hebben is much tamer. Its stem is **heb**, so **ik heb** and **jij hebt** follow the normal pattern from the present tense. Only **heeft** is odd. With **u** you can choose: **u hebt** works like **jij**, **u heeft** works like **hij**. Both are correct and both are common. With **zijn**, the usual form is **u bent**. **U is** is also correct, but much less common, so **u bent** is the one to learn. The dropped **t** in questions is the same one you met in Werk jij?.

Two pairs to compare:

- **Jij bent moe.** (You are tired.) **Ben jij moe?** (Are you tired?)
- **Zij is thuis.** (She is at home.) **Zij zijn thuis.** (They are at home.)

The verb tells you whether **zij** means she or they.

Sometimes Dutch picks **hebben** where English says be: **Ik heb honger** (I am hungry), **Ik heb dorst** (I am thirsty). For age, Dutch uses **zijn**, like English: **Ik ben dertig jaar.** Later, both verbs also help you talk about the past in the perfect tense.

Remember: zijn is as wild as English be, while **hebben** is almost tame. For **zijn**, learn four words: **ben**, **bent**, **is**, **zijn**. For **hebben**, mark the one odd form: **heeft**, for **hij**, **zij**, **het** or a name.

Watch out

NOT ~~Hij heb een nieuwe baan.~~
SAY **Hij heeft een nieuwe baan.**
hij, **zij** and **het** take **heeft**

NOT ~~Bent jij ziek?~~
SAY **Ben jij ziek?**
the **t** drops when **jij** follows the verb

NOT ~~Jullie bent welkom.~~
SAY **Jullie zijn welkom.**
jullie takes the plural form

NOT ~~Ik heb dertig jaar.~~
SAY **Ik ben dertig jaar.**
age goes with **zijn**, not **hebben** as in Spanish

NOT ~~Mijn zus thuis.~~
SAY **Mijn zus is thuis.**
Dutch needs **is** here; Arabic can leave it out

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **hebben**: **Sanne … een kat.**
2. Fill in the right form of **zijn**: **… jij vandaag thuis?**
3. Choose **is** or **zijn**: **Joris en Mei … in de supermarkt.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Hebt jij een paraplu?**

Answers on page 776.

Use it today

Write three sentences about yourself with **ik ben** and three with **ik heb**, for example your name, how you feel and what is in your bag. Then ask a

colleague or neighbour one real question that starts with **Heb jij** or **Bent u**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/zijn-and-hebben

RULE 67 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

Gaan, doen, komen, willen, kunnen, zullen and mogen

Gaan, **doen**, **komen**, **willen**, **kunnen**, **zullen** and **mogen** are irregular in the present tense (the verb form for now and for habits). In other words, they bend the usual pattern a little. **Gaan** and **doen** have short forms like **ik ga** and **ik doe**, **komen** gives **ik kom**, and **willen**, **kunnen**, **zullen** and **mogen** never add a t after **hij** or **zij** (she): **hij wil**, **zij kan**, **hij zal**, **zij mag**.

The pattern

> **Learn the ik form of each verb by heart: ga, doe, sta, sla, kom, wil, kan, zal, mag. With wij, jullie and zij (they), every one of these verbs uses the infinitive, the dictionary form.**

- **gaan**, **doen**, **staan**, **slaan**: **ik ga**, **jij gaat**, **hij gaat**, **wij gaan**; **ik doe**, **jij doet**, **wij doen**. Add t for **jij** and **hij**, as in the usual pattern, and write **aa** in **gaat**, **staat** and **slaat**.
- **komen**: **ik kom**, **jij komt**, **hij komt**, **wij komen**.
- **willen**: **ik wil**, **jij wilt** or **jij wil**, **hij wil**, **wij willen**.
- **kunnen**: **ik kan**, **jij kunt** or **jij kan**, **hij kan**, **wij kunnen**.
- **zullen**: **ik zal**, **jij zult** or **jij zal**, **hij zal**, **wij zullen**.
- **mogen**: **ik mag**, **jij mag**, **hij mag**, **wij mogen**. No t anywhere.

Both **jij** forms are correct. When **jij** comes after the verb, the t drops as usual: **Ga jij ook? Wil jij koffie?**

Examples

Ik **ga** vandaag met de fiets naar mijn werk.	I'm cycling to work today.
Sanne **doet** elke zaterdag de boodschappen.	Sanne does the shopping every Saturday.
Mei en Bas **staan** al bij de bushalte.	Mei and Bas are already standing at the bus stop.
Ik **kom** zo!	I'll be right there!
Fatima **wil** een nieuwe fiets.	Fatima wants a new bike.
Ahmed **kan** morgen niet komen.	Ahmed can't come tomorrow.
Ik **zal** je morgen bellen.	I'll call you tomorrow.
Ik **wil** je morgen bellen.	I want to call you tomorrow.
Mag ik even je pen lenen?	Can I borrow your pen for a moment?

Why it works this way

Gaan, **doen**, **staan** and **slaan** are less odd than they look. Their stems (the basic form of the verb) are short: **ga**, **doe**, **sta**, **sla**. Add the usual t for **jij** and **hij**. In **gaan**, **staan** and **slaan**, the vowel is written **a** at the end of the stem (**ga**, **sta**, **sla**) and **aa** before a consonant (**gaat**, **staat**, **slaat**); open and closed syllables explains why. **Doen** keeps **oe** everywhere: **doe**, **doet**, **doen**.

Willen, **kunnen**, **zullen** and **mogen** are modal verbs, helper verbs that often team up with a second verb at the end of the sentence: **Priya kan goed zwemmen.** For English speakers, **ik wil** is a trap: it means I want, not I will. For a promise, Dutch uses **ik zal**.

Remember: English says he can and he may, never he cans. Dutch is the same here: **hij kan**, **hij mag**, **hij wil**, **hij zal**, with no t.

Watch out

NOT ~~Hij wilt koffie.~~
SAY **Hij wil koffie.**
no t after **hij** with **willen**

NOT ~~Hij kunt goed koken.~~
SAY **Hij kan goed koken.**
kunt is a **jij** form; **hij** takes **kan**

NOT ~~Je magt hier niet fietsen.~~
SAY **Je mag hier niet fietsen.**
mag never takes a t

NOT ~~Ik koom morgen.~~
SAY **Ik kom morgen.**
the **ik** form has a short o

NOT ~~Ik gaan morgen naar de huisarts.~~
SAY **Ik ga morgen naar de huisarts.**
gaan is the infinitive; with **ik** use **ga**

Quick check

1. Fill in a form of **gaan**: **Emma … vandaag met de trein naar Utrecht.**
2. Fill in a form of **komen**: **Ik … uit Marokko.**
3. Choose **kan** or **kunt**: **Yara … morgen niet werken.**
4. Fix the form of **zullen**: **Hij zalt je morgen helpen.**

Answers on page 776.

Use it today

Tonight, say three plans for tomorrow out loud with **ik ga**, **ik wil** and **ik kan**, for example **Ik ga morgen naar de markt.** Then say them about a

friend, starting with **hij** or **zij**, and check that **wil** and **kan** get no t.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/irregular-present

RULE 68 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS NOW

D, t or dt: spelling verbs in the present

Verbs whose stem ends in d follow the normal present-tense rule: stem plus t for **jij**, **u**, **hij**, **zij** and **het**. That gives **ik word** but **jij wordt** and **hij vindt**, with dt. The t disappears when the subject **jij** or **je** comes after the verb, as in **word jij?**

The pattern

> **Take the stem and add the usual ending: nothing for ik, a t for jij, u, hij, zij (she) and het. A d at the end of the stem stays, so you write dt.**

- **ik word**, **ik vind**: just the stem.
- **jij wordt**, **u wordt**, **hij vindt**, **zij vindt**: stem plus t.
- Verb before the subject **jij** or **je**: no t, as in **word jij?** and **vind je het leuk?** It is the same rule as **werk jij?** (where the t disappears).
- Verb before **u**, **hij** or **zij**: the t stays, as in **wordt u?** and **vindt hij?**
- Stem already ends in t: no second t, as in **hij zit** and **jij wacht**.
- A few very common verbs have their own forms, like **hij kan** and **hij mag** (irregular verbs).

Examples

Ik **word** in mei dertig.	I turn thirty in May.
Morgen **wordt** Sanne veertig.	Sanne turns forty tomorrow.
Jij **vindt** de trein veel te duur.	You think the train is far too expensive.
Vind jij het ook koud vandaag?	Do you think it's cold today too?
Wordt u al geholpen?	Is someone already helping you?

Het vliegtuig **landt** om tien uur.	The plane lands at ten o'clock.
Ahmed **antwoordt** nooit op mijn berichten.	Ahmed never answers my messages.
Vindt je zus het nieuwe huis mooi?	Does your sister like the new house?
Dat **gebeurt** vaak op maandag.	That often happens on Mondays.
Wat is er **gebeurd**?	What happened?

Why it works this way

The d and the t do different jobs. The d belongs to the verb itself: it is in **worden** and **vinden**, so it stays in the stem. The t is the ending for **jij**, **u**, **hij**, **zij** and **het**, the same t as in **hij werkt**. Dutch spelling shows both pieces, so you get dt.

Your ears cannot help you here. At the end of a word, d is pronounced as t (why d sounds like t), so **word** and **wordt** sound exactly the same. Plenty of Dutch people get this wrong in their emails too.

So borrow a verb whose ending you can hear: **lopen**. Put a form of **lopen** in the same spot, with the same subject, and listen for a t. The sentence does not have to make sense.

- **hij loopt**, so **hij wordt**
- **loop jij?**, so **word jij?**
- **loopt u?**, so **wordt u?**
- **loopt je zus?**, so **wordt je zus?** (here **je** means your, so the subject is **je zus**)

The same test settles **gebeurt** or **gebeurd**. **Het ... vaak** becomes **het loopt vaak**: you hear a t, so it is the present tense, **het gebeurt vaak**. **Het is gisteren ...** becomes **het is gisteren gelopen**: no t, because that is a past participle, so you write the participle **gebeurd** (t or d in participles).

Remember: the d belongs to the verb, the t belongs to the person. When in doubt, ask **lopen**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Hij vind het te duur.**~~
SAY **Hij vindt het te duur.**
stem **vind** plus the t for **hij**

NOT ~~**Ik wordt in juni veertig.**~~
SAY **Ik word in juni veertig.**
ik gets just the stem, like **ik loop**

NOT ~~**Vindt jij het leuk?**~~
SAY **Vind jij het leuk?**
no t when **jij** follows the verb, even though German keeps its ending here

NOT ~~**Word u al geholpen?**~~
SAY **Wordt u al geholpen?**
u keeps the t

NOT ~~**Wat is er gebeurt?**~~
SAY **Wat is er gebeurd?**
after **is** you need the participle, like **is gelopen**

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Joris word volgende maand vader.**
2. Fill in a form of **worden**: **Hoe oud ... jij volgende week?**
3. Fill in a form of **vinden**: **... u het goed als ik hier ga zitten?**
4. Choose **gebeurt** or **gebeurd**: **Wat is er met je fiets ...?**

Answers on page 776.

Use it today

Check a birthday calendar (many Dutch homes keep a **verjaardagskalender** on the toilet door) and write three sentences: one with **ik word**, one about someone who **wordt** a certain age, and one question that starts with **Word jij**. Test every verb with **lopen** before you call it done.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/d-t-or-dt

RULE 69 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

Modal verbs: kunnen, moeten, willen, mogen, zullen

Kunnen (can), **moeten** (must, have to), **willen** (want), **mogen** (may, be allowed to) and **zullen** (shall, will) are modal verbs: helper verbs that add an idea like ability, duty, wish or permission to another verb. In a statement the modal comes second, and the other verb goes to the end in its dictionary form, with no **te**: **Ik wil morgen fietsen.**

The pattern

> **In a statement, the modal is conjugated (it changes to match the subject) and stands in position two. The other verb goes to the end as an infinitive (the dictionary form), without te.**

- **kunnen** (can, be able to): **ik kan, jij kunt, hij kan, wij kunnen**
- **moeten** (must, have to): **ik moet, jij moet, hij moet, wij moeten**
- **willen** (want): **ik wil, jij wilt, hij wil, wij willen**
- **mogen** (may, be allowed to): **ik mag, jij mag, hij mag, wij mogen**
- **zullen** (shall, will): **ik zal, jij zult, hij zal, wij zullen**
- With **jij** you also hear **kan**, **wil** and **zal**, and these are correct too. With **hij** and **zij** (she), **kan**, **wil**, **mag** and **zal** get no extra **-t**. More forms are in irregular verbs in the present.
- In a yes/no question the modal comes first, and the infinitive still goes to the end: **Mag ik hier zitten?**

Examples

Ik **wil** morgen **fietsen**.	I want to cycle tomorrow.

Mei **wil** een nieuwe fiets **kopen**.	Mei wants to buy a new bike.
Sanne **kan** goed **zwemmen**.	Sanne can swim well.
Daan **moet** vandaag tot zes uur **werken**.	Daan has to work until six today.
Fatima **moet** om acht uur bij de huisarts **zijn**.	Fatima has to be at the GP at eight.
Mag ik hier **zitten**?	May I sit here?
Je **mag** hier niet **roken**.	You are not allowed to smoke here.
Ik **zal** je morgen **bellen**.	I will call you tomorrow.
Zullen we koffie **drinken**?	Shall we have a coffee?

Why it works this way

Think of the modal and the infinitive as two bookends. The modal stands in second place and does the grammar work: it matches the subject. The infinitive stands at the end and only names the action. Everything else (**morgen**, **goed**, **een nieuwe fiets**) goes in between. You will meet this two-place pattern again and again; see the verb bracket.

English helps you here. You already say I can swim, not I can to swim. Dutch treats all five modals that way, so **willen** works like can: **Ik wil zwemmen**, with no **te**.

Willen is a false friend: **ik wil** means I want, not I will. To promise something, use **zullen**: **Ik zal je helpen.** For plans, people often just use the present tense: **Ik bel je morgen.** More in Zullen.

When a direction follows, Dutch often leaves out the second verb: **Ik moet naar de gemeente.** (I have to go to the town hall.) One related verb does need **te**: **hoeven**, as in **Je hoeft niet te komen.** That is the next lesson.

Remember: the modal does the paperwork in second place, and the infinitive just waits at the end, unchanged, like a bike parked at the station.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik wil te fietsen.**~~
SAY **Ik wil fietsen.**
no **te** after a modal

NOT ~~**Ik wil eten een appel.**~~
SAY **Ik wil een appel eten.**
the infinitive goes to the end

NOT ~~**Hij wilt naar huis.**~~
SAY **Hij wil naar huis.**
hij wil has no **-t**

NOT ~~**Mei kan goed zwem.**~~
SAY **Mei kan goed zwemmen.**
use the full infinitive, not the stem

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **willen**: **Bas … morgen fietsen.**
2. Fill in the right form of **mogen**: **… ik hier mijn fiets parkeren?**
3. Fix the sentence: **Wij moeten te werken.**
4. Put the words in order, starting with **Ahmed**: **koken**, **kan**, **goed**.

Answers on page 777.

Use it today

Tonight, say three sentences out loud about your plans for tomorrow: one with **moet**, one with **wil** and one with **kan**, such as **Ik moet morgen boodschappen doen.** Check that the second verb comes at the end each time.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/modal-verbs

RULE 70 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS NOW

Niet hoeven te: you don't have to

To say that something is not necessary, Dutch uses **niet hoeven te** with an infinitive (the basic form of a verb, like **komen**): **Je hoeft niet te komen** means "you don't have to come". Adding **niet** to **moeten** gives a very different message: **Je moet niet komen** means "you must not come". On a birthday invitation, that difference matters.

The pattern

No need? Use hoeven with niet (or another negative word) and put te plus the infinitive at the end: Ik hoef morgen niet te werken.

- The forms: **ik hoef**, **jij hoeft**, **hij hoeft**, **wij hoeven**. When **jij** comes after the verb, the **t** drops, as with other verbs: **Hoef jij niet te werken?**
- **Hoeven** almost always comes with **niet**, **geen**, **niets**, **nooit** or **niemand**, or with **alleen** or **maar** (only).
- **Moeten** is a modal verb (a helper verb) that takes the infinitive without **te**: **Ik moet werken.**
- With separable verbs (verbs that split, like **meenemen**), **te** goes between the two parts: **Je hoeft niets mee te nemen.**
- On its own, **Dat hoeft niet** means "that's not necessary".
- In relaxed speech you will hear **te** dropped (**Je hoeft niet komen**). In writing, keep it.

Examples

Je **hoeft** morgen **niet te komen**.	You don't have to come tomorrow.

Je **moet** morgen **niet komen**.	You must not come tomorrow.
Daan **hoeft** zaterdag **niet te werken**.	Daan doesn't have to work on Saturday.
Daan **moet** zaterdag **werken**.	Daan has to work on Saturday.
Bij de huisarts **hoef** je **niet** lang **te wachten**.	At the GP you don't have to wait long.
Je **hoeft geen** jas **mee te nemen**.	You don't need to bring a coat.
Bij de gemeente **hoef** je **alleen** je paspoort **mee te nemen**.	At the municipality you only need to bring your passport.
Hoef jij morgen **niet te werken**?	Don't you have to work tomorrow?
Wil je een tasje? Nee, dat **hoeft niet**.	Would you like a bag? No, no need.
Je **hoeft** het **maar te zeggen**.	Just say the word.

Why it works this way

Think of **moeten** as a rule. In **Je moet niet komen**, the rule stays and **niet** moves inside it: the new rule is "don't come". **Je hoeft niet te komen** deletes the rule itself. Come or stay home, both are fine.

English speakers trip here because **moeten** covers both "must" and "have to". "Have to" becomes "don't have to", so **moet** seems to become **moet niet**. It doesn't. German speakers know this trap from "du musst nicht", but they also get a gift: "du brauchst nicht zu kommen" is built exactly like **Je hoeft niet te komen**.

Hoeven is also picky about its company, a bit like English "need" in "you needn't worry" and "you need only ask". In a plain positive sentence, switch back to **moeten**: **Ik moet vandaag werken**.

Remember: hoeft niet means "no need", **moet niet** means "don't".

Watch out

NOT ~~Je moet niet te komen.~~
SAY **Je hoeft niet te komen.**
moeten takes no **te**, and "no need" is **hoeven**

NOT ~~Ik hoef vandaag te werken.~~
SAY **Ik moet vandaag werken.**
hoeven needs a negative or **alleen** or **maar**

NOT ~~Je hoeft niet te terugbellen.~~
SAY **Je hoeft niet terug te bellen.**
te goes between the parts of a separable verb

NOT ~~Hoeft jij morgen niet te werken?~~
SAY **Hoef jij morgen niet te werken?**
no **t** when **jij** follows the verb

Quick check

1. Fill in **hoeven** or **moeten** in the present tense: **Het is zondag, dus Bas ... vandaag niet te werken.**
2. Fill in **hoeven** or **moeten** in the present tense: **Ik ... morgen om zeven uur beginnen.**
3. Your neighbour Joris offers to feed your cat this weekend, but Yara is already doing it. Choose what you say to Joris: **Je hoeft niet te komen.** or **Je moet niet komen.**
4. Fix the sentence so it means "Mei doesn't have to cook tonight": **Mei moet vanavond niet te koken.**

Answers on page 777.

Use it today

When a cashier asks **Wil je het bonnetje?**, answer **Nee, dat hoeft niet.** Then tell someone at home three things they don't have to do this week, like **Je hoeft vanavond niet af te wassen.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/hoeven

RULE 71 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS NOW

Kunnen, mogen and durven

Kunnen means "can": you are able to do something, or something is possible (**Ik kan zwemmen**). **Mogen** means you are allowed to (**Mag ik hier parkeren?**), and with a person it can also mean to like someone (**Ik mag haar wel**). **Durven** means to dare, with or without **te**: **Ik durf niet te springen** and **Ik durf niet springen** are both correct.

The pattern

> **Kunnen is about ability or possibility, mogen is about permission, and durven is about courage. The second verb is an infinitive (the basic form of a verb, like zwemmen) and usually goes to the end of the sentence.**

- **kunnen**: **ik kan, jij kunt, hij kan, wij kunnen**. **Jij kan** is also correct and very common in speech. In a question: **Kun je komen?** or **Kan je komen?**
- **mogen**: **ik mag, jij mag, hij mag, wij mogen**. No **-t** in the present tense, not even after **jij** or **hij**.
- **durven**: **ik durf, jij durft, hij durft, wij durven**, with the normal endings, like **werken**.
- After **kunnen** and **mogen**, the infinitive comes without **te**. After **durven**, **te** is optional.
- **Mogen** plus a person, usually with **wel**, **graag** or **niet**, means to like that person.

Examples

Ik **kan** goed zwemmen.	I can swim well.

Kunt u mij even helpen?	Could you help me for a moment?
In deze winkel **kun** je alleen pinnen.	In this shop you can only pay by card.
De trein **kan** vertraging hebben.	The train may be delayed.
Mag ik hier parkeren?	Am I allowed to park here?
Op de stoep **mag** je niet fietsen.	You're not allowed to cycle on the pavement.
Ik **mag** mijn nieuwe buurman wel.	I quite like my new neighbour.
Fatima **mag** de nieuwe teamleider niet.	Fatima doesn't like the new team leader.
Ik **durf** niet **te springen**.	I don't dare to jump.
Carlos **durft** aan de telefoon nog geen Nederlands **te spreken**.	Carlos doesn't dare to speak Dutch on the phone yet.

Why it works this way

Before you do something, ask three questions. Is it possible, for your body, your skills or your schedule? That is **kunnen**. Is it okay with the rules or the person in charge? That is **mogen**. Are you brave enough? That is **durven**. Compare:

- **Ik kan morgen niet komen.** (I'm busy or ill.)
- **Ik mag morgen niet komen.** (Someone said no.)
- **Ik kan niet springen.** (My knee hurts.)
- **Ik durf niet te springen.** (I'm scared.)

In everyday speech, people also ask **Kan ik hier parkeren?** The clearest way to ask permission is still **Mag ik...?**, and in shops it is a very common way to ask for something: **Mag ik een tasje?** The short answer is often just **Ja hoor, dat mag.**

English "may" can also mean "perhaps". For chance, use **kunnen** or **misschien**, not **mogen**: "It may rain later" is **Het kan straks gaan regenen** or **Misschien gaat het straks regenen**.

The liking meaning of **mogen** is for people: **Ik mag Bas wel** means you think Bas is quite a nice person. Think of it as letting someone into your life. For food and drinks, Dutch usually says **Ik vind koffie lekker** or **Ik drink graag koffie** (see graag). If you speak German, keep "mögen" for coffee out of your Dutch.

Durven is relaxed about **te**, and it also works with **het** or **dat** instead of a verb: **Durf jij dat? Nee, dat durf ik niet.** For more on **te**, see infinitives with te, and for the verb at the end, the verb bracket.

Remember: kunnen checks your skills and the situation, **mogen** checks the rules, **durven** checks your nerves.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik kan te zwemmen**~~
SAY **Ik kan zwemmen**
no **te** after **kunnen** or **mogen**

NOT ~~**Hij magt hier niet roken**~~
SAY **Hij mag hier niet roken**
mogen has no **-t** ending in the present

NOT ~~**Ik kan zwemmen heel goed**~~
SAY **Ik kan heel goed zwemmen**
the infinitive goes at the end

NOT ~~**Hij durf niet te springen**~~
SAY **Hij durft niet te springen**
durven has normal endings: **hij durft**

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **kunnen**: **Daan ... heel goed koken.**
2. Fill in the right form of **mogen**: **In de trein ... je niet roken.**
3. Choose **kan** or **durft**: **Sanne is bang voor honden en ... de hond van de buren niet te aaien.**
4. Ahmed thinks the new colleague is a nice person. Fill in a form of **kunnen**, **mogen** or **durven**: **Ik ... hem wel.**

Answers on page 777.

Use it today

At the supermarket or the bakery, ask for one thing with **Mag ik...?**, for example **Mag ik een tasje?** Then tell a friend or colleague one thing you can do and one thing you don't dare to do yet: **Ik kan goed fietsen, maar ik durf nog niet in het Nederlands te bellen.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/kunnen-mogen-durven

RULE 72 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

Separable verbs: opbellen, meenemen

A separable verb has a prefix (a small extra word in front), like **op** in **opbellen** (to call) or **mee** in **meenemen** (to take along). In a normal sentence the verb splits, and the prefix moves to the end: **Ik bel je morgen op**. After **wil**, **kan** or **moet**, the verb stays in one piece: **Ik wil je opbellen**.

The pattern

In a main clause (a normal statement or question), the conjugated verb (the form that changes for ik, jij or hij) takes its usual place and the prefix moves to the end, after the object and time words. In the infinitive (the dictionary form), for example after wil or kan, the prefix stays attached.

- A phrase can sometimes follow the prefix, especially in speech: **Ik bel je op na het eten.**
- With **te**, the infinitive splits after all: **Ik probeer je op te bellen.**
- Common prefixes: **op**, **af**, **aan**, **uit**, **mee**, **terug**, **weg**, **in**, **door**.
- The prefix carries the stress: **OPbellen**, **MEEnemen**, **AFwassen**.

Examples

Ik **bel** je morgen **op**.	I'll call you tomorrow.
Ik wil je morgen **opbellen**.	I want to call you tomorrow.
Neem jij de taart **mee**?	Are you bringing the cake?
De trein **komt** om acht uur **aan**.	The train arrives at eight.
Fatima **wast** vanavond **af**.	Fatima is doing the dishes tonight.

Carlos **komt** morgen **terug**.	Carlos is coming back tomorrow.
Ik moet om vijf uur **weggaan**.	I have to leave at five.

Why it works this way

Think of the end of the sentence as the verb's home. In a normal sentence the conjugated verb goes to work at the front (see Verb second: the golden rule), but the prefix stays home. After **wil** or **kan**, the infinitive stays home too, so verb and prefix stay together.

Remember: the verb goes to work, the prefix stays home.

English does this too (you pick the kids up), but Dutch pushes the prefix past time words as well: **Ik haal de kinderen om drie uur op**.

The stressed prefix is your clue that a verb can split. Verbs with **be-**, **ver-** or **ont-** never split, and neither do a few verbs with **door**; see the next lesson.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik opbel je morgen.**~~
SAY **Ik bel je morgen op.**
in a normal sentence the prefix splits off

NOT ~~**Neem jij mee de taart?**~~
SAY **Neem jij de taart mee?**
the prefix comes after the object

NOT ~~**Ik sta op altijd om zeven uur.**~~
SAY **Ik sta altijd om zeven uur op.**
time words come before the prefix

NOT ~~**Ik wil je op bellen.**~~
SAY **Ik wil je opbellen.**
the infinitive is one word

Quick check

1. Fill in the gaps with **terugbellen**: **Joris … zijn moeder … .**
2. Fix the sentence: **Emma meeneemt haar fiets.**
3. Choose: **Yara wil de radio (zet uit / uitzetten).**
4. Which part of **uitgaan** carries the stress: **uit** or **gaan**?

Answers on page 777.

Use it today

Tonight, say your plans for tomorrow out loud with three separable verbs. For example: **Ik sta om zeven uur op. Ik neem mijn laptop mee. Ik kom om zes uur terug.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/separable-verbs

RULE 73 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS NOW

Inseparable verbs: be-, ver-, ont-, her-, ge-, er-

Verbs with the prefix **be-**, **ver-**, **ont-**, **ge-** or **er-** are inseparable: they stay in one piece, so you say **Ik betaal** and **Ik vertel het je**. The same goes for everyday **her-** verbs like **herhalen**. These prefixes (small syllables glued to the front of a verb) are unstressed, and in the perfect tense the past participle (the form after **heb** or **ben**) gets no extra **ge-**: **betaald**, **verteld**, **ontmoet**.

The pattern

> **A verb with the unstressed prefix be-, ver-, ont-, ge- or er- never splits, and its past participle gets no extra ge-. Everyday her- verbs such as herhalen and herkennen work the same way.**

- The verb stays whole in every position: **Ik betaal. Betaal jij? Ik weet dat hij betaalt.**
- You stress the verb part, not the prefix: **ta** in **betalen**, **tel** in **vertellen**, **moe** in **ontmoeten**.
- Make the participle as usual, just without **ge-**: **herhalen** gives **herhaald**, **ontmoeten** gives **ontmoet**. Irregular verbs keep their vowel change: **verkopen** gives **verkocht**, **begrijpen** gives **begrepen**.
- Everyday examples: **bezoeken** (visit), **vergeten** (forget), **verhuizen** (move house), **ontbijten** (have breakfast), **herkennen** (recognise), **gebeuren** (happen), **geloven** (believe), **erkennen** (recognise officially).
- **Her-** is less tidy: a few long, formal **her-** verbs follow other patterns, such as **herstructureren** (restructure), which gives **geherstructureerd**. You will rarely need them.

Examples

Ik **betaal** vandaag de koffie.	I'm paying for the coffee today.
Ik **vertel** het je morgen.	I'll tell you tomorrow.
Mei **verkoopt** haar oude fiets.	Mei is selling her old bike.
Bas **ontvangt** een brief van de gemeente.	Bas receives a letter from the municipality.
Herken je die man?	Do you recognise that man?
Daan heeft de rekening al **betaald**.	Daan has already paid the bill.
Ik heb Ahmed op de verjaardag van Lotte **ontmoet**.	I met Ahmed at Lotte's birthday.
De huisarts heeft het twee keer **herhaald**.	The GP repeated it twice.
Wat is er **gebeurd**?	What happened?
Is je diploma hier **erkend**?	Is your diploma recognised here?

Why it works this way

In separable verbs like **opbellen** and **meenemen**, the stressed first part can move away from the verb to the end of the sentence: **Ik bel je straks op.** That first part is often also a word on its own, like **op** or **mee**, but that alone does not make a verb separable.

The prefixes in this lesson work differently: they are short, unstressed syllables that are not words on their own, and they never move. Some add a clear meaning: **her-** often means again, so **herkennen** is literally to know again. In many verbs the meaning is hard to see: the **ver** in **vertellen** has nothing to do with **ver** (far). Either way, the prefix belongs to the verb as firmly as "for" belongs to forget in English. You would never say "I get it for", so do not say **Ik tel het je ver**.

The participle has its own fixed pattern: verbs with these prefixes take no extra **ge-**, so **betalen** gives **betaald**, not **gebetaald**. You will meet more verbs like this in Participles without ge-.

One check: these prefixes are unstressed, so a stressed first syllable is not one of them. In **bellen**, **geven** and **verven** (to paint) you stress the first syllable, so it is simply part of the verb, and the participles are normal: **gebeld**, **gegeven**, **geverfd**. A few loanwords only look as if they have a prefix: **verifiëren** (to verify) gives **geverifieerd**. And the **er** in **eruitzien** (to look, as in looking good) is the separate little word **er**, so that verb does split: **Je ziet er goed uit.** Stress can even change a verb's meaning, as you will see in One verb, two meanings.

If you speak German, you have a head start: German be-, ver-, ent- and er- also stay attached and also skip ge-. Dutch **ont-** is simply the cousin of ent-.

Remember: be-, ver-, ont-, ge- and **er-** are glued to the verb. They never move to the end of the sentence, and they leave no room for an extra **ge-** in front.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb de rekening gebetaald.**~~
SAY **Ik heb de rekening betaald.**
no extra **ge-** in front of **be-**

NOT ~~**Ik heb Sanne gisteren geontmoet.**~~
SAY **Ik heb Sanne gisteren ontmoet.**
no extra **ge-** in front of **ont-**

NOT ~~**Ik zoek morgen mijn oma be.**~~
SAY **Ik bezoek morgen mijn oma.**
be- never splits off like **op** in **opbellen**

NOT ~~**Hij verteld het altijd.**~~
SAY **Hij vertelt het altijd.**
present tense is stem plus **t**; **verteld** is the participle

NOT ~~**Ik heb haar beld.**~~
SAY **Ik heb haar gebeld.**
in **bellen** you stress **bel**, so **be** is not a prefix here

Quick check

1. Fill in the participle of **verkopen**: **Joris heeft zijn fiets gisteren …**
2. Choose the correct sentence: **Wij verhuizen in mei.** or **Wij huizen in mei ver.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Carlos heeft de vraag niet gebegrepen.**
4. Fill in the present tense of **vertellen**: **Emma … haar buurman het nieuws.**

Answers on page 777.

Use it today

Tonight, write three sentences about your day with **betaald**, **ontmoet** and **verteld**, for example **Ik heb de boodschappen betaald.** Read them aloud and put the stress on the verb part, not on the prefix.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/inseparable-verbs

RULE 74 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS NOW

One verb, two meanings: when stress decides

Some Dutch verbs exist twice, spelled the same but with different meanings, and the stress (the syllable you say loudest) tells you which one you mean. Stress the prefix (the part in front), as in **VOORkomen**, and the verb means occur and splits like any separable verb: **Dat komt vaak voor.** Stress the verb part, as in **voorKOmen**, and it means prevent and never splits: **We voorkomen problemen.**

The pattern

> **Some verbs with door-, om-, onder-, over- or voor- come in pairs. Stress on the prefix makes the verb separable; stress on the verb part makes it inseparable (the prefix stays attached), with a different meaning.**

- **VOORkomen**: occur. **voorKOmen**: prevent.
- **ONDERgaan**: go down (**De zon gaat onder.**). **onderGAAN**: undergo (**Hij ondergaat een operatie.**).
- **OVERkomen**: come over from far away (**Mijn zus komt in juli uit Chili over.**), or come across (**Hij komt aardig over.**). **overKOmen**: happen to someone (**Wat is je overkomen?**).
- In the participle (the form you use with **hebben** or **zijn**), the separable verb puts **ge-** in the middle (**voorgekomen**); the inseparable one has no ge- at all (**voorkomen**).
- With **te**: **voor te komen** (to occur), but **te voorkomen** (to prevent).

Examples

Zulke fouten **komen** in elk team **voor**.	Mistakes like that happen in every team.
Zoiets is hier nog nooit **voorgekomen**.	Something like that has never happened here before.
Door snel te remmen heeft Yara een ongeluk **voorkomen**.	By braking quickly, Yara prevented an accident.
In december **gaat** de zon al rond half vijf **onder**.	In December the sun already sets around half past four.
Joris **ondergaat** morgen een kleine operatie aan zijn knie.	Tomorrow Joris is undergoing a minor operation on his knee.
Priya's ouders **komen** met kerst uit India **over**.	Priya's parents are coming over from India for Christmas.
Je fiets is helemaal kapot. Wat is je **overkomen**?	Your bike is completely wrecked. What happened to you?
Ik weet niet hoe ik bij mijn nieuwe collega's **overkom**.	I don't know how I come across to my new colleagues.

Why it works this way

In the separable verb, the prefix still acts like a little word of its own, with its own meaning (**onder**: under or down) and its own stress. That makes it strong enough to stand alone, so in a main clause it moves away from the verb, like **op** in **opbellen**. In the inseparable verb, the prefix is unstressed and works like **be-** or **ver-** from the previous lesson: it stays attached and leaves no room for **ge-**.

English uses word order for the same contrast: go under versus undergo. Dutch writes both as one word and lets the stress decide. As a tendency, not a rule, the separable verb is the more physical one (the sun really goes

down) and the inseparable one the more abstract one (nothing goes down when you undergo surgery).

In a subordinate clause (a clause starting with **dat**, **omdat** and so on), the separable verb is written as one word again, so the pair looks identical: **dat dit vaak voorkomt** (that this often occurs), **dat dit ruzie voorkomt** (that this prevents arguments). Context and stress tell them apart. Writers sometimes add accents to help: **vóórkomen**, **voorkómen**.

Remember: a stressed prefix is strong enough to walk off on its own. An unstressed prefix is too weak to leave, so it stays glued to the verb.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De zon ondergaat om negen uur.**~~
SAY **De zon gaat om negen uur onder.**
sunset uses the separable verb, so **onder** goes to the end

NOT ~~**Hoofdpijn voorkomt vaak bij mensen met stress.**~~
SAY **Hoofdpijn komt vaak voor bij mensen met stress.**
occur is separable

NOT ~~**We hebben veel problemen voorgekomen.**~~
SAY **We hebben veel problemen voorkomen.**
prevent is inseparable: no **ge-**

NOT ~~**Wat is je overgekomen?**~~
SAY **Wat is je overkomen?**
happen to is inseparable: no **ge-**

NOT ~~**Om fouten voor te komen, controleert Bas alles twee keer.**~~
SAY **Om fouten te voorkomen, controleert Bas alles twee keer.**
prevent never splits, not even for **te**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Mijn buurvrouw heeft vorige maand een heupoperatie (ondergegaan / ondergaan).**
2. Choose: **Zulke vragen (komen vaak voor / voorkomen vaak) in het inburgeringsexamen.**
3. Fill in the participle of **overkomen**: **Weet je wat Carlos gisteren in de trein … is?**
4. Fix the sentence: **Om stress voor te komen, plant Sanne haar week op zondag.**

Answers on page 778.

Use it today

Tell a friend or colleague about a small mishap from this week, starting with **Weet je wat mij vandaag is overkomen?** Then say how you will stop it happening again, starting with **Om dat te voorkomen**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/stress-decides

RULE 75 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS NOW

The imperative: Kom binnen!

To tell someone what to do in Dutch, you use the imperative (the command form). Take the stem of the verb (roughly, the verb without **-en**) and put it first: **Kom binnen!** means "Come in!" It works for one friend or a whole group. To be polite you add **u** (**Komt u binnen**), and signs often use the infinitive (the dictionary form): **Niet roken**.

The pattern

> **For jij and jullie, put the bare verb stem first and usually leave out the pronoun: Kom!, Wacht!, Luister!**

- Find the stem as usual: **lopen** becomes **loop**, **zitten** becomes **zit**, **geven** becomes **geef** (see Finding the stem of a verb).
- The same form works for one person or a group: **Wacht, Sanne!** and **Wacht, jongens!**
- Polite: use the **u** form of the verb, then **u**: **Komt u binnen. Gaat u zitten.** (more in U or jij)
- Softer: add **even** (just, for a moment) or **maar** (go ahead): **Wacht even. Kom maar.**
- Separable verbs usually send their small part to the end: **Kom binnen. Doe het raam dicht.**
- Signs and many general instructions use the infinitive: **Niet roken. Duwen.**
- **zijn** is the odd one out: **Wees stil!**, and politely **Weest u voorzichtig.**

Examples

Kom binnen, Daan!	Come in, Daan!

Wacht even, ik pak mijn fiets.	Wait a moment, I'm getting my bike.
Jongens, **luister even**!	Guys, listen for a second!
Komt u binnen, meneer Jansen.	Come in, Mr Jansen.
Gaat u maar zitten.	Please take a seat.
Neem maar een stuk taart, Yara.	Go ahead, have a piece of cake, Yara.
Wees voorzichtig, het is glad.	Be careful, it's slippery.
Doe het raam **dicht**, Bas.	Close the window, Bas.
Niet roken	No smoking
Duwen	Push

Why it works this way

When you give a command, the person is right in front of you. There is no need to say **jij**: you are practically pointing at them. So Dutch strips the verb down to its core, just as English does with "Come in!"

A sign talks to nobody in particular, so it does not choose a person at all. It uses the neutral dictionary form: **Niet parkeren**, **Trekken**. You will also hear this as a firm, impersonal order, for example from a teacher: **Opletten!** ("Pay attention!")

On its own, a bare command like **Wacht!** can sound abrupt. Dutch speakers very often add a small word. **Even** makes the request feel quick and light (it has nothing to do with English "even"). **Maar** gives permission or encouragement: **Kom maar** means "go ahead, come in, it's fine". More in Even, maar, eens.

The **u** form sounds polite and a little formal. You will hear it at the GP, at the **gemeente** counter and in shops.

If your language has a separate plural command, as German, Spanish and Arabic do, relax: Dutch uses the same form for **jullie**.

Remember: when you speak to someone directly, one friend or a whole group, use the stem. To be polite, use the **u** form plus **u**: **Komt u binnen**. When a sign speaks to nobody in particular, it usually uses the infinitive.

Watch out

NOT ~~Komt binnen, Sanne!~~
SAY **Kom binnen, Sanne!**
no **-t** in a **jij** command

NOT ~~Kom u binnen, mevrouw.~~
SAY **Komt u binnen, mevrouw.**
with **u**, use the **u** form: **u komt**

NOT ~~Ben voorzichtig, Ahmed!~~
SAY **Wees voorzichtig, Ahmed!**
zijn has its own command form

NOT ~~Opbel me morgen.~~
SAY **Bel me morgen op.**
the small part goes to the end

Quick check

1. Your friend Lotte is at the door. (komen) ... binnen, Lotte!
2. At the GP, the assistant calls Carlos in and says: (gaan) ... u zitten.
3. Your neighbour Joris asks if he can come in. You mean "go ahead": Kom ... binnen. (even / maar)
4. A sign in the train says: Niet ... (eten)

Answers on page 778.

Use it today

When a colleague or neighbour knocks today, say **Kom maar binnen!** or, if you are busy, **Wacht even!** On your way home, spot one sign with an infinitive and work out what it tells you to do.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/imperative

RULE 76 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS NOW

Aan het + infinitive: I am doing it right now

To say that you are busy doing something right now, Dutch uses a form of **zijn** + **aan het** + an infinitive (the basic form of a verb, like **koken**): **Ik ben aan het koken**, I'm cooking. To also show how your body is positioned, use **zitten**, **staan**, **liggen** or **lopen** + **te** + infinitive: **Ik zit te lezen**, I'm sitting reading. For most other English -ing sentences, the plain present tense is enough.

The pattern

> **Stress an action in progress with zijn + aan het + infinitive. Add the body position with zitten, staan, liggen or lopen + te + infinitive.**

- **Zijn** changes with the subject: **ik ben**, **jij bent**, **ze is**, **we zijn**. The infinitive usually comes last.
- An object such as **een boek** or **de soep** goes before **aan het**: **Ik ben een boek aan het lezen.**
- With a posture verb, the object goes before **te**: **Mei zit een mail te schrijven.**
- Separable verbs stay in one piece after **aan het** (**aan het opruimen**), but **te** splits them (**af te wassen**). See separable verbs.
- Verbs for states rather than activities, such as **weten**, **kennen** and **houden van**, normally stay in the plain present.

Examples

Ik ben **aan het koken**, kun je straks terugbellen?	I'm cooking, can you call back later?

Daan is zijn fiets **aan het repareren**.	Daan is repairing his bike.
We zijn **aan het verhuizen**, dus het is hier een chaos.	We're moving house, so it's chaos here.
Fatima **zit** in de trein **te lezen**.	Fatima is reading on the train.
Joris **staat** bij de bushalte **te wachten**.	Joris is waiting at the bus stop.
Mijn zoon **ligt** nog **te slapen**.	My son is still sleeping.
Carlos **loopt** de hele dag **te zingen**.	Carlos goes around singing all day.
Priya **staat** in de keuken **af te wassen**.	Priya is doing the dishes in the kitchen.
Wat **doe** je vanavond?	What are you doing tonight?
Ik **werk** vandaag thuis.	I'm working from home today.

Why it works this way

Het koken is a verb used as a noun: the cooking. So **Ik ben aan het koken** is literally "I am at the cooking": you are in the middle of it and your hands are busy. German speakers know the same idea as "am Kochen".

The Dutch present tense already covers "now": **Ik kook** can mean I cook or I'm cooking. That is why **aan het** is optional most of the time. Speakers add it when the busy-right-now part matters, for example to explain why they can't answer the door. More on the basic form in the present tense.

Compare:

- **Ik werk in Utrecht.** My job is in Utrecht.
- **Ik ben aan het werken.** I'm busy working right now.
- **Bas leest de krant.** Bas reads the paper, or is reading it.
- **Bas zit de krant te lezen.** Bas is sitting there reading the paper.

The posture verbs reflect a Dutch habit of saying how someone is positioned. **Zitten** is the most common one. **Lopen** often suggests that

someone keeps doing something, sometimes annoyingly, even without much walking: **Hij loopt altijd te klagen.**

Remember: aan het is "at the": you are at the cooking, at the cleaning. If your body position is part of the picture, swap in **zit**, **sta**, **lig** or **loop** and add **te**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben aan koken.**~~
SAY **Ik ben aan het koken.**
the **het** is part of the pattern; German "am" tempts you to drop it

NOT ~~**Ik ben aan het lezen een boek.**~~
SAY **Ik ben een boek aan het lezen.**
the object goes before **aan het**

NOT ~~**Ik zit lezen.**~~
SAY **Ik zit te lezen.**
a posture verb needs **te** here

NOT ~~**Ik ben aan het te koken.**~~
SAY **Ik ben aan het koken.**
aan het takes the bare infinitive; **te** goes with **zit**, **sta**, **lig** and **loop**

Quick check

1. Fix the word order: **Daan is aan het maken de pizza.**
2. Fill in one word: **Yara zit op de bank een serie ... kijken.**
3. Emma has the flu and is in bed. Choose **zit**, **staat** or **ligt**: **Emma ... te slapen.**
4. Put the verb **opruimen** in the gap: **Lotte staat in de keuken ... .**

Answers on page 778.

Use it today

The next time someone calls or texts you, answer with what you are doing at that moment, such as **Ik ben aan het koken** or **Ik lig op de bank te lezen**. On the train, describe two fellow passengers to yourself: **Die man staat te bellen.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/progressive

Verbs in time

Past, future, would, the passive and verb clusters.

- The perfect tense: ik heb gewerkt
- Regular past participles: ge- plus stem plus t or d
- 't kofschip: choosing t or d
- Irregular past participles
- Hebben or zijn in the perfect tense
- Participles without ge-
- The simple past of regular verbs: -te and -de
- The simple past of irregular verbs
- Patterns in irregular verbs
- Perfect or simple past: which one when
- The past perfect: ik had gegeten
- Talking about the future with gaan
- Zullen: promises, suggestions and assumptions
- Zou and zouden: would
- Infinitives with te
- Om te: in order to
- Laten: let, and having something done
- Worden: become, and the passive
- The passive with worden

- The passive in the perfect: is gebouwd
- Er wordt gedanst: the passive without a subject
- Verbs with a fixed preposition
- Verb clusters: heb kunnen komen
- Zien, horen, voelen plus an infinitive
- The present participle: lachend, slapend
- Past participles as adjectives
- Must have, should have, could have
- Old verb forms in fixed phrases: Leve de koning!

RULE 77 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS IN TIME

The perfect tense: ik heb gewerkt

When you talk about what you did, Dutch usually puts a form of **hebben** (to have) in second place and a past participle (a past form like **gewerkt**, worked) at the end: **Ik heb gisteren gewerkt.** This is the perfect tense, and in everyday conversation it is the most common way to talk about the past. So where English uses the simple past (I worked), Dutch usually uses this form.

The pattern

> **In a statement, a form of hebben (or sometimes zijn) goes in position two and the past participle goes to the end. Everything else sits in between.**

- The participle (in Dutch, the **voltooid deelwoord**) often starts with **ge-**: **werken** becomes **gewerkt**, **bellen** becomes **gebeld**. The next lesson shows how to build the regular ones.
- The form of **hebben** changes with the subject: **ik heb**, **jij hebt**, **hij heeft**, **wij hebben**. The participle stays the same.
- Position two means the second part of the sentence, which is not always the second word: **Vorige week heb ik veel gewerkt.** See verb second.
- Most verbs use **hebben**. A smaller group uses **zijn**, including **gaan** and **komen**: **Ik ben naar huis gegaan.** More in hebben or zijn.
- In a yes or no question, the form of **hebben** comes first: **Heb je Joris gebeld?**

Examples

Ik **heb** gisteren **gewerkt**.	I worked yesterday.

Fatima **heeft** de huisarts **gebeld**.	Fatima called the GP.
Gisteren **heb** ik pasta **gekookt**.	Yesterday I cooked pasta.
Daan **heeft** boodschappen **gedaan**.	Daan did the shopping.
Het **heeft** de hele dag **geregend**.	It rained all day.
Priya **heeft** drie jaar in Utrecht **gewoond**.	Priya lived in Utrecht for three years.
We **hebben** een uur op de trein **gewacht**.	We waited an hour for the train.
Heb je Joris **gebeld**?	Did you call Joris?
Ahmed **is** naar de gemeente **gegaan**.	Ahmed went to the town hall.

Why it works this way

Think of **heb** and the participle as two slices of bread. **Heb** is the top slice in position two, the participle is the bottom slice at the end, and the filling (when, what, where) goes in between: **Ik heb gisteren in de tuin gewerkt.** The action itself comes last, so Dutch listeners wait for it.

English splits the past into have worked and worked, and I have worked yesterday is wrong. Dutch uses one everyday form for both meanings, so it combines easily with **gisteren** or **vorige week**:

- **Ik heb al gegeten.** I have already eaten.
- **Ik heb om zes uur gegeten.** I ate at six.

If you speak German, this works almost the same as the German perfect.

Dutch also has a simple past (**ik werkte**). It tends to appear in longer stories and in writing, and it is very common with **zijn** and **hebben** themselves: **Ik was ziek. Ik had geen tijd.** More in perfect or simple past.

Remember: English keeps have and yesterday apart. Dutch happily puts them together: **Ik heb gisteren gewerkt.**

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb gekookt pasta.**~~
SAY **Ik heb pasta gekookt.**
the participle goes to the end

NOT ~~**Gisteren ik heb gewerkt.**~~
SAY **Gisteren heb ik gewerkt.**
heb must stay in position two

NOT ~~**Sanne gisteren gewerkt.**~~
SAY **Sanne heeft gisteren gewerkt.**
a participle needs **heeft** or **is** next to the subject

NOT ~~**Bas heb vandaag gewerkt.**~~
SAY **Bas heeft vandaag gewerkt.**
with **hij**, **zij** or a name, use **heeft**

NOT ~~**Ik heb naar huis gegaan.**~~
SAY **Ik ben naar huis gegaan.**
gaan uses **zijn**

Quick check

1. Choose **heb**, **hebt** or **heeft**: **Jij … gisteren tot zes uur gewerkt.**
2. Fix the word order and keep **Gisteren** at the start: **Gisteren ik heb soep gekookt.**
3. Fix the word order and keep **Fatima** at the start: **Fatima heeft gebeld de huisarts.**

4. Choose **heeft** or **is**: **Ahmed … naar de supermarkt gegaan.**

Answers on page 778.

Use it today

Tonight, tell someone (or your phone) three things you did today, each with **Ik heb** and a participle from this lesson. For example: **Ik heb gewerkt**, **Ik heb gekookt** and **Ik heb mijn moeder gebeld**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/perfect-tense

RULE 78 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS IN TIME

Regular past participles: ge- plus stem plus t or d

A regular Dutch verb builds its past participle (the form after **heb** or **heeft**, like worked in I have worked) from three parts: **ge-**, the stem, and **-t** or **-d**. So **werken** gives **gewerkt** and **wonen** gives **gewoond**. In the sentence, the participle goes to the end: **Ik heb vandaag gewerkt.**

The pattern

> **For most regular verbs, the past participle is ge- plus the stem plus -t or -d, and it goes at the end of the sentence.**

- The stem is the **ik** form of the verb (finding the stem): **werk**, **woon**, **maak**, **fiets**.
- The stem keeps its own spelling: **maak** gives **gemaakt**, **fiets** gives **gefietst**.
- Use **'t kofschip** to choose: in most cases, a stem ending in t, k, f, s, ch or p gives **-t**, and any other ending gives **-d**: **gewoond**, **gebeld**, **geleerd**.
- If the stem already ends in t or d, you do not write a second one: **gewacht**, **geantwoord**.
- Regular verbs whose infinitive (the dictionary form) has v or z right before **-en** take **-d**, even though the stem is written with f or s: **leven** gives **geleefd**, **reizen** gives **gereisd**. A v or z elsewhere in the verb does not count: **vissen** gives **gevist**. The next lesson covers this in detail.
- Verbs with the prefix **be-** or **ver-** (and a few others) get no **ge-**: **betalen** gives **betaald** (participles without ge-). Irregular verbs such as **eten** (**gegeten**) have their own forms.

Examples

Ik heb gisteren hard **gewerkt**.	I worked hard yesterday.
Sanne heeft drie jaar in Utrecht **gewoond**.	Sanne lived in Utrecht for three years.
Daan heeft een taart **gemaakt**.	Daan made a cake.
Fatima heeft vanochtend een uur **gefietst**.	Fatima cycled for an hour this morning.
Het heeft de hele dag **geregend**.	It rained all day.
Joris heeft de buurvrouw **gebeld**.	Joris called the neighbour.
Wij hebben een kwartier op de bus **gewacht**.	We waited a quarter of an hour for the bus.
Mei heeft met de huisarts **gepraat**.	Mei talked to the GP.
Lotte heeft koffie **gezet**.	Lotte made coffee.

Why it works this way

The six letters in **'t kofschip** stand for voiceless sounds: you make them with air only, with no buzz in your throat. Put a hand on your throat and say a long s, then a long z, and you will feel the difference. After a voiceless sound, t is the natural partner. That is also why **reizen**, with its buzzing z, gives **gereisd**.

You will not hear the d, though. At the end of a Dutch word, d sounds like t, so **gewoond** and **gewerkt** both end in a t sound. The choice shows in spelling, and it comes back later in the simple past (**woonde**, **werkte**).

Think of the participle as a sandwich: **ge-** and the t or d are the bread, the stem is the filling. You never change the filling, so **maak** stays **maak** in **gemaakt**.

For word order, picture two bookends: **heb** or **heeft** on one side, the participle at the end, and the rest of the sentence in between. English

keeps have worked together; Dutch pulls them apart. A phrase with a preposition may sometimes follow the participle, but putting it before is the safe choice.

Remember: 't kofschip is an old type of Dutch sailing ship, and its name holds the letters t, k, f, s, ch and p. Stem ends in one of them? Usually t. Any other letter? Usually d.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb gebeld de huisarts.**~~
SAY **Ik heb de huisarts gebeld.**
the participle goes after the object, at the end

NOT ~~**Ik heb soep gemakt.**~~
SAY **Ik heb soep gemaakt.**
keep the stem **maak** exactly as it is

NOT ~~**Wij hebben in Leiden gewoont.**~~
SAY **Wij hebben in Leiden gewoond.**
n is not in **'t kofschip**, so write d, even though you hear t

NOT ~~**Ik heb op de trein gewachtt.**~~
SAY **Ik heb op de trein gewacht.**
the stem already ends in t, so you add nothing

Quick check

1. Fill in the participle of **koken**: **Priya heeft gisteren …**
2. Fill in the participle of **horen**: **Heb jij de bel …?**
3. Choose **gespeelt** or **gespeeld**: **De kinderen hebben buiten …**
4. Fix the sentence: **Carlos heeft gehuurd een fiets.**

Answers on page 778.

Use it today

Tonight, write three true sentences about your day with **ik heb** and a regular verb, such as **werken**, **fietsen** or **koken**. Check each one: is the participle at the end, and did **'t kofschip** give you t or d?

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/regular-participles

RULE 79 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS IN TIME

't kofschip: choosing t or d

If the stem of a regular verb (its **ik** form, like **werk** or **woon**) ends in one of the consonants of **'t kofschip** (**t**, **k**, **f**, **s**, **ch**, **p**, and also **x**), the past forms take **-t** and **-te**: **gewerkt**, **werkte**. Otherwise they take **-d** and **-de**: **gewoond**, **woonde**. For verbs like **leven** and **reizen**, check the infinitive (the dictionary form) instead of the stem.

The pattern

> **If the stem ends in a consonant from 't kofschip, use -t in the past participle and -te in the simple past; otherwise use -d and -de. If the stem ends in f or s, check the infinitive first: a v or z there means -d and -de.**

- Past participle (the "worked" in "I have worked"): usually **ge-** + stem + **-t** or **-d**, so **gewerkt**, **gewoond** (regular participles).
- Simple past (the "worked" in "I worked yesterday"): stem + **-te** or **-de**, plus **-n** in the plural: **werkte**, **werkten**, **woonde**, **woonden** (more on the simple past).
- **leven** (stem **leef**) and **reizen** (stem **reis**): **v** and **z** are not in **'t kofschip**, so **leefde**, **geleefd**, **reisde**, **gereisd**.
- A stem that already ends in **t** or **d** gets no extra letter in the participle (**gewacht**, **geantwoord**), but the full ending in the simple past (**wachtte**, **antwoordde**).
- Mixed verbs like **bakken** (**bakte**, **gebakken**) and irregular verbs have their own participles, and a few English loanwords follow the sound: **skypen**, **skypete**, **geskypet**.

Examples

Daan **werkte** gisteren thuis.	Daan worked from home yesterday.
Ik heb drie jaar in Utrecht **gewoond**.	I lived in Utrecht for three years.
Fatima **fietste** door de regen naar haar werk.	Fatima cycled to work in the rain.
We hebben soep **gekookt**.	We made soup.
Sanne **belde** de huisarts.	Sanne called the GP.
Mei heeft een bakfiets **gehuurd**.	Mei rented a cargo bike.
Emma **wachtte** tien minuten op de trein.	Emma waited ten minutes for the train.
Onze kat **leefde** achttien jaar.	Our cat lived for eighteen years.
Priya **reisde** met de trein naar Parijs.	Priya travelled to Paris by train.

Why it works this way

The consonants on board are all voiceless: you make them without a buzz in your throat. Put two fingers on your throat and say a long **s**, then a long **z**. Only the **z** buzzes. A voiceless **t** slides easily after a voiceless sound (**werkte**, **fietste**), while a buzzing **d** fits after a vowel or a buzzing consonant (**woonde**, **belde**). The **x** joins the crew because it is really **k** plus **s**: **faxen** gives **faxte** and **gefaxt**.

That explains **leven** and **reizen** too. Their **v** and **z** are the buzzing partners of **f** and **s**, but Dutch spelling usually writes **f** and **s** at the end of a word (v and f, z and s), so the stems look like **leef** and **reis**. The ending follows the infinitive.

Your ear won't always help. A final **d** sounds like **t** (why that happens), so **gewoond** sounds just like the wrong **gewoont**. For **g**, go by the letter, not the accent: many people in the Netherlands say it like **ch**, yet **leggen** gives **legde** and **gelegd**.

Remember: a **kof** is a real type of old Dutch sailing ship. Its consonants travel with **-t**; **v** and **z** are not on board, so they travel with **-d**, even when spelling dresses them up as **f** and **s**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik werkde tot zes uur.**~~
SAY **Ik werkte tot zes uur.**
werk ends in **k**; the English -ed is no guide here

NOT ~~**We hebben in Leiden gewoont.**~~
SAY **We hebben in Leiden gewoond.**
n is not on the ship; German speakers often write **-t** out of habit

NOT ~~**Emma wachte op de bus.**~~
SAY **Emma wachtte op de bus.**
stem **wacht** plus **-te** gives two t's

NOT ~~**Opa leefte heel gezond.**~~
SAY **Opa leefde heel gezond.**
the infinitive **leven** has a **v**

NOT ~~**Ik heb veel gereist.**~~
SAY **Ik heb veel gereisd.**
the infinitive **reizen** has a **z**

Quick check

1. Fill in the past participle of **spelen**: **De kinderen hebben de hele middag buiten …**
2. Choose: **Mei (stopte / stopde) vorig jaar met roken.**
3. Fill in the simple past of **reizen**: **Yara … in de zomer naar Marokko.**

4. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed heeft zijn moeder gebelt.**

Answers on page 779.

Use it today

Tonight, write three sentences about your day with regular verbs such as **werken**, **fietsen**, **koken** or **bellen**, for example **Ik heb soep gekookt.** Before you write each ending, find the stem and ask yourself: is that letter on the ship?

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/t-kofschip

RULE 80 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS IN TIME

Irregular past participles

Many everyday Dutch verbs do not follow the regular **t** or **d** pattern for their past participle (the form you use with **hebben** or **zijn** in the perfect tense, like **gewerkt** in **ik heb gewerkt**). Most of them end in **-en** instead, often with a new vowel: **drinken** becomes **gedronken**. A small group ends in **-cht**, and a few, like **zijn** and **geweest**, are one of a kind, so you learn each verb and its participle as a pair.

The pattern

> **Irregular verbs do not follow the recipe ge- + stem (the ik form) + t or d. Most of their participles end in -en, a small group ends in -cht, and a few are one of a kind.**

- Some are simply **ge-** plus the infinitive (the dictionary form): **lopen** → **gelopen**, **komen** → **gekomen**, **zien** → **gezien**, **gaan** → **gegaan**.
- Some change the vowel and end in **-en**: **schrijven** → **geschreven**, **drinken** → **gedronken**, **nemen** → **genomen**.
- A small group ends in **-cht**. These are sometimes called mixed verbs, because they combine a change in the stem with a **t** ending: **brengen** → **gebracht**, **denken** → **gedacht**, **kopen** → **gekocht**, **zoeken** → **gezocht**.
- Three very common verbs are one of a kind: **zijn** → **geweest**, **hebben** → **gehad**, **doen** → **gedaan**.
- The 't kofschip rule only works for regular verbs. It cannot predict any of these forms.
- Several of these verbs use **zijn** instead of **hebben** (**ik ben gekomen**). Choosing between them is the next lesson.

Examples

Ik ben vanochtend naar het station **gelopen**.	I walked to the station this morning.
Fatima heeft een brief aan de gemeente **geschreven**.	Fatima wrote a letter to the municipality.
Op de verjaardag van Lotte hebben we veel koffie **gedronken**.	We drank a lot of coffee at Lotte's birthday.
Daan heeft de trein van kwart over acht **genomen**.	Daan took the 8:15 train.
Heb je de nieuwe buren al **gezien**?	Have you seen the new neighbours yet?
Ik ben vorige week bij de huisarts **geweest**.	I went to the GP last week.
Joris heeft de hele week griep **gehad**.	Joris had the flu all week.
Wat hebben jullie zaterdag **gedaan**?	What did you do on Saturday?
Ahmed heeft in de supermarkt brood **gekocht**.	Ahmed bought bread at the supermarket.
Heb je aan de melk **gedacht**?	Did you remember the milk?

Why it works this way

Irregular verbs are a minority, but they include many of the verbs you use most. Words that people say every day tend to keep their odd forms, because everyone hears them too often to forget them. New verbs almost always follow the regular recipe: **appen** → **geappt**, **googelen** → **gegoogeld**.

You cannot tell from the infinitive whether a verb is irregular: **hopen** → **gehoopt**, but **lopen** → **gelopen** and **kopen** → **gekocht**. So learn each new verb together with its participle, out loud. Later, the patterns in irregular verbs make the list feel shorter.

Remember: English has the same two families. Where English says written, eaten or seen, Dutch usually ends in **-en** too: **geschreven**, **gegeten**, **gezien**. And thought, brought, bought and sought match the Dutch **-cht** verbs: **gedacht**, **gebracht**, **gekocht**, **gezocht**. It is a tendency, not a rule: walked and helped are regular in English, but **gelopen** and **geholpen** are not.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben naar huis geloopt.**~~
SAY **Ik ben naar huis gelopen.**
lopen is irregular, so **'t kofschip** does not apply

NOT ~~**Ik heb nieuwe schoenen gekoopt.**~~
SAY **Ik heb nieuwe schoenen gekocht.**
kopen is a **-cht** verb, like bought in English

NOT ~~**Wat heb je gisteren gedoet?**~~
SAY **Wat heb je gisteren gedaan?**
doen has a participle of its own

NOT ~~**Ik ben nog nooit in Groningen gewesen.**~~
SAY **Ik ben nog nooit in Groningen geweest.**
a German form; Dutch uses **geweest**

NOT ~~**Sanne heeft een mail geschrijft.**~~
SAY **Sanne heeft een mail geschreven.**
schrijven ends in **-en** and changes **ij** to **e**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Priya is vandaag met de bus naar haar werk … (komen).**

2. Choose the right form: **Ik heb mijn sleutels overal … (gezoekt / gezocht).**
3. Fill in the gap: **Emma is zaterdag met de trein naar Utrecht … (gaan).**
4. Fix the sentence: **Bas heeft zijn buurvrouw naar het ziekenhuis gebrengd.**

Answers on page 779.

Use it today

Today, ask a colleague **Wat heb jij gisteren gedaan?** When they ask you back, answer in three sentences, each with a verb from this lesson, such as **Ik ben naar de markt gegaan** or **Ik heb boodschappen gedaan**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/irregular-participles

RULE 81 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS IN TIME

Hebben or zijn in the perfect tense

Most Dutch verbs form the perfect tense (a helper verb plus a form like **gewerkt** or **gegaan**) with **hebben**: **ik heb gewerkt**. You use **zijn** for verbs that describe a change of place or state, as in **ik ben vertrokken** or **hij is ziek geworden**, and for the verbs **zijn** and **blijven** themselves. Movement verbs like **fietsen** take **zijn** when you say where you went and **hebben** when you mean the activity.

The pattern

> **Most verbs take hebben in the perfect tense. Use zijn for verbs that describe a change of place or state, and for zijn and blijven.**

- **hebben**: most verbs, such as **werken**, **eten**, **kopen** and **slapen** (**ik heb geslapen**)
- **zijn** for a change of place: **gaan**, **komen**, **vertrekken** (**ze is vertrokken**)
- **zijn** for a change of state: **worden**, **sterven**, **beginnen** (**het is begonnen**)
- **zijn** for the verbs **zijn** and **blijven**: **ik ben ziek geweest**, **ik ben gebleven**
- movement verbs (**fietsen**, **lopen**, **rijden**, **zwemmen**): **zijn** with a destination, **hebben** for the activity

Examples

Ik **heb** gisteren tot zes uur **gewerkt**.	I worked until six yesterday.
Sanne **is** om acht uur **vertrokken**.	Sanne left at eight.
Mijn moeder **is** gisteren op bezoek **gekomen**.	My mother came to visit yesterday.

Mijn buurvrouw **is** vorige week oma **geworden**.	My neighbour became a grandmother last week.
De cursus **is** in september **begonnen**.	The course started in September.
Mijn opa **is** in 2015 **gestorven**.	My grandfather died in 2015.
Ik **ben** vorige week ziek **geweest**.	I was ill last week.
Emma **is** de hele dag in bed **gebleven**.	Emma stayed in bed all day.
Ik **ben** naar huis **gefietst**.	I cycled home.
Ik **heb** vandaag veel **gefietst**.	I cycled a lot today.

Why it works this way

Think about what each helper puts in the spotlight. With **hebben**, the sentence is about something you did: **Ik heb gewerkt**. With **zijn**, the sentence usually describes a change: the subject moved to another place or became something else. **Sanne is vertrokken** means Sanne left. **Mijn buurvrouw is oma geworden** means she became a grandmother. Often the new situation still holds, but the tense does not promise that: Sanne may well be back home by now.

Movement verbs show this best. **Ik ben naar huis gefietst** tells you where I went. **Ik heb vandaag veel gefietst** only tells you what I did. A place where the activity happened is not a destination, so **Mei heeft in het park gewandeld** takes **hebben**.

Remember: zijn is for moving to another place or turning into something else. If you just did something, use **hebben**. The verbs **zijn** and **blijven** do not fit this picture, so learn them as a pair: **ik ben geweest**, **ik ben gebleven**.

Treat the change idea as a strong tendency rather than a law. Some change verbs switch to **hebben** when they have an object: **Het glas is gebroken**

(the glass broke), but **Daan heeft het glas gebroken** (Daan broke the glass). The safest habit is to learn each **zijn** verb together with its helper.

English uses have with every verb, and Spanish also has one helper for everything, so speakers of both tend to use **hebben** everywhere. German splits its verbs in a similar way, which helps, but German often uses its word for "be" with swimming or cycling even without a destination, where Dutch wants **hebben**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb ziek geweest.**~~
SAY **Ik ben ziek geweest.**
zijn takes **zijn** as its helper, even though English says have been

NOT ~~**We hebben naar de markt gegaan.**~~
SAY **We zijn naar de markt gegaan.**
gaan takes **zijn**

NOT ~~**Ik heb een week in Utrecht gebleven.**~~
SAY **Ik ben een week in Utrecht gebleven.**
blijven takes **zijn**

NOT ~~**Het heeft koud geworden.**~~
SAY **Het is koud geworden.**
worden is a change of state

NOT ~~**Lotte is de hele middag gezwommen.**~~
SAY **Lotte heeft de hele middag gezwommen.**
no destination, just the activity

Quick check

1. Fill in **is** or **heeft**: **Daan ... gisteren naar Amsterdam gefietst.**

2. Fill in **is** or **heeft**: **Yara … zondag twee uur in het bos gewandeld.**
3. Fix the sentence: **De les heeft om negen uur begonnen.**
4. Fill in **is** or **heeft**: **Joris … vorige maand naar Rotterdam verhuisd.**

Answers on page 779.

Use it today

This weekend, send a friend a short Dutch message with three sentences: one with a destination (**Ik ben naar de markt gefietst**), one about an activity (**Ik heb veel gewandeld**), and one with **geweest** or **gebleven**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/hebben-or-zijn

RULE 82 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS IN TIME

Participles without ge-

Most Dutch past participles (the verb form in **ik heb gewerkt**) start with **ge-**, but not all of them. If the verb begins with an unstressed prefix (a short first part that you say without emphasis) such as **be-**, **ver-** or **ont-**, you leave **ge-** out: **betalen** becomes **betaald**, and **vergeten** stays **vergeten**. Separable verbs like **opbellen** and **meenemen** usually keep **ge-**, but tuck it into the middle: **opgebeld**, **meegenomen**.

The pattern

> **If a verb starts with an unstressed prefix such as be-, ver- or ont-, its past participle gets no ge-. In a separable verb, the front part stays put and the rest builds its participle as normal, so ge- usually lands in the middle: opgebeld.**

- The usual unstressed prefixes are **be-**, **ge-**, **her-**, **ver-**, **ont-** and **er-**. Verbs with them are called inseparable verbs.
- Regular verbs still end in **-t** or **-d**, chosen with 't kofschip: **betalen**, **betaald**; **herhalen**, **herhaald**; **gebeuren**, **gebeurd**; **ontmoeten**, **ontmoet** (the stem already ends in **t**).
- Irregular verbs keep their irregular form, just without **ge-**: **vergeten**, **vergeten**; **begrijpen**, **begrepen**; **vertrekken**, **vertrokken**.
- Separable verbs (verbs whose first part splits off, as in **Ik bel je op**): **opbellen**, **opgebeld**; **meenemen**, **meegenomen**; **aankomen**, **aangekomen**.
- The prefix must be unstressed. In **geven** and **verven** (to paint), the first syllable is stressed and belongs to the verb itself, so you get **gegeven** and **geverfd**.

- Loan verbs like **studeren**, **proberen** and **reserveren** also start with an unstressed syllable, but it is not one of these prefixes, so they take **ge-** as normal: **gestudeerd**, **geprobeerd**, **gereserveerd**.

Examples

Ik heb de boodschappen al **betaald**.	I have already paid for the groceries.
Fatima is de naam van de nieuwe buurman **vergeten**.	Fatima has forgotten the new neighbour's name.
Daan heeft Priya op een verjaardag **ontmoet**.	Daan met Priya at a birthday party.
De conducteur heeft het twee keer **herhaald**.	The conductor repeated it twice.
Wat is er met je fiets **gebeurd**?	What happened to your bike?
Ahmed heeft vanochtend de huisarts **opgebeld**.	Ahmed called the GP this morning.
Heb je je paraplu **meegenomen**?	Did you bring your umbrella?
Bas heeft Yara bloemen **gegeven**.	Bas gave Yara flowers.
Carlos heeft zich goed op het examen **voorbereid**.	Carlos prepared well for the exam.

Why it works this way

A handy picture: imagine one small seat directly in front of the verb. In an ordinary participle, **ge-** sits there: **gewerkt**, **gefietst**. Prefixes like **be-**, **ver-** and **ont-** occupy that seat permanently, so **ge-** has nowhere to sit: **betaald**, not **gebetaald**. In **geven**, the **ge** is simply part of the verb, so the seat is still free: **gegeven**.

Separable parts like **op** and **mee** are stressed and behave like separate words. In a sentence they even walk off to the end: **Ik neem een taart mee.** They stand outside the seat, so **ge-** fits in after them: **op-ge-beld**.

The same picture explains **voorbereiden** (to prepare). **Voor** stands outside, but **be-** already fills the seat, so you get **voorbereid**. If you speak German, this system will feel familiar; the main trap for you is the last point below.

Remember: say the verb out loud. An unstressed **be-**, **ver-**, **ont-**, **her-**, **ge-** or **er-** at the start means no **ge-**. A stressed part that splits off stays in front, and the rest gets the same check: **op-ge-beld**, but **voor-bereid**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb de rekening gebetaald.**~~
SAY **Ik heb de rekening betaald.**
be- already fills the seat

NOT ~~**Ik ben de pincode gevergeten.**~~
SAY **Ik ben de pincode vergeten.**
the participle looks exactly like the infinitive

NOT ~~**Ik heb Sanne geopbeld.**~~
SAY **Ik heb Sanne opgebeld.**
ge- comes after the separable part, not before it

NOT ~~**Ik heb me goed voorgebereid.**~~
SAY **Ik heb me goed voorbereid.**
bereiden starts with **be-**, so there is no room for **ge-**

NOT ~~**Ik heb het probeerd.**~~
SAY **Ik heb het geprobeerd.**
proberen has none of the six prefixes; German speakers often drop **ge-** here

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Ik heb de huur al …** (**betalen**)

2. Fill in the gap: **We hebben een taart voor de buren …** (**meenemen**)
3. Fix the sentence: **Sorry, ik ben je naam gevergeten.**
4. Fill in the gap: **De fietsenmaker heeft mijn band …** (**repareren**)

Answers on page 779.

Use it today

Tonight, send a friend a short message in Dutch about your day with three participles from this lesson, for example: **Ik heb de huur betaald, mijn moeder opgebeld en de keuken opgeruimd.** Check each one: unstressed prefix means no **ge-**, separable verb means **ge-** in the middle.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/participles-without-ge

RULE 83 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS IN TIME

The simple past of regular verbs: -te and -de

To put a regular Dutch verb in the simple past (the one-word past tense, like English worked), take the stem and add **-te** or **-de**: **ik werkte**, **ik woonde**. In the plural, add **-ten** or **-den**: **wij werkten**, **wij woonden**. The memory trick **'t kofschip** tells you whether you need the **t** or the **d**.

This tense, **de onvoltooid verleden tijd**, is the tense of stories, written texts and descriptions of how things were: **Het regende. Daan werkte tot zes uur en fietste daarna naar huis.** When you chat about one finished event, Dutch speakers usually prefer the perfect tense (**Ik heb gisteren gewerkt.**). The lesson Perfect or simple past explains that choice.

The pattern

> **Look at the consonant just before -en in the infinitive. If it belongs to the 't kofschip group, add -te to the stem (plural -ten); if not, add -de (plural -den).**

- The **'t kofschip** group is **t, k, f, s, ch** and **p**, plus **x** and **c** in a few loanwords, such as **faxen**: **faxte**.
- Find the stem first: drop **-en** and fix the spelling, so **werken** gives **werk**, **wonen** gives **woon**, **stoppen** gives **stop**. See Finding the stem of a verb.
- **ik, jij, u, hij, zij** (she) and **het** share one form: **jij werkte**. There is no extra **-t** for **jij** or **hij**.
- **wij, jullie** and **zij** (they) add **-n**: **jullie werkten**, **zij woonden**.
- Check the infinitive, not the stem: **leven** has a **v** and **reizen** a **z**, so you write **leefde** and **reisde**.

- A stem that already ends in **t** or **d** keeps it: **wacht** plus **-te** gives **wachtte**, **antwoord** plus **-de** gives **antwoordde**.
- Irregular verbs such as **gaan**, **kopen** and **zijn** have their own forms: see The simple past of irregular verbs.

Examples

Ik **werkte** vroeger in een bakkerij.	I used to work in a bakery.
Mijn broers **werkten** daar ook.	My brothers worked there too.
Priya **woonde** twee jaar in Rotterdam.	Priya lived in Rotterdam for two years.
Joris en Lotte **woonden** vroeger boven een snackbar.	Joris and Lotte used to live above a snack bar.
Ahmed **fietste** elke ochtend naar zijn werk.	Ahmed cycled to work every morning.
Yara **belde** om acht uur de huisarts.	Yara called the GP at eight o'clock.
Carlos **wachtte** een uur bij de gemeente.	Carlos waited an hour at the town hall.
De buren **verhuisden** in de zomer naar Groningen.	The neighbours moved to Groningen in the summer.
Het **regende** de hele dag.	It rained all day.

Why it works this way

Put your fingers on your throat and say a long **s**, then a long **z**. On the **z** you can feel a buzz: that is a voiced sound. The **s** has no buzz, and neither do the other consonants of **'t kofschip**. The ending matches: **t** is the quiet partner of **d**, so a quiet consonant gets **-te**, and most other sounds (vowels, **l, m, n, r**) get **-de**.

The letters **v**, **z** and **g** also take **-de**, simply because they are not in **'t kofschip**: **leven** gives **leefde**, **reizen** gives **reisde**, **zorgen** gives **zorgde**. In

much of the Netherlands, people pronounce **g**, and often **v** and **z** as well, with little or no buzz, so your throat is not a reliable test for these letters. Trust the spelling of the infinitive.

Remember: the past tense makes the same choice as the past participle, which you already know from choosing t or d. If the participle ends in **t** (**gewerkt**), the past takes **-te** (**werkte**); if it ends in **d** (**gewoond**), it takes **-de** (**woonde**).

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik woonte drie jaar in Leiden.**~~
SAY **Ik woonde drie jaar in Leiden.**
n is not in **'t kofschip**; German speakers often reach for **-te** here

NOT ~~**Mei makte elke zondag soep.**~~
SAY **Mei maakte elke zondag soep.**
the stem is **maak**, with a double **a**

NOT ~~**Daan wachte twintig minuten op de bus.**~~
SAY **Daan wachtte twintig minuten op de bus.**
stem **wacht** plus **-te**: you hear one **t** but write two

NOT ~~**Wij verhuisten in maart naar Utrecht.**~~
SAY **Wij verhuisden in maart naar Utrecht.**
verhuizen has a **z**, so **-den**

NOT ~~**Fatima en Bas fietste naar het strand.**~~
SAY **Fatima en Bas fietsten naar het strand.**
two people, so **-ten**; the **n** is easy to miss in speech

Quick check

1. Put the verb in the simple past: **Sanne … (koken) gisteren voor haar collega's.**
2. Put the verb in the simple past: **Emma en Mei … (wachten) een kwartier op de trein.**
3. Choose: **De kinderen (speelden / speelten) de hele middag buiten.**
4. Fix the verb: **Joris reiste vorig jaar door Spanje.**

Answers on page 779.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your life before your current home, using regular verbs like **wonen**, **werken**, **leren** and **verhuizen**, for example **Ik woonde in Madrid en werkte bij een bank.** Check every ending with **'t kofschip** before you show them to a Dutch friend.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/simple-past-regular

RULE 84 · LEVEL A2 · VERBS IN TIME

The simple past of irregular verbs

In the simple past (the one-word past, like "went" or "saw"), most irregular verbs don't add **-te** or **-de**. They change their vowel instead: **lopen** (to walk) becomes **ik liep** (I walked). In the singular (one person or thing) nothing is added to that new form, and in the plural it ends in **-en**: **wij liepen** (we walked).

The pattern

> **Most irregular verbs show the past with a new vowel instead of -te or -de. In the singular nothing is added; the plural ends in -en.**

- One person or thing (**ik**, **jij**, **u**, **hij**, **zij** meaning she, **het**): just the new form, as in **ik liep**, **jij liep**, **u liep**.
- More than one (**wij**, **jullie**, **zij** meaning they): add **-en**, as in **wij liepen**, **jullie liepen**.
- Six verbs to learn first: **lopen**: **liep**; **schrijven**: **schreef**; **drinken**: **dronk**; **komen**: **kwam**; **zien**: **zag**; **nemen**: **nam**.
- Three you will use every day: **zijn**: **was**, **waren**; **hebben**: **had**, **hadden**; **gaan**: **ging**, **gingen**.
- Plural spelling: **schreef** becomes **schreven** (the **v** of **schrijven** comes back) and **had** becomes **hadden** (short **a**, so double **d**). In **kwamen** and **namen** the **a** is long, so the **m** stays single (see open and closed syllables).
- A few common verbs add **-den** in the plural: **kon**, **konden** (could); **zei**, **zeiden** (said).

Examples

Ik **liep** gisteren naar het station.	Yesterday I walked to the station.

Sanne **schreef** een kaart voor haar buurvrouw.	Sanne wrote a card for her neighbour.
Daan **dronk** koffie in de trein.	Daan drank coffee on the train.
Carlos **kwam** te laat op zijn werk.	Carlos got to work late.
Fatima **zag** haar huisarts in de supermarkt.	Fatima saw her GP in the supermarket.
Priya en Bas **namen** de trein naar Utrecht.	Priya and Bas took the train to Utrecht.
Het **was** koud op het perron.	It was cold on the platform.
Jullie **waren** zaterdag niet thuis.	You two weren't at home on Saturday.
Emma **had** hoofdpijn.	Emma had a headache.
Mijn buren **gingen** op vakantie naar Spanje.	My neighbours went on holiday to Spain.

Why it works this way

Compare a regular verb with an irregular one:

- **Ik werkte thuis.** (I worked at home.) The past is an ending.
- **Ik liep naar huis.** (I walked home.) The past is inside the word.

Now compare present and past: **wij lopen**, **wij liepen**. The plural ends in **-en** in both; only the vowel tells you it already happened. In the singular, the past even drops the **-t** of the present: **hij loopt** (he walks), **hij liep** (he walked).

Good news: English does this too. Drink, drank is **drinken**, **dronk**; come, came is **komen**, **kwam**. The pairs don't always match, though: walked is regular in English, while **liep** is not. You usually can't tell from the infinitive (the dictionary form, like **lopen**) whether a verb is irregular, so learn each one as a pair. Patterns in irregular verbs shows groups that change in the same way.

When do you use it? In conversation, Dutch speakers often use the perfect for a single event (**ik heb koffie gedronken**). The simple past is typical in stories and for describing how things were, and **was** and **had** are very common in everyday speech too.

Remember: the new form tells you it is the past, and the ending tells you how many. Nothing for one, **-en** for more than one.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik loopte naar het station.**~~
SAY **Ik liep naar het station.**
lopen is irregular: new vowel, no **-te**

NOT ~~**Jij kwamt te laat.**~~
SAY **Jij kwam te laat.**
nothing is added in the singular past, not even with **jij**

NOT ~~**Wij was gisteren bij de huisarts.**~~
SAY **Wij waren gisteren bij de huisarts.**
a plural subject needs the plural form

NOT ~~**Wij schreefen een kaart voor Lotte.**~~
SAY **Wij schreven een kaart voor Lotte.**
the **v** of **schrijven** comes back before **-en**

NOT ~~**De gasten kwammen om acht uur.**~~
SAY **De gasten kwamen om acht uur.**
the **a** is long in **kwamen**, so one **m**

Quick check

Use the simple past.

1. **Mei … gisteren thee bij haar buurvrouw.** (**drinken**)
2. **Ahmed en Yara … vorige week naar Utrecht.** (**gaan**)
3. Choose: **Sanne en Joris (was / waren) zaterdag op een verjaardag.**
4. Fix the verb: **Bas nemde de fiets naar zijn werk.**

Answers on page 780.

Use it today

Send a friend or colleague three sentences about your weekend, using **was**, **ging** and one more verb from this lesson. For example: **Zaterdag was het mooi weer. Ik ging naar het strand en zag veel fietsers.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/simple-past-irregular

RULE 85 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Patterns in irregular verbs

Irregular Dutch verbs are much less random than they look. Most of them change their vowel in a limited set of fixed patterns, so **schrijven, schreef, geschreven** and **blijven, bleef, gebleven** follow exactly the same tune. Learn the six big families below and most new irregular verbs become variations on something you already know.

The pattern

Most irregular verbs change their vowel across three forms: the infinitive (the dictionary form), the simple past (the one-word past) and the past participle (the form after heb or ben). Verbs that change in the same way form a family.

- **ij, ee, ee**: **schrijven, schreef, geschreven**; **blijven, bleef, gebleven**. Also **kijken**, **rijden**, **krijgen**.
- **ie, oo, oo**: **kiezen, koos, gekozen**; **bieden, bood, geboden**. Also **vliegen**, **schieten**.
- **i, o, o**: **drinken, dronk, gedronken**; **zingen, zong, gezongen**; **beginnen, begon, begonnen** (no **ge-** after the prefix **be-**). Also **vinden**, **winnen**. Many have **nk**, **ng**, **nd** or **nn** after the **i**.
- **e, a, e**: **geven, gaf, gegeven**; **lezen, las, gelezen**; **eten, at, gegeten**.
- **e, a, o**: **nemen, nam, genomen**; **breken, brak, gebroken**. Also **spreken**.
- **a or oo, ie, a or oo**: **slapen, sliep, geslapen**; **lopen, liep, gelopen**. Also **laten**, **vallen**.
- The plural past adds **-en**: **wij schreven, kozen, dronken, sliepen**. In the two families with **a**, that **a** becomes long in the plural: **ik gaf** but **wij**

gaven, **ik nam** but **wij namen**.

- The family names describe sound. In these verb forms, a long **ee** or **oo** is written double before a consonant in the same syllable and single when the syllable ends in the vowel: **koos** but **ge-ko-zen** (open and closed syllables). An **f** or **s** in the singular often becomes **v** or **z** in the plural: **schreef, schreven**; **las, lazen** (v and f, z and s).

Examples

Toen Fatima bij de gemeente werkte, **schreef** ze elke dag tientallen e-mails.	When Fatima worked at the municipality, she wrote dozens of emails every day.
Ik ben gisteren thuis **gebleven**, omdat het zo hard regende.	I stayed at home yesterday because it was raining so hard.
De buren **boden** aan om onze planten water te geven terwijl wij op vakantie waren.	The neighbours offered to water our plants while we were on holiday.
Op Lottes verjaardag **zongen** we zo hard dat de buren aanbelden.	At Lotte's birthday we sang so loudly that the neighbours rang the doorbell.
De vergadering was al **begonnen** toen Joris eindelijk binnenkwam.	The meeting had already started when Joris finally came in.
Sanne **las** de brief van de huisarts twee keer, omdat ze hem niet meteen begreep.	Sanne read the letter from the GP twice because she didn't understand it straight away.
Carlos **nam** de trein van kwart over acht, maar die had vertraging.	Carlos took the quarter past eight train, but it was delayed.
Omdat er geen bus meer reed, **liep** Bas naar huis.	Because there were no more buses, Bas walked home.

Why it works this way

These verbs are often called strong verbs (**sterke werkwoorden**): they show the past by changing their vowel instead of adding **-te** or **-de**. Dutch shares this old system with English and German, which is why **drinken, dronk, gedronken** sounds so much like drink, drank, drunk. The verbs that kept it are mostly everyday ones, and words you use constantly tend to resist change.

The families sort verbs; they do not predict them. The infinitive does not tell you whether a verb is irregular: **rijden** gives **reed**, but **bevrijden** (to set free) is regular, **bevrijdde**. **Winnen** gives **won**, but **pinnen** (to pay by card) gives **pinde**. Verbs with **e** are the trickiest, because they spread over several families: **geven** (**gaf, gegeven**), **nemen** (**nam, genomen**), **helpen** (**hielp, geholpen**). There are smaller families too, like **sluiten, sloot, gesloten**, and a few loners such as **zijn, was, geweest**.

So check a new verb once, then file it in its family. That second step is where the real saving happens.

Remember: say each new irregular verb as a set of three, like a little tune: **drinken, dronk, gedronken**. Once a family's tune is in your head, **vinden, vond, gevonden** is just new words to a melody you already know.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik drank gisteren te veel koffie.**~~
SAY **Ik dronk gisteren te veel koffie.**
English drank misleads you; in Dutch **drank** is a noun meaning drinks

NOT ~~**Ik heb een nieuwe telefoon gekiesd.**~~
SAY **Ik heb een nieuwe telefoon gekozen.**
kiezen is irregular: **koos, gekozen**

NOT ~~We hebben bij Yara Indonesisch gegaten.~~
SAY **We hebben bij Yara Indonesisch gegeten.**
in the **e, a, e** family the participle goes back to **e**

NOT ~~Daan is naar het station geliepen.~~
SAY **Daan is naar het station gelopen.**
in this family the participle returns to the vowel of **lopen**

NOT ~~Wij schreefen een kaart voor oma.~~
SAY **Wij schreven een kaart voor oma.**
open syllable, so one **e**, and **f** becomes **v**

Quick check

1. Fill in the simple past of **schrijven**: **Vorig jaar … Priya haar eerste brief aan de gemeente in het Nederlands.**
2. Fill in the past participle of **lezen**: **Heb jij de mail van de huisarts al …?**
3. Choose the right form: **Joris heeft zijn arm (gebraken / gebroken / gebreken) toen hij van de trap viel.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Mei is vorig jaar naar Japan gevliegen.**

Answers on page 780.

Use it today

Tonight, write five short sentences about your day in the simple past using **at**, **las**, **dronk**, **liep** and **schreef**, such as **Ik dronk koffie met Ahmed.** Then say the three forms of each verb out loud and name its family.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/strong-verb-patterns

RULE 86 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Perfect or simple past: which one when

Use the perfect (**ik heb gezien**, like English "have seen") for one finished event or a piece of news in conversation. Use the simple past (**ik zag**, the one-word past, like English "saw") when you tell a story step by step, describe what a past situation was like, or talk about old habits with **vroeger**. A typical Dutch story uses both: one opening sentence in the perfect, then the rest in the simple past.

The pattern

> **The perfect reports that something happened. The simple past tells how it went, scene by scene.**

- Perfect: a form of **hebben** or **zijn** plus a past participle, the form like **gezien** (see the perfect tense). Use it for single completed events and news: **Ik heb hem gisteren gezien.**
- Simple past (see the simple past of irregular verbs): the next steps of a story and the background. **Het was koud en we liepen naar huis.**
- Stories: open with the perfect, continue in the simple past.
- Habits: **vroeger** plus the simple past. **Vroeger rookte ik.**
- With **zijn**, **hebben** and modal verbs (verbs like must and can: **moeten**, **kunnen**), speakers often choose the simple past even for a single fact: **Het was gezellig. Ik moest werken.**

Examples

Ik **heb** hem gisteren bij de supermarkt **gezien**.	I saw him at the supermarket yesterday.
Sanne **heeft** eindelijk een huis **gekocht**!	Sanne has finally bought a house!

Bas **heeft** vrijdag zijn verjaardag **gevierd**.	Bas celebrated his birthday on Friday.
Het **was** erg gezellig en iedereen **bleef** tot laat.	It was great fun and everyone stayed until late.
Het **was** koud buiten en we **liepen** samen naar huis.	It was cold outside and we walked home together.
Vroeger **fietste** Joris elke dag naar zijn werk in Leiden.	Joris used to cycle to work in Leiden every day.
Toen Yara in Groningen **studeerde**, **at** ze bijna nooit thuis.	When Yara was a student in Groningen, she hardly ever ate at home.
Ik **kon** gisteren niet komen, want ik **moest** werken.	I couldn't come yesterday because I had to work.

Why it works this way

Think of the perfect as a photo and the simple past as a film. When you share news, you hold up one photo: **Sanne heeft een huis gekocht!** The event is complete, and what matters is that it happened. When you tell what happened next, the camera starts rolling, and each simple past verb moves the scene forward or paints the background.

That is why the two meet in one story: the first sentence says what happened, the rest tells how it went. Dutch news reports often work the same way: **Bij Utrecht is een vrachtwagen gekanteld. De bestuurder raakte licht gewond.**

Compare:

- **Ik heb in Utrecht gewoond.** (a fact about your life)
- **Ik woonde toen in Utrecht en werkte in Amersfoort.** (the background of a story you are about to tell)

English trips you up in two places. English cannot say "I have seen him yesterday", so you may avoid the perfect with **gisteren**. Dutch has no such limit: **Ik heb hem gisteren gezien** is completely normal. And English "I have lived here for three years" is a present in Dutch: **Ik woon hier al drie jaar** (more in the lesson on ago and since).

For habits, **vroeger** ("in the past, back then") plus the simple past gives you English "used to": **Vroeger woonde ik in Madrid.** You will also hear **Vroeger heb ik veel gevoetbald**, which presents the habit as a closed fact about your life. To describe what life was like, the simple past is the natural choice.

Remember: the perfect tells that something happened, the simple past tells how it went.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb hem gisteren zag**~~
SAY **Ik heb hem gisteren gezien**
after **heb** you need the participle, not the simple past

NOT ~~**Ik gebruikte elke dag te fietsen**~~
SAY **Vroeger fietste ik elke dag**
gebruiken means to use; for an old habit use **vroeger** plus the simple past

NOT ~~**Toen ik klein ben geweest, woonden we in Tilburg**~~
SAY **Toen ik klein was, woonden we in Tilburg**
after **toen**, a past situation takes the simple past

NOT ~~**Ik heb hier sinds 2021 gewoond**~~
SAY **Ik woon hier sinds 2021**
you still live here, so Dutch uses the present

Quick check

1. Fill in one word: **Heb je het al gehoord? Daan … zijn arm gebroken bij het voetballen.**
2. Fill in the right form of **gaan**: **Vroeger … Carlos elke zaterdag met zijn vader naar de markt.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Toen we in Delft hebben gewoond, fietsten we overal naartoe.**
4. Fill in a form of **zijn**: **Ik ben gisteren naar Utrecht gegaan. Het … zo druk in de trein dat ik de hele reis moest staan.**

Answers on page 780.

Use it today

Tonight, tell someone about your day, or record it on your phone. Start with one sentence in the perfect, such as **Ik heb vandaag iets grappigs meegemaakt**, and then continue for three or four sentences in the simple past.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/perfect-or-simple-past

RULE 87 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

The past perfect: ik had gegeten

Dutch uses **had** or **was** plus a past participle for something that happened before another moment in the past: **Toen ik aankwam, was de trein al vertrokken** (when I arrived, the train had already left). This is the past perfect, the past of the past. You will need it most with **toen**, **al** and **nadat**.

The pattern

For an action that was already over at some moment in the past, use the simple past of hebben or zijn plus a past participle (the "done" form of a verb, like gegeten, eaten).

- The helper is **had** (plural **hadden**) or **was** (plural **waren**): **ik had gegeten**, **wij waren vertrokken**.
- Verbs that take **zijn** in the perfect tense take **was** or **waren** here: **ik ben gegaan** becomes **ik was gegaan**. The rest take **had** or **hadden** (see choosing the helper verb).
- In a main clause, **had** or **was** comes second and the participle goes to the end: **Ik had de soep al gegeten.**
- In a subordinate clause (a side clause starting with a word like **nadat** or **toen**), both verbs go to the end, in either order: **nadat ik had gegeten** or **nadat ik gegeten had**.

Examples

Toen ik op het station aankwam, **was** de trein al **vertrokken**.	When I arrived at the station, the train had already left.
Nadat Daan zijn fiets **had gerepareerd**, fietste hij naar zijn werk.	After Daan had repaired his bike, he cycled to work.

Priya **had** het formulier al **ingevuld** voordat ze naar de gemeente ging.	Priya had already filled in the form before she went to the town hall.
De huisarts vroeg of ik al eerder last van mijn rug **had gehad**.	The GP asked whether I had had back problems before.
Joris **was** nog nooit in Groningen **geweest** voordat hij daar ging studeren.	Joris had never been to Groningen before he went to study there.
Het **had** de hele nacht **geregend**, dus de fietspaden waren nat.	It had rained all night, so the cycle paths were wet.
Toen Mei binnenkwam, **begon** de film.	When Mei came in, the film started.
Toen Mei binnenkwam, **was** de film al **begonnen**.	When Mei came in, the film had already started.

Why it works this way

Picture a story in the simple past: **Ik kwam thuis, zette thee en ging zitten.** Each verb moves the clock forward, and that simple past is the "now" of your story. The past perfect is a flashback to something that was already finished by then.

The last two examples show the difference. With **begon**, the film starts as Mei walks in. With **was begonnen**, it started before she arrived, and she has missed the opening. If you simply tell events in the order they happened, the simple past is enough. You only need **had** or **was** when you step back.

This also explains **nadat** (after). English happily says "after I ate, I left", because "after" already shows the order. Dutch **nadat** wants a finished action, so when the main clause is in the past, the **nadat** clause is usually in the past perfect: **Nadat ik had gegeten, ging ik weg.** More in the lesson on time words.

German speakers are in luck: "hatte gegessen" and "war gegangen" work the same way. English and Spanish use one helper for every verb, so the

choice between **had** and **was** is where most slips happen.

The same form also appears in unreal sentences such as **Als ik het had geweten** (if I had known). That use has its own lesson.

Remember: the simple past tells the story, and **had** or **was** opens a flashback. If "already, by then" fits your meaning, you probably need them.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Toen we bij de halte kwamen, had de bus al vertrokken.**~~
SAY **Toen we bij de halte kwamen, was de bus al vertrokken.**
vertrekken takes **zijn**, so it takes **was** here

NOT ~~**Nadat Fatima had betaald, ze pakte haar boodschappen in.**~~
SAY **Nadat Fatima had betaald, pakte ze haar boodschappen in.**
after a subordinate clause, the verb comes straight after the comma

NOT ~~**Nadat ik had de afwas gedaan, ging ik zitten.**~~
SAY **Nadat ik de afwas had gedaan, ging ik zitten.**
in a subordinate clause, **had** joins the participle at the end

NOT ~~**Mei had gekocht een cadeau voor Yara.**~~
SAY **Mei had een cadeau voor Yara gekocht.**
the participle closes the main clause

Quick check

1. Fill in **had**, **hadden**, **was** or **waren**: **Toen Lotte eindelijk terugkwam met de taart, … haar gasten al naar huis gegaan.**
2. Fill in **had**, **hadden**, **was** or **waren**: **Nadat Bas alle e-mails … beantwoord, ging hij naar huis.**

3. Fix the sentence by moving one word: **Toen Carlos aankwam, het feest was al begonnen.**
4. Fix the sentence by changing one word: **Emma had al naar bed gegaan toen haar telefoon ging.**

Answers on page 780.

Use it today

Tell a colleague or neighbour about a time you were too late for something, using **toen** plus **had** or **was**. For example: **Toen ik bij de bakker kwam, hadden ze de laatste croissant al verkocht.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/past-perfect

RULE 88 · LEVEL A1 · VERBS IN TIME

Talking about the future with gaan

To talk about the future in Dutch, you can put a form of **gaan** (to go) in front of an infinitive, the basic dictionary form of a verb: **Ik ga morgen verhuizen** (I am going to move tomorrow). Very often you simply use the present tense, the normal "now" form of the verb, with a time word: **Morgen werk ik thuis** (I am working from home tomorrow). These two cover most of what English does with "will" and "going to".

The pattern

> **For plans and predictions, use a form of gaan plus an infinitive at the end. When a time word already makes the future clear, the present tense is usually enough.**

- The form of **gaan** changes for the person, and the infinitive stays the same: **ik ga**, **jij gaat**, **u gaat**, **hij gaat**, **wij gaan**, **jullie gaan**.
- In a statement, **gaan** comes second and the infinitive usually closes the sentence: **Ik ga een fiets kopen**.
- There is no **te** in between: **Het gaat regenen**.
- Time words such as **morgen** (tomorrow), **straks** (later, soon), **vanavond** (tonight) and **volgende week** (next week) make a present-tense sentence clearly about the future.
- If you start with the time word, the verb still comes second: **Morgen ga ik**, **Morgen werk ik** (see inversion).
- When **jij** or **je** comes after **gaan**, the t drops: **Ga je morgen sporten?** (why).

Examples

Ik **ga** morgen **verhuizen**.	I am going to move tomorrow.
Het **gaat** vanmiddag **regenen**.	It is going to rain this afternoon.
Mei en Bas **gaan** vanavond pizza **eten**.	Mei and Bas are going to eat pizza tonight.
Gaan jullie volgend jaar een huis **kopen**?	Are you going to buy a house next year?
Dat **gaat** niet **lukken**.	That is not going to work.
Morgen werk ik thuis.	I am working from home tomorrow.
Priya **vliegt vrijdag** naar India.	Priya is flying to India on Friday.
Ik **bel** je **straks**.	I will call you later.

Why it works this way

The verb **gaan** means go, and **gaan** plus an infinitive works much like English "going to", minus the "to". You are on your way to an action, and the action waits at the end of the sentence. That suits plans (**Ik ga verhuizen**) and predictions (**Kijk, het gaat regenen**). For plain movement, one **gaan** is enough: "I am going to go to the station" is just **Ik ga naar het station**.

The present tense works because Dutch verbs have no future ending. Once a time word says when, nothing else is needed. English does this too ("My train leaves at eight"), but Dutch does it far more, even for quick decisions where English says "I'll": **Ik bel je straks**.

Two English traps. First, **wil** means want, so **Ik wil morgen komen** is "I want to come tomorrow" (see false friends). Second, **zullen** looks like will, but in everyday speech it mostly does promises, suggestions and assumptions. That is the next lesson: zullen.

Remember: gaan is "going to" without the "to", and the real action waits at the end.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ga kopen een fiets.**~~
SAY **Ik ga een fiets kopen.**
the infinitive goes to the end

NOT ~~**Morgen ik werk thuis.**~~
SAY **Morgen werk ik thuis.**
the verb comes second, right after the time word

NOT ~~**Het gaat te regenen.**~~
SAY **Het gaat regenen.**
no **te** after **gaan**

NOT ~~**Gaat jij vanavond koken?**~~
SAY **Ga jij vanavond koken?**
the t drops when **jij** comes after the verb

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **gaan**: **Fatima ... volgende week verhuizen.**
2. Fill in the right form of **gaan**: **... je zaterdag sporten?**
3. Fix the word order: **Ik ga kopen een taart.**
4. Fix the word order and keep **vrijdag** at the start: **Vrijdag Lotte gaat boodschappen doen.**

Answers on page 781.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your weekend: two with **gaan** plus an infinitive, like **Zaterdag ga ik fietsen**, and one with the present tense, like **Zondag werk ik niet**. Then say one of them to a colleague or neighbour tomorrow.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/future-gaan

RULE 89 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Zullen: promises, suggestions and assumptions

Zullen is a helper verb (a verb that works together with an infinitive, the basic verb form like **sturen**) with four jobs: promising (**Ik zal het morgen sturen**), suggesting (**Zullen we koffie drinken?**), guessing (**Dat zal wel kloppen**) and the formal future (**De trein zal later vertrekken**). For plain plans in everyday talk, Dutch usually prefers the present tense or gaan, so **zullen** tends to carry an extra message: I promise, shall we, or I suppose.

The pattern

> **Zullen plus an infinitive at the end of the clause. In speech it usually adds a promise, an offer, a suggestion or a guess; as a neutral future it mostly belongs to formal and written Dutch.**

- Forms: **ik zal**, **jij zult** (in speech often **jij zal**), **hij zal**, **zij zal**, **het zal**, **wij zullen**, **jullie zullen**, **zij zullen**.
- The infinitive goes to the end: **Ik zal het morgen sturen.**
- In a subordinate clause (a side clause starting with a word like **dat** or **omdat**), **zal** moves to the end as well, usually right before the infinitive: **dat ik het morgen zal sturen**.
- Promise or decision: **ik zal**, **we zullen**.
- Offer: **Zal ik ...?** Suggestion: **Zullen we ...?**
- Guess: **zal wel** or **zullen wel** plus an infinitive.
- Formal future: announcements, the news, letters from organisations.

Examples

Ik **zal** het morgen **sturen**.	I will send it tomorrow.
Priya en Daan beloven dat ze de sleutel bij de buren **zullen afgeven**.	Priya and Daan promise that they will leave the key with the neighbours.
Zullen we zaterdag naar de markt **gaan**?	Shall we go to the market on Saturday?
Zal ik het raam even **dichtdoen**?	Shall I close the window?
Bas is er nog niet, die **zal wel** in de file **staan**.	Bas isn't here yet, probably stuck in traffic.
Fatima heeft de rekening gecontroleerd, dus dat **zal wel kloppen**.	Fatima has checked the bill, so it's probably correct.
Yara en Joris hebben de hele week nachtdienst gehad, dus ze **zullen wel** moe **zijn**.	Yara and Joris have worked night shifts all week, so they must be tired.
De trein naar Utrecht **zal** tien minuten later **vertrekken**.	The train to Utrecht will depart ten minutes later.
De gemeente **zal** u binnen vier weken een brief **sturen**.	The municipality will send you a letter within four weeks.

Why it works this way

Here is a mental model that ties the four uses together: what follows **zullen** is not a plain fact yet. It is something you vouch for, offer, suspect or officially announce. Compare:

- **Ik bel je morgen.** is simple information. **Ik zal je morgen bellen.** is a promise: you can hold me to it.
- **We gaan koffie drinken.** is already decided. **Zullen we koffie drinken?** hands the decision to the other person.

- **Het restaurant is vandaag dicht.** is what you know. **Het restaurant zal vandaag wel dicht zijn.** is what you suppose.

English has no single word for all four jobs. For offers and suggestions, English often uses shall: **Zal ik?** is Shall I? and **Zullen we?** is Shall we? In promises and future statements, **zullen** usually corresponds to will, and in guesses it often corresponds to probably or must. Beware the false friend **wil**: it means want, so **Ik wil je bellen** is I want to call you. German speakers, keep **worden** for become and the passive; Dutch does not build its future with it.

Tone matters with **wel**. **Dat zal wel kloppen** is a friendly guess, while **Dat zal wel.** on its own can sound sceptical, like if you say so.

The past form **zou** has a lesson of its own: Zou and zouden.

Remember: your agenda speaks with the present tense or **gaan**; your promises, offers and hunches speak with **zullen**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik zul je helpen.**~~
SAY **Ik zal je helpen.**
the ik form is irregular: **zal**

NOT ~~**Ik zal sturen het morgen.**~~
SAY **Ik zal het morgen sturen.**
the infinitive goes to the end

NOT ~~**Ik beloof dat ik zal het morgen sturen.**~~
SAY **Ik beloof dat ik het morgen zal sturen.**
after **dat**, both verbs go to the end

NOT ~~**Ik word je morgen bellen.**~~
SAY **Ik zal je morgen bellen.**
worden means become, it does not make a future

Quick check

1. Fill in the correct form of **zullen**: **Maak je geen zorgen, ik … de kat eten geven.**
2. Mei and Ahmed are bored on a rainy Sunday. Mei asks: **… we pannenkoeken bakken?** Choose **zal** or **zullen**.
3. Fix the word order: **Carlos zal bellen je vanavond.**
4. Joris is not at work today. Turn this fact into a guess with **zullen** and **wel**: **Joris is ziek.**

Answers on page 781.

Use it today

Send one message today that makes a suggestion and a promise, for example to a colleague: **Zullen we vrijdag samen lunchen? Ik zal een tafel reserveren.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/zullen

RULE 90 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Zou and zouden: would

Zou (plural **zouden**) is how Dutch says "would". You use it to ask politely (**Zou je me kunnen helpen?**), to imagine things that are not real (**Als ik rijk was, zou ik minder werken**), to give advice (**Ik zou dat niet doen**) and, in the news, to report claims nobody has confirmed. Just like "would" in English, it comes with an infinitive (the basic form of a verb, such as **werken**), and Dutch puts that infinitive at the end of the clause.

The pattern

> **Zou is the past tense of zullen, and it means "would". Use zou, or zouden with a plural subject, plus an infinitive at the end of the clause.**

- **Forms: ik, jij, u, hij, zij zou**; **wij, jullie, zij zouden**. In modern Dutch, **jij** and **u** get no extra -t.
- **Word order:** in a statement, **zou** is the second element and the infinitive goes last. In a question, **zou** comes first. In a subordinate clause, both verbs go to the end: **Je zei dat je zou bellen.** See the verb bracket.
- **Polite wishes and requests: Ik zou graag ...** (you can add **willen**: **Ik zou graag een kamer willen reserveren**) and **Zou je ... kunnen ...?**
- **Hypothetical (imagined) situations: als** with the simple past, then **zou** in the main clause. **Als ik meer tijd zou hebben** is also correct, just heavier. For "would have", see the unreal past.
- **Advice: Ik zou ...** means "if I were you". **Je zou ... moeten** means "you should".
- **News: zou** marks a claim, not a fact. For the past, add a perfect infinitive (past participle plus **hebben** or **zijn**). If you know German, this is "soll".

Dutch **moet** here would mean "must have".

Examples

Ik **zou** graag een kamer voor twee nachten **reserveren**.	I would like to book a room for two nights.
Zou je de deur dicht **kunnen doen**? Het tocht.	Could you close the door? There's a draught.
Zou u mij even met dit formulier **kunnen helpen**?	Could you help me with this form for a moment?
Als ik meer tijd had, **zou** ik vaker **sporten**.	If I had more time, I would exercise more often.
Als we een auto hadden, **zouden** we niet elke dag met de trein **gaan**.	If we had a car, we wouldn't take the train every day.
Ik **zou** die fiets niet **kopen**, want hij is veel te duur.	I wouldn't buy that bike, because it's far too expensive.
Je **zou** eens met de buren over het lawaai **moeten praten**.	You should talk to the neighbours about the noise.
Je zei toch dat je om acht uur **zou komen**?	You said you would come at eight, didn't you?
De minister **zou** het **geweten hebben**.	The minister is said to have known.
Volgens omwonenden **zou** de brand in de keuken **zijn begonnen**.	According to local residents, the fire reportedly started in the kitchen.

Why it works this way

Think of **zou** as _zullen_ taking one step back. A past form creates distance, and Dutch uses that distance in four ways. It can step back in time (**je zei dat je zou komen**) or away from reality (**als ik tijd had**). It can step away from bluntness: **Zou je ...?** sounds softer than **Kun je ...?**. And it can step

away from responsibility: a journalist who writes **zou** is saying "others claim this, I can't confirm it yet".

English "would" works in much the same way, which is good news for you. One difference: English also uses "would" for past habits ("every Sunday we would visit Grandma"). Dutch uses the simple past for that: **Elke zondag gingen we bij oma langs.**

Remember: zou is **zullen** one step back, from now, from reality, from bluntness or from the facts.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Wij zou graag een afspraak maken**~~
SAY **Wij zouden graag een afspraak maken**
with **wij**, **jullie** and **zij** it is **zouden**

NOT ~~**Ik zou graag reserveren een tafel voor vier**~~
SAY **Ik zou graag een tafel voor vier reserveren**
the infinitive goes to the end, unlike English

NOT ~~**Als het niet regende, we zouden gaan fietsen**~~
SAY **Als het niet regende, zouden we gaan fietsen**
after an **als**-clause, the main clause starts with its verb

NOT ~~**Ik zou hebben gekomen, maar de trein viel uit**~~
SAY **Ik zou zijn gekomen, maar de trein viel uit**
komen takes **zijn**, also after **zou**

Quick check

1. Fill in **zou** or **zouden**: **Mei en Joris ... graag een tafel voor zes personen reserveren.**

2. Fix the word order: **Als ik in Utrecht woonde, ik zou elke dag naar mijn werk fietsen.**
3. Ahmed has had a headache for a week and asks: **Wat zou jij doen?** Choose **zal** or **zou**: **Ik … eerst even de huisarts bellen.**
4. A news report about a rumour nobody has confirmed. Choose **zullen** or **zouden**: **De twee ministers … al maanden ruzie hebben.**

Answers on page 781.

Use it today

Next time you phone your GP's practice, a hotel or the **gemeente**, open with **Ik zou graag …** and ask one thing with **Zou u … kunnen …?**. Write both sentences down before you dial.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/zou-would

RULE 91 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Infinitives with te

Many Dutch verbs put the little word **te** (to) before the next infinitive, the basic form of a verb: **Ik probeer te slapen** (I'm trying to sleep). Modal verbs, the helpers **kunnen**, **moeten**, **willen**, **mogen** and **zullen**, never put **te** before the next verb: **Ik wil slapen**. And after **zitten**, **staan**, **liggen** and **lopen**, **te** shows what someone is busy doing: **Ik zit te eten** (I'm sitting eating).

The pattern

After verbs like proberen, beginnen and vergeten, put te before the infinitive. After a modal verb, the infinitive comes without te.

- With **te**: **proberen** (try), **beginnen** (start), **vergeten** (forget), **hopen** (hope), **weigeren** (refuse), **besluiten** (decide).
- Without **te**: the modal verbs, and also **gaan** and **laten**: **Ik ga fietsen.**
- **Hoeven** (need to) takes **te**, usually together with **niet**, **geen**, **alleen** or **maar**: **Je hoeft niet te betalen** (more in you don't have to).
- **Zitten**, **staan**, **liggen** or **lopen** + **te** shows an action in progress: **Ik sta te koken.**
- **Te** + infinitive normally goes to the end, after the object: **Ik probeer elke dag Nederlands te spreken.**
- With a separable verb (one that splits in two, like **opbellen**), **te** goes in the middle as a separate word: **op te bellen**, **mee te nemen**.

Examples

Ik **probeer** elke dag Nederlands **te spreken**.	I try to speak Dutch every day.

Het **begint te regenen**, dus ik neem de bus.	It's starting to rain, so I'm taking the bus.
Sanne **vergeet** vaak haar fietslampjes **aan te zetten**.	Sanne often forgets to switch on her bike lights.
Yara **hoopt** je op haar verjaardag **te zien**.	Yara hopes to see you at her birthday party.
De buurman **weigert** zijn fiets **te verplaatsen**.	The neighbour refuses to move his bike.
Daan en Lotte **hebben besloten** naar Utrecht **te verhuizen**.	Daan and Lotte have decided to move to Utrecht.
Ik **moet** morgen **werken**, maar ik **hoef** niet vroeg **op te staan**.	I have to work tomorrow, but I don't have to get up early.
Fatima **staat** in de keuken **te koken**.	Fatima is standing in the kitchen cooking.
Mei **zit** al twintig minuten bij de huisarts **te wachten**.	Mei has been waiting at the GP's for twenty minutes.
Bas **loopt** al de hele dag over het weer **te klagen**.	Bas has been moaning about the weather all day.

Why it works this way

English is a surprisingly good guide. The English modals "can", "must" and "may" take no "to", and neither do the Dutch modals. Verbs that take "to" in English, like "try to" and "decide to", usually take **te** in Dutch.

The trap is **willen** (want to) and **moeten** (have to). Their English translations contain "to", but in Dutch they are modals, so the next verb stays bare:

- **Ik wil slapen.** / **Ik probeer te slapen.**
- **Je moet betalen.** / **Je hoeft niet te betalen.**

The position verbs are a Dutch habit. The position is usually real, but the main message is that something is going on, much like **Ik ben aan het koken** (see the progressive). With **lopen** you are often not walking at all: **Hij loopt te zeuren** means he keeps moaning.

After some of these verbs, such as **besluiten**, you can also add **om**: **We hebben besloten om te verhuizen**. That is the topic of the next lesson.

Remember: think of **moeten** as "must" and **hoeven** as "need to". "Must" has no "to", so **moeten** has no **te**; "need to" has one, so **hoeven** gets one too.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik wil Nederlands te leren.**~~
SAY **Ik wil Nederlands leren.**
willen is a modal, even though English says want to

NOT ~~**Je hoeft vandaag niet koken.**~~
SAY **Je hoeft vandaag niet te koken.**
standard Dutch needs **te** after **hoeven**

NOT ~~**Ik probeer te spreken Nederlands.**~~
SAY **Ik probeer Nederlands te spreken.**
te + infinitive goes after the object

NOT ~~**Ik probeer de huisarts te opbellen.**~~
SAY **Ik probeer de huisarts op te bellen.**
te goes between the two parts of a separable verb

NOT ~~**Ik heb een uur gezeten te wachten.**~~
SAY **Ik heb een uur zitten wachten.**
after **heb**, **zitten** stays an infinitive and **te** usually drops

Quick check

1. Choose: **Joris wil volgend jaar een huis (kopen / te kopen).**
2. Choose: **Met een Museumkaart (moet / hoef) je niet te betalen.**
3. Fill in the gap with the right form of **meenemen**: **Carlos vergeet vaak zijn sleutels … als hij gaat sporten.**
4. Fix the sentence by adding one word: **Emma ligt al de hele middag op de bank slapen.**

Answers on page 781.

Use it today

Tonight, write three sentences about your day: one with **proberen** or **vergeten** + **te**, one with a modal verb, and one like **Ik zat in de trein te lezen**. Then say them out loud.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/infinitive-with-te

RULE 92 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Om te: in order to

To say why you do something, Dutch uses **om … te** plus an infinitive (the basic form of a verb, like **werken**): **Ik leer Nederlands om hier te kunnen werken** (I'm learning Dutch so I can work here). **Om** comes first, objects and other details follow, and **te** plus the infinitive usually close the group. The same pattern follows many adjectives and nouns: **Het is leuk om te doen**, **Het is tijd om te gaan**.

The pattern

> **Om opens the group, and te plus the infinitive usually close it. Use it to give a purpose, or to complete an adjective or a noun.**

- Purpose, like English "in order to": **Ik bel om een afspraak te maken.**
- After adjectives such as **leuk**, **moeilijk**, **belangrijk**, **te koud** and **oud genoeg**. You will sometimes see these without **om**, especially in writing: **Het is moeilijk te zeggen.**
- After nouns such as **tijd**, **zin**, **geld** and **de kans**.
- Objects and adverbs go between **om** and **te**: **om melk te kopen**.
- A phrase with a preposition can go before **te** or after the infinitive: **om naar het feest mee te gaan** and **om mee te gaan naar het feest** are both fine.
- A separable verb (a verb whose first part splits off, like **opbellen**) takes **te** in the middle: **om je op te bellen**. With a modal verb such as **kunnen**, **te** goes before the modal: **om te kunnen werken**.
- The **om** group usually comes after the whole main clause, even after a past participle: **Ik ben vroeg vertrokken om de file te vermijden.** Put

it first, and the verb follows straight away: **Om de file te vermijden, vertrek ik vroeg.**

Examples

Ik leer Nederlands **om** hier **te kunnen werken**.	I'm learning Dutch to be able to work here.
Fatima belt de gemeente **om** een afspraak **te maken**.	Fatima calls the municipality to make an appointment.
Daan fietst extra hard **om** de trein van 8.12 **te halen**.	Daan cycles extra fast to catch the 8:12 train.
Om op tijd **te zijn**, neemt Joris de bus van zeven uur.	To be on time, Joris takes the seven o'clock bus.
Het is leuk **om** met je buren **te praten**.	It's nice to chat with your neighbours.
Lotte is oud genoeg **om** alleen naar school **te fietsen**.	Lotte is old enough to cycle to school alone.
Het is tijd **om** naar huis **te gaan**.	It's time to go home.
Heb je zin **om** zaterdag **mee te gaan** naar de verjaardag van Emma?	Do you feel like coming along to Emma's birthday on Saturday?
Mei heeft geen tijd **om te koken** en haalt sushi.	Mei has no time to cook and picks up sushi.

Why it works this way

An **om te** group behaves like a mini subordinate clause (a part of a sentence that cannot stand on its own). Dutch parks the verb of such a clause near the end, and that is exactly what happens here.

The group has no subject of its own and no conjugated verb. In a purpose group, the person doing the action is usually the subject of the main clause: in **Fatima belt de gemeente om een afspraak te maken**, Fatima makes the appointment. After adjectives and nouns, the person comes

from the context or means people in general: **Het is leuk om met je buren te praten** is about anyone who chats with their neighbours.

Compare these pairs:

- **Bas probeert op tijd op te staan.** (what Bas tries: **proberen** takes **te**, see Infinitives with te)
- **Bas zet drie wekkers om op tijd op te staan.** (why Bas sets them: purpose, so **om**)
- **Ik bel de huisarts om een afspraak te maken.** (purpose: no subject after **om**)
- **Ik bel de huisarts omdat ik koorts heb.** (reason: **omdat** has its own subject and verb)

When the purpose needs its own subject, use a so that clause with **zodat**: **Ik praat langzaam zodat Ahmed me begrijpt.**

Remember: om and **te** plus the infinitive are the two slices of bread. Objects, adverbs and the first part of a separable verb (**melk**, **hier**, the **op** of **opbellen**) are the filling in between. A phrase with a preposition may stick out at the end, like a lettuce leaf: **om mee te gaan naar het feest**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ga naar de supermarkt om te kopen melk.**~~
SAY **Ik ga naar de supermarkt om melk te kopen.**
the object goes between **om** and **te**

NOT ~~**Ahmed belt de huisarts een afspraak te maken.**~~
SAY **Ahmed belt de huisarts om een afspraak te maken.**
for a purpose, **te** alone is not enough

NOT ~~**Ik spaar geld voor een auto te kopen.**~~
SAY **Ik spaar geld om een auto te kopen.**
standard Dutch uses **om**, not **voor**, before **te**

NOT ~~**Ik bel mijn buren om ze te uitnodigen.**~~
SAY **Ik bel mijn buren om ze uit te nodigen.**
a separable verb splits around **te**

Quick check

1. Choose **om** or **omdat**: **Het waait vandaag te hard … naar je werk te fietsen.**
2. Fill in the present tense of **vertrekken**: **Om de trein van 7.40 te halen, … Sanne elke ochtend vroeg van huis.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Carlos gaat naar het station om oma te ophalen.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Joris spaart geld om te kopen een nieuwe fiets.**

Answers on page 782.

Use it today

Write three sentences with **om … te** about your own week: why you go to the supermarket, why you take the train or the bike, and why you are learning Dutch. Say them out loud on your way there.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/om-te

RULE 93 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Laten: let, and having something done

Laten is the Dutch verb for letting something happen. With an infinitive (the dictionary form of a verb, like **slapen**), it means let or allow (**Laat hem maar slapen**) or have something done by someone else (**Ik laat mijn fiets repareren**). It also appears in two everyday expressions: **laten we** for let's, and **laat maar** for never mind.

The pattern

> **Laten plus an infinitive without te usually says that someone or something else does the action: you allow it, or you arrange it.**

- **Let or allow: Laat hem maar slapen.** The person who acts usually gets the object form: **hem**, not **hij**. The word **maar** makes it sound relaxed (more in softening particles).
- **Have something done: Ik laat mijn fiets repareren.** Who does the job usually stays unsaid.
- **Let's: Laten we gaan.** First **laten**, then **we**, and the infinitive at the end.
- **Never mind: Laat maar.** or **Laat maar zitten.**
- **Forms: ik laat, jij laat, hij laat** (no extra **t**, because **laat** already ends in one), **wij laten**; past **liet, lieten**.
- **Perfect tense** (the **heb ... gedaan** form): **Ik heb mijn jas thuis gelaten** (I left my coat at home), but with a second verb you use **laten**: **Ik heb mijn fiets laten repareren** (more in verb clusters).

Examples

Laat hem maar **slapen**, hij heeft de hele nacht gewerkt.	Let him sleep, he worked all night.

Mijn ouders **lieten** me nooit alleen naar school **fietsen**.	My parents never let me cycle to school on my own.
Ik **laat** mijn fiets **repareren**, want de remmen doen het niet meer.	I'm having my bike repaired, because the brakes don't work anymore.
Joris **laat** elke zes weken zijn haar **knippen**.	Joris has his hair cut every six weeks.
Fatima en Carlos hebben een nieuwe keuken **laten plaatsen**.	Fatima and Carlos have had a new kitchen installed.
Wil je Priya even **laten weten** dat de vergadering niet doorgaat?	Could you let Priya know that the meeting is cancelled?
Laten we de trein van half negen **nemen**.	Let's take the 8:30 train.
Laten we het niet aan Emma **vertellen**, het is een verrassing voor haar verjaardag.	Let's not tell Emma, it's a surprise for her birthday.
Ik wilde je nog iets vragen, maar **laat maar**, ik zoek het zelf wel op.	I wanted to ask you something, but never mind, I'll look it up myself.

Why it works this way

English spreads this job over several verbs: let, have, get, and sometimes make. Dutch uses **laten** for all of them, because the core idea is the same: you let an action happen, and usually someone or something else carries it out.

- **Ik schilder de woonkamer.** You hold the brush.
- **Ik laat de woonkamer schilderen.** A painter holds the brush, and you make the coffee.
- **Ik heb mijn fiets gerepareerd.** You fixed it.
- **Ik heb mijn fiets laten repareren.** The bike shop fixed it.

With a person after **laten**, context decides between let and make: **Mijn ouders lieten me lang opblijven** (they let me stay up late), **De docent liet ons de tekst twee keer lezen** (the teacher made us read it twice).

The same idea hides in **laten zien** (let see: show), **laten vallen** (let fall: drop) and **laten liggen** (let lie: leave behind). In combinations like these, English uses one verb for something you do yourself: **Bas liet zijn sleutels vallen** (Bas dropped his keys). With a reflexive pronoun such as **zich**, the subject can even be the one who falls: **Na het werk liet Sanne zich op de bank vallen** (Sanne dropped onto the sofa). The passive, which also keeps the doer out of sight, comes in Worden: become, and the passive.

Remember: with **laten** plus an infinitive, you usually hand the action over: you arrange it (**Ik laat mijn fiets repareren**) or you allow it (**Laat hem maar slapen**). In fixed combinations such as **laten vallen** and **laten zien**, English simply has one verb: drop, show.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik laat mijn fiets gerepareerd.**~~
SAY **Ik laat mijn fiets repareren.**
Dutch uses the infinitive where English uses repaired

NOT ~~**Ik laat mijn auto te wassen.**~~
SAY **Ik laat mijn auto wassen.**
laten is followed by an infinitive without **te**

NOT ~~**Ik heb mijn haar gelaten knippen.**~~
SAY **Ik heb mijn haar laten knippen.**
with a second verb, the perfect uses **laten**

NOT ~~**We hebben de keuken schilderen laten.**~~
SAY **We hebben de keuken laten schilderen.**
laten comes before the other infinitive, the reverse of the German order

NOT ~~Laat we morgen beginnen.~~
SAY **Laten we morgen beginnen.**
the verb takes the form that goes with **we**

Quick check

1. Fill in the correct form of **laten**: **Mijn fiets is kapot, dus ik … hem morgen bij de fietsenmaker repareren.**
2. Ahmed says: **Ik laat mijn auto wassen.** Who washes the car: Ahmed or someone else?
3. Choose: **Het regent en we zijn allemaal moe. (Laat / Laten) we een taxi nemen.**
4. Fix the sentence and keep the perfect tense: **Mei heeft haar laptop gelaten repareren.**

Answers on page 782.

Use it today

This week, tell a colleague or neighbour about something you are having done, using **laten**: **Ik laat zaterdag mijn fiets repareren.** And next time you lose track of what you wanted to say, just smile and say **Laat maar**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/laten

RULE 94 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Worden: become, and the passive

Worden means become, and you use it to say that someone or something changes: **Ik word moe** (I'm getting tired), **Zij wordt arts** (she's becoming a doctor). Its forms are **word**, **wordt** and **worden** in the present, **werd** and **werden** in the past, and **zijn** plus **geworden** in the perfect. The same verb also builds the passive, a sentence about what happens to something rather than who does it: **Het pakket wordt bezorgd** (the parcel is being delivered).

The pattern

Worden describes a change, while zijn describes the state itself. Combined with a past participle (a form like gewerkt or bezorgd), worden forms the passive.

- Present: **ik word**, **jij wordt**, **u wordt**, **hij wordt**, **wij worden**, **jullie worden**, **zij worden**. **Word** and **wordt** sound the same, so the t is a spelling matter: see D, t or dt.
- When the subject **jij** or **je** comes after the verb, the t drops: **Word jij ook moe?** Compare **Wordt je broer ook moe?**, where **je broer** is the subject and the t stays.
- Past: **werd** for one person or thing (**ik werd**, **Sanne werd**), **werden** for more than one (**wij werden**, **de buren werden**).
- Perfect (the past built with **hebben** or **zijn**) of **worden** meaning become: **zijn** plus **geworden**, as in **Hij is arts geworden.** In the perfect passive, you use **zijn** plus the other verb's participle and usually leave out **geworden**: **Het pakket is bezorgd.** More in The passive in the perfect.
- With a job or role, Dutch usually leaves out **een**: **Zij wordt arts.** Add an adjective and **een** returns: **Zij wordt een goede arts.** See When Dutch uses no article.

Examples

Fatima **wordt** arts, net als haar moeder.	Fatima is becoming a doctor, just like her mother.
Daan **wordt** zaterdag veertig, dus we geven een feestje.	Daan turns forty on Saturday, so we're throwing a party.
Joris **is** boos, want zijn trein heeft weer vertraging.	Joris is angry, because his train is delayed again.
Joris **wordt** boos als zijn trein weer vertraging heeft.	Joris gets angry when his train is delayed again.
Toen de huisarts mijn naam riep, **werd** ik ineens zenuwachtig.	When the GP called my name, I suddenly got nervous.
Op weg naar het station **werden** we drijfnat.	On the way to the station we got soaking wet.
Priya **is** dit jaar teamleider **geworden**.	Priya became team leader this year.
Je pakket **wordt** morgen tussen negen en twaalf **bezorgd**.	Your parcel will be delivered tomorrow between nine and twelve.

Why it works this way

Zijn shows how things are at one moment; **worden** shows them changing. English spreads that one idea over many verbs: get angry, turn forty, go quiet, grow old, become a doctor. Dutch usually needs just one: **boos worden**, **veertig worden**, **stil worden**, **oud worden**, **arts worden**.

A change points forward, so the present of **worden** often comes out in English as "will be" or "going to be". **Morgen wordt het warm** means it will be warm tomorrow, and **Wat wil je later worden?** asks a child what they want to be when they grow up.

In the perfect, Dutch tends to use **zijn** for verbs that describe a change of state, such as **beginnen** and **sterven**. **Worden** is change in its purest form, so it always takes **zijn**.

The passive grows from the same idea. In **Het pakket wordt bezorgd**, the parcel does nothing itself: something happens to it, and who does it matters less. The passive with worden takes this further.

Remember: zijn is a photo, **worden** is a video. If you could film the change happening, you probably need **worden**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik krijg moe.**~~
SAY **Ik word moe.**
getting tired is **moe worden**; English "get" leads you astray

NOT ~~**Hij heeft arts geworden.**~~
SAY **Hij is arts geworden.**
worden always takes **zijn** in the perfect

NOT ~~**Ik word morgen komen.**~~
SAY **Ik kom morgen.**
German speakers: **worden** is not a future helper; use the present or **zullen**

NOT ~~**Mijn broer word in juni vader.**~~
SAY **Mijn broer wordt in juni vader.**
with **hij** or a name as subject, write the stem plus t

NOT ~~**Het werdt al donker.**~~
SAY **Het werd al donker.**
the past form **werd** never takes an extra t

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **worden**: **Lotte … volgende week dertig.**

2. Choose **werd** or **werden**: **Toen de juf binnenkwam, … de kinderen meteen stil.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed heeft vorig jaar vader geworden.**
4. Choose **Word** or **Wordt**: **… jij ook zo moe van lange vergaderingen?**

Answers on page 782.

Use it today

Write three sentences about how your life has changed since you came to the Netherlands: one with **word** or **wordt**, one with **werd**, and one with **ben … geworden**. For example: **Sinds ik in Utrecht woon, ben ik een echte fietser geworden.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/worden

RULE 95 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

The passive with worden

When you want to say what happens to something rather than who does it, Dutch uses the passive: a form of **worden** plus a past participle (the form from the perfect tense, like **verkocht** or **gebouwd**). So **Het huis wordt verkocht** means the house is being sold. Add **door** to name the doer, and use **werd** or **werden** for the past: **Het huis werd in 1920 gebouwd**.

The pattern

> **Combine a form of worden with a past participle, which usually goes at the end of the clause. To name the doer, put door in front of it.**

- Present: the verb agrees with the subject (who or what the sentence is about): **ik word**; **jij** or **je wordt**, but **word jij** or **word je** when it follows the verb; **hij**, **zij**, **het** and **u wordt**. Plural subjects take **worden**: **De brief wordt verstuurd**, **De brieven worden verstuurd**.
- Past: **werd** with any singular subject, **werden** with plurals: **De brug werd in 1890 gebouwd**.
- In a main clause, **wordt** or **werd** takes second place and the participle usually goes to the end, as in the perfect tense: **Morgen wordt het pakket bezorgd**.
- In a subordinate clause (one that starts with a word like **dat** or **omdat**), both verbs go to the end, in either order: **omdat het pakket morgen wordt bezorgd** or **omdat het pakket morgen bezorgd wordt**.
- Naming the doer is optional, and many passive sentences leave it out.

Examples

Het huis van onze buren **wordt verkocht**.	Our neighbours' house is being sold.
Het afval **wordt** elke dinsdag **opgehaald**.	The rubbish is collected every Tuesday.
De brief **wordt door de directeur getekend**.	The letter is signed by the director.
Wordt u al **geholpen**?	Are you being served?
Bij de huisarts **word** je vaak eerst door de doktersassistent **geholpen**.	At the GP's, you are often helped by the doctor's assistant first.
Gisteren **werden** alle treinen naar Utrecht **geannuleerd**.	Yesterday all trains to Utrecht were cancelled.
Bij het ongeluk **werd** een fietser door een bestelbus **geraakt**.	In the accident, a cyclist was hit by a van.
Uw parkeervergunning **wordt** automatisch **verlengd**.	Your parking permit is renewed automatically.
Fatima weet nog niet of haar aanvraag **wordt goedgekeurd**.	Fatima doesn't know yet whether her application will be approved.

Why it works this way

The hook is in the verb itself: **worden** means become, as you saw in Worden: become, and the passive. **Het huis wordt verkocht** is literally the house becoming sold. Something is happening to it, so Dutch uses a verb of change where English uses be.

The passive turns an active sentence around. In **De directeur tekent de brief**, the director is the subject. In **De brief wordt door de directeur getekend**, the letter takes that spot, and the director becomes an optional extra.

Use it when the doer is unknown, obvious or beside the point. Nobody cares who empties your bin, only that it happens on Tuesday. That is why news reports and official letters love the passive: **Uw aanvraag wordt binnen acht weken behandeld** keeps the focus on what happens and the tone factual.

In conversation, people often use the perfect for past events (**Het huis is in 1920 gebouwd**), so **werd** tends to sound more written: think news, history and stories. Relaxed speech also likes a vague **ze** instead of a passive: **Ze halen het afval op dinsdag op** (see Men, je and ze).

Remember: when English uses is or are with a participle for something happening now, regularly or soon, Dutch uses **wordt** or **worden**. A Dutch **is** plus participle points to a finished action or its result, which is the topic of The passive in the perfect.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De brief wordt van de directeur getekend.**~~
SAY **De brief wordt door de directeur getekend.**
Dutch introduces the doer with **door**; **van** is a German habit

NOT ~~**Gisteren de treinen werden geannuleerd.**~~
SAY **Gisteren werden de treinen geannuleerd.**
the verb comes second, so **werden** follows **gisteren** directly

NOT ~~**De ramen wordt elke maand gelapt.**~~
SAY **De ramen worden elke maand gelapt.**
plural subject, plural verb

NOT ~~**Ik hoop dat mijn fiets wordt snel gerepareerd.**~~
SAY **Ik hoop dat mijn fiets snel wordt gerepareerd.**
in a subordinate clause, **wordt** joins the participle at the end

Quick check

1. Choose **wordt** or **worden**: **De nieuwe fietsenstalling bij het station … volgend jaar geopend.**
2. Choose **werd** or **werden**: **De fietsen van Joris en Mei … gisteren gestolen.**
3. Fill in the gap so the sentence means that Yara bakes the cake: **De verjaardagstaart wordt … Yara gebakken.**
4. Fix the word order, keeping **Vandaag** at the start: **Vandaag mijn salaris wordt overgemaakt.**

Answers on page 782.

Use it today

Open the next letter or email from your **gemeente**, bank or energy supplier, or read a short news item, and underline every **wordt**, **worden**, **werd** and **werden**. For each one, check whether it forms a passive with a past participle or simply means become. For each passive, find the participle and ask who does the action, and whether the text bothers to tell you.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/passive

RULE 96 · LEVEL B2 · VERBS IN TIME

The passive in the perfect: is gebouwd

In the Dutch passive (the form where the subject undergoes the action), the perfect tense (the tense of **ik heb gewerkt**) is a form of **zijn** plus the past participle, such as **gebouwd** or **bezorgd**: **Het huis is in 1920 gebouwd.** The **worden** you know from the passive with *worden* drops out, so standard Dutch adds no **geworden**. For the past perfect (had been), swap in **was**: **Het huis was al gebouwd.**

The pattern

> **In the perfect, the passive is a present form of zijn plus the past participle, without geworden. In the past perfect, you use was or waren.**

- Present: **Het huis wordt gebouwd.** (is being built)
- Simple past: **Het huis werd gebouwd.** (was built)
- Perfect: **Het huis is gebouwd.** (has been built, or was built)
- Past perfect: **Het huis was gebouwd.** (had been built)
- Plural: **De huizen zijn gebouwd**, **De huizen waren gebouwd**.
- If you say who did it, add **door**: **door een bekende architect**.
- In a subordinate clause both orders are fine: **dat het pakket is bezorgd** or **dat het pakket bezorgd is**.

Examples

Het stadhuis **is** in 1920 **gebouwd**.	The town hall was built in 1920.
Mijn fiets **is** vannacht **gestolen**.	My bike was stolen last night.

Uw aanvraag **is** door de gemeente **goedgekeurd**.	Your application has been approved by the municipality.
Ik **ben** vanochtend door de huisarts **teruggebeld**.	I was called back by the GP this morning.
Weet jij of het pakket al **is bezorgd**?	Do you know if the parcel has been delivered yet?
Toen Daan thuiskwam, **was** de taart al **aangesneden**.	When Daan got home, the cake had already been cut.
De vergadering **was** al **afgelast**, maar niemand had het ons verteld.	The meeting had already been cancelled, but nobody had told us.
De brug **is** vorige week door de gemeente **afgesloten**.	The bridge was closed by the municipality last week.
De brug **is afgesloten**, dus je moet omrijden.	The bridge is closed, so you have to take a detour.

Why it works this way

Worden means become: it describes a change in progress. **Het huis wordt gebouwd** is the building site, cranes and all. The perfect of **worden** takes **zijn** (**Het is koud geworden**), so on paper you might expect **is gebouwd geworden**. Standard Dutch keeps **zijn** and leaves **geworden** out. German keeps it (**ist gebaut worden**), which is why German speakers often add it. In informal speech in Belgium and the south of the Netherlands you may hear **is gebouwd geworden**, but it is not standard Dutch.

Remember: worden is the scaffolding. While the work is going on, you see it (**wordt gebouwd**). When the job is done, the scaffolding comes down and **is gebouwd** is what is left.

One form, two meanings

Because **is gebouwd** describes a finished result, it does two jobs. An action reading reports that something happened: **Het pakket is gisteren bezorgd.** A state reading describes a condition that holds now: **De brug is afgesloten**, so you cannot cross. Context tells you which one is meant. A time phrase or a doer with **door** usually points to an action, while a consequence in the present (**dus je moet omrijden**) points to a state. The state use works much like an adjective, see past participles as adjectives.

The English trap

English was built usually becomes **is gebouwd** or **werd gebouwd**. Dutch **was gebouwd** is the past perfect: had been built, or the state at a moment in the past. And routines like the rubbish is collected on Tuesdays need **worden**: **Het afval wordt op dinsdag opgehaald.** With **is** (**Het afval is op dinsdag opgehaald**), you report that it was collected on one particular Tuesday.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Het station is in 1920 gebouwd geworden.**~~
SAY **Het station is in 1920 gebouwd.**
standard Dutch leaves out **geworden**

NOT ~~**Mijn fiets heeft geweest gestolen.**~~
SAY **Mijn fiets is gestolen.**
English has been is not **heeft geweest**; Dutch uses **is** plus the participle

NOT ~~**De vergadering had al afgelast geweest.**~~
SAY **De vergadering was al afgelast.**
English had been becomes **was** plus the participle

NOT ~~**Mijn aanvraag is van de gemeente goedgekeurd.**~~
SAY **Mijn aanvraag is door de gemeente goedgekeurd.**
the doer comes with **door**, not **van**

Quick check

1. Put this sentence in the perfect: **Het zwembad werd vorig jaar geopend.**
2. Fix the sentence: **Onze buren zijn gisteren door de politie gewaarschuwd geworden.**
3. Fill in a form of **zijn**: **Toen Priya bij de balie kwam, … haar afspraak al geannuleerd.**
4. Does **is gesloten** describe a state or a past action here? **Sorry, deze kassa is gesloten. U kunt hiernaast afrekenen.**

Answers on page 783.

Use it today

Look at today's emails, post or app notifications and write three sentences about what has already been done, using **is** or **zijn** plus a participle, such as **Mijn pakket is bezorgd** or **De huur is betaald**. Then add one sentence with **was** about something that had already happened before you got home.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/passive-perfect

RULE 97 · LEVEL B2 · VERBS IN TIME

Er wordt gedanst: the passive without a subject

To say that something is going on without saying who is doing it, Dutch uses **er** + a form of **worden** + a past participle (the verb form you know from **ik heb gewerkt**). **Er wordt gedanst** means "there is dancing" or "people are dancing". You meet it on signs, in the news and in work emails, and in everyday speech whenever the activity matters more than the people.

The pattern

> **Start with er, put a singular form of worden in second place and the past participle at the end: Er wordt hard gewerkt.**

- Present: **Er wordt hard gewerkt.** Simple past: **Er werd veel gelachen.**
- It works with verbs that have no object (**dansen**, **lachen**, **werken**) and with verbs whose object is not important (**betalen**, **eten**, **bellen**).
- With a modal verb (a helper like **moeten**, **mogen** or **kunnen**), the modal takes second place and **worden** goes to the end as an infinitive: **Er moet nog betaald worden**. The order **worden betaald** is also correct.
- In the perfect, **worden** drops out and **zijn** takes over: **Er is hard gewerkt** (see The passive in the perfect).
- When another phrase starts the sentence, **er** comes after the verb, and you can often leave it out: **Hier wordt (er) niet gerookt.**

Examples

Er wordt bij ons op de afdeling **hard gewerkt**.	People work hard in our department.

Op de verjaardag van Daan **werd er veel gelachen**.	There was a lot of laughing at Daan's birthday.
Er wordt aangebeld. Verwacht jij een pakketje?	Someone's ringing the bell. Are you expecting a parcel?
Er moet nog betaald worden. Wie regelt dat?	Someone still has to pay. Who's taking care of it?
Er mag in de stiltecoupé **niet gebeld worden**.	You aren't allowed to make phone calls in the quiet carriage.
Hier wordt niet gerookt.	No smoking here.
In de kantine **wordt** vooral over het weer **gepraat**.	In the canteen, people mostly talk about the weather.
Op Schiphol **wordt** vandaag **gestaakt**.	There is a strike at Schiphol today.
Ik hoorde dat **er** bij de buren tot laat **gefeest werd**.	I heard the neighbours were partying until late.

Why it works this way

Dutch sentences like to have something in the subject's position. In an ordinary passive, the thing the action happens to is the subject: **De brug wordt gerepareerd**. With **dansen** or **lachen** there is no such thing, and you are deliberately not naming the people. So **er** fills the empty slot. It has no meaning of its own, a bit like "there" in "there is": it simply keeps the sentence in shape.

That explains the details. With no real subject, **worden** stays singular: **wordt**, **werd**. And when a phrase like **hier** or **op Schiphol** already stands in front of the verb, the sentence already feels complete, so **er** is often dropped.

English has no direct match, so translations use "people", "someone" or "there is". Dutch could also say **ze staken** or use **men** (see people in general), but the passive keeps the spotlight on the activity. That neutral

tone makes it popular on signs, in notices and in emails: Priya's IT department might write **Er wordt gewerkt aan een oplossing** when the system is down. In the present it can also sound like a firm order. A parent who says **En nu wordt er geslapen!** is not describing the bedroom.

Remember: er is an empty chair at the table. The activity is clearly going on, but nobody sits in the chair, so nobody gets named and **worden** stays singular.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Het wordt hier hard gewerkt**~~
SAY **Er wordt hier hard gewerkt**
the placeholder is **er**, not **het**, even though German uses **es**

NOT ~~**Er wordt gewerkt hard**~~
SAY **Er wordt hard gewerkt**
the participle goes to the end

NOT ~~**Er moet nog betaald wordt**~~
SAY **Er moet nog betaald worden**
after a modal, **worden** is an infinitive

NOT ~~**Er wordde veel gelachen**~~
SAY **Er werd veel gelachen**
the past of **worden** is irregular

Quick check

1. Fill in the simple past of **worden**: **Gisteren … er op het feest van Sanne tot drie uur 's nachts gedanst.**
2. Choose **Er** or **Het**: **… wordt in de stiltecoupé niet gebeld.**

3. Fix the sentence by changing one word: **Er mag op het perron niet gefietst wordt.**
4. Fill in the past participle of **vergaderen**: **Bij het team van Fatima wordt er op dinsdag altijd lang …**

Answers on page 783.

Use it today

Describe a place you know without naming anyone: write three sentences about your office, your street or your gym with **er wordt** or **er werd**, such as **In de sportschool wordt er veel gezweet**. Then add one house rule with a modal, for example **Er mag hier niet gerookt worden**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/impersonal-passive

RULE 98 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Verbs with a fixed preposition

Many Dutch verbs come with their own preposition (a small linking word such as **op**, **aan** or **voor**): you say **wachten op** for wait for, **denken aan** for think of and **houden van** for love. The preposition belongs to the verb, and it is often not the one English would choose. So learn each verb together with its preposition as one chunk, with a short example sentence.

The pattern

> **Many verbs link to their object (the person or thing they are about) with one particular preposition. Learn the verb and that preposition as one unit, because English is not a reliable guide.**

- Close to English: **praten over** (talk about), **luisteren naar** (listen to), **beginnen met** (start with).
- Different from English: **wachten op** (wait for), **denken aan** (think of, remember), **kijken naar** (look at, watch), **zorgen voor** (take care of, arrange).
- No preposition in English: **houden van** (love, really like).
- With the "self" word **zich**: **zich interesseren voor** (be interested in). See reflexive verbs.
- In a subordinate clause (a part starting with **omdat**, **dat** and so on), the verb goes to the end and the preposition group usually stays in front of it: **omdat ik op de bus wacht**.
- For things and in questions, the preposition can team up with **er** or **waar**: **Ik wacht erop. Waar wacht je op?** See er plus a preposition and questions with a preposition.

Examples

Ik **wacht** al tien minuten **op** de bus.	I have been waiting for the bus for ten minutes.
Denk je wel **aan** de afspraak bij de huisarts?	Will you remember the appointment with the GP?
Daan **houdt van** fietsen, ook als het regent.	Daan loves cycling, even when it rains.
Fatima **zorgt** sinds januari **voor** haar zieke moeder.	Fatima has been taking care of her sick mother since January.
Priya **praat** met haar buurvrouw **over** het weer.	Priya is talking to her neighbour about the weather.
Luister je wel **naar** me?	Are you actually listening to me?
In de trein **kijkt** Mei graag **naar** de weilanden.	On the train, Mei likes looking at the meadows.
We **beginnen** om negen uur **met** de vergadering.	We start the meeting at nine o'clock.
Ahmed **interesseert zich voor** lokale politiek, omdat hij iets voor zijn wijk wil doen.	Ahmed is interested in local politics because he wants to do something for his neighbourhood.

Why it works this way

In these pairs the preposition mostly works as glue between the verb and its object. Sometimes you can still see a picture: **naar** means towards, so with **kijken naar** and **luisteren naar** your eyes and ears go towards something. Often there is nothing to see: no picture of love explains the **van** in **houden van**. That is why guessing from English goes wrong so often. German speakers will recognise several pairs (German has "warten auf" and "denken an"), but even they should check each one.

The preposition can change the meaning completely, which shows how firmly it belongs to the verb:

- **Joris houdt van kippen.** He loves chickens. **Joris houdt kippen.** He keeps chickens.
- **Ik denk aan mijn oma.** My grandmother is on my mind. **Hoe denk jij over thuiswerken?** What is your opinion on working from home?

Remember: store each verb and its preposition as a pair, like shoes. **Wachten** on its own is fine (**Ik wacht.**), but as soon as you add the person or thing you are waiting for, the second shoe goes on: **Ik wacht op de bus.**

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik wacht voor een antwoord van de gemeente.**~~
SAY **Ik wacht op een antwoord van de gemeente.**
wait for is **wachten op**

NOT ~~**Emma zorgt van de kat van de buren.**~~
SAY **Emma zorgt voor de kat van de buren.**
take care of is **zorgen voor**

NOT ~~**Ik interesseer me in politiek.**~~
SAY **Ik interesseer me voor politiek.**
the verb takes **voor**, although the adjective says **geïnteresseerd in**

NOT ~~**Ik denk vaak in mijn familie.**~~
SAY **Ik denk vaak aan mijn familie.**
Spanish and Arabic use a word for in here; Dutch uses **aan**

Quick check

1. Choose: **Yara staat bij het station. Ze wacht … haar broer, want zijn trein heeft vertraging.** (**voor**, **op** or **naar**)
2. Choose: **Lotte praat in de pauze graag met Carlos … voetbal.** (**van**, **over** or **aan**)
3. Choose: **Morgen is Bas jarig. Wie zorgt … de taart?** (**van**, **voor** or **over**)
4. Fix the sentence by adding one word: **Mei interesseert voor Nederlandse geschiedenis.**

Answers on page 783.

Use it today

Today, write one true sentence about your own life for five of the pairs in this lesson, for example **Ik kijk vanavond naar het journaal**. Then say at least one of them out loud to a real person before bedtime: a colleague, a neighbour or your partner.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/verbs-with-prepositions

RULE 99 · LEVEL B2 · VERBS IN TIME

Verb clusters: heb kunnen komen

When a verb like **kunnen**, **moeten**, **laten** or **blijven** has another infinitive (the dictionary form, like **komen**) working with it, the perfect (the past with **hebben** or **zijn**) does not use its past participle (the **ge-** form). It uses the infinitive instead: **Ik heb niet kunnen komen**, not **gekund**. In a subordinate clause (a clause with **omdat**, **dat**, **of** and similar words), **heb** or **ben** comes first in the group of verbs at the end: **omdat ik niet heb kunnen komen**.

The pattern

In the perfect, a modal verb or a verb like laten, zien, horen, blijven or gaan becomes an infinitive when another infinitive depends on it. In a subordinate clause, the finite verb (the one that matches the subject, like heb or is) comes first in the final group.

- Verbs that do this: the modal verbs **kunnen**, **moeten**, **willen** and **mogen**, plus **laten**, **zien**, **horen**, **blijven**, **gaan** and **komen**.
- **zitten**, **staan**, **liggen** and **lopen** do it too, and lose their **te**: **Ik sta te wachten** becomes **Ik heb staan wachten**.
- **hebben** or **zijn**? Normally the one the first infinitive takes on its own. **kunnen** takes **hebben**, so **ik heb kunnen komen**; **blijven** takes **zijn**, so **ik ben blijven wachten**. That is why you say **Ik heb vroeg naar huis moeten gaan**, with **heb**.
- No second infinitive, no swap: **Ik heb het niet gekund.**
- Many verbs with **te**, such as **besluiten**, keep their participle: **Ik heb besloten te bellen.** A few, like **proberen**, allow both: **Ik heb geprobeerd te bellen** and **Ik heb proberen te bellen** are both standard.

Examples

Sorry, ik heb gisteren niet **kunnen komen**.	Sorry, I couldn't make it yesterday.
Fatima heeft de hele zaterdag **moeten werken**.	Fatima had to work all day Saturday.
Daan heeft zijn fiets bij de fietsenmaker **laten repareren**.	Daan had his bike repaired at the bike shop.
We zijn na de vergadering nog even **blijven praten**.	We stayed for a chat after the meeting.
Toen het droog werd, zijn we **gaan fietsen**.	When it stopped raining, we went for a bike ride.
Ik heb Sanne nog nooit zo hard **horen lachen**.	I've never heard Sanne laugh so hard.
Joris zegt dat hij een uur op de bus **heeft staan wachten**.	Joris says he stood waiting for the bus for an hour.
Ik weet niet of Ahmed de laatste trein nog **heeft kunnen halen**.	I don't know if Ahmed managed to catch the last train.
Een eigen zaak? Dat heeft Carlos altijd al **gewild**.	His own business? That's what Carlos has always wanted.

Why it works this way

Read the verb group as a chain of command from left to right. In **heb kunnen komen**, **heb** steers **kunnen**, and **kunnen** steers **komen**. Only the first verb changes with the subject. Normally **hebben** wants a participle next to it, as in **heb gewerkt**, but a verb that is busy steering another infinitive keeps its plain infinitive shape. The result is two infinitives side by side, often called the double infinitive.

The same picture helps with word order: in a subordinate clause, the boss stands at the head of the chain, as in **omdat ik mijn fiets heb laten**

repareren. With an ordinary participle Dutch allows both **omdat ik het heb gedaan** and **omdat ik het gedaan heb**, but with a double infinitive the finite verb goes first. More on this in the order of verbs at the end.

If you speak German, you know this trick from "Ich habe nicht kommen können", but Dutch puts the last two verbs the other way round: **kunnen komen**. English has nothing quite like it. Relax: the simple past **Ik kon gisteren niet komen** is just as correct. You only need the cluster when you choose the perfect, which Dutch speakers do constantly in conversation. The next lesson looks closer at zien, horen and voelen.

Remember: when one of these verbs has another infinitive on its right, it drops its **ge-** and turns into an infinitive too. Take that infinitive away, and **gekund**, **gewild** and **gelaten** come straight back.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb niet gekund komen**~~
SAY **Ik heb niet kunnen komen**
kunnen has an infinitive after it, so no **ge-**

NOT ~~**Ik heb mijn haar laten geknipt**~~
SAY **Ik heb mijn haar laten knippen**
English says "had my hair cut", but after **laten** Dutch uses an infinitive

NOT ~~**We zijn gisteren gegaan zwemmen**~~
SAY **We zijn gisteren gaan zwemmen**
gaan with an infinitive stays **gaan**

NOT ~~**omdat ze niet kunnen komen heeft**~~
SAY **omdat ze niet heeft kunnen komen**
with a double infinitive the finite verb goes first

Quick check

1. Choose **kunnen** or **gekund**: **Ik heb vannacht niet … slapen door het onweer.**
2. Choose **gaan** or **gegaan**: **Na het werk zijn Bas en Lotte nog … zwemmen.**
3. Put **heeft**, **verkopen** and **moeten** in the right order: **Priya zegt dat ze haar auto …**
4. Choose **willen** or **gewild**: **Een hond? Die heeft Yara nooit …**

Answers on page 783.

Use it today

Send a friend or colleague a short message about your week with three clusters: something you had to do (**Ik heb … moeten …**), something you had done for you (**Ik heb … laten …**), and something you went or stayed to do (**Ik ben … gaan …** or **Ik ben … blijven …**). For example: **Ik heb eindelijk mijn band laten plakken.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/verb-clusters

RULE 100 · LEVEL B2 · VERBS IN TIME

Zien, horen, voelen plus an infinitive

To say that you see, hear or feel something happen, put a plain infinitive (the dictionary form of a verb, like **lopen**) at the end, after **zien**, **horen** or **voelen**, with no **te**: **Ik zie hem lopen**. The person you perceive sits in between, in the object form (**hem**, not **hij**). In the perfect tense (the past with **hebben**), the verb of the senses becomes an infinitive too: **Ik heb hem zien lopen**, not **gezien**.

The pattern

> **After zien, horen and voelen, the action you perceive is a plain infinitive at the end of the clause, without te. In the perfect, the verb of the senses turns into an infinitive as well: Ik heb haar horen zingen.**

- Present or past: **Ik hoor de kinderen lachen**, **Ik voelde iets langs mijn been kruipen**.
- The person or thing you perceive is the object, so pronouns take the object form: **Ik zag hem vallen**, **Ik hoorde haar roepen**.
- No **te** here, unlike after **proberen** or **vergeten** (see infinitives with te).
- Perfect: **hebben** + **zien**, **horen** or **voelen** + the other infinitive. The auxiliary stays **hebben** even when the second verb normally takes **zijn**: **Ik heb de bus zien vertrekken**.
- In a subordinate clause (a clause with **dat**, **omdat** and so on), all the verbs gather at the end: **Ze zegt dat ze hem heeft zien lopen**.
- **Kijken** and **luisteren** do not combine with an infinitive like this. For "I watched him cycle off", use **zien** or a clause with **hoe**: **Ik keek hoe hij wegfietste**.

Examples

Ik **zie** hem elke ochtend langs het kanaal **lopen**.	I see him walking along the canal every morning.
Gisteravond **hoorde** ik de buren weer ruzie **maken**.	Last night I heard the neighbours arguing again.
Vlak voor een presentatie **voel** ik altijd mijn hart **kloppen**.	Just before a presentation I always feel my heart pounding.
Ik **zag** mijn trein **vertrekken** terwijl ik nog naar het perron rende.	I watched my train leave while I was still running to the platform.
Hoorde je Priya net over de reorganisatie **praten**?	Did you just hear Priya talking about the reorganisation?
Ik **heb** hem nog nooit zo hard **zien fietsen**.	I have never seen him cycle so fast.
Mei **heeft** de pakketbezorger niet **horen aanbellen**.	Mei didn't hear the delivery driver ring the bell.
De buren vertelden dat ze de vloer **hadden voelen trillen**.	The neighbours said they had felt the floor shake.
De huisarts vroeg of ik mijn hart weleens een slag **voelde overslaan**.	The GP asked whether I ever felt my heart skip a beat.

Why it works this way

This pattern usually reports something you perceive yourself, while it happens. A **dat** clause after the same verb often means something quite different:

- **Ik hoorde Joris zingen.** You heard the singing yourself.
- **Ik hoorde dat Joris gaat verhuizen.** Someone told you the news.
- **Ik voel mijn hart kloppen.** A physical sensation.
- **Ik voel dat er iets niet klopt.** A hunch.

English often uses an -ing form here (I heard the baby crying). Dutch uses the infinitive for both "cry" and "crying"; the **-end** form has other jobs (see the present participle).

Grammatically, **zien**, **horen** and **voelen** behave like modal verbs and laten: they take a bare infinitive and form a verb cluster (a group of verbs together). In the perfect, verbs of this group appear as an infinitive instead of a past participle when another infinitive depends on them. You met this in verb clusters with **Ik heb kunnen komen**. With no second verb, the normal participle returns: **Ik heb hem gezien**.

When you do see **te** after one of these verbs, it has another meaning: **De printer hoort gewoon te werken** (the printer is supposed to just work), **We moeten de trein van acht uur zien te halen** (we have to try to catch the eight o'clock train).

Remember: glue two sentences together. **Ik zie hem. Hij loopt.** becomes **Ik zie hem lopen**: **hem** stays an object, **hij** disappears, and **loopt** turns back into the infinitive **lopen**, which moves to the end. In the perfect, two infinitives stand side by side and neither gets **ge-**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik hoorde Daan te fluiten**~~
SAY **Ik hoorde Daan fluiten**
no **te** when you mean hearing something happen

NOT ~~**Ik zag hij de fiets pakken**~~
SAY **Ik zag hem de fiets pakken**
the person you see is the object

NOT ~~**Ik heb haar gezien vertrekken**~~
SAY **Ik heb haar zien vertrekken**
with a second verb, **zien** stays an infinitive

NOT ~~Ik heb hem lopen zien~~
SAY **Ik heb hem zien lopen**
German puts the verb of the senses last; Dutch puts it first

NOT ~~Ik hoorde de baby huilend~~
SAY **Ik hoorde de baby huilen**
English "crying" becomes a plain infinitive here

Quick check

1. Choose: **Op het perron zag ik Ahmed naar de verkeerde trein …** (rennen, te rennen, rennend)
2. Fill in **heeft** or **is**: **Joris … de kat van het dak zien springen.**
3. Choose: **Ik hoorde … in de gang telefoneren.** (zij, haar)
4. Fix the verb form and keep the perfect: **Tijdens de storm heb ik het hele huis gevoeld trillen.**

Answers on page 784.

Use it today

Tonight, write three sentences about your day: something you saw, something you heard and something you felt, such as **Ik zag een man zijn fiets uit de gracht vissen**. Then rewrite one of them in the perfect, so that **zien**, **horen** or **voelen** turns into an infinitive.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/perception-verbs

RULE 101 · LEVEL B2 · VERBS IN TIME

The present participle: lachend, slapend

The Dutch present participle (the form that matches English laughing or sleeping) is the infinitive plus **-d**: **lachen** becomes **lachend**, **slapen** becomes **slapend**. You use it to describe a noun (**een slapende kat**, a sleeping cat) or to say what someone is doing at the same moment as the main action (**Lachend liep ze weg**, she walked off laughing). It does far fewer jobs than English -ing, so you hear it much less in everyday speech.

The pattern

> **Add -d to the infinitive (the dictionary form): lachen becomes lachend. Use it before a noun like any adjective, or on its own for something the subject does at the same time as the main action.**

- Keep the whole infinitive, so the spelling stays the same: **fietsen**, **fietsend**; **gaan**, **gaand**; **ademen**, **ademend**. The main exception is **zijn**, which gives **zijnde** in formal writing.
- Before a noun (as an adjective, a describing word) it takes the normal adjective endings: **de slapende kat**, **een slapende kat**, **het huilende kind**, but **een huilend kind**.
- On its own (as an adverb, a word that says how something happens) it normally has no ending: **Ze liep lachend weg**. Old fixed phrases like **al doende leert men** (you learn by doing) are the exception.
- The final **d** is pronounced as a t, as at the end of any Dutch word (why d sounds like t); in **lachende** you hear a real d.

Examples

In de trein zat een **huilend** kind naast me.	A crying child was sitting next to me on the train.
Kijk uit, je trapt bijna op de **slapende** kat!	Careful, you're about to step on the sleeping cat!
Lachend liep Sanne de vergaderzaal uit.	Sanne walked out of the meeting room laughing.
Daan fietst elke ochtend **fluitend** naar zijn werk.	Daan cycles to work every morning, whistling.
Ga je **lopend** of met de fiets?	Are you going on foot or by bike?
Giet het **kokende** water voorzichtig in de theepot.	Carefully pour the boiling water into the teapot.
De gemeente zoekt een oplossing voor het **groeiende** aantal fietsen bij het station.	The municipality is looking for a solution to the growing number of bikes at the station.
Mei vertelde **stralend** dat ze de baan had gekregen.	Beaming, Mei told us she had got the job.
Het kantoor is **komende** week gesloten vanwege een verbouwing.	The office is closed next week because of a renovation.

Why it works this way

Think of **-end** as a label that says what someone or something is doing at that moment. **Een huilend kind** is a child with the label crying. In **Lachend liep ze weg**, the label sticks to **ze**: she left, and she was laughing while she did. The participle never shows the tense; the main verb does that.

English -ing does many more jobs, and Dutch gives most of them to other forms:

- I'm working: **Ik werk** or **Ik ben aan het werken** (see aan het + infinitive)
- Swimming is healthy: **Zwemmen is gezond**
- I saw her leaving: **Ik zag haar vertrekken** (see zien, horen, voelen)
- He sat reading: **Hij zat te lezen**

So in conversation you meet the participle less than English speakers expect. Short ones like **lachend** or **fluitend** are fine in speech, but longer participle phrases (**Zwaaiend naar de buren stapte hij in de auto**) sound like a news report or a novel. A few participles are everyday words, though: **lopend** (on foot), **komende week**, **volgend jaar**, **spannend**, **dringend**. Some now behave like ordinary adjectives, so they can even follow **zijn**: **De film was echt spannend**.

Remember: -end mainly does the two English -ing jobs that describe: a noun (a crying child) or how someone does something (she left laughing). For the other jobs, Dutch usually reaches for the infinitive.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben de afwas doend.**~~
SAY **Ik ben de afwas aan het doen.**
Dutch has no tense like English am doing

NOT ~~**Zwemmend is goed voor je rug.**~~
SAY **Zwemmen is goed voor je rug.**
an activity used as a noun is the infinitive

NOT ~~**Bas heeft een blaffend hond.**~~
SAY **Bas heeft een blaffende hond.**
hond is a de-word, so it gets the normal **-e**

NOT ~~**Het was een spannent boek.**~~
SAY **Het was een spannend boek.**
the ending is spelled **-end**, even though you hear a t

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap with a form of **huilen**: **Ahmed probeerde in de trein een … baby te troosten.**
2. Fill in the gap with a form of **passen**: **Carlos zocht een … cadeau voor de verjaardag van zijn schoonmoeder.**
3. Choose **zingend** or **zingen**: **Yara fietste … naar school.**
4. Fix the sentence by changing one word: **Fietsend in de regen vind ik vreselijk.**

Answers on page 784.

Use it today

On your next train or bike ride, name three things you see with a participle before a noun, like **een blaffende hond** or **een vertrekkende trein**. Then text a friend one sentence such as **Ik kom lopend, ik ben er over tien minuten.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/present-participle

RULE 102 · LEVEL B1 · VERBS IN TIME

Past participles as adjectives

A past participle, the verb form you know from the perfect tense (**gesloten**, **gekookt**), can describe a noun just like an adjective: **de gesloten deur** (the closed door), **een gekookt ei** (a boiled egg). Before the noun it takes the normal adjective endings. After **zijn** it describes a state: **De winkel is gesloten** means the shop is closed.

The pattern

> **A past participle can describe a noun like any adjective (a describing word). Before the noun it follows the usual -e rules; after zijn it has no ending and describes a state.**

- Most of the time, add -e: **de gekookte aardappel**, **het gekookte ei**, **gekookte eieren**.
- No -e with a singular het-word after **een**, **geen**, **elk** and similar words, or with no article: **een gekookt ei**, **gekookt water**.
- Participles ending in -en do not add -e: **de gesloten deur**, **gebakken aardappelen**.
- A participle ending in -t or -d keeps that letter: **gekookte**, **getrouwde** (not **gekookde**).
- After **zijn**, there is no ending: **De aardappelen zijn gekookt.**

The full ending rules are in Adjective endings.

Examples

Mag ik een **gekookt ei** bij mijn ontbijt?	Can I have a boiled egg with my breakfast?

Het **gekookte ei** is nog te heet om te pellen.	The boiled egg is still too hot to peel.
Bij de vis eten we vanavond **gebakken aardappelen**.	We're having fried potatoes with the fish tonight.
Fatima klopte op de **gesloten deur**, maar niemand deed open.	Fatima knocked on the closed door, but nobody answered.
Joris vond zijn **gestolen fiets** twee straten verderop terug.	Joris found his stolen bike two streets away.
Ahmed heeft de **ingevulde formulieren** naar de gemeente gestuurd.	Ahmed has sent the completed forms to the municipality.
De apotheek **is** op zondag **gesloten**.	The pharmacy is closed on Sundays.
Priya **is** al drie jaar **getrouwd**.	Priya has been married for three years.
Weet je of de tafel bij het raam **gereserveerd is**?	Do you know if the table by the window is reserved?

Why it works this way

A past participle in front of a noun often labels the result of a finished action: a door that someone has closed, an egg that has been boiled. It can also describe a situation that is still going on: **een bewoond huis** is a house that people live in now, and **een bewaakte ingang** is an entrance that someone is guarding. Either way, Dutch treats the participle as an ordinary adjective, so **gekookt** behaves like **warm**: **een warm ei**, **het warme ei**; **een gekookt ei**, **het gekookte ei**.

Compare the present participle, the -end form from the previous lesson. **Kokend water** is bubbling right now; **gekookt water** has finished boiling. **De vallende bladeren** are still on their way down; **de gevallen bladeren** are lying on the pavement. Because the participle describes what has happened to something or the state it is in, most participles used this way

come from verbs with an object, like **sluiten** and **koken**, or from verbs that take **zijn**, like **vallen**.

After **zijn**, the participle says how things are now: **De apotheek is gesloten** means about the same as **De apotheek is dicht**. The same words, **zijn** plus a participle, also form the passive in the perfect, which tells you something was done: **De brug is in 1890 gebouwd** (the bridge was built in 1890). As a tendency, a time or a doer (**in 1890**, **door de gemeente**) points to an event, while a sentence without them usually describes a state. Often both readings fit and the meaning hardly changes.

Remember: kokend water can burn you, **gekookt** water may already be cold. The present participle shows an action in progress; the past participle usually shows its result or a state.

Watch out

NOT ~~een gekookte ei~~
SAY **een gekookt ei**
singular het-word after **een**: no -e

NOT ~~de geslotene deur~~
SAY **de gesloten deur**
participles in -en add no -e; German speakers often add one

NOT ~~Ik eet graag gekookt aardappelen.~~
SAY **Ik eet graag gekookte aardappelen.**
plural: add -e

NOT ~~Ik hou van gebakte vis.~~
SAY **Ik hou van gebakken vis.**
the participle of **bakken** is **gebakken**, and it adds no -e

Quick check

1. Choose: Lotte loopt op krukken met een … been. (**gebroken** / **gebrokene**)
2. Fill in the participle of **schilderen**: Ga niet op de net … bank zitten!
3. Fix the sentence and keep the article **het**: Daan eet het gekookt ei met een beetje zout.
4. Choose **kokend** or **gekookt**: Yara geeft haar baby … water dat ze eerst heeft laten afkoelen.

Answers on page 784.

Use it today

In the supermarket, find three products with a participle on the label, such as **geraspte kaas**, **gerookte zalm** or **gezouten pinda's**, and say them out loud with **de** in front. Then say one Dutch sentence about when a shop near you is closed, for example **De bakker is op maandag gesloten.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/participle-as-adjective

RULE 103 · LEVEL C1 · VERBS IN TIME

Must have, should have, could have

To say that something must have happened, keep **moeten** in the present and end with a past participle (the form like **gemist** or **vergeten**) plus **hebben** or **zijn**: **Hij moet het vergeten zijn** (He must have forgotten). For something that should or could have happened but did not, use **had** (or **hadden** with a plural subject) with **moeten** or **kunnen** and an infinitive (the dictionary form, like **zeggen**): **Je had het eerder moeten zeggen** (You should have said so sooner). For an open maybe, say **Dat zou kunnen** (That's possible).

The pattern

To guess about the past, use a modal (a verb like moeten or kunnen) in the present and put the participle with hebben or zijn at the end. For a missed chance, put had (singular) or hadden (plural) in second place, with moeten or kunnen plus an infinitive at the end.

- **Must have** (a confident guess): **Ze moet de bus gemist hebben.** Use the helper verb the main verb takes in the perfect tense (**ik heb gewerkt**): **gemist hebben**, but **vertrokken zijn**. See hebben or zijn.
- **May have** (a cautious guess): **Ze kan de bus gemist hebben**, or more tentatively **Ze zou de bus gemist kunnen hebben**. Negative: **Dat kan ze niet gezegd hebben** (She can't have said that).
- **Should have** (regret or criticism): **Je had het eerder moeten zeggen.** With a plural subject: **We hadden het eerder moeten zeggen.**
- **Could have** (an unrealized possibility): **Het had erger kunnen zijn.**
- **Word order**: in a guess, participle and helper can swap (**gemist hebben** or **hebben gemist**). After **had** or **hadden**, the modal normally comes

first (**moeten zeggen**). In a subordinate clause (after **dat**, **omdat** and the like), the finite verb (the one that agrees with the subject) joins the group at the end: **dat ze de bus gemist moet hebben**, **dat je het had moeten zeggen**.

Examples

Sanne reageert niet in de groepsapp, dus ze **moet** het bericht **gemist hebben**.	Sanne isn't reacting in the group chat, so she must have missed the message.
Joris komt niet opdagen. Hij **moet** het **vergeten zijn**.	Joris isn't turning up. He must have forgotten.
De straat is kletsnat, dus het **moet** vannacht flink **geregend hebben**.	The street is soaking wet, so it must have rained hard last night.
Je **had** het eerder **moeten zeggen**, dan hadden we iets anders gepland.	You should have said so sooner, then we would have planned something else.
Carlos en Mei **hadden** hun fietsen bij het station op slot **moeten zetten**: nu zijn ze allebei gestolen.	Carlos and Mei should have locked their bikes at the station: now both have been stolen.
Je **had** me ook even **kunnen appen**.	You could at least have sent me a message.
Ahmed is van zijn fiets gevallen, maar het **had** veel erger **kunnen aflopen**.	Ahmed fell off his bike, but it could have ended much worse.
Heeft de bezorger het pakketje bij de buren afgegeven? Dat **zou kunnen**.	Did the courier leave the parcel with the neighbours? Could be.
Fatima vindt dat de huisarts haar veel eerder **had moeten doorverwijzen**.	Fatima thinks the GP should have referred her much sooner.

Je **had** het **moeten zien**: op Yara's verjaardag stond Bas op tafel te dansen.	You should have seen it: at Yara's birthday, Bas was dancing on the table.

Why it works this way

Ask when the thinking happens. You stand on the platform now and draw a conclusion about earlier, so the modal stays in the present and the past sits at the end (**gemist hebben**). English "must have" works the same way, so this half tends to feel friendly.

A missed chance is different: the moment of choice lies in the past, and it went the other way. Dutch marks that with **had** or **hadden**, the same unreal past as in **Als ik het had geweten** (see If only). The modal then stays an infinitive instead of becoming a participle, so two infinitives stand in a row: a double infinitive. The ordinary perfect does this too: **Ik heb moeten werken**, never **Ik heb gemoeten werken** (more in verb clusters).

On their own, these two differ by one small verb:

- **Ik heb moeten werken.** I had to work, and I did.
- **Ik had moeten werken.** On its own, this normally means: I should have worked, but I didn't.

In a story told in the past, context can turn **had moeten** into a plain past perfect: **Hij was kapot, want hij had de hele dag moeten werken** (he had had to work all day, and did).

Remember: find where the past sits. At the end (**gemist hebben**), you are a detective reading clues. Up front on **had** or **hadden**, you are looking back at a road not taken.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ze moet hebben de bus gemist.~~
SAY **Ze moet de bus gemist hebben.**
the object comes before the verbs at the end, unlike English

NOT ~~Hij moet al naar huis gegaan hebben.~~
SAY **Hij moet al naar huis gegaan zijn.**
English always says have, but **gaan** takes **zijn** in the perfect

NOT ~~Je had moeten het eerder zeggen.~~
SAY **Je had het eerder moeten zeggen.**
only **had** stays in second place; both infinitives close the sentence

NOT ~~Ik had het gemoeten zeggen.~~
SAY **Ik had het moeten zeggen.**
next to another verb, the modal stays **moeten**, with no **ge-**

NOT ~~Dat had ik moeten geweten.~~
SAY **Dat had ik moeten weten.**
English says known, but Dutch needs the infinitive **weten**

Quick check

1. Choose **hebben** or **zijn**: **Het is zo stil bij de buren. Ze moeten al op vakantie … vertrokken.**
2. Choose **heeft** or **had**: **Emma kwam te laat bij de huisarts, want ze vertrok pas om half negen. Ze … eigenlijk om acht uur moeten vertrekken.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Je had moeten mij waarschuwen.**
4. Sanne asks: **Is de vergadering naar donderdag verplaatst?** You are not sure, but it is possible. Choose **kunnen** or **moeten**: **Dat zou …**

Answers on page 784.

Use it today

Pick one small thing that went wrong this week, like a forgotten umbrella or a missed bus. Say one detective guess (**Ik moet hem in de trein hebben laten liggen**), one regret (**Ik had eerder moeten vertrekken**) and one honest maybe (**Het zou kunnen dat …**) out loud.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/modal-perfect

RULE 104 · LEVEL C1 · VERBS IN TIME

Old verb forms in fixed phrases: Leve de koning!

A handful of old verb forms survive mainly in fixed phrases: **Leve de koning!**, **Het ga je goed**, **Men neme**, **zij het** and **God zegene je**. They are leftovers of the Dutch subjunctive (a verb form for wishes and for what should happen, rather than for facts). You meet them in speeches, songs, cards, signs and formal texts, so it pays to recognise them, but you never need them to build sentences of your own.

The pattern

> **Old subjunctive forms survive mainly in fixed phrases for wishes, blessings, old-style instructions and concessions (admitting a limit, as in albeit). Recognise them; in everyday sentences, use the normal verb forms.**

- Wishes and blessings: **Leve de koning!** (long live the king), **Het ga je goed** (all the best), **God zegene je** (God bless you), **godzijdank** (thank God)
- Old-style instructions: **Men neme …** (take …, in recipes), **Gelieve …** (please …, on formal signs and in letters)
- Concessions: **zij het** (albeit), **het zij zo** (so be it), **hoe het ook zij** (be that as it may)
- The form usually looks like the infinitive (the dictionary form) without its final -n: **leven** gives **leve**, **nemen** gives **neme**, **zegenen** gives **zegene**. The short verbs **gaan** and **zijn** give **ga** and **zij**. An old past form, **ware**, survives in **als het ware** (as it were).

- Some frames still take new words: any noun after **Leve** (**Leve de vrijdag!**), any instruction after **Gelieve**, and fresh wishes with **Moge** (may), as in **Moge het nieuwe jaar je veel geluk brengen**. Such new sentences are correct, but they sound formal or literary.

Examples

Toen de koning op het balkon verscheen, klonk het uit duizenden kelen: **Leve de koning!**	When the king appeared on the balcony, thousands of voices rang out: Long live the king!
Op de afscheidskaart voor Joris stond in sierlijke letters: **Het ga je goed!**	The farewell card for Joris said, in elegant lettering: All the best!
Men neme een fiets, een regenjas en een flinke portie tegenwind, en klaar is Kees.	Take one bike, one raincoat and a generous helping of headwind, and Bob's your uncle.
Na de storing reden de treinen naar Groningen weer, **zij het** met een uur vertraging.	After the disruption the trains to Groningen were running again, albeit an hour late.
Bij het afscheid op Schiphol fluisterde de oma van Fatima: **God zegene je**, kind.	Saying goodbye at Schiphol, Fatima's grandmother whispered: God bless you, child.
De gemeente heeft het plan goedgekeurd, dus de oude kastanjes moeten wijken. **Het zij zo**, maar zonde blijft het.	The council has approved the plan, so the old chestnut trees have to go. So be it, but it's still a shame.
Op de deur van de huisartsenpraktijk hangt een bordje: **Gelieve uw fiets niet tegen het raam te zetten.**	On the door of the GP's practice there is a sign: Please do not lean your bike against the window.
Bij de beëdiging eindigde de nieuwe minister met de vaste formule: **Zo waarlijk helpe mij God almachtig!**	At the swearing-in, the new minister ended with the set formula: So help me God Almighty!

Bij de opening van het nieuwe gemeentehuis sprak de burgemeester: **Moge dit gebouw een huis voor alle inwoners zijn.**	At the opening of the new town hall, the mayor said: May this building be a home for all residents.

Why it works this way

Older Dutch had a full subjunctive (in Dutch: **de aanvoegende wijs**) for what is wished, ordered or imagined. Over the centuries, helpers like **moeten**, **laten** and **ik hoop dat** took over, and the forms vanished from daily speech. Modern Dutch does not even use them in reported speech, which surprises German speakers.

They survived where people kept repeating the exact same words: cheers, blessings, prayers, oaths and recipes. So today you find them in ritual language: the **Koningsdag** cheer, a minister's oath, the Christmas song **Ere zij God**, the traditional Lord's Prayer (**Uw naam worde geheiligd**), and modern writers who use **Men neme** with a wink. Only **moge** still regularly opens brand-new wishes, and mostly in speeches, sermons and formal cards.

English kept the same fossils: "God save the King" (not "saves"), "long live the King", "so be it", "be that as it may", even "albeit" (from "all be it"). Match them with **God zegene je**, **Leve de koning**, **Het zij zo**, **Hoe het ook zij** and **zij het**, and the Dutch suddenly feels familiar. It also shows why **Leve de koning!** is not an imperative (an order): nobody is telling the king to live, they are wishing it.

Remember: think of these forms as museum pieces that occasionally leave the museum. Recognise them and enjoy them. A new wish with **moge** is correct Dutch, but it sounds like a speech or a wedding card. For your own everyday wishes, use the normal present (**Ik hoop dat het je goed gaat**) or the patterns in wishes with maar.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Lang leef de koning!**~~
SAY **Lang leve de koning!**
leef is an order to you, so it cannot take **de koning** as its subject

NOT ~~**Ik hoop dat het je goed ga in je nieuwe baan.**~~
SAY **Ik hoop dat het je goed gaat in je nieuwe baan.**
after **hopen dat** Dutch uses the normal present, unlike Spanish

NOT ~~**Carlos zei dat de monteur morgen kome.**~~
SAY **Carlos zei dat de monteur morgen komt.**
unlike German, Dutch reported speech uses ordinary verb forms

NOT ~~**De wet is aangenomen, zei het met een krappe meerderheid.**~~
SAY **De wet is aangenomen, zij het met een krappe meerderheid.**
zij and **zei** sound the same, but **zei** means said

Quick check

1. Fill in one word: **Na de verbouwing is de bibliotheek weer open, … het met kortere openingstijden.**
2. On **Koningsdag** the crowd chants: **Lang … de koning!** Choose: **leeft**, **leve** or **leef**.
3. Fill in the right form of **gaan**: **Ik hoop dat het je in Rotterdam goed …**
4. Fix the sentence by changing one word: **Volgens de huismeester werke de lift morgen weer.**

Answers on page 785.

Use it today

Write a farewell or good-luck card for a colleague or neighbour and end it with **Het ga je goed!** Then add one modern line of your own, such as **Ik**

hoop dat je het naar je zin hebt in je nieuwe baan, so the fossil and the living form sit side by side.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/fixed-subjunctive

Word order

Where the verb goes, and every other piece of the sentence.

- Verb second: the golden rule
- Inversion: Morgen ga ik
- Yes or no questions: the verb comes first
- Questions with a question word
- The verb bracket: two verbs, two places
- Time, manner, place
- Where does niet go?
- Geen or niet?
- En, maar, of, want, dus
- Subordinate clauses: the verb goes to the end
- Omdat or want: two ways to say because
- When the subordinate clause comes first
- Als, wanneer or toen: when and if
- Dat clauses: Ik denk dat...
- Indirect questions: Weet jij of...?
- Relative clauses inside a sentence
- The order of verbs at the end
- Separable verbs in subordinate clauses
- Two objects and short pronouns

- The four jobs of er
- Er is and er zijn: there is, there are
- Er with numbers: Ik heb er drie
- Erop, ervan, daarmee: er plus a preposition
- Splitting er and its preposition
- Starting with the object for emphasis or contrast
- Where adverbs go: al, nog, graag, vaak, ook
- What can come after the final verbs
- Questions with a preposition
- Zowel … als, niet alleen … maar ook
- Daarom, toch, dan, daarna: linking words that invert
- Hoe meer, hoe beter
- Hoewel, ook al, zelfs als: although and even if
- Zodat, opdat, zo … dat
- Voordat, nadat, terwijl, sinds, totdat, zodra
- Reporting what someone said
- Leaving words out in spoken Dutch

RULE 105 · LEVEL A1 · WORD ORDER

Verb second: the golden rule

In a Dutch statement, the conjugated verb (the verb form that changes with the person: **ik werk**, **hij werkt**) is the second element. One element comes first, then the verb, then the rest. That first element can be one word or a whole group of words, so you count elements, not words.

The pattern

> **One element first, then the conjugated verb. An element is a word or a group of words that belongs together, like ik, om acht uur or mijn oude buurman uit Delft.**

- Position one can be the subject, a time, a place or an object, among other things.
- When the subject is not in position one, it goes right after the verb. More in Inversion: Morgen ga ik.
- With two verbs, the conjugated one is second and the other usually goes to the end (the verb bracket).
- **En**, **maar**, **want**, **ja** and **nee** at the start of a clause do not count as position one.
- Questions with a question word follow the rule too (**Waar woon jij?**), while yes or no questions and commands start with the verb (**Woon jij hier?**, **Kom binnen!**).

Examples

Ik **woon** in Utrecht.	I live in Utrecht.

Mijn oude buurman uit Delft **woont** nu hier.	My old neighbour from Delft lives here now.
Mijn zus en haar vriend **komen** zaterdag.	My sister and her boyfriend are coming on Saturday.
Vandaag **werkt** Priya thuis.	Priya is working from home today.
Om acht uur **vertrekt** de trein.	The train leaves at eight o'clock.
In de supermarkt **betaal** ik met mijn pinpas.	In the supermarket I pay with my debit card.
Die appels **neem** ik.	I'll take those apples.
Sanne **wil** vanavond pizza eten.	Sanne wants to eat pizza tonight.
Ik **fiets** vaak naar mijn werk.	I often cycle to work.

Why it works this way

Picture a Dutch statement as a train. The first carriage holds whatever you start with: a person, a time, a place or a thing. It can be tiny (**ik**) or long (**mijn oude buurman uit Delft**), but there is only one. The verb is the second carriage.

English works differently: in "Today I work at home" the verb comes third. Dutch keeps it second, so the subject steps aside: **Vandaag werk ik thuis.** If you speak German, relax: German main clauses follow the same rule.

In relaxed speech you will hear **Weet ik niet** (I don't know), with **dat** left out of position one. The verb stays exactly where it was.

This is the rule for main clauses, sentences that can stand on their own. After **omdat** (because) or **dat** (that), the verb goes to the end; see Subordinate clauses.

Remember: one block, then the verb. Count blocks, not words.

Watch out

NOT ~~Vandaag ik werk thuis.~~
SAY **Vandaag werk ik thuis.**
vandaag is position one, so the verb comes next

NOT ~~Ik vaak fiets naar mijn werk.~~
SAY **Ik fiets vaak naar mijn werk.**
English puts often before the verb; Dutch keeps the verb second

NOT ~~Ik ook spreek Engels.~~
SAY **Ik spreek ook Engels.**
ook goes after the verb

NOT ~~Ik blijf thuis, want regent het.~~
SAY **Ik blijf thuis, want het regent.**
want does not count, so **het** takes position one

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence, keeping **morgen** at the start: **Morgen Joris gaat naar de huisarts.**
2. In **Mijn broer uit Rotterdam komt vandaag**, which word is in position two: **broer**, **uit** or **komt**?
3. Choose the correct sentence: **Lotte morgen wil zwemmen.** or **Lotte wil morgen zwemmen.**
4. Fill in the gap: **Die tas … ik niet.** (kopen)

Answers on page 785.

Use it today

Tonight, write three sentences about your day: one starting with **ik**, one starting with a time (**vanavond**) and one starting with a place (**op mijn werk**). Then check each one: is the verb the second element?

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/verb-second

RULE 106 · LEVEL A1 · WORD ORDER

Inversion: Morgen ga ik

When a Dutch statement starts with something other than the subject (the person or thing doing the action, like **ik** or **Sanne**), the verb stays in second place and the subject moves to right after it. So **Ik ga morgen** becomes **Morgen ga ik**. This swap is called inversion, and it is completely normal, everyday Dutch.

The pattern

> **The verb is the second part of a Dutch statement. If something other than the subject comes first, the subject goes right after the verb.**

- Subject first: **Ik ga morgen naar Utrecht.**
- Time word first: **Morgen ga ik naar Utrecht.**
- The first part can be a group of words, like **op zaterdag** or **na het werk**. The verb follows the whole group.
- When **jij** or **je** follows the verb, the ending **-t** drops: **Vanavond kook jij.** See Werk jij? Where the t disappears.
- **En**, **maar**, **want**, **ja** and **nee** do not count as a first part: **Ja, ik kom.**

Examples

Ik werk vandaag thuis.	I'm working from home today.
Vandaag werk ik thuis.	Today I'm working from home.
Morgen ga ik naar Utrecht.	Tomorrow I'm going to Utrecht.
Om acht uur begint de les.	The lesson starts at eight o'clock.

Op zaterdag fietst Sanne naar de markt.	On Saturdays Sanne cycles to the market.
In de trein leest Daan een boek.	On the train Daan reads a book.
Vanochtend schijnt de zon.	This morning the sun is shining.
Bij de bakker koopt Fatima brood.	At the bakery Fatima buys bread.
Vanavond kook jij.	Tonight you're cooking.

Why it works this way

English locks the subject in front of the verb. Dutch locks the verb in second place instead, as you saw in Verb second: the golden rule, and lets almost anything take first place. So when **morgen** takes the first seat, the subject has to move, and its new seat is right behind the verb. English has a small leftover of this: "Here comes the bus" works the same way.

Starting with a time word is not fancy or old-fashioned. Dutch speakers like to set the scene first, and a time word links one sentence to the next: **Ik werk tot vijf uur. Daarna ga ik naar de sportschool.** You will hear this all day, especially with words like **vandaag**, **morgen** and **nu**.

If you speak German, this is the rule you already know. If you speak Spanish or Arabic, keep the subject: Dutch cannot drop it after the verb.

Remember: the verb keeps seat two. If anything other than the subject takes seat one, the subject sits down right behind the verb.

Watch out

NOT ~~Morgen ik ga naar Utrecht.~~
SAY **Morgen ga ik naar Utrecht.**
the verb stays second, so **ik** moves behind it

NOT ~~Op zaterdag Sanne fietst naar de markt.~~
SAY **Op zaterdag fietst Sanne naar de markt.**
the verb comes right after the whole first part

NOT ~~Vanavond kookt jij.~~
SAY **Vanavond kook jij.**
the ending **-t** drops when **jij** follows the verb

NOT ~~Morgen ga naar de markt.~~
SAY **Morgen ga ik naar de markt.**
Dutch needs the subject, also after the verb

Quick check

1. Choose: **Vanmiddag … boodschappen.** (**ik doe** or **doe ik**)
2. Fix the sentence and keep **morgen** at the start: **Morgen Mei gaat naar de huisarts.**
3. Fill in the right form of **fietsen**: **Op maandag … jij naar je werk.**
4. Fix the sentence and keep **op vrijdag** at the start. It should mean "On Fridays I eat pizza": **Op vrijdag eet pizza.**

Answers on page 785.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your week that start with **vandaag**, **morgen** and **op zaterdag**, for example about work, shopping or sport. Read them aloud and check that the verb comes second each time.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/inversion

RULE 107 · LEVEL A1 · WORD ORDER

Yes or no questions: the verb comes first

To ask a yes or no question in Dutch, put the conjugated verb (the form that matches the person) first and the subject (who or what does it) right after it: **Heb je tijd? Woont hij hier?** When the subject **jij** or **je** follows the verb, the verb loses its -t ending (**Werk jij?**), and your voice usually rises at the end.

The pattern

> **In a yes or no question, the conjugated verb comes first and the subject follows. The rest keeps its usual order.**

- **Hij woont hier.** becomes **Woont hij hier?**
- When the subject **jij** or **je** follows the verb, the -t ending drops: **Werk jij?** **Ben je moe?**
- A t that is already in the **ik** form stays: **ik zit**, **Zit jij hier?**
- With other subjects, the form does not change: **Werkt u?**
- A second verb stays at the end: **Kun je zwemmen?**

Examples

Heb je morgen tijd?	Do you have time tomorrow?
Woont Daan hier?	Does Daan live here?
Werk jij op zaterdag?	Do you work on Saturdays?
Spreek je Engels?	Do you speak English?
Is de supermarkt nog open?	Is the supermarket still open?
Gaat deze trein naar Utrecht?	Does this train go to Utrecht?

Heeft u pijn?	Are you in pain?

Why it works this way

In a statement, the verb comes second, as in Inversion: Morgen ga ik. In a yes or no question it moves to the front, and that move itself signals the question. English does this with only a few verbs (Are you tired?) and adds "do" for the rest. Dutch puts any conjugated verb first, and before **jij** a regular verb is just its **ik** form: **ik werk**, **Werk jij?** More in Werk jij? Where the t disappears.

In relaxed speech you also hear statement order with a rising voice: **Je komt morgen?** That sounds like checking or surprise. For a plain question, put the verb first, especially if your language often asks with intonation alone, as Spanish and spoken Arabic do.

Remember: when a statement starts with the subject, swap the subject and the verb: **De winkel is open.** becomes **Is de winkel open?** If **jij** or **je** now follows the verb, drop the -t.

Watch out

NOT ~~Werkt jij morgen?~~
SAY **Werk jij morgen?**
the -t drops when the subject **jij** follows the verb

NOT ~~Bent je moe?~~
SAY **Ben je moe?**
zijn loses its t too

NOT ~~Doe je hier werken?~~
SAY **Werk je hier?**
Dutch has no helper verb like "do"

NOT ~~**Woon hij hier?**~~
SAY **Woont hij hier?**
the -t ending only drops when the subject **jij** or **je** follows the verb

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **werken**: **… jij morgen?**
2. Choose **Kom** or **Komt**: **… u morgen ook?**
3. Fix the verb: **Bent jij de nieuwe buurvrouw?**
4. Turn this into a question that starts with the verb: **Sanne fietst naar haar werk.**

Answers on page 785.

Use it today

Ask a colleague or neighbour three yes or no questions that start with the verb, like **Werk je morgen?** Check each one for the lost t, and let your voice rise at the end.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/yes-no-questions

RULE 108 · LEVEL A1 · WORD ORDER

Questions with a question word

In a Dutch question with a question word, the question word comes first, the verb comes second and the subject usually comes third: **Waar woon je?** (Where do you live?), **Wanneer begint de les?** (When does the class start?). When you ask about a thing with a preposition, Dutch usually puts **waar** at the front and the preposition at the end: **Waar wacht je op?** (What are you waiting for?).

The pattern

> **The question word takes first place and the conjugated verb (the verb form that matches the subject, like woon or begint) takes second place. The subject (who or what does the action) usually follows right after the verb.**

- Question words ask for information: **wie** (who), **wat** (what), **waar** (where), **wanneer** (when), **hoe** (how), **waarom** (why). See Question words.
- A phrase like **hoe laat** (what time) or **welke bus** (which bus) counts as one block in first place.
- When **je** or **jij** follows the verb, the verb drops its -t ending: **jij woont**, but **Waar woon je?** With **u** the -t stays: **Waar woont u?** More in Werk jij? Where the t disappears.
- If the question word is the subject itself, no other subject is needed: **Wie heeft een pen?**
- To ask about a thing with a preposition, most speakers start with **waar** and put the preposition at the end: **Waar wacht je op?** For a person, the preposition goes before **wie**: **Op wie wacht je?**

Examples

Waar woon je?	Where do you live?
Wanneer begint de les?	When does the class start?
Hoe laat vertrekt de trein naar Utrecht?	What time does the train to Utrecht leave?
Wat eet Daan vanavond?	What is Daan eating tonight?
Waarom fietst Fatima vandaag niet?	Why isn't Fatima cycling today?
Hoeveel kost een brood?	How much is a loaf of bread?
Wie heeft een pen?	Who has a pen?
Waar wacht je **op**?	What are you waiting for?
Waar praten jullie **over**?	What are you talking about?
Waar kom je **vandaan**?	Where are you from?

Why it works this way

Dutch keeps the conjugated verb in second place in a main clause (Verb second). In a statement, the subject often takes first place. In a question, the question word claims that spot, so the subject moves behind the verb. Compare:

- **Je woont in Delft.** (a statement)
- **Woon je in Delft?** (a yes or no question: the verb comes first)
- **Waar woon je?** (the question word first, the verb second)

English gets the verb forward with a helper: where do you live? Dutch has no helper here. The real verb moves itself, so do and does simply vanish in translation.

The split preposition will feel familiar, because English does it too: what are you looking at? The only change is that Dutch uses **waar** for the thing

instead of **wat**. The joined form **Waarop wacht je?** is also correct, but it sounds more formal and turns up more in writing. More in Questions with a preposition.

Remember: first place is a single seat. Once the question word sits there, the subject queues behind the verb, just like in **Morgen ga ik**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Wanneer de les begint?**~~
SAY **Wanneer begint de les?**
the verb comes right after the question word

NOT ~~**Waar woont je?**~~
SAY **Waar woon je?**
when **je** follows the verb, the -t disappears

NOT ~~**Wat kijk je naar?**~~
SAY **Waar kijk je naar?**
with a preposition, use **waar** for things

NOT ~~**Wie praat je met?**~~
SAY **Met wie praat je?**
for people, the preposition goes before **wie**

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Hoe laat Mei vertrekt?**
2. Choose: **Waar … je?** (**werk** or **werkt**)
3. Lotte asks **… wacht je op?** and Ahmed answers **Op bus 12.** Choose **Wat** or **Waar**.
4. Fill in the gap. Joris asks **Met … praat je?** and Emma answers **Met Bas.**

Answers on page 786.

Use it today

Write down three questions for a neighbour or colleague, such as **Waar kom je vandaan?** and **Hoe laat begin je morgen?**, and ask one of them out loud today. Check that your verb comes right after the question word.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/wh-questions

RULE 109 · LEVEL A1 · WORD ORDER

The verb bracket: two verbs, two places

When a Dutch main clause (a sentence that can stand on its own) has two verb parts, they split up. The conjugated verb, the form that matches the subject, takes position two. The other verb part goes to the end: **Ik wil morgen fietsen**, **Ik heb het boek gelezen**, **Ik bel je op**.

The pattern

> **In a main clause, the conjugated verb sits in position two and the other verb parts go to the end. Most other words go in between.**

- **The end:** an infinitive (dictionary form: **fietsen**), a past participle ("done" form: **gelezen**) or a separable prefix (the part that breaks off: **op** from **opbellen**).
- With another verb in position two, a separable verb stays in one piece at the end: **Ik wil je opbellen**. More in Separable verbs.
- A few things, like a clause with **dat**, can follow the last verb part.

Examples

Ik **wil** morgen **fietsen**.	I want to cycle tomorrow.
Ik **heb** het boek **gelezen**.	I have read the book.
Ik **bel** je morgen **op**.	I'll call you tomorrow.
Sanne **moet** vandaag **werken**.	Sanne has to work today.
Priya **heeft** de huisarts **gebeld**.	Priya called the GP.
Fatima **neemt** een taart **mee**.	Fatima is bringing a cake.

Why it works this way

The conjugated verb does the grammar work: it matches the subject and shows the tense. The last verb part often carries the meaning: **Ik doe het raam open** (I open the window) and **Ik doe het raam dicht** (I close the window) differ only in the last word. So listen to the end of a Dutch sentence.

English and Spanish keep the verbs together ("I want to cycle"), so their speakers often glue them together in Dutch too.

Remember: picture the two verb parts as the arms of a pair of pliers (**de tang**, hence the Dutch name **tangconstructie**): one arm in position two, one at the end, gripping the rest of the sentence.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb gelezen het boek.**~~
SAY **Ik heb het boek gelezen.**
participle at the end

NOT ~~**Mei wil drinken koffie.**~~
SAY **Mei wil koffie drinken.**
infinitive at the end

NOT ~~**Ik opbel je morgen.**~~
SAY **Ik bel je morgen op.**
the prefix breaks off

NOT ~~**Ik wil je bellen op.**~~
SAY **Ik wil je opbellen.**
after **wil** it stays in one piece

Quick check

1. Fix the word order: **Bas heeft gekocht een nieuwe fiets.**
2. Choose the right word: **Lotte wil morgen een jas …** (**koopt** / **kopen** / **gekocht**)
3. It is raining. Fill in both gaps with the present tense of **meenemen**: **Ik … vandaag een paraplu …**
4. Choose the correct sentence: (a) **Ik moet Emma opbellen.** (b) **Ik moet Emma bellen op.** (c) **Ik moet opbellen Emma.**

Answers on page 786.

Use it today

Send a friend three Dutch sentences: one with **Ik heb** (something you did today), one with **Ik wil** (a weekend plan) and one with a separable verb. Check that the second verb part sits at the end.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/verb-bracket

RULE 110 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

Time, manner, place

In the middle of a Dutch sentence, the usual order is time, then manner (how something happens), then place. So you say **Ik ga morgen met de trein naar Utrecht**, while English says "I'm going to Utrecht by train tomorrow": almost the mirror image. You can also open the sentence with the time, as long as the verb stays in second place.

The pattern

> **After the first verb, Dutch usually gives the time first, then the manner, then the place: when, how, where.**

- Time (**tijd**) answers when: **morgen**, **om acht uur**, **elke dag**, **na het eten**.
- Manner (**manier**) answers how or with whom: **met de trein**, **snel**, **samen**, **met Sanne**.
- Place (**plaats**) answers where or where to: **thuis**, **in de tuin**, **naar Utrecht**.
- With two verbs, the whole chain sits between them, inside the verb bracket: **Ik ben gisteren met de fiets naar huis gegaan.**
- The time can also go first. The verb stays in second place and the subject moves behind it, which is called inversion: **Morgen ga ik met de trein naar Utrecht.**

Examples

Ik ga **morgen met de trein naar Utrecht**.	I'm going to Utrecht by train tomorrow.

Emma fietst **in de winter voorzichtig naar haar werk**.	Emma cycles carefully to work in winter.
Bas gaat **elke zaterdag met Yara naar de markt**.	Bas goes to the market with Yara every Saturday.
Fatima werkt **op vrijdag thuis**.	Fatima works from home on Fridays.
Joris wandelt **na het eten rustig door het park**.	Joris walks calmly through the park after dinner.
Priya is **gisteren met de bus naar het gemeentehuis** gegaan.	Priya went to the town hall by bus yesterday.
Morgen ga ik met de trein naar Utrecht.	Tomorrow I'm going to Utrecht by train.
Vanavond eet Lotte met haar buren in de tuin.	Tonight Lotte is having dinner in the garden with her neighbours.

Why it works this way

Dutch likes to keep what belongs most closely to the verb near the end of the sentence, where the second verb goes. In **naar huis gegaan**, the place tells you where the going ends, so the two stay together like two halves of one idea. The time is the background for the whole event, so it comes early. The manner fits in between.

English usually does it the other way round, with the place first and the time last:

- "I cycle to work every day." becomes **Ik fiets elke dag naar mijn werk.**
- "We ate at home yesterday." becomes **We hebben gisteren thuis gegeten.**

This is a strong tendency, not a law. Time before place is the most reliable part. Manner and place swap more easily: **We hebben samen in de keuken gekookt** and **We hebben in de keuken samen gekookt** are both

fine. A direction with **naar**, on the other hand, usually stays at the end. If you speak German, you are in luck: German uses almost the same order.

Remember: when, how, where. Or take the usual English order (where, how, when) and turn it round.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben naar Utrecht gisteren gegaan.**~~
SAY **Ik ben gisteren naar Utrecht gegaan.**
time comes before place

NOT ~~**Ik ben naar mijn werk met de fiets gegaan.**~~
SAY **Ik ben met de fiets naar mijn werk gegaan.**
manner comes before the direction

NOT ~~**Ik wil naar huis om vijf uur fietsen.**~~
SAY **Ik wil om vijf uur naar huis fietsen.**
the place stays next to the final verb

NOT ~~**Morgen ik ga met de trein naar Amsterdam.**~~
SAY **Morgen ga ik met de trein naar Amsterdam.**
after a time at the start, the verb comes second and the subject follows

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence and keep **Sanne** at the start: **Sanne is naar Groningen vorige week gegaan.**
2. Fill the gap with **gisteren** and **thuis** in the usual order: **Ahmed heeft … gewerkt.**
3. Choose the correct sentence: (a) **Morgen Mei gaat met de tram naar de markt.** (b) **Morgen gaat Mei met de tram naar de markt.**

4. Fill the gap with **met de trein** and **zondag** in the usual order: **Yara gaat … naar haar oma.**

Answers on page 786.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your week, each with a time, a way of travelling and a place, like **Ik ga woensdag met de bus naar de bibliotheek.** Then say each one again, starting with the time.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/time-manner-place

RULE 111 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

Where does niet go?

In a normal Dutch sentence, **niet** goes towards the end: after the verb, after a person or thing that is already known (**hem**, **de fiets**), and after time words like **vandaag** and **morgen**. It stops in front of whatever finishes the sentence: the verbs at the end, an adjective or a place phrase like **naar huis**. If you want to deny just one word, put **niet** directly in front of that word.

The pattern

In a neutral sentence, niet comes after the verb in second place, after known people and things, and after time words like vandaag. It comes before the verbs at the end, adjectives and most phrases with a preposition, such as naar huis.

- After a pronoun or a definite object (a specific person or thing: a name, or a noun with **de**, **het**, **deze**, **mijn** and so on): **Ik ken Bas niet.**
- After ordinary time expressions such as **vandaag**, **morgen** and **gisteren**: **Ik zie hem vandaag niet.**
- With frequency words such as **altijd** and **vaak**, the position changes the meaning: **Ik werk niet altijd** means "I don't always work".
- Before the verbs at the end, including the second part of a separable verb (a verb that splits in two, like **terugbellen**): **Ik heb hem niet gezien. Ik bel je niet terug.**
- Before an adjective after **zijn**: **Het is niet duur.**
- Before most place phrases and other phrases with a preposition (a small word like **naar**, **in** or **op** plus a noun): **Ik ga niet naar huis.**
- Short place words such as **hier** and **daar** usually come before **niet**, unless you stress them for contrast: **Ik woon hier niet.**

- Directly before one word you want to deny, usually followed by **maar** and the right word: **Niet Anna, maar Tom.**

With **een** or no article, Dutch usually says **geen** instead of **niet**. That is the next lesson: Geen or niet?

Examples

Daan werkt morgen **niet**.	Daan isn't working tomorrow.
Ahmed vindt zijn sleutels **niet**.	Ahmed can't find his keys.
Ik heb de buren gisteren **niet** gezien.	I didn't see the neighbours yesterday.
Fatima kan vanavond **niet** komen.	Fatima can't come tonight.
Lotte neemt haar paraplu **niet** mee.	Lotte isn't taking her umbrella.
De aardbeien zijn vandaag **niet** duur.	The strawberries aren't expensive today.
Mei gaat **niet** naar de huisarts.	Mei isn't going to the GP.
Priya woont hier **niet**.	Priya doesn't live here.
Ik heb **niet Anna** gebeld, maar Tom.	I didn't call Anna, I called Tom.

Why it works this way

Think of a Dutch sentence as having a front and a back. The front holds the background: who, the verb, the people or things involved, and when. The back holds the part that completes the meaning: **gezien**, **komen**, **mee**, **duur**, **naar huis**. A neutral **niet** sits on the border between the two and denies the whole action.

This fits what you saw in Time, manner, place: time comes early, so it lands before **niet**; a place phrase like **naar huis** comes late, so it usually lands after it. Short words like **hier** and **daar** count as background, so they slip in front: **Ik woon hier niet.** The second part of separable verbs waits at the very end, after **niet**.

When you move **niet** in front of one word, it denies only that word. That is why **Ik heb niet Anna gebeld** sounds unfinished on its own: a Dutch listener waits for **maar Tom**.

English keeps "not" close to the first verb ("I have not seen him"), and Spanish and Arabic put the negative right before the verb. Dutch lets the object and time words go first. If you speak German, good news: **niet** mostly sits where **nicht** does. Speakers sometimes shift things for emphasis, but this is the order to learn first.

Remember: niet lets the known things pass first (who, what, when, and little words like **hier**) and then stands guard in front of the ending.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik niet werk vandaag.**~~
SAY **Ik werk vandaag niet.**
in a main clause, **niet** follows the verb in second place

NOT ~~**Ik heb niet gezien hem.**~~
SAY **Ik heb hem niet gezien.**
the object goes before **niet**, the participle goes to the very end

NOT ~~**Het is duur niet.**~~
SAY **Het is niet duur.**
niet goes before the adjective

NOT ~~**Ik ga naar huis niet.**~~
SAY **Ik ga niet naar huis.**
niet goes before a place phrase with **naar**

NOT ~~**Ik neem mijn jas mee niet.**~~
SAY **Ik neem mijn jas niet mee.**
the separable part stays last, after **niet**

Quick check

1. Choose the correct sentence: **Emma heeft de rekening niet betaald.** or **Emma heeft niet betaald de rekening.**
2. Fix the sentence: **De trein is laat niet.**
3. Fix the sentence, with no contrast intended: **Carlos niet werkt vandaag.**
4. Fill in the gap with one word: **Ik heb … Bas gebeld, maar Yara.**

Answers on page 786.

Use it today

Say three true sentences about your own day out loud: one with a time word (**Ik werk vrijdag niet.**), one with a verb at the end (**Ik heb de afwas niet gedaan.**) and one with a place (**Ik ga vandaag niet naar de supermarkt.**). Swap in your own details.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/niet-position

RULE 112 · LEVEL A1 · WORD ORDER

Geen or niet?

Use **geen** instead of **een** (**Ik heb geen auto**), and before a plural (more than one, like **kinderen**) or an uncountable noun (something you don't count, like **tijd**) when there is no **de** or **het** in front: **Ik heb geen tijd**. Use **niet** for everything else, such as verbs (doing words), adjectives (describing words), names, and nouns with **de**, **het** or **mijn**: **Ik heb de auto niet**, **Het is niet koud**. As a rough guide, **geen** is the Dutch "no" and **niet** is the Dutch "not".

The pattern

> **Geen takes the place of een, and it also goes before plurals and uncountable nouns that have no article (no de, het or een). Niet says "not" to everything else.**

- **een fiets** becomes **geen fiets**, **kinderen** becomes **geen kinderen**, **tijd** becomes **geen tijd** (more in Countable and uncountable nouns).
- **Geen** stands right before the noun, or before an adjective plus noun: **geen grote tas**.
- **Niet** goes with verbs (**Ik werk niet**), adjectives (**niet koud**), names (**Ik ken Ahmed niet**), words like **veel** (**niet veel tijd**), and nouns with **de**, **het**, **deze**, **dit** or a possessive (a word that says whose, like **mijn** or **haar**).
- With a preposition (a small linking word such as **naar** or **met**), think about what you say "not" to. To say "not" about the whole phrase, put **niet** in front of it: **Ik ga vandaag niet naar school**. This is the most common pattern. **Geen** after a preposition is also correct when you say "no" about the noun itself: **Ik praat met geen enkele buurman** (I don't talk to a single neighbour). For the exact place of **niet**, see Where does niet go?

Examples

Ik heb **geen** auto.	I don't have a car.
Ik heb de auto **niet**.	I don't have the car.
Mei is **geen** dokter.	Mei isn't a doctor.
Mei is **niet** ziek.	Mei isn't ill.
Bas drinkt **geen** koffie.	Bas doesn't drink coffee.
Bas drinkt **niet**.	Bas doesn't drink.
Er zijn **geen** bananen meer.	There are no bananas left.
Priya vindt haar sleutels **niet**.	Priya can't find her keys.
Ik heb **geen** honger.	I'm not hungry.
Ik ken Ahmed **niet**.	I don't know Ahmed.

Why it works this way

Geen belongs to the noun: it does the job of **een**, with a "no" built in. **Niet** is the all-rounder that says no to verbs, describing words, names, and nouns that already have their own little word in front.

English gives you a quick test. If English could say "no", "not a" or "not any", Dutch usually wants **geen**: "I have no car", "I don't have any time". If English needs a plain "not", as in "not cold" or "not the car", Dutch wants **niet**.

The test fails with **honger** (hunger) and **dorst** (thirst). English says "I'm not hungry", but Dutch uses the noun with **hebben**, so you get **Ik heb geen honger**.

German speakers have it easy: **geen** works much like "kein", and **niet** much like "nicht". Spanish uses "no" for both jobs, so Spanish speakers are often tempted to use **niet** everywhere.

Remember: think of **geen** as **niet** and **een** melted into one word. It needs the empty spot right in front of the noun. If **de**, **het** or **mijn** already sits there, the spot is taken, so **niet** does the job.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb niet honger.**~~
SAY **Ik heb geen honger.**
English says hungry, but **honger** is a noun with no article

NOT ~~**Het is geen koud.**~~
SAY **Het is niet koud.**
koud is an adjective, not a noun

NOT ~~**Ik heb geen mijn paspoort.**~~
SAY **Ik heb mijn paspoort niet.**
mijn already stands before the noun

NOT ~~**Het is niet probleem.**~~
SAY **Het is geen probleem.**
no article before **probleem**, so **geen**

Quick check

1. Choose **geen** or **niet**: **Lotte heeft … fiets. Ze neemt de bus.**
2. Choose **geen** or **niet**: **Het is vandaag … warm.**
3. Choose **geen** or **niet**: **Daan ziet zijn fiets … bij het station.**
4. Fix the sentence by changing one word: **Carlos heeft niet kinderen.**

Answers on page 787.

Use it today

Open your fridge and say three things you have and three things you don't: **Ik heb melk. Ik heb geen eieren.** Then look outside and describe the weather with **niet**, for example **Het is niet warm.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/geen-or-niet

RULE 113 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

En, maar, of, want, dus

En (and), **maar** (but), **of** (or), **want** (because) and **dus** (so) link two complete sentences without changing their word order: **Ik ben moe, want ik heb slecht geslapen.** The second sentence carries on as if it stood on its own, usually with the subject first and the verb second. **Dus** is the flexible one: the verb can also come straight after it.

The pattern

En, maar, of and want connect two main clauses (sentences that could stand on their own) without changing the word order of either one. Dus can do the same, or it can pull the verb forward.

- The grammar term is coordinating conjunctions: words that link two equal parts.
- The linking word does not take a position. What follows is a normal sentence with the verb in second place: **maar ik heb**, **want het regent**.
- If something other than the subject comes next, such as **dan** or **morgen**, it takes first place and the verb follows it: **en dan ga ik**.
- After **en**, **maar** and **of** you can drop a repeated subject (the person doing the action) when the second sentence would start with it: **Ik sta op en ga naar mijn werk.**
- After **want** you cannot drop just the repeated subject, and in sentences like the ones in this lesson you keep it after **dus** too: **want ik ben moe**, **dus ik ga naar huis**.
- After **dus** you choose: **dus ik ga** or **dus ga ik**.

Examples

Ik ben moe, **want ik heb** slecht geslapen.	I'm tired, because I slept badly.
Fatima werkt bij de gemeente **en haar man is** huisarts.	Fatima works for the municipality and her husband is a GP.
Ik wil graag komen, **maar ik heb** vanavond geen tijd.	I'd love to come, but I don't have time tonight.
Ik bel je vanavond **of ik stuur** je een berichtje.	I'll call you tonight or I'll send you a message.
Het regent, **dus ik neem** de bus.	It's raining, so I'm taking the bus.
Het regent, **dus neem ik** de bus.	It's raining, so I'm taking the bus.
Daan staat om zeven uur op **en fietst** naar zijn werk.	Daan gets up at seven and cycles to work.
Priya is verkouden **maar gaat** toch naar de verjaardag van Joris.	Priya has a cold but is still going to Joris's birthday.
Ahmed is naar de supermarkt gegaan **en heeft** melk gekocht.	Ahmed went to the supermarket and bought milk.

Why it works this way

Picture a Dutch train: two carriages with a coupling between them. **En**, **maar**, **of** and **want** are the coupling. They connect the carriages, but they never take a seat, so each carriage keeps its own seating plan. The second sentence starts fresh and follows the usual verb second rule.

Dus is a coupling that sometimes slips into the first seat. When it does, it behaves like **daarom** (that's why), one of the linking words that invert, and the verb sits right next to it: **dus neem ik de bus**. When it stays a coupling, you get normal order: **dus ik neem de bus**. Both are correct. In speech you hear **dus ik** constantly; in writing you will see both. **Dus** can even sit inside the sentence: **Ik neem dus de bus.**

If you speak English, **want** feels easy, because English because doesn't change the order either. Mind the meaning, though: **want** has nothing to do with wanting. For that you need **willen**: **Ik wil koffie.** The trickier word is **omdat**, which also means because but sends the verb to the end, as you will see in Omdat or want. **Of** has a second job too: in **Ik weet niet of hij komt** it means whether, and then the verb goes to the end.

Remember: en, **maar**, **of** and **want** are couplings, never passengers. **Dus** can be either.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben moe, want heb ik slecht geslapen.**~~
SAY **Ik ben moe, want ik heb slecht geslapen.**
want takes no position, so there is no inversion

NOT ~~**Ik blijf thuis, want ik ziek ben.**~~
SAY **Ik blijf thuis, want ik ben ziek.**
that is **omdat** order; after **want** the verb stays second

NOT ~~**Daan blijft thuis, want is ziek.**~~
SAY **Daan blijft thuis, want hij is ziek.**
after **want** you cannot leave out just the repeated subject

NOT ~~**Ik eet eerst en dan ik ga naar bed.**~~
SAY **Ik eet eerst en dan ga ik naar bed.**
dan takes first place, so the verb follows it

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Ik ga vroeg naar bed, want ben moe.**
2. Fill in **want**, **maar** or **dus**: **Bas wil graag naar het feest, … hij moet werken.**

3. Fix the sentence: **We eten eerst en dan we gaan naar de film.**
4. Choose: **Ik heb de trein gemist, …** (a) **dus ik kom te laat** (b) **dus kom ik te laat** (c) both are correct

Answers on page 787.

Use it today

Send a friend or colleague a short message in Dutch about your weekend plans, with one sentence using **want**, one using **maar** and one using **dus**. For example: **Zaterdag ga ik naar de markt, want ik heb geen groente meer.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/coordinating-conjunctions

RULE 114 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

Subordinate clauses: the verb goes to the end

In Dutch, words like **dat** (that), **omdat** (because), **als** (if, when), **toen** (when, in the past), **terwijl** (while), **hoewel** (although) and **of** (whether) send the verbs to the back of the clause: **Ik weet dat hij morgen komt.** The subject usually comes straight after the linking word, so you get: linking word, subject, the rest, verbs.

The pattern

> **In a subordinate clause, the verbs move to the back, after the subject, the objects and words like morgen or niet. The subject usually comes right after the conjunction.**

- A clause is a group of words with its own verb. A subordinate clause (**bijzin**) cannot stand on its own: **omdat ik geen tijd heb** needs a main clause next to it.
- A conjunction is the linking word that opens it, like **omdat** or **dat**.
- Two verbs? Both go to the back: **dat ze heeft gebeld** and **dat ze gebeld heeft** are both correct (more in The order of verbs at the end).
- A phrase with a preposition can sometimes follow the verbs: **dat Lotte blij is met haar nieuwe fiets**. In casual speech, a time word sometimes comes last too, but the verb-last order is the safe choice.
- **Want** and **of** meaning "or" keep normal order (En, maar, of, want, dus).

Examples

Yara weet **dat Carlos morgen komt**.	Yara knows that Carlos is coming tomorrow.

Fatima neemt de bus **omdat haar fiets kapot is**.	Fatima is taking the bus because her bike is broken.
Ik bel je **als ik thuis ben**.	I'll call you when I'm home.
Emma heeft boodschappen voor me gedaan **toen ik ziek was**.	Emma did the shopping for me when I was ill.
Priya luistert naar een podcast **terwijl ze fietst**.	Priya listens to a podcast while she cycles.
Joris fietst naar zijn werk, **hoewel het koud is**.	Joris cycles to work, although it is cold.
Weet jij **of de supermarkt vandaag open is**?	Do you know if the supermarket is open today?
Mei zegt **dat ze de huisarts heeft gebeld**.	Mei says she has called the GP.
Ahmed denkt **dat hij morgen moet werken**.	Ahmed thinks he has to work tomorrow.

Why it works this way

In a main clause statement, the conjugated verb (the form that changes with the person, like **heb** or **heeft**) jumps forward to second place. A handy way to picture a subordinate clause: the conjunction is already sitting in the spot the verb would jump to, so the verb stays at the back. That is where Dutch parks its other verbs anyway, like **gewerkt** in **Ik heb gisteren gewerkt**.

Compare:

- **Hij komt morgen.** and **Ik weet dat hij morgen komt.**
- **Ik heb geen tijd.** and **omdat ik geen tijd heb**
- **Wil je thee, of wil je liever koffie?** (**of** means or: normal order) and **Sanne vraagt of je koffie wilt.** (**of** means whether: verb last)

- **Ik blijf thuis, want ik ben ziek.** and **Ik blijf thuis omdat ik ziek ben.** (same meaning, see Omdat or want)

English, Spanish and Arabic do not move the verb in clauses like these, so **omdat ik heb geen tijd** can sound fine to you at first. German does the same as Dutch, though Dutch is more flexible about the order of the final verbs. When the subordinate clause comes first, the main clause changes too: see When the subordinate clause comes first.

Remember: the conjunction opens the box, and the verbs close the lid.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik bel je morgen omdat ik heb nu geen tijd.**~~
SAY **Ik bel je morgen omdat ik nu geen tijd heb.**
after **omdat** the verb goes to the end

NOT ~~**Ik weet dat komt hij morgen.**~~
SAY **Ik weet dat hij morgen komt.**
no inversion after **dat**: subject first, verb last

NOT ~~**Ik denk dat Bas heeft de taart gekocht.**~~
SAY **Ik denk dat Bas de taart heeft gekocht.**
both verbs go to the back

NOT ~~**Weet jij of is de apotheek open?**~~
SAY **Weet jij of de apotheek open is?**
of meaning whether also sends the verb back

NOT ~~**Daan is moe als hij staat vroeg op.**~~
SAY **Daan is moe als hij vroeg opstaat.**
a separable verb joins up again at the end

Quick check

1. Fix the word order and keep **omdat**: **Yara gaat naar de huisarts omdat ze heeft koorts.**
2. Which sentence is correct: **Weet jij of Lotte morgen komt?** or **Weet jij of komt Lotte morgen?**
3. Choose **want** or **omdat**: **Ik neem vandaag de bus, … het regent heel hard.**
4. Put the words in the right order: **Mei zegt dat …** (druk, de, is, supermarkt)

Answers on page 787.

Use it today

Next time you message a colleague or a neighbour, give one reason with **omdat**, for example **Ik kom iets later omdat de trein vertraging heeft.** Before you send it, check that the verb is at the end.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/subordinate-clauses

RULE 115 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

Omdat or want: two ways to say because

Both **want** and **omdat** mean because. The difference is word order: after **want** the sentence carries on as normal (**want ik heb honger**), while **omdat** sends the verb to the end (**omdat ik honger heb**). Also, only **omdat** lets you give the reason first.

The pattern

> **After want, use normal word order, as in an ordinary sentence. After omdat, the conjugated verb (the form that changes with the subject, like heb or is) goes to the end of the omdat part.**

- **want** + normal order: **want ik heb honger**. The verb is in second place, just as in **Ik heb honger**.
- **omdat** + verb at the end: **omdat ik honger heb**. With two verbs, both go to the end: **omdat ik de trein heb gemist**.
- An **omdat** clause (the part that starts with **omdat**) can come first: **Omdat ik honger heb, eet ik een appel.** The rest then starts with its verb (more in When the subordinate clause comes first). A **want** clause never comes before the part it explains.
- In writing, a comma before **want** is usual. Before **omdat** it is optional.

Examples

Ik eet een appel, **want ik heb honger**.	I'm eating an apple because I'm hungry.
Ik eet een appel **omdat ik honger heb**.	I'm eating an apple because I'm hungry.

Omdat ik honger heb, eet ik een appel.	Because I'm hungry, I'm eating an apple.
Ik doe vandaag de boodschappen, **want morgen heb ik geen tijd**.	I'm doing the shopping today because I don't have time tomorrow.
Daan gaat naar de huisarts, **want hij is al een week ziek**.	Daan is going to the GP because he has been ill for a week.
Fatima is te laat **omdat ze de trein heeft gemist**.	Fatima is late because she missed the train.
Ahmed belt de gemeente **omdat hij een nieuw paspoort nodig heeft**.	Ahmed is calling the municipality because he needs a new passport.
Omdat het regent, neemt Sanne de bus.	Because it's raining, Sanne is taking the bus.
Priya gaat vroeg slapen **omdat ze om zes uur opstaat**.	Priya goes to bed early because she gets up at six.

Why it works this way

Want is a linking word, like **en** (and) and **maar** (but): it joins two ordinary sentences and changes nothing (see En, maar, of, want, dus). Take **want** away and a complete sentence remains: **Ik heb honger. Want** does not even take up a place, so after it you can start with **morgen** and use inversion (verb before subject): **want morgen heb ik geen tijd**.

Omdat starts a subordinate clause: a part of a sentence that cannot stand on its own. In those clauses Dutch puts the conjugated verb at the end (Subordinate clauses: the verb goes to the end). The clause is a closed package, so you can move it to the front. **Want** is a bridge from one sentence to the next, so it only works after the first one. You may see **Want** begin a new sentence as an afterthought (**Ik ga niet mee. Want ik ben moe.**), but the reason still comes second.

When the reason comes second, the two are usually interchangeable. One tendency: if the reason is evidence rather than a cause, speakers prefer

want: **Joris is thuis, want zijn fiets staat voor de deur.** The bike is not why Joris is home; it is how you know. To answer **Waarom?** with just the reason, the usual choice is **omdat**: **Omdat ik de bus heb gemist.** German speakers can map **want** to "denn" and **omdat** to "weil".

Remember: omdat ends in **dat**, and just like in **Ik denk dat Sanne ziek is**, the verb waits until the end. **Want** is a bridge: put it between two normal sentences and change nothing.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik blijf thuis omdat ik ben ziek.**~~
SAY **Ik blijf thuis omdat ik ziek ben.**
omdat sends the verb to the end

NOT ~~**Ik eet niets, want ik geen honger heb.**~~
SAY **Ik eet niets, want ik heb geen honger.**
want keeps normal order

NOT ~~**Want het regent, ik neem de bus.**~~
SAY **Omdat het regent, neem ik de bus.**
a **want** reason cannot come first

NOT ~~**Omdat de winkel dicht is, wij gaan naar de markt.**~~
SAY **Omdat de winkel dicht is, gaan wij naar de markt.**
after an **omdat** clause, the verb comes right after the comma

NOT ~~**Ik ben moe omdat ik sta om zes uur op.**~~
SAY **Ik ben moe omdat ik om zes uur opsta.**
at the end, **opstaan** is one word again

Quick check

1. Choose the right ending: **Ik bel de huisarts, want ik …** (**ben ziek** or **ziek ben**)
2. Fix the word order and keep **omdat**: **Lotte blijft thuis omdat ze is moe.**
3. Choose **want** or **omdat**: **… het koud is, draagt Carlos een muts.**
4. Fill in the right form of **opstaan**: **Mei is moe omdat ze elke dag om zes uur …**

Answers on page 787.

Use it today

Text a friend or colleague to move a plan, and give your reason twice: once with **want** and once with **omdat**. For example: **Ik kom later, want de trein heeft vertraging.** and **Ik kom later omdat de trein vertraging heeft.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/omdat-or-want

RULE 116 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

When the subordinate clause comes first

When a sentence opens with a subordinate clause starting with a word like **als**, **omdat** or **toen**, that whole clause counts as position one. (A subordinate clause is a part of a sentence that can't stand on its own.) The main clause then goes on with its verb, and the subject comes after it: **Als het regent, blijf ik thuis.** In most sentences this means two verbs meet at the comma.

The pattern

> **A subordinate clause at the start of a sentence fills position one, so the main clause usually continues with its conjugated verb (the verb that changes with the person), followed by the subject.**

- The subordinate clause comes first, usually with its verb as the last word: **Als het regent**. See Subordinate clauses.
- A comma separates the two clauses.
- The conjugated verb of the main clause comes next, then the subject: **blijf ik thuis**.
- Other verbs in the main clause, like a past participle, still go to the end: **Omdat de trein uitviel, ben ik te laat gekomen.**
- When **je** or **jij** follows a present tense verb, the ending -t drops: **zie je**, not **ziet je**. See Werk jij?

Examples

Als het **regent, blijf ik** thuis.	If it rains, I stay at home.
Omdat de trein **uitviel, kwam ik** te laat.	Because the train was cancelled, I was late.

Toen Sanne op het station **aankwam, was haar trein** al weg.	When Sanne got to the station, her train had already left.
Als je bij de bibliotheek links **afslaat, zie je** het gemeentehuis.	If you turn left at the library, you'll see the town hall.
Omdat Daan griep **had, heeft hij** de huisarts gebeld.	Because Daan had the flu, he called the GP.
Voordat Joris naar zijn werk **fietst, drinkt hij** een kop koffie.	Before Joris cycles to work, he has a cup of coffee.
Omdat Mei vandaag jarig **is, neemt ze** taart mee naar kantoor.	Because it's Mei's birthday today, she's taking cake to the office.
Terwijl Ahmed op de bus **wachtte, belde zijn moeder**.	While Ahmed was waiting for the bus, his mother called.

Why it works this way

Starting with the subordinate clause sets the scene. You give the condition, the reason or the time first, and then say what happens. **Omdat de trein uitviel, kwam ik te laat** explains the problem before your manager has even looked at the clock.

The order comes from verb second: a Dutch main clause has one element in position one and the conjugated verb right after it. That element can be a single word, a phrase or a complete clause:

- **Morgen blijf ik thuis.**
- **Bij slecht weer blijf ik thuis.**
- **Als het regent, blijf ik thuis.**

So shrink the clause in your head to one word such as **dan**, and the order is obvious: **Dan blijf ik thuis.** In speech you will even hear both together: **Als het regent, dan blijf ik thuis.** Here **dan** repeats position one, and the verb still comes before the subject.

Put the subordinate clause at the end instead, and the main clause keeps its normal order: **Ik blijf thuis als het regent.**

Remember: verb, comma, verb. In most sentences the subordinate clause ends with its verb, the main clause opens with its verb, and the two meet at the comma.

English and Spanish keep the subject first in both halves (if it rains, I stay home), which is why so many learners write **ik blijf** after the comma. German works like Dutch here, so German speakers mostly have this already.

Two cases work differently. A **want** clause can't come before the main clause at all, so use **omdat** when you want to start with the reason (Omdat or want). And after a clause with **ook** in the sense of whatever or however, the main clause normally keeps its subject first: **Wat je ook zegt, ik ga niet naar dat feest.**

Watch out

NOT ~~**Als het regent, ik blijf thuis.**~~
SAY **Als het regent, blijf ik thuis.**
the whole clause is position one, so the verb comes next

NOT ~~**Omdat de trein viel uit, kwam ik te laat.**~~
SAY **Omdat de trein uitviel, kwam ik te laat.**
in the subordinate clause the verb goes to the end, joined to its particle

NOT ~~**Als je bus 12 neemt, bent je in tien minuten bij het ziekenhuis.**~~
SAY **Als je bus 12 neemt, ben je in tien minuten bij het ziekenhuis.**
when **je** follows the verb, the -t drops

NOT ~~Want ik was ziek, ik bleef thuis.~~
SAY **Omdat ik ziek was, bleef ik thuis.**
a **want** clause cannot open the sentence

Quick check

1. Choose **Omdat** or **Want**: **… de supermarkt al dicht was, kocht Priya brood bij het station.**
2. Choose **hij moest** or **moest hij**: **Omdat Bas zijn sleutels niet bij zich had, … bij de buren aanbellen.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Toen Lotte thuiskwam, ze zag dat haar fiets weg was.**
4. Fill in the right form of **hebben**: **Als je in de winter fietst, … je handschoenen nodig.**

Answers on page 788.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your own day that start with **toen**, **omdat** and **als**: one about your commute, one about the weather and one about the supermarket. Read them aloud and check that the verb comes straight after each comma.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/subclause-first

RULE 117 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Als, wanneer or toen: when and if

English uses "when" for almost everything, but Dutch uses **toen** for one moment or period in the past, and **als** for "if" and for "when" in the present, the future or with repeated events. **Wanneer** is a more formal "when" and also the question word. As linking words, all three send the verb to the end of their clause.

The pattern

> **Toen looks back at one moment or period in the past; als sets up a condition, a present or future moment, or a habit. Wanneer is the formal twin of als and also the question word.**

- **toen** + a past form, for one occasion or one period: **Toen ik in Leiden woonde, ...**
- **als** for "if": **Als ik tijd heb, bel ik je.**
- **als** for "when" in the present or future, and for events that repeat, even in the past: **Als het regent, neemt Bas de bus.**
- **wanneer** in a direct question, followed by the verb: **Wanneer begint de les?**
- As linking words, all three start a subordinate clause (a part of a sentence that cannot stand alone), so the conjugated verb (the one that matches the subject) goes to the end. A main clause after it starts with its verb.

Examples

Toen Mei vijf jaar geleden naar Nederland **kwam**, sprak ze nog geen Nederlands.	When Mei came to the Netherlands five years ago, she didn't speak any Dutch yet.

Ik stond net onder de douche, **toen** de bel **ging**.	I was just in the shower when the doorbell rang.
Als Emma morgen niet **kan**, verplaatsen we de vergadering.	If Emma can't make it tomorrow, we'll move the meeting.
Als Sanne **thuiskomt**, gaan we eten.	When Sanne gets home, we'll have dinner.
Als Joris naar zijn werk **fietst**, luistert hij altijd naar een podcast.	When Joris cycles to work, he always listens to a podcast.
Als we vroeger bij opa **logeerden**, mochten we lang opblijven.	When we stayed at Grandpa's back then, we were allowed to stay up late.
Wanneer u **verhuist**, moet u dit doorgeven aan de gemeente.	When you move house, you have to report it to the municipality.
Weet jij **wanneer** de huisartsenpraktijk weer open **is**?	Do you know when the GP's practice is open again?

Why it works this way

English "when" does two jobs. Sometimes it points at one spot on the timeline: that is **toen**. Sometimes it sets up a condition or a pattern (whenever this, then that): that is **als**, which is why **als** covers "if" and "when" alike. **Als Sanne thuiskomt** (she will) and **als het morgen regent** (it might) feel different in English, but Dutch treats both as the setting for the main clause.

Compare:

- **Toen het vorige week sneeuwde, nam ik de trein.** One week, one time.
- **Als het vroeger sneeuwde, nam ik de trein.** Every time it snowed.
- **Toen Daan belde, zat ik bij de tandarts.** One call, already over.
- **Als Daan belt, zeg dan dat ik bij de tandarts zit.** A call that may still come.

Toen has a second job: at the start of a main clause it means "then", and the verb follows straight away: **Ik kwam thuis. Toen belde ik Lotte.** Compare **Toen ik thuiskwam, belde ik Lotte.**

German speakers, careful: German "als" is Dutch **toen**, and German "wenn" is Dutch **als**.

Wanneer in a statement simply sounds more formal. Letters from the **gemeente** use it a lot, often meaning "if" (**Wanneer u vragen heeft, kunt u ons bellen.**), while at the kitchen table most people say **als**.

Remember: asking when something happens? **wanneer**. One moment or period in the past? **toen**. A condition, a present or future moment, or a habit? **als** (or **wanneer** in formal Dutch).

Watch out

NOT ~~**Als ik gisteren thuiskwam, was het pakket er al.**~~
SAY **Toen ik gisteren thuiskwam, was het pakket er al.**
one moment in the past needs **toen**

NOT ~~**Als ik heb tijd, bel ik je.**~~
SAY **Als ik tijd heb, bel ik je.**
the verb goes to the end of the **als** clause

NOT ~~**Toen ik in Amsterdam woonde, ik had geen auto.**~~
SAY **Toen ik in Amsterdam woonde, had ik geen auto.**
after the **toen** clause, the main clause starts with its verb

NOT ~~**Ik weet niet als Carlos morgen komt.**~~
SAY **Ik weet niet of Carlos morgen komt.**
"if" in the sense of "whether" is **of**

Quick check

1. Fill in **toen**, **als** or **wanneer**: … ik vorige week in Rotterdam was, kwam ik Fatima tegen.
2. Choose **toen** or **als**: … het morgen regent, neem ik de trein naar mijn werk.
3. Fix the sentence: **Toen Ahmed was ziek, bleef hij thuis.**
4. Choose **toen**, **als** or **wanneer**: … begint de cursus Nederlands?

Answers on page 788.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your first weeks in the Netherlands that start with **Toen ik …**, then one plan for this weekend that starts with **Als het mooi weer is, …**. Check that the verb sits at the end of each **toen** or **als** clause.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/als-wanneer-toen

RULE 118 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

Dat clauses: Ik denk dat...

To say what someone thinks, says or knows, Dutch joins two sentences with **dat**: **Ik denk dat het gaat regenen.** Unlike English that, **dat** cannot be left out. And in the part after **dat**, the verb moves to the end.

The pattern

> **Put dat between the two parts when you report a thought, a message or a fact. In the part after dat, the verbs move to the end, after the subject, the objects and the time words.**

- The first part is a normal sentence with the verb in second place: **Ik denk**, **Sanne zegt**, **Gelukkig weet ik**.
- The part after **dat** is a subordinate clause: a sentence inside a sentence. Its conjugated verb (the form that matches the subject, like **is** or **komt**) goes to the end: **dat hij ziek is**.
- Two verbs both go to the end: **dat ik morgen moet werken**. In the perfect tense, both orders are correct: **dat ze heeft gebeld** and **dat ze gebeld heeft**.
- A separable verb (a verb like **opbellen** that splits in a normal sentence) becomes one word again: **dat hij me opbelt**.
- **Dat** stays **dat**, also before a de-word: **Ik denk dat de trein vol is.**
- A phrase with a preposition (a word like **met** or **op**) may come before or after the verb: **dat Mei blij met haar baan is** and **dat Mei blij is met haar baan** are both fine. More in What can come after the final verbs.
- Useful starters: **ik denk dat**, **ik weet dat**, **ik hoop dat**, **ik vind dat** (for your opinion), **wat leuk dat**.

Examples

Ik denk **dat** het vanmiddag **gaat regenen**.	I think it's going to rain this afternoon.
Sanne zegt **dat** ze morgen niet **komt**.	Sanne says she isn't coming tomorrow.
Ik weet **dat** de supermarkt op zondag om zes uur **sluit**.	I know the supermarket closes at six on Sundays.
Daan vindt **dat** de trein vaak te vol **is**.	Daan thinks the train is often too full.
De huisarts zegt **dat** ik veel water **moet drinken**.	The GP says I have to drink a lot of water.
Fatima zegt **dat** ze de huur al **heeft betaald**.	Fatima says she has already paid the rent.
Ik hoop **dat** Bas me vanavond **opbelt**.	I hope Bas calls me tonight.
Gelukkig zegt Ahmed **dat** hij morgen **kan helpen**.	Luckily, Ahmed says he can help tomorrow.
Wat fijn **dat** je er **bent**!	How nice that you're here!

Why it works this way

A helpful way to see it: in English, the second half of I think (that) it's raining keeps its normal word order, so that can disappear without causing confusion. In Dutch, the word order of the second half changes, and **dat** is the signal for that change.

Think of **dat** as opening a box. The subject, the time words and the objects go in, and the verb closes the lid. You already know this box from **omdat** and **als** (see subordinate clauses). **Dat** is one of the most frequent box openers of all.

If you want to avoid **dat**, you have to build a different sentence: put **denk ik** at the end (**Het gaat regenen, denk ik.**) or quote the words directly (**Sanne zegt: "Ik kom niet."**).

Remember: dat opens the box, the verb closes it.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ik denk het gaat regenen.~~
SAY **Ik denk dat het gaat regenen.**
English drops that, Dutch keeps **dat**

NOT ~~Ik weet dat hij is ziek.~~
SAY **Ik weet dat hij ziek is.**
the verb goes to the end

NOT ~~Sanne zegt dat ze komt morgen.~~
SAY **Sanne zegt dat ze morgen komt.**
time words come before the final verb

NOT ~~Ik hoop dat Daan belt me op.~~
SAY **Ik hoop dat Daan me opbelt.**
a separable verb joins up at the end

NOT ~~Komt Bas ook? Ik denk zo.~~
SAY **Komt Bas ook? Ik denk het wel.**
for I think so, Dutch uses **het**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Ik denk ... de bus vandaag later komt.**
2. Put the words in the right order: **Joris zegt dat ... (is, ziek, hij).**
3. Fix the sentence: **Ik weet dat Mei heeft een nieuwe fiets.**
4. Choose the right form: **Ik hoop dat Yara ... (komt mee / meekomt).**

Answers on page 788.

Use it today

Check the weather app tonight and say three sentences out loud about tomorrow: one starting with **Ik denk dat**, one with **Ik hoop dat** and one with **Ik vind dat**. Check that each verb waits until the end. Next up: Weet jij of...?

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/dat-clauses

RULE 119 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Indirect questions: Weet jij of...?

An indirect question is a question tucked inside a bigger sentence, such as **Weet jij of de winkel open is?** or **Ik weet niet waar hij woont.** Yes or no questions start with **of** (whether, if), questions with a question word keep that word, and in both the verb moves to the end. You use this all day: to ask politely, to wonder aloud and to say what you do not know yet.

The pattern

> **Start with of for a yes or no question, or with the question word for any other question. Then use subordinate clause order (the order of a sentence part that cannot stand alone): the subject usually comes next and the verbs go to the end.**

- Yes or no: **Is de winkel open?** becomes **Weet jij of de winkel open is?**
- Question word: **Waar woont Ahmed?** becomes **Ik weet niet waar Ahmed woont.** Groups like **hoe laat**, **hoeveel** and **welke bus** stay together at the front.
- If the question word is itself the subject, as **wie** and **wat** can be, the rest follows straight away: **Weet je wie er vanavond kookt?**
- Two verbs both go to the end, and a separable verb joins up again: **of ik kan komen**, **hoe laat de apotheek opengaat** (more in Separable verbs in subordinate clauses).
- The main sentence decides the punctuation: a question mark in **Weet jij of hij komt?**, a full stop in **Ik weet niet of hij komt.**

Examples

Weet jij **of** de winkel op zondag open **is**?	Do you know if the shop is open on Sunday?
Ik weet niet **waar** Ahmed **woont**.	I don't know where Ahmed lives.
Sanne vraagt **of** je morgen op kantoor **bent**.	Sanne is asking whether you are at the office tomorrow.
Kunt u me vertellen **hoe laat** de huisartsenpraktijk **opengaat**?	Can you tell me what time the GP practice opens?
Ik vraag me af **waarom** de trein vertraging **heeft**.	I wonder why the train is delayed.
Weet je **wie** er vanavond **kookt**?	Do you know who is cooking tonight?
Mag ik vragen **hoeveel** een nieuw paspoort **kost**?	May I ask how much a new passport costs?
Priya en Carlos weten nog niet **of** ze in mei op vakantie **kunnen gaan**.	Priya and Carlos don't know yet whether they can go on holiday in May.

Why it works this way

Compare **Komt Daan morgen?** with **Weet jij of Daan morgen komt?** In the second sentence, the real question is **Weet jij**. The part about Daan is no longer a question of its own: it is information packed into the sentence, just like a clause after **dat** in Dat clauses. So it gets the same shape: a linking word at the front, the verb at the back. **Of** simply takes the place of **dat** when the answer could be yes or no. **Ik weet dat Daan komt** means you know he is coming; **Ik weet niet of Daan komt** means you have no idea.

English already does half the job: "Where does he live?" becomes "I don't know where he lives". The helper "does" disappears and the subject moves forward. Dutch takes one more step and sends the verb to the end. If you

speak German, **of** works like ob, with the same order. Spanish speakers often reach for **als**, because si covers both if and whether.

Of also means or, as in **koffie of thee**. In that meaning it links two main clauses and leaves the word order alone: **Ga je mee of blijf je thuis?** (see En, maar, of, want, dus).

A small bonus: because **jij** now comes before the verb, the verb keeps its **-t**. **Werk jij morgen?** turns into **Lotte vraagt of jij morgen werkt.** (Werk jij? explains why the **-t** disappears in direct questions.)

Remember: the main sentence has already done the asking. Think of what follows as a box: **of** or the question word is the lid on top, and the verb sits at the bottom.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Weet jij als de winkel open is?**~~
SAY **Weet jij of de winkel open is?**
for whether, Dutch uses **of**, not **als**

NOT ~~**Ik weet niet waar woont hij.**~~
SAY **Ik weet niet waar hij woont.**
subject first, verb last inside the sentence

NOT ~~**Mijn baas vraagt of werk jij morgen.**~~
SAY **Mijn baas vraagt of jij morgen werkt.**
no question order after **of**, and the **-t** comes back

NOT ~~**Weet jij hoe laat de apotheek gaat open?**~~
SAY **Weet jij hoe laat de apotheek opengaat?**
a separable verb joins up again at the end

Quick check

1. Choose the right word: **Weet jij … de bibliotheek vandaag open is?** (**als** or **of**)
2. Fix the word order: **Ik weet niet waar is het station.**
3. Turn this into an indirect question that starts with **Kunt u me vertellen**: **Hoe laat vertrekt de laatste trein?**
4. Choose the right verb form: **Weet Lotte al of jij zaterdag …?** (**werk** or **werkt**)

Answers on page 788.

Use it today

Next time you call the GP or visit **de gemeente**, ask one question indirectly, starting with **Weet u of** or **Kunt u me vertellen**. Tonight, write three sentences about things you do not know yet, such as **Ik weet nog niet of ik zaterdag tijd heb.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/indirect-questions

RULE 120 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Relative clauses inside a sentence

A relative clause (a mini-sentence that tells you more about a noun, often starting with **die** or **dat**) usually comes straight after its noun and puts its verb at the end. When a sentence starts with a noun and its relative clause, the main verb (the verb of the main sentence) follows right after that whole group: **De man die daar staat, is mijn buurman.** That is why you often see two verbs side by side, frequently separated by a comma.

The pattern

> **A relative clause usually comes straight after its noun and has its verb at the end. If the noun starts the sentence, the main verb follows directly after the relative clause.**

- Build it as noun + **die** or **dat** + the rest + verb: **de trein die om acht uur vertrekt**. For choosing between the two, see Relative pronouns: die and dat.
- When they start the sentence, the noun and its relative clause fill the first place together, so the main verb comes next: **De trein die om acht uur vertrekt, heeft vertraging.**
- Writers often put a comma where the two verbs meet. It is optional here, but it shows where the relative clause stops.
- When the clause only adds extra information about someone already clear, such as a name or **mijn moeder**, it is set off with commas: **Lotte, die bij de gemeente werkt, helpt ons.**
- When the main sentence ends in a verb, the relative clause often moves behind that verb: **Priya heeft een fiets gekocht die bijna nieuw is.** This is common and correct (more in What can come after the final verbs).

Examples

De man **die daar bij de bushalte staat**, **is** mijn buurman.	The man who is standing at the bus stop over there is my neighbour.
De trein **die om acht uur vertrekt**, **heeft** twintig minuten vertraging.	The train that leaves at eight is twenty minutes late.
Het pakket **dat ik vorige week heb besteld**, **is** nog steeds niet bezorgd.	The parcel I ordered last week still hasn't been delivered.
Het meisje **dat naast ons woont**, **is** morgen jarig.	The girl who lives next door has her birthday tomorrow.
Fatima heeft de formulieren **die de gemeente stuurde** meteen ingevuld.	Fatima immediately filled in the forms that the council sent.
Daan zoekt een kamer **die dicht bij het station ligt**.	Daan is looking for a room close to the station.
Lotte, **die bij de gemeente werkt**, **helpt** ons met de aanvraag.	Lotte, who works for the council, is helping us with the application.
Priya heeft een fiets gekocht **die bijna nieuw is**.	Priya has bought a bike that is almost new.

Why it works this way

Think of the noun and its relative clause as one package. A Dutch statement puts its conjugated verb (the verb that changes with the subject, like **is** or **heeft**) in second place, right after the first block, however long that block is. That is verb second. **De man** is one block. **De man die daar bij de bushalte staat** is also one block, just a longer one. So the main verb waits until the package is closed.

Inside the package, the relative clause behaves like any subordinate clause (a clause that cannot stand on its own): its verb goes to the end. In speech, a phrase with a preposition, such as **naar Utrecht**, sometimes follows that verb, but putting it before the verb is the safe choice. That final verb works

like a closing bracket. When you hear it, the package is done and the next verb belongs to the main sentence. The comma simply marks that spot.

Good news for English speakers: English also puts the main verb after the relative clause ("the man who is standing there is my neighbour"). Only the order inside the clause is different. If you speak German, the word order will feel familiar, so focus on the comma instead: Dutch has no comma before **die** when the clause tells you which person or thing you mean.

Remember: in **De man die daar staat, is mijn buurman**, look for verb, comma, verb. The first verb closes the relative clause, the second one carries on with the main sentence.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De buurman die heeft een grote hond, woont op nummer 12.**~~
SAY **De buurman die een grote hond heeft, woont op nummer 12.**
inside the relative clause, the verb goes to the end, after its object

NOT ~~**De vrouw die naast ons woont, verpleegkundige is.**~~
SAY **De vrouw die naast ons woont, is verpleegkundige.**
only the relative clause sends its verb to the end; the main verb comes right after it

NOT ~~**Het boek ik nu lees, is spannend.**~~
SAY **Het boek dat ik nu lees, is spannend.**
English can drop "that", Dutch cannot drop **die** or **dat**

NOT ~~**De huisarts die ik haar gisteren sprak, was heel aardig.**~~
SAY **De huisarts die ik gisteren sprak, was heel aardig.**
die already stands for the doctor, so no extra **haar**; a typical slip for Arabic speakers

Quick check

1. Put the words in order: **De vrouw …, is onze nieuwe huisarts.** (draagt, die, een rode jas)
2. Choose: **Het formulier dat ik moet invullen, … .** (is erg lang / erg lang is)
3. Fill in **die** or **dat**: **Het pakket … Bas vorige week heeft besteld, ligt bij de buren.**
4. Add the commas. You have only one sister: **Mijn zus die in Groningen woont komt zaterdag langs.**

Answers on page 789.

Use it today

On your next train or bus ride, describe three people around you in your head, with the relative clause in the middle: **De vrouw die naast mij zit, leest een boek.** Then say one of them quietly out loud and listen for the two verbs meeting.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/relative-clause-order

RULE 121 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

The order of verbs at the end

At the end of a subordinate clause (the part after **omdat**, **dat**, **of** and similar words), the verbs form one block, and no object, **niet** or time word goes between them. With a form of **hebben** or **zijn** plus a past participle (the form after **hebben** and **zijn**, like **gezien**), both orders are correct: **omdat ik het heb gezien** and **omdat ik het gezien heb**. With a modal verb (**moeten**, **kunnen**, **willen** and friends), the conjugated verb (the one that matches the subject) usually comes first: **omdat ik morgen moet werken**, **omdat ik het niet heb kunnen doen**.

The pattern

> **The verbs at the end of a subordinate clause stay together as one block. Inside it, the conjugated verb usually comes first, but a past participle may also stand at the front.**

- **Auxiliary plus participle: your choice. omdat ik het heb gezien** or **omdat ik het gezien heb**. The same goes for **zijn** and **worden**: **dat de trein is vertrokken** or **dat de trein vertrokken is**.
- **Modal plus infinitive (the dictionary form): modal first. omdat ik morgen moet werken**. The reverse, **werken moet**, exists and feels familiar to German speakers, but it is much less common. Don't make it your habit.
- **Three or more verbs ending in an infinitive (with a modal, laten or gaan): conjugated verb first, main verb last. omdat ik het niet heb kunnen doen**. The modal appears as an infinitive here (**kunnen**, not **gekund**), see Verb clusters.
- **Three verbs ending in a participle: the participle may jump to the front. dat de brug moet worden vervangen** or **dat de brug**

vervangen moet worden.

- **No splitting.** Objects, **niet**, time words and other adverbs go before the block. Only **te** and the first part of a separable verb can sit inside it, which is the topic of the next lesson.

You need this block whenever you explain, apologise or pass on news: why you missed the train, what the GP said, what **de gemeente** is planning.

Examples

Sanne zegt dat ze de offerte al **heeft verstuurd**.	Sanne says she has already sent the quote.
Sanne zegt dat ze de offerte al **verstuurd heeft**.	Sanne says she has already sent the quote.
Ik kan vanavond niet, omdat ik morgen vroeg **moet werken**.	I can't make it tonight, because I have to work early tomorrow.
Weet jij of Ahmed vrijdag ook **wil komen**?	Do you know if Ahmed wants to come on Friday too?
Het spijt me dat ik niet op je verjaardag **heb kunnen komen**.	I'm sorry I couldn't come to your birthday.
Fatima vertelde dat ze de huisarts de hele ochtend niet **had kunnen bereiken**.	Fatima said she hadn't been able to reach the GP all morning.
De gemeente laat weten dat de brug volgend jaar **moet worden vervangen**.	The municipality says the bridge needs to be replaced next year.
De gemeente laat weten dat de brug volgend jaar **vervangen moet worden**.	The municipality says the bridge needs to be replaced next year.
Ik denk dat Joris dat best **zou moeten kunnen regelen**.	I think Joris should be able to sort that out.

Why it works this way

Each verb in the block is the boss of the next one. **Heb** sets the time, **kunnen** adds ability, and **doen** carries the actual action, so the block runs from boss to worker: **heb kunnen doen**. That happens to be the English order too: have been able to do, should be able to sort out, needs to be replaced.

The past participle is the free spirit. It can behave like an adjective (**de winkel is gesloten**), and adjectives sit before the verb (**omdat de winkel dicht is**), so **gesloten is** feels just as natural as **is gesloten**. English puts the participle after the auxiliary, German puts it before, and Dutch allows both. Many speakers switch between the two without noticing.

Remember: the verbs at the end are a coupled train. Nobody climbs in between the carriages, and lining them up in English order (have been able to do: **heb kunnen doen**) is your safe default.

Watch out

NOT ~~**omdat ik heb het gezien**~~
SAY **omdat ik het heb gezien**
the object comes before the whole block, not after the first verb as in English

NOT ~~**omdat ik het heb niet gezien**~~
SAY **omdat ik het niet heb gezien**
niet stands in front of the block

NOT ~~**omdat ik moet morgen werken**~~
SAY **omdat ik morgen moet werken**
time words also go before the block

NOT ~~omdat ik het niet kunnen doen heb~~
SAY **omdat ik het niet heb kunnen doen**
with a modal in a group of three, the conjugated verb leads

Quick check

1. Choose the correct sentence: (a) **Ik kom wat later, omdat ik moet nog boodschappen doen.** (b) **Ik kom wat later, omdat ik nog boodschappen moet doen.**
2. Put the verbs in the right order: **Priya appt dat ze de trein van acht uur niet … (halen, heeft, kunnen).**
3. Right or wrong? **Mei zegt dat ze de rekening al betaald heeft.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ik vind het jammer dat Sanne heeft niet kunnen komen.**

Answers on page 789.

Use it today

Send a short message to a neighbour or colleague about something you could not do, using **omdat** or **dat** and a block of three verbs, for example **Sorry dat ik je pakketje gisteren niet heb kunnen aannemen.** Then say one sentence with **heb** plus a participle out loud in both orders.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/end-verb-order

RULE 122 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

Separable verbs in subordinate clauses

In a subordinate clause (a clause that starts with a word like **dat**, **omdat** or **of**), a separable verb such as **opbellen** (to phone) goes back together at the end: **Hij zegt dat hij morgen opbelt.** With an extra verb such as **wil**, the separable verb usually stays whole: **dat hij morgen wil opbellen**. In the perfect, the participle (the **ge-** form) is one word too: **dat hij heeft opgebeld**.

The pattern

In a subordinate clause, the conjugated verb (the one that matches the subject) goes to the end, right next to its prefix (the front part, like op), so the two become one word. With an extra verb, the separable verb usually stays whole at the end.

- In a main clause, the prefix splits off: **Hij belt morgen op.** The basics are in Separable verbs: opbellen, meenemen.
- One verb: prefix and verb join at the end: **omdat ik om zeven uur opsta**.
- Extra verb, such as **wil**, **moet**, **gaat** or **kan**: the separable verb is an infinitive (its dictionary form) and stays whole: **dat ik morgen moet opstaan**. You will also see **dat ik morgen op moet staan**. That is correct too, but the whole version is easier.
- Perfect: the participle is one word, usually with **ge-** in the middle. Both **dat hij heeft opgebeld** and **dat hij opgebeld heeft** are correct (see The order of verbs at the end).
- With **te**, the **te** squeezes in between: **dat je niet hoeft af te wassen**.

Examples

Sanne zegt dat ze je morgen **opbelt**.	Sanne says she will call you tomorrow.
Ik weet niet hoe laat de trein **aankomt**.	I don't know what time the train arrives.
Lotte zegt dat de supermarkt om acht uur **opengaat**.	Lotte says the supermarket opens at eight.
Fatima gaat naar de gemeente omdat ze een formulier **moet invullen**.	Fatima is going to the municipality because she has to fill in a form.
Daan vraagt of hij zijn zus **mag meenemen**.	Daan asks if he can bring his sister along.
Ik hoop dat Joris vanavond **wil afwassen**.	I hope Joris wants to do the dishes tonight.
Mei is moe omdat ze om vijf uur **is opgestaan**.	Mei is tired because she got up at five.
Priya vertelt dat ze de buren voor haar verjaardag **heeft uitgenodigd**.	Priya says she has invited the neighbours to her birthday.
Weet jij of Ahmed de huisarts al **heeft teruggebeld**?	Do you know if Ahmed has already called the GP back?

Why it works this way

You need this pattern constantly: passing on a message, giving a reason with **omdat**, asking whether something has happened yet.

Think of the prefix as parked at the end of the clause. In a main clause, the conjugated verb has to drive off to second place, so the prefix stays behind: **Hij belt morgen op.** In a subordinate clause, the verb goes to the end too, so it parks right next to its prefix and they become one word again.

Compare these pairs:

- **Hij belt morgen op.** / **Ik denk dat hij morgen opbelt.**

- **Hij wil morgen opbellen.** / **Ik denk dat hij morgen wil opbellen.**
- **Hij heeft gisteren opgebeld.** / **Ik denk dat hij gisteren heeft opgebeld.**

In the second and third pairs, the separable verb does not change at all: it was already whole at the end. Only **wil** and **heeft** move.

Remember: the prefix stays put, the verb travels. When the verb travels to the end, the pair is reunited.

English keeps its little words apart in every kind of sentence ("that he calls back", "I have to fill in"), so **dat hij belt terug** can feel right. It is not. If you speak German, you already know this one: "dass er morgen anruft" works the same way.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik denk dat hij morgen belt op.**~~
SAY **Ik denk dat hij morgen opbelt.**
in a subordinate clause the verb joins its prefix at the end

NOT ~~**Ik hoop dat ze morgen op belt.**~~
SAY **Ik hoop dat ze morgen opbelt.**
when the parts meet, you write one word

NOT ~~**Fatima belt de gemeente omdat ze een formulier moet vullen in.**~~
SAY **Fatima belt de gemeente omdat ze een formulier moet invullen.**
the prefix never trails after the infinitive; keep it whole

NOT ~~**Ik weet dat Bas heeft gebeld op.**~~
SAY **Ik weet dat Bas heeft opgebeld.**
the participle is one word

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap with the present-tense form of **aankomen**: **Ik weet niet hoe laat de bus …**
2. Fix the sentence: **Mei vertelt dat ze om zeven uur staat op.**
3. Choose **ophalen** or **halen op**: **Emma hoopt dat ze haar fiets morgen kan …**
4. Fill in the participle of **terugbellen**: **Yara is blij dat Carlos haar heeft …**

Answers on page 789.

Use it today

Next time you message a friend or colleague, add one subordinate clause with a separable verb, for example **Ik bel je terug als ik ben aangekomen.** Then say two more out loud about your own day, one with **omdat** and one with **dat**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/separable-in-subclauses

RULE 123 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Two objects and short pronouns

Short object pronouns such as **hem**, **haar**, **het** and **je** come early in a Dutch sentence: right after the verb and the subject, before time words and before nouns. So you say **Ik heb hem gisteren gezien** and **Ik geef haar het boek**. With two nouns, the person comes before the thing (**Ik geef mijn moeder bloemen**), unless you use **aan**: then the person usually comes after it (**Ik geef bloemen aan mijn moeder**).

The pattern

> **Short pronouns go straight after the verb and subject, before time words and nouns. With two objects, the person comes before the thing, unless you use aan: then the person usually comes last.**

- An object pronoun (a short word for the person or thing the action is aimed at) goes before time words: **Ik heb hem gisteren gezien.**
- It also goes before a noun object: **Ik geef haar het boek.**
- In a subordinate clause (a side clause after a word like **dat** or **omdat**), it sits right after the subject: **Weet je dat ik hem gisteren heb gezien?**
- Two nouns, no **aan**: person, then thing. **Ik geef mijn moeder bloemen.**
- With **aan**: thing, then **aan** plus person. **Ik geef bloemen aan mijn moeder.**
- If the thing is **het** and the person is a noun, most speakers use **aan**: **Ik geef het aan mijn moeder.** If both are pronouns, **het** usually comes first: **Ik geef het hem.**

This happens with verbs like **geven**, **sturen**, **lenen**, **vertellen**, **uitleggen** and **laten zien**. For the pronoun forms themselves, see object pronouns.

Examples

Ik heb **hem** gisteren op het station gezien.	I saw him at the station yesterday.
Bas belt **je** vanavond terug.	Bas will call you back tonight.
Ik geef **haar** het boek na de les.	I'll give her the book after class.
Kun je **me** het zout even aangeven?	Could you pass me the salt?
Lotte laat **ons** morgen haar nieuwe fiets zien.	Lotte is showing us her new bike tomorrow.
Priya heeft **haar buurvrouw een taart** gegeven.	Priya gave her neighbour a cake.
Priya heeft **een taart aan haar buurvrouw** gegeven.	Priya gave a cake to her neighbour.
De huisarts heeft **het** al aan Ahmed uitgelegd.	The GP has already explained it to Ahmed.
Het pakketje? Ik heb **het hem** gisteren gegeven.	The parcel? I gave it to him yesterday.

Why it works this way

Dutch likes to put what you already know early and what is new towards the end, where the main stress usually falls. A pronoun points to something you have just mentioned, so it carries no news and slips in right behind the verb. A time word or a fresh noun is more likely to be the news, so it waits.

Nouns are freer than pronouns: **Ik heb de film gisteren gezien** and **Ik heb gisteren de film gezien** are both correct. A pronoun can stand later only when you stress it for contrast: **Ik heb gisteren hém gezien, niet zijn broer.** The forms **me**, **je**, **ze** and **het** cannot carry stress, so they stay early (more in stressed and unstressed pronouns).

The two-object part will feel familiar from English: "I give my mother flowers" and "I give flowers to my mother" work the same way. The Dutch word for that "to" is **aan**, not **naar**. As a tendency, speakers pick the version that ends with the most important information, so **aan mijn moeder** at the end puts the weight on who gets the flowers.

Remember: old news first, new news last. A pronoun is old news, so it skips the queue and stands right behind the verb.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik bel morgen je.**~~
SAY **Ik bel je morgen.**
je cannot be stressed, so it goes before the time word

NOT ~~**Ik geef mijn moeder het.**~~
SAY **Ik geef het aan mijn moeder.**
het comes before a noun object, so let **aan** carry the person

NOT ~~**Daan stuurt een kaartje zijn oma.**~~
SAY **Daan stuurt zijn oma een kaartje.**
without **aan**, the person comes first

NOT ~~**Ik geef het boek naar Fatima.**~~
SAY **Ik geef het boek aan Fatima.**
after **geven**, "to" is **aan**

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Het formulier? Joris heeft vorige week het ingevuld.**
2. Choose the right word: **Mei geeft een cadeau (aan / naar) haar collega.**

3. Fix the sentence without adding a word: **Yara stuurt een berichtje haar broer.**
4. Choose the correct sentence: **Ik geef de buurman het.** or **Ik geef het aan de buurman.**

Answers on page 789.

Use it today

Think of the next birthday on your calendar and write three sentences about your present: one with the person first (**Ik geef Sanne een plant.**), one with **aan**, and one with a pronoun and a time word (**Ik geef haar zaterdag de plant.**). Say them out loud on your way there.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/object-order

RULE 124 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

The four jobs of er

Er is one small word with four jobs. It can mean "there" for a place you already mentioned, stand in for a noun after a number, announce something new (like English "there is"), or join a preposition (a small word like **op** or **met**) to mean "it" or "them". Once you spot which job it is doing, the sentence makes sense.

The pattern

> **Er is an unstressed placeholder. It stands for a known place, a dropped noun or a thing after a preposition, or it announces a new subject.**

- **Place: Ik woon er al drie jaar.** Here **er** means "there" and points back to a place. For pointing or contrast, use stressed **daar**.
- **Number: Ik heb er twee.** When you drop the noun after a number or a word like **veel** or **geen**, **er** marks the gap. See Er with numbers.
- **Dummy start: Er staat een man voor de deur.** A dummy is an empty word that only fills a slot. Use it when the subject is new (with **een**, **geen**, a number or no article). It can also appear later in the sentence: **Vandaag staat er een man voor de deur.** See Er is and er zijn.
- **Preposition: Ik denk erover.** For things, **er** plus the preposition means "it" or "them": **erop**, **erover**, **ermee** (**met** becomes **mee**). The two parts often split: **Ik ben er blij mee.** See Erop, ervan, daarmee.
- **Position: er** comes early in the middle of the sentence. It normally follows a known subject (**Morgen ga ik er weer heen**, **omdat ik er al drie jaar woon**) but comes before a new one (**omdat er een man voor de deur staat**).

Examples

Ken je Zwolle? Ik woon **er** al drie jaar.	Do you know Zwolle? I've lived there for three years.
Carlos werkt bij de gemeente en hij vindt het **er** leuk.	Carlos works for the council and he likes it there.
Hoeveel kinderen heeft Daan? Hij heeft **er** twee.	How many children does Daan have? He has two.
Ik wilde avocado's kopen, maar de supermarkt had **er** geen meer.	I wanted to buy avocados, but the supermarket had none left.
Er staat een man voor de deur.	There's a man at the door.
Er rijden vandaag geen treinen tussen Utrecht en Amersfoort.	There are no trains between Utrecht and Amersfoort today.
Ga je die baan in Rotterdam nemen? Ik denk **erover**.	Are you taking that job in Rotterdam? I'm thinking about it.
Mei heeft een nieuwe fiets en ze is **er** heel blij **mee**.	Mei has a new bike and she's really happy with it.
Ahmed heeft een brief van de gemeente gekregen, maar hij begrijpt **er** niets **van**.	Ahmed got a letter from the council, but he doesn't understand any of it.

Why it works this way

Dutch keeps known things light and saves new things for later. **Er** serves both habits.

For a place, **er** is to **daar** what **je** is to **jij**: the light version. After a number, English happily says "I have two", but Dutch wants a marker for the missing noun, and **er** is that marker.

The dummy start has its own logic. Dutch prefers not to open a sentence with a brand-new subject like **een man**. **Er** announces that something new

is coming, and the new subject follows. It does this job anywhere in the sentence, not only at the front:

- **Er staat een man voor de deur.**
- **Vandaag staat er een man voor de deur.**
- **Ik zie dat er een man voor de deur staat.**

A known subject needs no announcement: **De buurman staat voor de deur.** When a sentence already starts with a place, **er** is often optional: **In de trein zat (er) een hond.** That is a tendency, not a fixed rule.

With prepositions, Dutch avoids **het** for a thing. English once did the same, which is where "therefore" and "thereby" come from. People keep their pronoun:

- **Ik denk aan Emma. Ik denk aan haar.** (a person)
- **Ik denk aan de afspraak. Ik denk eraan.** (a thing)

Remember: er is a sticky note on the sentence. It stands for a known place, a dropped noun or a hidden "it", or it announces a new subject before it arrives.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb twee.**~~
SAY **Ik heb er twee.**
a number on its own needs **er** for the missing noun

NOT ~~**Is een probleem met mijn rooster.**~~
SAY **Er is een probleem met mijn rooster.**
Dutch needs **er** to announce a new subject, even where Spanish just says "hay"

NOT ~~**Ik denk over het.**~~
SAY **Ik denk erover.**
no **het** after a preposition for things

NOT ~~**Ik ben blij met het.**~~
SAY **Ik ben er blij mee.**
met becomes **mee** after **er**

NOT ~~**Daan is mijn collega en ik werk er graag mee.**~~
SAY **Daan is mijn collega en ik werk graag met hem.**
er plus a preposition is for things, not people

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Hoeveel broers heb je? Ik heb ... drie.**
2. Choose: **(Er / Het / Dat) ligt een pakketje voor je bij de buren.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Sanne heeft een nieuwe laptop en ze werkt graag met het.**
4. Which job does **er** do here: place, number, dummy start or preposition? **Ben je weleens in Maastricht geweest? Ja, ik ben er vorig jaar geweest.**

Answers on page 790.

Use it today

When someone asks how long you have lived in your town, answer with **Ik woon er al ... jaar.** Then check your fridge and say how many eggs are left: **Ik heb er nog drie.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/er-overview

RULE 125 · LEVEL A2 · WORD ORDER

Er is and er zijn: there is, there are

To say there is or there are in Dutch, use **er is** for one thing or an amount you cannot count, and **er zijn** for two or more: **Er is geen melk**, **Er zijn veel mensen**. It brings something new into the conversation, and when a real object is in a real place, Dutch often swaps **zijn** for **staan**, **liggen**, **zitten** or **hangen**: **Er ligt een brief op tafel.**

The pattern

> **Er plus a verb introduces something new: er is for one thing or an uncountable amount, er zijn for more. The verb agrees with the thing named after it, not with er.**

- One thing, or an amount you cannot count: **Er is een feestje. Er is veel verkeer.**
- Two or more: **Er zijn twee supermarkten in ons dorp.** So **Er is veel werk**, but **Er zijn veel mensen** (more in countable and uncountable nouns).
- The new thing usually starts with **een**, **geen**, a number, **veel** or a word like **iets** or **iemand**, or has no article at all (**Er is koffie**).
- If the listener already knows the thing (**de**, **het**, **mijn**, a name), you normally start with it instead: **De melk staat in de koelkast.**

For a real object in a real place, Dutch speakers usually name its position:

- **staan**: standing upright, like a bottle, a bike or a plant
- **liggen**: lying flat, like a letter, keys or a phone
- **zitten**: inside something, like money in a wallet or apples in a bag
- **hangen**: hanging, like a coat, a lamp or a picture

The verb still agrees: **Er ligt een sleutel**, **Er liggen twee sleutels**. This is a strong tendency, not a law. **Er is een brief op tafel** is not wrong, just flat, and some choices are habit: plates on a set table **staan**, even though they are flat.

Examples

Er is geen melk meer.	There is no milk left.
Er zijn veel mensen op het station.	There are a lot of people at the station.
Er ligt een brief op tafel.	There is a letter on the table.
Er liggen twee brieven op tafel.	There are two letters on the table.
Er staat een fiets voor de deur.	There is a bike outside the door.
Er zit geen geld in mijn portemonnee.	There is no money in my wallet.
Er hangt een jas aan de kapstok.	There is a coat on the coat rack.
Is er een apotheek in de buurt?	Is there a pharmacy nearby?
Vanavond **is er** een feestje bij Sanne.	There is a party at Sanne's tonight.
De melk staat in de koelkast.	The milk is in the fridge.

Why it works this way

Dutch, like English, likes to put new information later in the sentence. **Een man staat voor de deur** is also possible, but the usual way to introduce the man as someone new is to let **er** take the first seat. The verb stays in second place (see verb second), and the new thing arrives after it: **Er staat een man voor de deur.** This is one of the four jobs of er. In this job **er** does not point to a place; you add the place yourself.

Because **er** is only a placeholder, the real subject is the noun after the verb. That is why the verb looks ahead to agree.

When a time word starts the sentence, the verb still comes second and **er** follows it: **Morgen is er een markt.** In a yes or no question, the verb comes first and **er** follows it: **Is er nog koffie?** If you start with the place itself, **er** is often left out: **Op tafel ligt een brief.**

Remember: er is the doorbell, not the guest. The verb looks past it to see who walks in: one guest, **is**; a crowd, **zijn**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Er is veel mensen in de trein.**~~
SAY **Er zijn veel mensen in de trein.**
the verb agrees with **veel mensen**, so English "there's" does not carry over

NOT ~~**Morgen er is een markt op het plein.**~~
SAY **Morgen is er een markt op het plein.**
the verb comes second, so **er** follows it

NOT ~~**Het geeft een supermarkt in mijn straat.**~~
SAY **Er is een supermarkt in mijn straat.**
German "es gibt" has no word-for-word copy in Dutch

NOT ~~**Ik ga naar de supermarkt omdat er is geen melk meer.**~~
SAY **Ik ga naar de supermarkt omdat er geen melk meer is.**
after **omdat** the verb goes to the end

Quick check

1. Choose **is** or **zijn**: Er … veel toeristen in Amsterdam.
2. Choose **is** or **zijn**: Er … geen brood meer.
3. Choose **ligt** or **hangt**: Er … een lamp boven de tafel.
4. Fix the word order and keep **Zaterdag** at the start: **Zaterdag er is een barbecue bij Daan.**

Answers on page 790.

Use it today

Open your fridge and say three sentences out loud: one with **er staat**, one with **er ligt** and one with **er is geen**, for example **Er is geen boter meer.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/er-is-er-zijn

RULE 126 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Er with numbers: Ik heb er drie

When you leave out the noun after a number or an amount word such as **veel**, **weinig**, **een paar** or **geen**, Dutch adds the little word **er**. Someone asks **Hoeveel kinderen heb je?** and you answer **Ik heb er twee**. English stops at "I have two", but Dutch needs **er** to stand in for the noun you dropped.

The pattern

> **If a number or amount word stands without its noun, put er in the sentence. Er takes the place of the noun you left out.**

- The left-out noun is something you can count: children, apples, chairs, bikes.
- The trigger words: numbers, **veel**, **weinig**, **een paar**, **geen**, **genoeg** and **hoeveel**.
- **Er** usually comes early, right after the verb and the subject. The amount stays where the noun would have been: **Ik heb er gisteren drie gekocht.**
- In a subordinate clause (a part of a sentence that starts with a word like **dat** or **omdat** and puts its verb at the end), you get the same split: **dat ik er drie heb**.
- With er is and er zijn you may hear two: **Er zijn er drie.** If the two would stand side by side, one **er** does both jobs: **Ik denk dat er drie zijn.**
- A one-word answer has no sentence around it, so no **er**: **Hoeveel? Drie.**

Examples

Hoeveel kinderen heeft Fatima? Ze heeft **er drie**.	How many children does Fatima have? She has three.

Heb je broers of zussen? Nee, ik heb **er geen**.	Do you have brothers or sisters? No, I don't have any.
De appels waren in de aanbieding, dus Daan heeft **er tien** gekocht.	The apples were on offer, so Daan bought ten.
Priya kent veel mensen op haar werk, maar in haar eigen straat kent ze **er weinig**.	Priya knows lots of people at work, but she knows few in her own street.
Hoeveel fietsen staan er in de schuur? **Er staan er vijf.**	How many bikes are there in the shed? There are five.
We hebben stoelen van de buren geleend, omdat we **er** zelf niet **genoeg** hadden.	We borrowed chairs from the neighbours because we didn't have enough ourselves.
De huisarts vroeg hoeveel tabletten ik nog had, en ik zei dat ik **er** nog **zes** had.	The GP asked how many tablets I had left, and I said I had six left.
Lotte had koekjes gebakken voor haar verjaardag, maar ze heeft **er** zelf maar **een paar** gegeten.	Lotte had baked biscuits for her birthday, but she only ate a few herself.

Why it works this way

Think of **er** as a pointer. You have just mentioned children, apples or chairs, and **er** points back at them while the number says how many. English has a loose version in "three of them" or "I don't have any", but there it is optional. In Dutch the pointer belongs in the sentence, so **Ik heb twee** sounds as if you forgot a word.

If you speak French, you know this already: "j'en ai deux" works the same way. Speakers of English, German, Spanish and Arabic tend to forget **er**, because in those languages a number can stand alone.

Er points at an open amount, part of a group. When you mean the whole group, with **allebei** or **allemaal**, use **ze** instead: **Die boeken? Ik heb ze**

allebei gelezen.

Why does **er** move forward while **drie** stays behind? Small unstressed words like **er**, **het** and **hem** like to sit close to the verb. The number is the news, so it stays further back, where the stress falls. This is one of the four jobs of er.

Remember: when the noun leaves, **er** moves in, and the number stays where it was.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb twee broers en Daan heeft drie.**~~
SAY **Ik heb twee broers en Daan heeft er drie.**
the second **broers** is left out, so **er** fills its place

NOT ~~**Ik wilde aardbeien kopen, maar ze hadden geen meer.**~~
SAY **Ik wilde aardbeien kopen, maar ze hadden er geen meer.**
geen without its noun needs **er** too

NOT ~~**Er waren veel mensen op het feest, maar ik kende weinig.**~~
SAY **Er waren veel mensen op het feest, maar ik kende er weinig.**
same rule for **veel** and **weinig**

NOT ~~**Die twee boeken? Ik heb er allebei gelezen.**~~
SAY **Die twee boeken? Ik heb ze allebei gelezen.**
allebei means the whole group, so use **ze**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Hoeveel collega's heb je? Ik heb … twaalf.**
2. Choose **er** or **ze**: **Ik had tien boterhammen gesmeerd, maar Bas heeft … allemaal opgegeten.**

3. Fix the sentence without repeating the noun: **Mijn buurvrouw heeft drie katten en ik heb geen.**
4. Choose **er** or **er er**: **Hoeveel bussen rijden er op zondag? Ik denk dat … maar twee rijden.**

Answers on page 790.

Use it today

Answer three how-many questions about your own life out loud in full Dutch sentences: children, bikes, houseplants or colleagues (**Ik heb er geen** counts too). Then, at the market or the bakery, point at what you want and say **Ik neem er zes.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/er-with-numbers

RULE 127 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Erop, ervan, daarmee: er plus a preposition

In Dutch, "about it" is **erover**, not **over het**, and "with it" is **ermee**. When "it" or "them" follows a preposition (a word like on, with or about) and means a thing, Dutch uses **er** plus the preposition instead. For people you keep the normal pronoun: **Ik denk aan hem.**

The pattern

> **For things, a preposition plus "it" or "them" becomes er plus the preposition. For people, you keep the preposition and the normal pronoun (hem, haar).**

- **over het** becomes **erover**, **van het** becomes **ervan**. When they stand together, you write them as one word. "Them" works the same way for things, so **ermee** can mean "with it" or "with them".
- **Daar** (there, that) replaces **er** when the thing is stressed or comes first: **Daar heb ik geen zin in.** It also replaces **dat**: not **met dat** but **daarmee**.
- **Hier** (here, this) replaces **dit**: **hiermee** means "with this".
- **Met** becomes **mee** (**ermee**, **daarmee**, **hiermee**) and **tot** becomes **toe** (**ertoe**, **daartoe**). Most other prepositions simply attach: **eraan**, **ernaar**, **erin**.
- People keep the pronoun: **Ik wacht op haar**, **Ik praat met hem**.

Examples

Ik heb de brief van de gemeente gelezen en ik denk **erover** na.	I have read the letter from the council and I am thinking about it.

Fatima heeft een tweedehands fiets gekocht en gaat **ermee** naar haar werk.	Fatima has bought a second-hand bike and goes to work on it.
Die oude kasten? Ik weet niet wat ik **ermee** moet doen.	Those old cupboards? I don't know what to do with them.
Houd je van drop? Ja, ik houd **ervan**.	Do you like liquorice? Yes, I love it.
Pak deze sleutel: **hiermee** open je de fietsenstalling.	Take this key: you open the bike shed with this one.
Een feestje op maandagavond? **Daar** heb ik geen zin **in**.	A party on a Monday evening? I'm not in the mood for that.
Bas mist zijn oma en denkt vaak **aan haar**.	Bas misses his grandma and often thinks about her.
Het slechte weer heeft **ertoe** geleid dat veel treinen niet reden.	The bad weather led to many trains not running.

Why it works this way

Compare these pairs:

- **Ik wacht op de bus.** becomes **Ik wacht erop.**
- **Ik wacht op Yara.** becomes **Ik wacht op haar.**
- **Ik denk aan de afspraak.** becomes **Ik denk eraan.**
- **Ik denk aan Daan.** becomes **Ik denk aan hem.**

Er, **daar** and **hier** are place words. Dutch points at a thing as if it were a spot: **erop** is literally "there-on" and **ervan** "there-of". English once worked like this too and still keeps a few fossils: therefore, thereby, herewith, hereby. Dutch simply kept the system for daily use. A person is not a spot you point at, so people keep **hem** and **haar**. The technical name for **erop** and **daarmee** is pronominal adverb: an adverb that stands in for a pronoun.

The three place words differ in strength. **Er** is the quiet, unstressed one, and in this job it cannot open a sentence. **Daar** is the stressed, pointing version: "that, not something else". **Hier** points to something close: "this". Dutch speakers often react by starting with the thing, which is why you hear **Daar ben ik het mee eens** and **Daar weet ik niets van** all the time. Sometimes **er** even points ahead to a whole clause, as in the **ertoe … dat** example above.

In those **daar** sentences, **daar** and its preposition stand apart, and **er** often splits from its preposition too: see Splitting er and its preposition. You will need this most with Verbs with a fixed preposition, and questions use the same trick with **waar**: Waarmee, waarover, waaraan.

Remember: thing after a preposition? Think "therefore" and use **er**, **daar** or **hier**. Person after a preposition? Keep **hem** or **haar**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Het pakket komt vandaag, dus ik wacht op het.**~~
SAY **Het pakket komt vandaag, dus ik wacht erop.**
no **het** after a preposition

NOT ~~**Wat doe je ermet?**~~
SAY **Wat doe je ermee?**
met becomes **mee** after **er**

NOT ~~**Joris is mijn nieuwe buurman en ik heb ermee gepraat.**~~
SAY **Joris is mijn nieuwe buurman en ik heb met hem gepraat.**
people keep the pronoun

NOT ~~**Er heb ik geen zin in.**~~
SAY **Daar heb ik geen zin in.**
er cannot start the sentence here

NOT ~~**Ik ben het eens met dat.**~~
SAY **Daar ben ik het mee eens.**
dat after a preposition becomes **daar**

Quick check

1. Fill in **er** plus **met** as one word: **Je hebt een nieuwe laptop! Wat ga je … doen?**
2. Choose: **Ik heb Lotte gebeld, want ik wilde (met haar / ermee) praten.**
3. Choose: **Op zaterdag werken? (Er / Daar) heb ik echt geen tijd voor.**
4. Fill in **er** plus **tot** as one word: **Het nieuwe rooster heeft … geleid dat iedereen later begint.**

Answers on page 790.

Use it today

React to a plan or a question today with a **daar** sentence, such as **Daar heb ik zin in!** or **Daar weet ik niets van.** Then describe one thing you use every day: **Dit is mijn fiets en ik ga ermee naar mijn werk.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/er-plus-preposition

RULE 128 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

Splitting er and its preposition

When **er**, **daar** or **waar** goes with a preposition (a word like **aan**, **op** or **van**), Dutch usually splits the pair. The small word stays early in the sentence, and the preposition moves to the end, right before any verbs waiting there: **Ik heb er niet aan gedacht** (I didn't think of it), **Daar heb ik niets van gemerkt** (I didn't notice anything), **Waar heb je het over?** (What are you talking about?).

In the previous lesson you learned **erop**, **ervan** and **daarmee** as single words. In real conversations you will hear them split all the time, so this lesson shows where each half goes.

The pattern

> **Er, daar and waar stay early in the sentence, and their preposition moves back to stand just before the verbs at the end of the sentence.**

- **Er** comes early, usually right after the subject or the conjugated verb (the verb that changes with the subject): **Gisteren heb ik er niet aan gedacht.**
- Other words in the middle (**niet**, **al**, **niets**, a time, an object) go between the two halves.
- The preposition stands right before the final verbs, also in a subordinate clause (a clause starting with a word like **omdat** or **of**): **omdat ik er niet aan had gedacht**. With no final verb, it usually comes last: **Bas klaagt er elke dag over.**
- With a separable verb (a verb like **opbellen** that splits into two parts), the preposition comes before the separated part: **Ik kijk er erg naar uit.**

- **Daar** and **waar** often start the sentence, and the preposition still waits at the end: **Waar wacht je op?**
- Spelling: one word when the parts touch (**Ik heb erover nagedacht**), two words when something stands between them (**Ik heb er lang over nagedacht**).

Examples

Sorry, ik heb **er** helemaal niet **aan** gedacht.	Sorry, I completely forgot about it.
Daar heb ik niets **van** gemerkt.	I didn't notice a thing.
Waar heb je het **over**?	What are you talking about?
Fatima heeft **er** twee weken **op** moeten wachten.	Fatima had to wait two weeks for it.
Lotte vindt de regen niet erg, maar Bas klaagt **er** elke dag **over**.	Lotte doesn't mind the rain, but Bas complains about it every day.
De gemeente heeft **er** pas gisteren een brief **over** gestuurd.	The municipality didn't send a letter about it until yesterday.
Ik weet niet of Daan **er** zin **in** heeft.	I don't know if Daan feels like it.
Is dat de app **waar** je het **over** had?	Is that the app you were talking about?
Priya kijkt **er** erg **naar** uit.	Priya is really looking forward to it.

Why it works this way

A Dutch sentence has a frame: the conjugated verb near the start and the other verbs at the end (see the verb bracket). Inside that frame, short unstressed words like **het**, **me** and **er** tend to sit at the front. Words that belong tightly to the verb sit at the back: separable parts, and the fixed preposition of verbs like **denken aan**, **wachten op** and **klagen over** (more

in verbs with a fixed preposition). So **er** is pulled forward, its preposition is pulled back, and Dutch lets each half go where it belongs.

Remember: treat the preposition like the **op** of **opbellen**. You say **Ik bel je morgen op**, so you say **Ik denk er morgen aan**.

With **er**, the split is the normal pattern. With **daar** and **waar**, the joined form is also correct: **Daarvan heb ik niets gemerkt**, **Waarover heb je het?** These sound more formal or written; in conversation and most work emails the split version is more common. **Daar** is the stressed word (that one), so it can open a sentence. Unstressed **er** does not normally open a sentence in this meaning, so at the start you say **daar**.

English speakers have a head start, because English also leaves prepositions behind: What are you waiting for? Two things change in Dutch: **wat** becomes **waar**, and the preposition goes before the final verbs, not after them: **Waar heb je op gewacht?** German speakers often keep the pair together, as standard German usually does, and say **niet eraan**. That is not the normal Dutch order: in a neutral sentence, Dutch says **er niet aan**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik kijk er erg uit naar.**~~
SAY **Ik kijk er erg naar uit.**
naar goes before the separable part **uit**, not after it

NOT ~~**Wat heb je het over?**~~
SAY **Waar heb je het over?**
with a preposition, **wat** becomes **waar**

NOT ~~**Ik ben bang voor het.**~~
SAY **Ik ben er bang voor.**
the pronoun **het** does not follow a preposition; **er** takes its place and **voor** goes to the end

NOT ~~**Ik weet niet of ik er tijd heb voor.**~~

SAY **Ik weet niet of ik er tijd voor heb.**

in a subordinate clause the preposition still comes before the verb at the end

Quick check

1. Your colleague is explaining something and you have lost track. Fill in the question word: **… heb je het over? Ik kan je even niet volgen.**
2. Fill in the preposition: **Lotte heeft geen zin in de buurtbarbecue, maar Carlos heeft er wel zin …, want hij kent de hele straat.**
3. Choose the correct sentence: **Mei heeft er al een uur op gewacht.** or **Mei heeft er al een uur gewacht op.**
4. Choose **er** or **daar**: **Was er gisteren een stroomstoring? … heb ik niets van gemerkt.**

Answers on page 791.

Use it today

Send a friend or colleague a short message about something coming up this week, using two split forms, for example **Ik kijk er erg naar uit** and **Ik heb er nog niet over nagedacht**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/split-er-preposition

RULE 129 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

Starting with the object for emphasis or contrast

In Dutch you can start a main clause with the object (the person or thing the action is aimed at), or with almost any other part, to put it in the spotlight or to contrast it with something. The conjugated verb (the form that matches the subject, like **heb** or **vond**) stays in second place, so the subject moves behind it: **Dat boek heb ik al gelezen.** In everyday speech this happens all the time with **die** and **dat**, which point back to something that was just said.

The pattern

> **Put the part you want to focus on, contrast or link back to in position one, the slot before the verb. The conjugated verb stays in position two, and the subject comes after it.**

- Neutral order: **Ik vond die film saai.**
- With focus: **Die film vond ik saai.**
- Almost any sentence part can go first: an object, a time, place or manner phrase (**op de fiets**), even an adjective.
- Only one part goes before the verb. Linking words like **en**, **maar** and **want** don't count.
- In speech, position one is very often **die** or **dat**, referring back to what was just mentioned.
- This works in main clauses. After **omdat**, **als** or **terwijl**, the verb goes to the end as usual (see Omdat or want).

Examples

Dat boek heb ik al gelezen, maar het tweede deel nog niet.	I've already read that book, but not the second part yet.
Die film vond ik eerlijk gezegd een beetje saai.	To be honest, I found that film a bit boring.
Joris van hiernaast? **Die** heb ik al weken niet gezien.	Joris next door? I haven't seen him for weeks.
Dat weet ik niet, vraag het maar even aan Daan.	I don't know, just ask Daan.
Koffie drink ik niet meer, thee wel.	I don't drink coffee anymore, but I do drink tea.
Op de fiets ben ik er in tien minuten.	By bike I'm there in ten minutes.
Moe ben ik niet, ik heb alleen honger.	I'm not tired, I'm just hungry.
Dat formulier kun je ook online invullen.	You can also fill in that form online.
De offerte ontvangt u uiterlijk vrijdag.	You will receive the quote by Friday at the latest.

Why it works this way

Dutch has one firm rule for main clauses: the conjugated verb sits in second place (Verb second: the golden rule). The first slot is free, and speakers fill it with whatever makes the best bridge from the previous sentence. Very often that is not the subject.

Say Priya asks: **Heb je de mail van Lotte al gelezen?** The natural reply is **Ja, die heb ik vanochtend gelezen.** The word **die** picks up the mail you were both just talking about, and the new information, **vanochtend**, comes later. Known information first, news later: that is a strong tendency rather than a law, but it explains most of the fronting you will hear.

Contrast follows the same logic. In **Koffie drink ik niet meer, thee wel**, both **koffie** and **thee** get stress, so the listener hears the opposition straight away.

English can front an object too (That one I've read), but it sounds marked. In Dutch it is completely ordinary. In this slot, speakers usually choose **die** and **dat** rather than **hem**, and object **het** is not possible there at all (more in Die and dat instead of hij and het in speech). In relaxed speech you will even hear the topic named first and then picked up again: **Die nieuwe collega, die heb ik gisteren gesproken.** The first part stands outside the sentence, followed by a tiny pause.

Remember: seat two belongs to the verb. If anything other than the subject takes seat one, the subject sits down after the verb.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Die film ik vond echt saai.**~~
SAY **Die film vond ik echt saai.**
the verb stays second, so **ik** moves behind it

NOT ~~**Het heb ik al gedaan.**~~
SAY **Dat heb ik al gedaan.**
object **het** cannot open a sentence, so use **dat**

NOT ~~**Dat boek heb ik het al gelezen.**~~
SAY **Dat boek heb ik al gelezen.**
don't repeat the fronted object with a pronoun, a habit from Spanish and Arabic

NOT ~~**Ik kom niet mee, omdat die film heb ik al gezien.**~~
SAY **Ik kom niet mee, want die film heb ik al gezien.**
after **omdat** the verb goes to the end, while **want** keeps main clause order

Quick check

1. Keep **Die jas** at the start and fix the word order: **Die jas ik heb gisteren in de uitverkoop gekocht.**
2. Mei asks: **Weet jij hoe laat het gemeentehuis vandaag sluit?** You answer: **Nee, … weet ik niet.** (choose **dat** or **het**)
3. Rewrite the sentence starting with **de huur**: **Ik betaal de huur altijd op de eerste van de maand.**
4. Fill in **ben ik** or **ik ben**: **Met de trein … er in twintig minuten, met de auto duurt het veel langer.**

Answers on page 791.

Use it today

When someone asks whether you know, have seen or have done something, answer with **die** or **dat** in first position: **Dat weet ik niet**, **Die heb ik al gezien**, **Dat heb ik gisteren gedaan**. Aim for three of these before the day is over.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/fronting-for-emphasis

RULE 130 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Where adverbs go: al, nog, graag, vaak, ook

Words like **al** (already), **nog** (still), **graag** (gladly, with pleasure), **vaak** (often) and **ook** (also, too) sit in the middle of a Dutch sentence. In a main clause that starts with the subject, they come after the conjugated verb (the verb form that matches the subject, like **fiets** or **heb**), not in front of it as in English "I often cycle". If there is a short pronoun such as **het** or **hem**, the pronoun goes first: **Ik heb het al gedaan**, **Ik zie hem vaak**.

The pattern

> **In a main clause, al, nog, graag, vaak and ook normally go in the middle field: after the conjugated verb, after a short pronoun object, and before any verbs at the end.**

- The middle field (the part between the conjugated verb and the end of the clause, or the final verbs such as **gedaan**) is where these words usually live.
- Short unstressed pronouns (**het**, **hem**, **ze**, **me**, **je**) come before them: **Ik zie hem vaak.**
- If something else comes first, the subject follows the verb and usually stands before these words: **Vandaag werkt Joris ook thuis.** The adverb itself can also come first for emphasis: **Vaak fiets ik naar mijn werk.**
- In simple sentences that start with the subject, **graag** follows the verb directly: **Ik fiets graag.** A short pronoun still goes in front of it: **Ik doe het graag.**
- **Ook** and **al** usually come early, before new information such as **een kaartje** or **naar huis**. When two of these words meet, **ook** usually goes

first: **Lotte is ook al jarig geweest.**

- In a subordinate clause the order stays the same, but the conjugated verb moves to the end: **Ik weet dat je hem vaak ziet.**
- Next to **niet**, you say **nog niet** and **ook niet**, while **niet graag** means you don't enjoy something: **Ik fiets niet graag.** More in Where does niet go?

Examples

Ik **fiets graag** naar mijn werk.	I like cycling to work.
Ik heb **het al** gekocht.	I've already bought it.
Ik heb **al een kaartje** gekocht.	I've already bought a ticket.
Daan ziet **hem vaak** in de supermarkt.	Daan often sees him in the supermarket.
Daan zegt dat hij **hem vaak** ziet.	Daan says he often sees him.
We wachten **nog** op de trein naar Utrecht.	We're still waiting for the train to Utrecht.
Heb je **de huisarts al** gebeld?	Have you called the GP yet?
Morgen gaat **Priya ook** naar de gemeente.	Priya is going to the town hall tomorrow too.
Fatima drinkt **ook graag** thee.	Fatima likes drinking tea too.
Ik heb **het ook al** gehoord.	I've already heard it too.

Why it works this way

English lets an adverb slip in between the subject and the verb: "I often cycle", "she already knows". Dutch keeps the conjugated verb in second place in a main clause (see verb second). When the subject comes first, these adverbs normally follow the verb: **Ik fiets vaak.** An adverb can also take first place itself, and then the subject moves behind the verb: **Vaak**

fiets ik naar mijn werk. What Dutch does not allow is an adverb squeezed between the subject and the verb, because then the verb would end up third. Speakers of English and Spanish tend to carry their own order over. German speakers have it easier, because German orders these words almost the same way. As a short reply, **Ik ook.** is perfectly fine: there is no verb to get in the way.

Inside the middle field, Dutch tends to put known information first and new information later, where the stress of the sentence usually falls. Short pronouns like **het** and **hem** refer to something already mentioned or obvious, so they move to the front. Full nouns follow the same tendency, though less strictly: **Heb je de huisarts al gebeld?** (you both know which GP) but **Ik heb al een afspraak** (new information).

Remember: think of the adverb as a fence. Old news stands in front of it, new news behind it, and a short pronoun is the oldest news there is.

For what these words mean in time expressions, see Al, nog, pas, nog niet, niet meer.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik vaak fiets naar mijn werk.**~~
SAY **Ik fiets vaak naar mijn werk.**
after the subject comes the conjugated verb, so the adverb follows it

NOT ~~**Ik ga naar het feest ook.**~~
SAY **Ik ga ook naar het feest.**
ook goes before **naar het feest**, not at the end like English "too"

NOT ~~**Ik heb al het betaald.**~~
SAY **Ik heb het al betaald.**
a short pronoun goes before the adverb

NOT ~~**Ik neem de fiets omdat ik fiets graag.**~~
SAY **Ik neem de fiets omdat ik graag fiets.**
in a subordinate clause the verb goes to the end, after **graag**

Quick check

1. Put **het** and **al** in the right order: **Het nieuwe rooster? Heb je … gelezen?**
2. Fix the sentence without changing the first word: **Ik ook werk bij de gemeente.**
3. Choose **graag kookt** or **kookt graag**: **Bas zegt dat hij … en vaak mensen uitnodigt.**
4. Choose **vaak ze** or **ze vaak**: **De buren? Ik zie … in het park.**

Answers on page 791.

Use it today

On your way home, say three true sentences out loud: something you like doing (**Ik … graag …**), something you have already done today (**Ik heb … al …**) and someone you often see (**Ik zie … vaak**). Then replace the person or thing with **hem**, **haar** or **het** and check that the pronoun moves in front of the adverb.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adverb-position

RULE 131 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

What can come after the final verbs

Most of a Dutch sentence has to fit before the final verbs (the verbs that close the clause, like **gezegd** in **Ik heb gezegd**). A few parts may follow them: subordinate clauses (mini sentences with their own verb, such as **dat** and **om te** clauses), comparisons with **dan** or **als**, and often a prepositional phrase (a preposition plus its noun, like **op de bus**). Objects (the person or thing the verb acts on) and **niet** stay before the final verbs: **Ik heb gezegd dat ik kom**, but **Ik heb de bus gemist**.

The pattern

> **Objects and niet stay before the final verbs of their own clause. Clauses with their own verb, comparisons and often a prepositional phrase can follow those verbs, and dat clauses must.**

- Clauses with **dat** and indirect questions with **of**, **waarom** or **wie**: after the final verbs, not between the two verb parts.
- Other subordinate clauses, started by words like **omdat**, **toen** or **als**: usually after the final verbs, or at the very start of the sentence.
- Relative clauses with **die** or **dat**: right after their noun, or behind the final verbs.
- **Om te** clauses (in order to): usually after the final verbs. Inside them, the object comes before **te** plus the verb.
- Comparisons with **dan** or **als** (comparisons): usually after.
- Prepositional phrases: before or after. After is common with verbs that have a fixed preposition and with longer phrases.

Examples

Ik heb gisteren tegen mijn baas gezegd **dat ik vrijdag vrij wil**.	Yesterday I told my boss that I want Friday off.
Fatima heeft gevraagd **of de cursus ook online kan**.	Fatima asked whether the course can also be taken online.
We zijn thuisgebleven **omdat het zo hard regende**.	We stayed at home because it was raining so hard.
Sanne is naar de gemeente gegaan **om haar nieuwe paspoort op te halen**.	Sanne went to the town hall to collect her new passport.
Joris is dit jaar langer geworden **dan zijn vader**.	This year Joris has grown taller than his father.
De huren zijn in Utrecht net zo hard gestegen **als in Amsterdam**.	Rents in Utrecht have gone up just as fast as in Amsterdam.
Ik denk dat de vergadering langer heeft geduurd **dan gepland**.	I think the meeting went on longer than planned.
Bas heeft twintig minuten gewacht **op de bus naar het ziekenhuis**.	Bas waited twenty minutes for the bus to the hospital.
Priya heeft gisteren een buurvrouw ontmoet **die ook uit Chennai komt**.	Yesterday Priya met a neighbour who is also from Chennai.

Why it works this way

Think of the clause as a train. In a main clause, the conjugated verb (the one that matches the subject) opens the doors and the final verbs close them. Objects, **niet** and most adverbs have to be on board before the doors shut: **Ik heb de bus niet gehaald.** A whole clause is a small sentence with its own verb, so it travels in a second carriage coupled behind. Comparisons and many prepositional phrases may ride there too. This builds on the verb bracket. In a subordinate clause the conjugated verb

joins the final verbs, and the same rule applies: **dat de vergadering langer heeft geduurd dan gepland**.

The back carriage also keeps sentences easy to follow. Squeeze a clause inside and the verbs pile up, as in the wrong **Ik heb dat ik later kom gezegd**.

For prepositional phrases you often have a real choice. **Ik heb lang op de bus gewacht** and **Ik heb lang gewacht op de bus** are both correct; the second is very common in speech. Short phrases that form a unit with the verb stay inside: **Ze is naar huis gegaan**, **Hij is in slaap gevallen**. With comparisons, **Joris is langer dan zijn vader geworden** is possible, but most speakers put **dan zijn vader** at the end.

When an object seems to follow the final verbs, it belongs to the trailing clause: in **Ik heb geprobeerd de huisarts te bellen**, **de huisarts** belongs to **te bellen** and still comes before it. In relaxed speech you may also hear an afterthought after a pause: **Ik heb hem gezien, die nieuwe collega**. That is an add-on; the object **hem** is already inside the sentence.

English, Spanish and Arabic put the object after the verb, so **Ik heb gekocht een fiets** feels natural to many learners. In Dutch it is wrong. German works much like Dutch here, though Dutch moves prepositional phrases behind the verbs more freely.

Remember: if it has its own verb, or starts with **dan** or **als**, it may ride in the back carriage. A plain object or **niet** stays on board.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb gisteren gekocht een nieuwe fiets.**~~
SAY **Ik heb gisteren een nieuwe fiets gekocht.**
the object stays before the final verb

NOT ~~We hebben de factuur betaald niet.~~
SAY **We hebben de factuur niet betaald.**
niet stays before the final verb

NOT ~~Ze heeft dat ze later komt gezegd.~~
SAY **Ze heeft gezegd dat ze later komt.**
a **dat** clause goes after the final verbs

NOT ~~Ik bel de gemeente om te maken een afspraak.~~
SAY **Ik bel de gemeente om een afspraak te maken.**
inside an **om te** clause, the object comes before **te** plus verb

NOT ~~Hij is gegaan naar huis.~~
SAY **Hij is naar huis gegaan.**
a short fixed phrase like **naar huis** stays inside

Quick check

1. Fix the word order, keeping **Daan** at the start: **Daan heeft dat hij later komt gemaild.**
2. Which sentence is wrong? (a) **Carlos heeft de hele middag gepraat over de verbouwing.** (b) **De reparatie is duurder geworden dan de garage had gezegd.** (c) **Emma heeft gisteren gekocht een tweedehands fiets.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed heeft de huisarts gebeld niet.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Yara gaat naar de bibliotheek om te lenen een kookboek.**

Answers on page 792.

Use it today

Write a colleague or neighbour a short message in the perfect tense with three sentences: one with **gezegd dat** or **gevraagd of**, one with an **om te**

clause, and one with **gewacht op** or **nagedacht over**. Then check that every object sits before its final verb.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/after-the-final-verb

RULE 132 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Questions with a preposition

When a question is about a thing and needs a preposition (a small linking word like **met**, **op** or **over**), Dutch uses **waar** plus that preposition: **Waarover gaat het?** or, split in two, **Waar gaat het over?** When the question is about a person, you put the preposition before **wie**: **Met wie ga je?** You may hear **met wat** or **over wat** in informal speech, but **waar** plus a preposition is the usual form and the safe choice, especially in writing and exams.

The pattern

> **For things, use waar plus the preposition, joined or split. For people, use the preposition plus wie, together at the start of the question.**

- Joined: **waarover**, **waarop**, **waaraan**, **waarnaar**. This sounds slightly more formal and is common in writing.
- Split: **waar** goes first and the preposition moves to the end of the clause. If there are final verbs, it goes just before them, not after them: **Waar heb je naar gekeken?** (see what can come after the final verbs). This is the usual choice in speech.
- After **waar**, **met** becomes **mee** and **tot** becomes **toe**: **waarmee**, **Waar betaal je mee?**
- The verb decides the preposition: **kijken naar**, **wachten op**, **denken aan** (see verbs with a fixed preposition).
- For people, the pair does not split: **met wie**, **op wie**, **aan wie**, **van wie**.
- **Wat voor** (what kind of) can follow a preposition: **Met wat voor bus kom je?**

Examples

Waar kijk je **naar**?	What are you looking at?
Waarover gaat de brief van de gemeente?	What is the letter from the council about?
Waar heb je het **over**?	What are you talking about?
Waar heeft Mei zich **voor** aangemeld?	What has Mei signed up for?
Waarmee ga je naar je werk, met de fiets of met de trein?	How do you get to work, by bike or by train?
Met wie ga je zaterdag naar de verjaardag van Sanne?	Who are you going to Sanne's birthday with on Saturday?
Waar wacht je eigenlijk **op**?	What are you actually waiting for?
Op wie wacht je?	Who are you waiting for?
Van wie is die blauwe fiets bij de deur?	Whose is that blue bike by the door?
Ik begrijp niet **waar** de huisarts het **over** had.	I don't understand what the GP was talking about.

Why it works this way

Dutch usually avoids a preposition followed by a pronoun for a thing, such as **het**, **dat** or **wat**. Instead it uses a place word and attaches the preposition to it: **ermee** (with it), **daarmee** (with that) and, in questions, **waarmee** (with what). You may know the first two from er plus a preposition. So in these preposition questions, **waar** does not mean "where" but stands for "what": **Waar kijk je naar?** simply means "What are you looking at?" Without a preposition, as in **Waar woon je?**, it still means "where".

People work differently. **Met hem**, **met haar** and **met wie** are normal Dutch, so the preposition stays in front of **wie**. The contrast pairs show it: **Op wie wacht je?** expects a person (**Op Daan.**), while **Waar wacht je op?**

expects a thing (**Op de bus.**). **Met wie ga je?** asks about company, **Waarmee ga je?** about transport.

Why can **waar** travel? A question word wants the first position, while the preposition stays in its normal place near the end. One fun trap: as a question word, **waarom** means "why", but **Waar gaat het om?** means "What is it about?" If you speak German, **waarmee** is your **womit**; Dutch just splits it far more freely. You will hear **met wat** and **over wat** in informal speech, especially in Belgian Dutch, so they are not shocking. Careful speakers and writers in the Netherlands still prefer the **waar** form, so use that in emails, letters and exams.

Remember: things get **waar**, people get **wie**. Decide first whether the answer will be a thing or a person, and the rest of the question follows.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Waarover gaat de vergadering over?**~~
SAY **Waar gaat de vergadering over?**
use the preposition once: joined or split, not both

NOT ~~**Wat wacht je op?**~~
SAY **Waar wacht je op?**
English "what ... for" still needs **waar**

NOT ~~**Wie ga je naar het feest met?**~~
SAY **Met wie ga je naar het feest?**
with people, the preposition and **wie** stay together at the start

NOT ~~**Waarmet betaal je hier?**~~
SAY **Waarmee betaal je hier?**
met becomes **mee** after **waar**

NOT ~~Waar heb je gekeken naar?~~
SAY **Waar heb je naar gekeken?**
the preposition comes before the final verb

Quick check

1. Joris has earbuds in. Fill in the preposition: **Waar luister je ...?** Joris answers: **Naar een podcast over fietsen.**
2. Choose: Priya asks **(Met wie / Waarmee) ga je naar de verjaardag van Bas?** and Ahmed answers **Met mijn buurvrouw Yara.**
3. Fix the question word, keeping it as one word: **Waarmet ga je naar je werk, met de bus of met de fiets?**
4. Fatima finds a key in the hall and wants to know who owns it. Fill in the preposition: **... wie is deze sleutel?**

Answers on page 792.

Use it today

Today, ask someone two questions about things and one about a person, for example **Waar heb je vanavond zin in?** and **Met wie heb je vandaag geluncht?** Check that each question about a thing uses **waar** plus the right preposition, joined or split, and that a split preposition comes before any final verbs, as in **Waar heb je naar gekeken?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/preposition-questions

RULE 133 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

Zowel … als, niet alleen … maar ook

To say both … and, not only … but also, either … or and neither … nor, Dutch uses four word pairs: **zowel … als**, **niet alleen … maar ook**, **óf … óf** and the formal **noch … noch**. Their grammar name is paired conjunctions: linking words that come in twos. The first word tells your listener that a second option is coming, and the second word brings it in.

The pattern

> **Each pair puts one half in front of each option: zowel A als B, niet alleen A maar ook B, óf A óf B, noch A noch B. The two options are usually the same kind of sentence part, such as two nouns, two verbs or two clauses (groups of words with their own verb).**

- **zowel A als B**: both are true, with equal weight. The partner of **zowel** is **als**, not **en**.
- **niet alleen A maar ook B**: both are true, and B is the extra or the surprise. Between clauses, **maar** can drop out and **ook** can move into the second clause.
- **óf A óf B**: one of the two. The accents are usual in writing: they show the stress and keep it apart from plain **of** (or).
- **noch A noch B**: neither of the two. It sounds formal, so in conversation you will more often hear **geen tijd en ook geen zin** than **noch tijd noch zin**.
- A pair that links words or phrases does not change the word order. The whole pair counts as one sentence part, even at the start.
- As a subject, agreement depends on the pair. With **zowel … als** and two singular subjects, a plural verb is the safe choice, although the singular is also possible. With **óf … óf** and two singular subjects, you normally

use a singular verb: **Óf Fatima óf Ahmed komt morgen.** If both subjects are plural, the verb is plural too.

- **Niet alleen … maar ook** and **óf … óf** also link whole clauses. **Zowel … als** and **noch … noch** mostly link words and phrases.

Examples

Zowel Fatima **als** Ahmed werken bij de gemeente.	Both Fatima and Ahmed work for the municipality.
Mei heeft **zowel** gekookt **als** afgewassen.	Mei both cooked and did the dishes.
Priya spreekt **niet alleen** Nederlands, **maar ook** een beetje Fries.	Priya speaks not only Dutch, but also a bit of Frisian.
Daan komt **niet alleen** te laat, **maar** hij heeft **ook** zijn laptop thuis laten liggen.	Not only is Daan late, but he has also left his laptop at home.
Niet alleen is de huur verhoogd, **maar** de energierekening is **ook** flink gestegen.	Not only has the rent been raised, but the energy bill has also gone up a lot.
Het feestje is **óf** zaterdag **óf** zondag, dat hoor ik nog.	The party is either on Saturday or on Sunday, I'll find out which.
Óf je maakt online een afspraak, **óf** je belt de gemeente.	Either you make an appointment online, or you call the municipality.
De minister wilde het bericht **noch** bevestigen **noch** ontkennen.	The minister would neither confirm nor deny the report.
Ik heb **noch** de huisarts **noch** de apotheek kunnen bereiken.	I could reach neither the GP nor the pharmacy.

Why it works this way

Think of the first word as a signpost. When a Dutch listener hears **zowel**, they wait for **als**, just as **zo groot** makes them wait for **als** in **zo groot als** (as big as). The signpost also announces what kind of second option is coming: an equal partner, an extra, an alternative or another no.

Word order gets interesting when the pairs link clauses. If **niet alleen** on its own opens a clause, it fills the first position, so the verb comes next: **Niet alleen is de huur verhoogd**. English does something similar in "not only has the rent gone up", except that Dutch never needs an extra "do": **Niet alleen regent het** simply means "not only does it rain".

Óf is different. Like **en** and **maar**, it takes no position at all, so what follows is an ordinary main clause, usually starting with the subject: **Óf je maakt online een afspraak, óf je belt de gemeente.**

Finally, **noch** already contains the "not". If you speak Spanish or French, you may be tempted to add **niet**, the way you would add "no" or "ne". In Dutch that becomes a double negative.

Remember: the first word is a promise. After **zowel** you owe an **als**, after **óf** or **noch** you owe a second one, and after **niet alleen** you owe a second part, usually with **ook**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik spreek beide Engels en Nederlands.**~~
SAY **Ik spreek zowel Engels als Nederlands.**
beide cannot link two options; **beide talen** is fine

NOT ~~**Je kunt zowel in de winkel en online bestellen.**~~
SAY **Je kunt zowel in de winkel als online bestellen.**
English "and" becomes **als** after **zowel**

NOT ~~**Niet alleen het is koud, het waait ook hard.**~~
SAY **Niet alleen is het koud, het waait ook hard.**
the verb comes straight after **niet alleen**

NOT ~~**Ik heb niet noch tijd noch zin.**~~
SAY **Ik heb noch tijd noch zin.**
noch already means not

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Je kunt zowel met je pinpas … met je telefoon betalen.**
2. Which pair fits, **zowel** and **als**, **óf** and **óf**, or **noch** and **noch**? **Mei twijfelt tussen twee plekken voor haar verjaardag. Het wordt … bij haar thuis … in het café om de hoek.**
3. Fix the word order without moving **niet alleen**: **Niet alleen het sneeuwt, het is ook glad op de fietspaden.**
4. Choose **zowel**, **niet alleen** or **noch**: **De nieuwe regels gelden … voor huurders, maar ook voor huiseigenaren.**

Answers on page 792.

Use it today

Send a friend or colleague a Dutch message today that offers a choice, such as **Zullen we óf vrijdag óf zaterdag afspreken?**, and add one sentence about your week with **niet alleen … maar ook**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/paired-conjunctions

RULE 134 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Daarom, toch, dan, daarna: linking words that invert

Daarom, **toch**, **dan** and **daarna** link two ideas, but they are adverbs (words that say when, why or how), not conjunctions (pure joining words like **en** and **want**). So when one of them starts a main clause, it takes the first position and the verb comes straight after it: **Daarom blijf ik thuis.** After **want** you keep the normal order: **want ik ben ziek**.

The pattern

> **When daarom, toch, dan or daarna opens a main clause, it fills position one. The finite verb (the verb that changes with the subject) comes next, and the subject follows it: this swap is called inversion.**

- **daarom**: that is why, for that reason
- **toch**: still, even so, yet
- **dan**: then, next, or in that case
- **daarna**: after that, afterwards
- Order: linking word, verb, subject, rest: **Daarna gingen we eten.**
- Put the word after the verb and the subject stays in front: **Ik blijf daarom thuis.**
- **want** (because) does not cause inversion: **want ik ben ziek**.
- **dus** (so) allows both orders: **dus ik blijf thuis** and **dus blijf ik thuis** are both correct.

Examples

Het regent al de hele dag. **Daarom blijf ik** thuis.	It has been raining all day. That's why I'm staying at home.
Eerst vergaderden Lotte en Bas. **Daarna gingen ze** samen lunchen.	First Lotte and Bas had a meeting. After that they went for lunch together.
De trein had vertraging. **Toch was Daan** op tijd op zijn werk.	The train was delayed. Even so, Daan got to work on time.
Je stapt uit bij de bibliotheek, **dan loop je** nog twee minuten rechtdoor.	You get off at the library, then you walk straight on for two more minutes.
Het was koud, **maar toch gingen Yara en Carlos** naar het strand.	It was cold, but Yara and Carlos still went to the beach.
Ahmed was ziek. Hij **is daarom** niet naar de gemeente gegaan.	Ahmed was ill. That's why he didn't go to the town hall.
Priya neemt de trein, **want haar fiets heeft** een lekke band.	Priya is taking the train, because her bike has a flat tyre.
Emma is jarig, **dus ik koop** een taart.	It's Emma's birthday, so I'm buying a cake.
Emma is jarig, **dus koop ik** een taart.	It's Emma's birthday, so I'm buying a cake.

Why it works this way

Each of these words is a sentence part in disguise. **Daarom** means **om die reden** (for that reason), **daarna** means **na dat moment** (after that moment), **toch** means roughly **ondanks alles** (despite everything), and **dan** means **daarna** or **in dat geval**. In a Dutch statement, one sentence part comes before the finite verb (see verb second). If that part is not the subject, the subject moves behind the verb, just as in **Morgen werk ik**

thuis. So **Om die reden blijf ik thuis** and **Daarom blijf ik thuis** have exactly the same order.

Want is a different kind of word. You cannot swap it for a phrase like **om die reden**: it is pure glue, like **en**, **maar** and **of**. Glue words stand outside the clause, in a kind of position zero, so the clause after them starts fresh. Usually it starts with the subject (**want ik ben ziek**), but another part can open it and cause inversion in the normal way: **want morgen heb ik geen tijd**. That is also why **maar toch gingen we** is right: **maar** is the glue, **toch** fills position one.

Dus can be either kind of word, so the last two examples are both standard Dutch. The order without inversion is very common in speech, and the inverted one tends to sound a little more careful. For the difference between **want** and **omdat**, see Omdat or want.

Remember: a Dutch statement has one seat in front of the verb. **Daarom**, **toch**, **dan** and **daarna** sit in that seat, so the subject has to sit behind the verb. **Want** only holds the door open and never takes the seat, and **dus** can do either.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Daarna we gingen eten.**~~
SAY **Daarna gingen we eten.**
English says "after that we went", Dutch needs the verb in second place

NOT ~~**Eerst bel ik de huisarts, dan ik ga naar de apotheek.**~~
SAY **Eerst bel ik de huisarts, dan ga ik naar de apotheek.**
dan fills position one, so the verb follows

NOT ~~**Ik was moe, maar toch ik ging mee.**~~
SAY **Ik was moe, maar toch ging ik mee.**
maar is glue, **toch** takes position one

NOT ~~**Ik neem de trein, want is mijn fiets kapot.**~~
SAY **Ik neem de trein, want mijn fiets is kapot.**
want does not cause inversion

NOT ~~**Ik ben ziek, daarom ik thuis blijf.**~~
SAY **Ik ben ziek, daarom blijf ik thuis.**
daarom is not **omdat**, so the verb does not go to the end

Quick check

1. Put **ik** and **neem** in the right order: **Het regent hard. Daarom … de bus.**
2. Choose: **Ik blijf vandaag thuis, want (ik ben / ben ik) ziek.**
3. Fix the sentence, keeping **daarna** directly after **en**: **Eerst doet Joris boodschappen en daarna hij kookt voor Mei.**
4. Which sentence is wrong? (a) **Het is glad, dus ik ga lopen.** (b) **Het is glad, dus ga ik lopen.** (c) **Het is glad, daarom ik ga lopen.**

Answers on page 792.

Use it today

Tonight, tell someone (or your phone) in three Dutch sentences how your day went, putting **daarna**, **daarom** and **toch** once each at the start of a main clause, for example **Daarna heb ik gekookt.** Then check that the finite verb comes straight after each linking word.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/linking-adverbs

RULE 135 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

Hoe meer, hoe beter

To say "the more ..., the better ..." in Dutch, start both halves with **hoe** plus a comparative and put the verb at the end of each half: **Hoe meer je oefent, hoe beter je wordt.** In slightly more formal Dutch, the second half can start with **des te**, and then the verb comes straight after the comparative: **Hoe meer je oefent, des te beter word je.**

You need this whenever two things move together: the later you book, the more you pay; the harder the headwind, the slower you get home. It turns up in advice from your GP, in the news and in emails from **de gemeente**.

The pattern

> **Each half starts with hoe plus a comparative (the -er form, like groter, bigger) and sends its verb to the end. If the second half starts with des te instead, its verb comes right after the comparative.**

- First half: **hoe** + comparative + subject + rest + verb: **hoe later je boekt**
- Second half with **hoe**: the same order: **hoe duurder het wordt**
- Second half with **des te**: comparative, verb, subject: **des te duurder wordt het**
- A noun that belongs to the comparative stays glued to it: **hoe meer mensen**, **hoe minder suiker**
- A comma separates the two halves.
- In short sayings the verbs often disappear: **hoe groter, hoe beter**

If the -er forms still feel shaky, revisit comparatives and goed, beter, best.

Examples

Hoe meer je **oefent**, **hoe beter** je **wordt**.	The more you practise, the better you get.
Hoe later je **boekt**, **hoe duurder** de vlucht meestal **wordt**.	The later you book, the more expensive the flight usually gets.
Hoe harder het **waait**, **hoe langzamer** ik naar huis **fiets**.	The harder the wind blows, the slower I cycle home.
Hoe minder suiker Daan **eet**, **hoe beter** hij **slaapt**.	The less sugar Daan eats, the better he sleeps.
Hoe meer mensen er **komen**, **hoe gezelliger** het **wordt**.	The more people come, the more fun it gets.
Hoe langer Priya in Utrecht **woont**, **des te beter begrijpt** ze de Nederlandse humor.	The longer Priya lives in Utrecht, the better she understands Dutch humour.
Hoe sneller u het formulier **terugstuurt**, **des te eerder kunnen** wij uw aanvraag behandelen.	The sooner you return the form, the sooner we can process your application.
Wanneer wil je het rapport hebben? **Hoe eerder, hoe beter.**	When do you want the report? The sooner, the better.
Neem je zus gerust mee: **hoe meer zielen, hoe meer vreugd**!	Feel free to bring your sister: the more the merrier!

Why it works this way

The first half is a subordinate clause: a side clause that leans on the other half and cannot stand alone. **Hoe** opens it the way **omdat** or **als** would, so the verb goes to the end, just as in **Weet jij hoe laat de trein vertrekt?** (see subordinate clauses). The second **hoe** simply mirrors the first: same word, same order.

Des te behaves like **daarom** from the previous lesson. **Des te** plus its comparative fills the first place of a main clause, so the verb follows at once and the subject comes after it: **des te beter word je** is built exactly like **daarom word je beter**. The first half keeps its verb at the end either way.

Hoe ... hoe is the everyday choice. **Des te** sounds a little more formal and is common in news, reports and work emails. On its own, **Des te beter!** means "all the better". If you speak German, the word order is the same as with "je ... desto".

Hoe eerder, hoe beter (the sooner, the better) is a fixed phrase that works as a complete reply. Likewise, **hoe meer zielen, hoe meer vreugd** is the Dutch "the more the merrier"; keep **vreugd** without a final -e in this saying.

Remember: hoe sends the verb to the back of the clause, **des te** pulls it forward, right behind the comparative.

Watch out

NOT ~~De meer je oefent, de beter je wordt.~~
SAY **Hoe meer je oefent, hoe beter je wordt.**
English "the" becomes **hoe** here

NOT ~~Hoe meer oefen je, hoe beter je wordt.~~
SAY **Hoe meer je oefent, hoe beter je wordt.**
the first half is a subordinate clause, so the verb goes to the end

NOT ~~Hoe meer je oefent, des te beter je wordt.~~
SAY **Hoe meer je oefent, des te beter word je.**
after **des te** plus comparative, the verb comes next

NOT ~~Hoe later je boekt, hoe meer duur de vlucht wordt.~~
SAY **Hoe later je boekt, hoe duurder de vlucht wordt.**
duur simply takes -er

Quick check

1. Fill in the comparative of **goed**: **Hoe vaker je fietst, hoe … je conditie wordt.**
2. Fix the sentence: **Hoe langer duurt de vergadering, hoe minder ik onthoud.**
3. Choose: **Hoe drukker het op de snelweg is, des te later (Joris thuiskomt / komt Joris thuis).**
4. Fill in **hoe** or **des te**: **Hoe meer Yara verdient, … meer ze uitgeeft.**

Answers on page 793.

Use it today

Next time you cycle against the wind or queue at the supermarket, make up two sentences about it: one with **hoe … hoe** and one with **des te**, such as **Hoe harder het regent, hoe natter ik word**. And when you ask a colleague for something, add **hoe eerder, hoe beter**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/the-more-the-better

RULE 136 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

Hoewel, ook al, zelfs als: although and even if

To say "although", use **hoewel** or its formal twin **ofschoon**: both send the verb to the end, and when they open the sentence, the next part starts with a verb (**Hoewel het regende, gingen we fietsen.**). **Ook al** ("even though") is followed directly by the verb, and **zelfs als** ("even if") works exactly like **als**.

The pattern

Hoewel, ofschoon and zelfs als start a subordinate clause (a part of the sentence that cannot stand on its own), so the verbs go to the end. Ook al is the odd one out: the conjugated verb (the one that matches the subject) comes straight after it.

- **hoewel** + subject + verb at the end: **hoewel het regende**. If this clause comes first, the main clause (the part that could stand alone) starts with its verb: **Hoewel het regende, gingen we fietsen.**
- **ofschoon** works the same way but is formal: think letters from the **gemeente** and news reports.
- **ook al** + verb + subject: **ook al regent het**. If this clause comes first, the main clause can keep its normal order: **Ook al regent het, we gaan fietsen.** Inversion (verb before subject) is also correct: **Ook al regent het, gaan we fietsen.**
- **zelfs als** + subject + verb at the end, just like **als**: **Zelfs als het regent, gaan we fietsen. Ook als** means the same and behaves the same.
- If the main clause comes first, nothing changes in it: **We gaan fietsen, hoewel het regent.**

What about meaning? **Hoewel** admits a fact and says it changes nothing. **Ook al** does the same with a bit more force, and it can also be about something imagined: **Ook al zou je me betalen, ik doe het niet. Zelfs als** is for a possibility ("even if") or for something that happens now and then ("even when").

Examples

Daan ging naar zijn werk, **hoewel** hij koorts **had**.	Daan went to work, although he had a fever.
Hoewel Sanne al tien jaar in Utrecht **woont**, **spreekt ze** nog steeds Engels met haar buren.	Although Sanne has lived in Utrecht for ten years, she still speaks English with her neighbours.
Ofschoon de gemeente de klacht in mei **heeft ontvangen**, **is er** nog niets gebeurd.	Although the municipality received the complaint in May, nothing has happened yet.
Ook al regent het, **we gaan** gewoon fietsen.	Even though it's raining, we're going cycling anyway.
Ook al heeft de trein vertraging, **Fatima is** nog op tijd voor haar afspraak.	Even though the train is delayed, Fatima is still on time for her appointment.
Ik ga niet naar dat feest, **ook al vraagt** Joris het nog zo lief.	I'm not going to that party, however nicely Joris asks.
Zelfs als het morgen **sneeuwt**, **gaat** de markt gewoon door.	Even if it snows tomorrow, the market will go ahead as usual.
Priya neemt altijd een paraplu mee, **zelfs als** de zon **schijnt**.	Priya always takes an umbrella, even when the sun is shining.

Why it works this way

A Dutch main clause has its conjugated verb in second place (see Verb second). A **hoewel** or **zelfs als** clause is one big building block. When it

opens the sentence, it fills place one, so the verb of the main clause follows right after the comma, just as it does after **omdat** or **als** (see When the subordinate clause comes first).

An **ook al** clause is built differently. It starts with its verb, like a yes or no question, and it hangs loosely in front of the sentence, more like a remark than a building block. It does not have to take place one, so the main clause can start fresh with its subject. Count it as place one anyway and you get the inverted version, which is also fine.

Remember: hoewel walks in and takes the first seat, so the verb sits down right next to it. **Ook al** stays on the doorstep, so the main clause can start from the beginning.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Hoewel het regende, we gingen fietsen.**~~
SAY **Hoewel het regende, gingen we fietsen.**
English order; after a **hoewel** clause, the main clause starts with its verb

NOT ~~**Hoewel ik ben moe, ga ik mee.**~~
SAY **Hoewel ik moe ben, ga ik mee.**
hoewel sends the verb to the end

NOT ~~**Ook al het regent, we gaan fietsen.**~~
SAY **Ook al regent het, we gaan fietsen.**
the verb comes straight after **ook al**

NOT ~~**Hoewel het duur was, maar we kochten het.**~~
SAY **Hoewel het duur was, kochten we het toch.**
hoewel already carries the contrast, so no **maar**; a typical slip for Arabic speakers

Quick check

1. Choose: **Hoewel Ahmed al twee keer had gebeld, … niet.** (**de gemeente reageerde** or **reageerde de gemeente**)
2. Choose: **Ook al … te laat, Emma haalt haar trein nog.** (**de bus is** or **is de bus**)
3. Fill in the right form of **doorwerken**: **Zelfs als Carlos de hele nacht …, krijgt hij het rapport niet af.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Hoewel regent het, gaat de wedstrijd gewoon door.**

Answers on page 793.

Use it today

Next time something annoying does not stop you (a delayed train, rain on your way to work, a long queue at the supermarket), say it in Dutch twice: once with **hoewel** and once with **ook al**. Check that the verb is at the end after **hoewel** and right behind **ook al**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/although

RULE 137 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

Zodat, opdat, zo ... dat

Use **zodat** to say "so that": it gives the purpose of an action or its result, while **opdat** is a formal word for purpose only. **Zo** plus an adjective plus **dat** means "so ... that" (**zo moe dat**). After **zodat**, **opdat** and that **dat**, the verb goes to the end of its clause.

The pattern

> **Zodat, opdat and dat start a subordinate clause (a part of the sentence that cannot stand on its own), so its verbs go to the end. In zo ... dat, the zo and the adjective or adverb belong to the main clause: Ik was zo moe | dat ik meteen sliep.**

- **zodat**: "so that". Purpose (what you want to happen) or result (what actually happened).
- **opdat**: "so that, in order that". Purpose only, formal.
- **zo** + adjective or adverb + **dat**: "so ... that". Something is strong enough to have a consequence.
- With a singular count noun, use **zo'n** + noun + **dat**: **zo'n lange rij dat**. With plural nouns, use **zulke** (**zulke lange rijen dat**); for quantity, use **zoveel** (**zoveel mensen dat**, **zoveel water dat**). See Zo'n, zulk and zulke.
- Several verbs gather at the end together: **zodat iedereen het kan zien**. See The order of verbs at the end.

Examples

Ik zet twee wekkers, **zodat ik mijn trein niet mis**.	I set two alarms so that I don't miss my train.

Sanne spreekt langzaam, **zodat de nieuwe collega's alles kunnen volgen**.	Sanne speaks slowly so that the new colleagues can follow everything.
De trein had twintig minuten vertraging, **zodat Priya te laat bij de huisarts kwam**.	The train was twenty minutes late, so Priya was late for the GP.
Het was erg glad op straat, **zodat veel mensen de fiets lieten staan**.	The streets were very slippery, so lots of people left their bikes at home.
De gemeente zet de regels online, **opdat iedere inwoner ze kan nalezen**.	The municipality puts the rules online so that every resident can read them.
Ik was gisteravond **zo moe dat** ik om negen uur al sliep.	Last night I was so tired that I was asleep by nine.
De soep was **zo heet dat** Yara tien minuten moest wachten.	The soup was so hot that Yara had to wait ten minutes.
Joris fietst **zo hard dat** de rest van de groep achterblijft.	Joris cycles so fast that the rest of the group falls behind.
Er stond **zo'n lange rij** bij de kassa **dat** Ahmed zonder boodschappen weer vertrok.	There was such a long queue at the checkout that Ahmed left again without any shopping.

Why it works this way

English already makes this split: "so that" for a goal, "so tired that" for degree. Dutch follows it closely, with two twists. The conjunction **zodat** is written as one word, while in **zo moe dat** the adjective keeps **zo** and **dat** apart. And just like **omdat** and **hoewel**, the words **zodat**, **opdat** and **dat** each open a subordinate clause, so the verb waits at the end (see Subordinate clauses).

Think of **zo** as a volume knob: **moe** is tired, **zo moe** is tired turned all the way up, and the **dat** clause tells you what that volume caused.

You will also see **zo** and **dat** side by side as two separate words. Then **zo** belongs to the main clause and is not part of a conjunction: **Het is nu eenmaal zo dat veel winkels om zes uur sluiten** ("The fact is that many shops close at six"). So two words next to each other are not automatically **zodat**; only the conjunction for "so that" is glued.

Context decides whether **zodat** means purpose or result. Purpose clauses often contain **kan** or **kunnen** (**zodat iedereen het kan zien**), while result clauses usually report what really happened (**zodat ik de bus miste**). German speakers: Dutch **zodat** does the work of both sodass and damit.

With the same subject in both parts, **om … te** is often shorter: **Ik vertrek vroeg om op tijd te zijn.** When the subject changes, you need a full clause: **Ik vertrek vroeg, zodat de kinderen op tijd op school zijn.** More in Om te: in order to.

Opdat sounds like an official letter, and that is where you meet it: letters from the **gemeente**, policy texts, speeches. In conversation, people say **zodat**. If your language uses a special verb form after "so that", as Spanish and French do, relax: Dutch uses the normal present or past.

Remember: "so that" is one glued word, **zodat**. When **zo** turns up an adjective or adverb, that word stands between **zo** and **dat**: **zo moe dat**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De trein had vertraging, zodat ik kwam te laat.**~~
SAY **De trein had vertraging, zodat ik te laat kwam.**
the verb goes to the end after **zodat**

NOT ~~**Ik was zo moe zodat ik meteen sliep.**~~
SAY **Ik was zo moe dat ik meteen sliep.**
after **zo** plus an adjective, use plain **dat**

NOT ~~**Ik leg het nog een keer uit om jij het te begrijpen.**~~
SAY **Ik leg het nog een keer uit, zodat jij het begrijpt.**
om … te cannot have its own subject

NOT ~~**Het regende, zo ik bleef thuis.**~~
SAY **Het regende, zodat ik thuisbleef.**
English "so" here is **zodat** or **dus**, not **zo**

NOT ~~**Er was een storing, opdat alle treinen stilstonden.**~~
SAY **Er was een storing, zodat alle treinen stilstonden.**
opdat only expresses purpose, never a result

Quick check

1. Choose **zodat** or **dat**: **Ik was zo zenuwachtig voor het examen … ik die nacht slecht sliep.**
2. Fix the sentence: **Neem een paraplu mee, zodat je wordt niet nat.**
3. Choose **zodat** or **opdat**: **Er was een storing in het systeem, … niemand kon inloggen.**
4. Choose **zodat** or **om**: **Ik bel de huisarts morgen vroeg, … ik nog een afspraak kan krijgen.**

Answers on page 793.

Use it today

Write three sentences about your week: one with **zodat** for something you did on purpose, one with **zodat** for something that went wrong, and one with **zo** plus an adjective plus **dat** about the weather. Read them aloud on your way to work and check that every verb after **zodat** or **dat** sits at the end.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/so-that

RULE 138 · LEVEL B1 · WORD ORDER

Voordat, nadat, terwijl, sinds, totdat, zodra

Voordat, **nadat**, **terwijl**, **sinds**, **totdat** and **zodra** link two events in time: before, after, while, since, until and as soon as. Each one starts a subordinate clause (a side sentence that cannot stand on its own), so its verb moves to the end: **Ik bel je zodra ik thuis ben.** When that clause comes first, the main clause (the part that could stand alone) starts with its verb: **Zodra ik thuis ben, bel ik je.**

The pattern

> **Voordat, nadat, terwijl, sinds, totdat (or tot) and zodra open a subordinate clause, so the verb of that clause goes to the end.**

- **voordat** (before), **nadat** (after), **terwijl** (while, or whereas), **sinds** (since), **totdat** or **tot** (until), **zodra** (as soon as)
- Main clause first: **We blijven binnen tot het droog is.**
- Time clause first, main verb next: **Nadat we hadden gegeten, gingen we wandelen.** (When the subordinate clause comes first)
- With two verbs, both go to the end: **nadat ik had gegeten** or **nadat ik gegeten had**.
- A separable verb such as **terugbellen** joins up again: **zodra je terugbelt**.

Examples

Ik drink altijd koffie **voordat** ik op de fiets **stap**.	I always have coffee before I get on my bike.
Nadat Daan de rekening **had betaald**, gingen we naar huis.	After Daan had paid the bill, we went home.

Nadat je **hebt betaald**, krijg je een bevestiging per mail.	After you have paid, you get a confirmation by email.
Terwijl we op de trein **wachtten**, begon het te regenen.	While we were waiting for the train, it started to rain.
Sanne neemt elke dag de trein, **terwijl** Ahmed altijd **fietst**.	Sanne takes the train every day, whereas Ahmed always cycles.
Sinds we een hond **hebben**, wandelen we elke dag.	Since we've had a dog, we've been going for a walk every day.
We blijven binnen **totdat** het niet meer **regent**.	We're staying inside until it stops raining.
Zodra de huisarts **terugbelt**, laat ik het je weten.	As soon as the GP calls back, I'll let you know.

Why it works this way

Picture the time word as opening a box around one event. Everything about that event goes inside, and the verb closes the lid. When the box comes first, it fills the first place in the sentence, so the main verb follows straight after it.

Each word also has tense habits. **Nadat** looks back at a finished action, so it usually comes with a form of **hebben** or **zijn**: **had betaald** (had paid) in a story about the past, **hebt betaald** (have paid) about now or in general (The past perfect). After **zodra** and **totdat**, the present usually covers the future too.

Sinds marks the starting point of a situation. When that situation is still going on, Dutch usually uses the present where English uses the present perfect: **Sinds we een hond hebben, wandelen we elke dag.** The **sinds** clause can also name a single event in the past: **Sinds ik vorig jaar ben verhuisd, fiets ik naar mijn werk.** (Since I moved last year, I've been cycling to work.)

In standard Dutch, **sinds** is about time only. When English "since" means because, Dutch uses **omdat** (Omdat or want).

In everyday Dutch, **voor** often replaces **voordat**, and **tot** is just as correct as **totdat**. **Nadat** has no such shortcut: **na** alone cannot open a clause, so keep it for phrases like **na het eten** (after dinner).

Remember: the time word opens the box, and the verb closes it.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Voordat ik ga naar huis, doe ik boodschappen.**~~
SAY **Voordat ik naar huis ga, doe ik boodschappen.**
the verb goes to the end of the time clause

NOT ~~**Zodra de trein vertrekt, ik bel je.**~~
SAY **Zodra de trein vertrekt, bel ik je.**
the main clause starts with its verb

NOT ~~**Na ik de mail had gelezen, belde ik de klant.**~~
SAY **Nadat ik de mail had gelezen, belde ik de klant.**
na alone cannot open a clause

NOT ~~**Terwijl koken luister ik naar de radio.**~~
SAY **Terwijl ik kook, luister ik naar de radio.**
after **terwijl** you need a subject and a verb; without them, say **tijdens het koken**

NOT ~~**Sinds het morgen een feestdag is, heb ik vrij.**~~
SAY **Omdat het morgen een feestdag is, heb ik vrij.**
sinds is about time, not reasons

Quick check

1. Fix the sentence: **Ik eet altijd een boterham voordat ik ga naar de sportschool.**
2. Fix the sentence: **Zodra het droog is, wij gaan fietsen.**
3. Choose **sinds** or **totdat**: **Ik woon in Utrecht … ik vorig jaar een nieuwe baan kreeg.**
4. Choose **terwijl** or **zodra**: **Lotte drinkt alleen thee, … Carlos vijf koppen koffie per dag drinkt.**

Answers on page 794.

Use it today

Tonight, write three sentences about your day with **voordat**, **nadat** and **zodra**, for example **Nadat ik had gegeten, belde ik mijn zus.** Read them out loud and check that the verbs of each time clause stand at the end.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/time-conjunctions

RULE 139 · LEVEL B2 · WORD ORDER

Reporting what someone said

To report a statement in Dutch, link it with **dat** and move the verb to the end: **Hij zei dat hij moe was.** To report a question, use **of** for a yes or no question and keep the question word for the others: **Ze vroeg of ik kwam** and **Ze vroeg waar ik woonde**. Then retell it from where you stand now: pronouns (words like **ik** and **hij**), time words and often the tense change with you.

The pattern

A reported statement starts with dat, a reported question with of or a question word. After that word, the subject and verb are not swapped and the verbs go to the end, as in any subordinate clause (a sentence inside a sentence).

- Statements: **zeggen**, **vertellen**, **schrijven** or **laten weten** plus **dat**: **Sanne zei dat de trein vertraging had.**
- Yes or no questions: **vragen** or **willen weten** plus **of**: **Hij vroeg of ik koffie wilde.**
- Other questions: keep **wie**, **wat**, **waar**, **wanneer**, **hoe** or **waarom**: **Ze vroeg waarom ik te laat was.**
- English often drops that. Dutch keeps **dat**.
- Pronouns and time words shift to your point of view: **ik** becomes **hij** or **zij**, **morgen** may become **de volgende dag**.
- The tense often moves one step back: **ben** becomes **was**, **heb gedaan** becomes **had gedaan**, **zal** becomes **zou**.

Examples

Daan zei **dat hij moe was**.	Daan said he was tired.

Fatima schreef **dat ze vrijdag vrij is**.	Fatima wrote that she is off on Friday.
Mijn buurvrouw vroeg **of ik haar pakketje wilde aannemen**.	My neighbour asked if I would take in her parcel.
De conducteur vroeg **waar ik was ingestapt**.	The conductor asked where I had got on.
De huisarts vroeg **hoe lang ik al last had van mijn knie**.	The GP asked how long I had been having trouble with my knee.
Ahmed zei dat hij **de volgende dag zou bellen**.	Ahmed said he would call the next day.
Lotte vertelde **dat ze haar rijbewijs had gehaald**.	Lotte told us she had passed her driving test.
De gemeente liet weten **dat de aanvraag nog in behandeling is**.	The municipality let us know that the application is still being processed.
Bas vroeg **wie er zaterdag voor de taart zorgt**.	Bas asked who is taking care of the cake on Saturday.

Why it works this way

Think of yourself as a reporter. The other person's words become a piece of information inside your own sentence, and once they are inside, they follow the rules of any subordinate clause. A reported question is no longer a real question, so it loses its question order, just like in indirect questions such as **Weet jij of de winkel open is?**

Everything that points at a person, a place or a moment is recalculated from your chair:

- **"Ik ben ziek," zei Fatima.** becomes **Fatima zei dat ze ziek was.**
- **"Woon je hier al lang?" vroeg Carlos.** becomes, told later at work, **Carlos vroeg of ik daar al lang woonde.**
- **"Wat heb je gisteren gedaan?" vroeg Emma.** becomes **Emma vroeg wat ik de dag ervoor had gedaan.**

The usual time swaps are **vandaag** to **die dag**, **morgen** to **de volgende dag**, **gisteren** to **de dag ervoor** and **nu** to **toen**. Change a time word whenever it would now point to a different moment than the speaker meant. If Joris asked you this morning, **Joris vroeg of ik morgen kom** is exactly right, because his **morgen** is still your **morgen**. If he asked yesterday, his **morgen** is today: **Joris vroeg gisteren of ik vandaag kom.**

The tense follows the same logic, loosely. One step back is the normal choice when you retell a past situation. When something is still true or still ahead, speakers often keep the present: **Mei zei dat ze in Utrecht woont** tells you she lives there now. **Mei zei dat ze in Utrecht woonde** is also correct, but leaves open whether she still does. For **zal** becoming **zou**, see zou and zouden.

English if and Spanish si cover both conditions and reported questions. Dutch splits that job: **als** for conditions, **of** for reported questions.

Remember: report from your own chair. Ask who **ik** is now, where **hier** is now and which day **morgen** is now, then park the verbs at the end of the clause that **dat**, **of** or the question word opens.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Daan zei dat hij was moe.**~~
SAY **Daan zei dat hij moe was.**
after **dat**, the verb goes to the end

NOT ~~**Mei vroeg als ik meeging.**~~
SAY **Mei vroeg of ik meeging.**
a reported yes or no question uses **of**; **als** is the if of conditions

NOT ~~**De conducteur vroeg waar ging ik naartoe.**~~
SAY **De conducteur vroeg waar ik naartoe ging.**
no question order inside a reported question

NOT ~~**Lotte zei dat ze komt vanavond langs.**~~

SAY **Lotte zei dat ze vanavond langskomt.**

a separable verb like **langskomen** joins up again at the end

Quick check

1. Sanne asked you: **"Heb je zaterdag tijd?"** Fill in **of**, **als** or **dat**: **Sanne vroeg … ik zaterdag tijd had.**
2. Fix the word order: **Ahmed vroeg hoe laat begon de vergadering.**
3. Bas told you: **"Ik ben mijn sleutels kwijt."** Choose **mijn**, **zijn** or **jouw**: **Bas zei dat hij … sleutels kwijt was.**
4. On Monday, Priya said: **"Ik werk morgen thuis."** It is now Thursday. Choose **morgen**, **de volgende dag** or **vandaag**: **Priya zei dat ze … thuis werkte.**

Answers on page 794.

Use it today

This evening, retell one conversation from your day in Dutch, in a message or out loud: one thing someone said with **dat** and one thing someone asked with **of** or a question word. For example: **Mijn collega vroeg of ik morgen op kantoor ben.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/reported-speech

RULE 140 · LEVEL C1 · WORD ORDER

Leaving words out in spoken Dutch

In relaxed spoken Dutch you can leave out a first **dat** or **het** when everyone knows what it refers to: **Dat weet ik niet** becomes **Weet ik niet**, and **Dat kan wel** becomes **Kan wel**. Short answers repeat the verb of the question: **Heb je het gezien? Ja, heb ik.** Use this in conversation and chats, not in formal writing.

The pattern

> **In casual Dutch the first slot of a main clause (the place before the verb) can stay empty when it would hold a known, unstressed pronoun, usually dat or het.**

- **Dat weet ik niet** becomes **Weet ik niet**; **Het gaat wel** becomes **Gaat wel**.
- Short answers repeat the verb, often an auxiliary (a helping verb like **hebben** or **kunnen**): **Kun je zaterdag? Ja, kan ik.**
- Many fixed replies work this way: **Klopt**, **Geeft niet**, **Maakt niet uit**, **Ligt eraan**.
- In text messages a first **ik** often goes too: **Ben er over tien minuten.**

Examples

Hoe laat sluit het gemeentehuis? **Weet ik niet**, kijk even op de website.	What time does the town hall close? No idea, just check the website.
Kunnen we de vergadering verschuiven? **Kan wel**, maar dan wordt het krap.	Can we move the meeting? That's possible, but it'll be tight.

Wie belt de verhuurder over de lekkage? **Doe ik morgen**, vandaag lukt het niet meer.	Who's calling the landlord about the leak? I'll do it tomorrow, today won't work.
Heb je de mail van Joris gelezen? Ja, **heb ik**, en ik snap er niks van.	Have you read Joris's email? Yes, I have, and it makes no sense to me.
Ga je mee naar de verjaardag van Mei? **Ligt eraan**: als het blijft gieten, blijf ik thuis.	Are you coming to Mei's birthday? Depends: if it keeps pouring, I'm staying home.
Daan zegt dat de nieuwe website vrijdag af is. **Zal wel.**	Daan says the new website will be done on Friday. Yeah, right.
Hoe gaat het met je knie? **Gaat wel**, alleen fietsen doet nog pijn.	How's your knee? Not too bad, only cycling still hurts.

Why it works this way

Dutch main clauses have one slot before the verb, which comes second (see verb second). In conversation that slot often holds **dat**, linking back to what was just said. When the link is obvious, speakers leave it out.

The verb keeps its place. If the dropped word is an object, the subject still follows the verb: in **Weet ik niet**, the missing **dat** is what you don't know. If the dropped word is the subject, as in **Gaat wel**, there is no subject after the verb, but other words can still follow it, like **wel** here or **niet uit** in **Maakt niet uit**.

English also leaves out understood words ("Sounds good", "Doesn't matter"), but in different patterns. German speakers know "Weiß ich nicht". Spanish and Arabic drop subject pronouns freely; Dutch only empties the first slot.

A stressed pronoun stays, as in **Dát weet ik niet, maar ik weet wel wie het weet.** And since **Kan wel** starts with a verb like a yes or no question, context and a falling melody show it is a statement. Use these forms with

friends, neighbours and colleagues; in emails to the gemeente or exam texts, write the full sentence (see formal and informal Dutch).

Remember: the first slot is a reserved seat. When everyone knows who would sit there, you can leave it empty, but the verb stays in seat two.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Heb je het gezien? Ja, ik heb.**~~
SAY **Heb je het gezien? Ja, heb ik.**
a bare **ik heb** is not a Dutch answer; the verb comes before **ik**

NOT ~~**Ik doe morgen.**~~
SAY **Doe ik morgen.**
doen needs an object, so drop **dat** and start with the verb

NOT ~~**Morgen heb geen tijd.**~~
SAY **Morgen heb ik geen tijd.**
only the first slot can stay empty, so **ik** after the verb stays

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Heb je Fatima al gebeld? Ja, … ik.**
2. Put the dropped word back: **Wie brengt de kinderen naar zwemles? Doe ik wel.** becomes **… doe ik wel.**
3. Ahmed texts a friend "I'm going to Carlos's on Saturday, are you coming too?" Fill in the word that cannot be left out: **Zaterdag ga … naar Carlos, ga jij ook mee?**
4. Priya asks in the team chat if the meeting can move to Friday. Joris replies **Kan wel.** Does Joris mean (a) "Is that possible?" or (b) "That's possible."?

Answers on page 794.

Use it today

In your next WhatsApp chat with a Dutch friend or colleague, answer three messages with a short form like **Klopt**, **Weet ik niet** or **Ja, heb ik**. Then listen at work or on the train for **Maakt niet uit** and work out which word is missing.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/dropping-words

Adjectives and adverbs

Endings, comparing, and saying how things are done.

- Adjective endings: when to add -e
- Spelling changes when an adjective gets -e
- Adjectives after zijn, worden and blijven
- Adjectives that never take -e
- Comparatives: groter, mooier, duurder
- Superlatives: de grootste, het grootst
- Goed, beter, best and other irregulars
- Meer and meest instead of -er and -st
- Adverbs: no -ly needed
- Graag: the Dutch way to say you like doing something
- Heel, erg, echt, best, nogal, vrij
- Altijd, vaak, soms, nooit
- Iets leuks, niets nieuws: the extra -s
- Dan, als and zo … als
- Adjectives used as nouns
- Ander, andere and anders
- Heel, al and alle: whole and all
- Veel, weinig, een paar, een beetje

RULE 141 · LEVEL A1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Adjective endings: when to add -e

An adjective (a describing word, like big or new) usually gets an extra -e when it stands before a noun: **een grote stad** (a big city), **de grote stad**, **grote steden**. The main exception is a singular het-word (a noun that uses **het** for "the") after **een**, **geen** or a similar word, or with no article at all: **een groot huis** (a big house). Put **het**, **dit**, **dat** or **mijn** in front, and the -e comes back: **het grote huis**.

The pattern

> **Before a noun, an adjective usually gets -e. The main exception is a singular het-word with no het, dit, dat or possessive (my, your, our: mijn, jouw, ons) in front of it.**

- With a de-word, add -e whatever comes before it: **de grote stad**, **een grote stad**, **geen grote stad**.
- In the plural, add -e: **grote steden**, **de grote huizen**.
- With a het-word after **het**, **dit**, **dat** or a possessive, add -e: **het grote huis**, **dit grote huis**, **ons grote huis**.
- With a singular het-word after **een**, **geen**, **elk**, **ieder**, **veel**, **zo'n** or **welk**, or with no article, leave it off: **een groot huis**, **elk groot huis**, **groot nieuws**.
- An adjective after a verb such as **is** usually has no -e: **Het huis is groot.** More in Adjectives after zijn, worden and blijven.
- A small group of adjectives never takes -e, such as **oranje** and **houten** (wooden). See Adjectives that never take -e.

Examples

Sanne woont in **een grote stad**.	Sanne lives in a big city.
Grote steden zijn vaak druk.	Big cities are often busy.
Fatima heeft **een groot huis**.	Fatima has a big house.
Het grote huis op de hoek is van Fatima.	The big house on the corner is Fatima's.
Ahmed heeft **geen groot huis**.	Ahmed doesn't have a big house.
Mei woont nu in **haar nieuwe huis**.	Mei now lives in her new house.
Emma werkt in **dat oude gebouw**.	Emma works in that old building.
Joris wil ook **zo'n groot huis**.	Joris wants a big house like that too.
Het is **mooi weer** vandaag.	The weather is nice today.
Bas koopt **twee verse broodjes**.	Bas buys two fresh rolls.

Why it works this way

Think of -e as the normal setting. Leaving it off is a special case for one combination: a het-word, in the singular, with nothing in front that points to one specific thing. **Het**, **dit**, **dat** and **mijn** point to one specific house, so the adjective keeps its -e. **Een**, **geen**, **elk** and **zo'n** do not, and neither does having no article at all.

Remember: ask three questions. Is it a het-word? Is it singular? Is there no **het**, **dit**, **dat** or possessive in front? Three times yes means no -e. This is one more reason to learn every noun together with its article: see De or het.

English adjectives do not change to match the noun, so the -e is a new habit for English speakers. German speakers can lean on **het grote huis**, which works like "das große Haus", but **een groot huis** has no ending

where German says "ein großes Haus". And if your language makes adjectives male or female, as Spanish and Arabic do: the Dutch -e has nothing to do with male or female.

You may also have spotted that **groot** becomes **grote**, with one o. That spelling change is the topic of Spelling changes when an adjective gets -e.

Watch out

NOT ~~een mooi stad~~
SAY **een mooie stad**
stad is a de-word, so -e, even after **een**

NOT ~~een grote huis~~
SAY **een groot huis**
singular het-word after **een**: no -e

NOT ~~mijn klein huis~~
SAY **mijn kleine huis**
after a possessive, the -e comes back

NOT ~~Ik drink koude water.~~
SAY **Ik drink koud water.**
het water, singular, no article: no -e

NOT ~~Het huis is grote.~~
SAY **Het huis is groot.**
after **is**, no -e

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **klein**: **Joris woont in een … dorp.**
2. Choose **duur** or **dure**: **Ahmed heeft geen … fiets.**
3. Fill in the right form of **vers**: **Priya koopt … brood bij de bakker.**

4. Fix the sentence: **Dit is ons nieuw huis.**

Answers on page 794.

Use it today

Next time you are in the supermarket, name three things in your basket out loud with an adjective, for example **een grote zak chips**, **vers brood** and **rode appels**. Ask the three questions before each one.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adjective-endings

RULE 142 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Spelling changes when an adjective gets -e

When an adjective (a describing word) gets **-e**, its spelling sometimes changes: **groot** becomes **grote**, **dik** becomes **dikke** and **lief** becomes **lieve**. Most changes follow the same open and closed syllable rules as plurals (does the syllable end in a vowel or a consonant?), and **f** and **s** often turn into **v** and **z**. Adjectives ending in an unstressed **-en** (said weakly, as in **open**) do not change at all.

The pattern

> **When you add -e, keep the vowel sound the same. Write aa, ee, oo or uu with one letter if its syllable becomes open, and double a consonant only when it is the single consonant after a short stressed vowel.**

- Long vowel that ends up at the end of a syllable: **groot**, **grote**; **laag**, **lage**; **geel**, **gele**; **duur**, **dure**.
- Short stressed vowel plus one consonant: **dik**, **dikke**; **wit**, **witte**; **snel**, **snelle**.
- Two or more consonants at the end: no doubling, and the vowel keeps its spelling: **zacht**, **zachte**; **sterk**, **sterke**; **paars**, **paarse**.
- Directly after a long vowel, **ie** or **ij**, **f** usually becomes **v** and **s** usually becomes **z**: **lief**, **lieve**; **vies**, **vieze**; **boos**, **boze**; **actief**, **actieve**.
- Unstressed **-en**: no **-e** and no change: **open**, **eigen**, **gouden**, **houten**, **tevreden**.
- Many others simply add **-e**: **mooi**, **mooie**; **aardig**, **aardige**.

Examples

Sanne woont in een **grote** stad.	Sanne lives in a big city.
Daan draagt een **dikke** jas.	Daan is wearing a thick coat.
Joris koopt de **witte** fiets.	Joris is buying the white bike.
Wat een **lieve** buurvrouw!	What a sweet neighbour!
Lotte, je hebt **vieze** schoenen aan.	Lotte, you're wearing dirty shoes.
Wat een **grijze** dag vandaag!	What a grey day today!
Ahmed koopt **paarse** sokken.	Ahmed is buying purple socks.
We hebben de **aardige** buren uitgenodigd.	We have invited the nice neighbours.
Mei zit bij het **open** raam.	Mei is sitting by the open window.
Carlos heeft een **gouden** ring gekocht.	Carlos has bought a gold ring.

Why it works this way

Dutch spelling shows vowel length through syllables. In **groot** the syllable is closed (it ends in a consonant), so the long vowel needs two letters, or you would read **grot** (cave). Add **-e** and the word splits into **gro-te**. Now the syllable is open (it ends in a vowel), and a single vowel there already sounds long. This works in unstressed syllables too: **langzaam**, **langzame**. With two consonants, one stays behind, so the syllable stays closed and **paars** keeps its **aa**: **paar-se**.

A short vowel has the opposite problem: **nat** plus **-e** written as **nate** would sound like a long **aa**. Doubling gives **nat-te**, and the first **t** keeps the vowel short. English does something similar with "big" and "bigger". If the word already ends in two consonants, one stays behind anyway, so nothing doubles: **zach-te**. There is no doubling after the neutral e sound (a short, relaxed "uh") either, as in the ending **-ig**: **aardig**, **aardige**. More in open and closed syllables.

The **v** and **z** follow sound. Dutch words normally do not end in a **v** or **z** sound, so you write **lief** and **vies**. Between two vowels the softer sound appears, and the spelling shows it, just like **huis**, **huizen** (see v and f, z and s). This is a strong tendency, not a law. After a consonant the **s** usually stays: **Frans**, **Franse**; **vals**, **valse**. Some nationality words keep it too: **Chinees**, **Chinese**. After a short vowel the consonant usually doubles instead: **fris**, **frisse**; **laf**, **laffe**. One well-known exception is **grof** (rough), which becomes **grove**.

Adjectives in unstressed **-en** already end in a weak syllable with the neutral e sound. They take no **-e**, so there is nothing to respell: **de open deur**, **een tevreden klant**. **Groen** is different: its **e** belongs to **oe** and the syllable is stressed, so you get **de groene deur**.

No **-e**, no change: in **een dik boek** or **De jas is dik** the adjective stays bare. See Adjective endings and adjectives after zijn, worden and blijven.

Remember: the **-e** pulls one consonant into the next syllable. If that leaves a long vowel at the end of a syllable, one letter will do (**gro-te**). If it would leave a short stressed vowel with no consonant behind it, write that one consonant twice: one stays, one moves on (**dik-ke**). With two consonants, one stays behind anyway, so nothing changes (**zach-te**, **paar-se**).

Watch out

NOT ~~een groote stad~~
SAY **een grote stad**
the **o** ends the syllable, so one **o** is enough

NOT ~~een dike jas~~
SAY **een dikke jas**
short stressed **i** plus one **k**, so double the **k**

NOT ~~een liefe buurvrouw~~
SAY **een lieve buurvrouw**
after **ie**, the **f** becomes **v**

NOT ~~een bose klant~~
SAY **een boze klant**
after a long vowel, the **s** usually becomes **z**

NOT ~~de opene deur~~
SAY **de open deur**
unstressed **-en** takes no **-e**

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **duur**: **Priya koopt een … tas.**
2. Choose **dune** or **dunne**: **Daan heeft een … trui aan.**
3. Fill in the right form of **lief**: **Emma heeft een … kat.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Yara koopt een houtene tafel.**

Answers on page 795.

Use it today

Write today's shopping list with five adjectives that get **-e**, like **witte bonen**, **grote eieren** or **rode paprika's**. Check each spelling against the pattern before you cycle to the supermarket.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adjective-spelling

RULE 143 · LEVEL A1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Adjectives after zijn, worden and blijven

After **zijn** (to be), **worden** (to become) and **blijven** (to stay), a Dutch adjective (a describing word like big or cold) keeps its basic form, with no -e: **Het huis is groot**. The -e belongs to adjectives that stand before a noun, as in **het grote huis**. So once the adjective comes after the verb, you can forget about the -e.

The pattern

> **After zijn, worden and blijven, the adjective gets no -e. The -e belongs before a noun.**

- These three are linking verbs: verbs that link the subject to a description. **Het huis is groot. Ik word moe. Het blijft koud.**
- De-word, het-word or plural: after the verb it makes no difference. **De soep is warm. De appels zijn duur.**
- Put the adjective before a noun and the -e usually appears: **de warme soep**, **de dure appels**. The details are in Adjective endings: when to add -e.
- No -e also means none of the spelling changes: **duur** stays **duur**, **wit** stays **wit**.
- **Lijken** (to seem) works the same way: **Het lijkt duur.**

Examples

De koffie is **koud**.	The coffee is cold.
Ik drink geen **koude** koffie.	I don't drink cold coffee.
De fiets van Ahmed is **nieuw**.	Ahmed's bike is new.

Ahmed heeft een **nieuwe** fiets.	Ahmed has a new bike.
De appels zijn **duur**.	The apples are expensive.
Priya koopt geen **dure** appels.	Priya doesn't buy expensive apples.
Ik word **moe**.	I'm getting tired.
In november wordt het vroeg **donker**.	In November it gets dark early.
Het weer blijft **mooi**.	The weather stays nice.
Fatima blijft **rustig**.	Fatima stays calm.

Why it works this way

An adjective can do two jobs. Before a noun, it helps to name something: **de koude koffie** is one package, and the -e ties that package together. After **is**, **wordt** or **blijft**, the adjective is a separate comment about the subject: **De koffie is koud.** A comment stands on its own, so it stays bare.

German does the same (**Das Haus ist groß**), so German speakers have a head start. In Spanish and Arabic, adjectives agree with the noun even after the verb, so speakers of those languages often add -e after a plural subject. English speakers usually get it right at first, then start adding -e in the wrong places right after learning the ending.

You will sometimes hear an -e after **is** anyway: **Mijn fiets is de rode** (my bike is the red one). That -e is there because the noun **fiets** is understood after **rode**, with **de** in front. A bare adjective after the verb never gets -e. A few adjectives, like **open**, never take -e anywhere: see Adjectives that never take -e.

Remember: the -e is glue that only sticks an adjective to a noun. After **is**, **wordt** or **blijft** there is no noun to stick to, so the glue stays in the tube.

Watch out

NOT ~~De soep is warme.~~
SAY **De soep is warm.**
no noun follows, so no -e, even with a de-word

NOT ~~De kinderen worden grote.~~
SAY **De kinderen worden groot.**
plurals get no -e after the verb either

NOT ~~Het blijft koude.~~
SAY **Het blijft koud.**
blijven is a linking verb too

NOT ~~Het is een koud dag.~~
SAY **Het is een koude dag.**
here the de-word **dag** follows, so the -e is needed

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **vol**: **De trein is …**
2. Fill in the right form of **snel**: **Bas heeft een … fiets.**
3. Choose **boos** or **boze**: **Yara wordt …**
4. Fix the sentence: **De bananen worden bruine.**

Answers on page 795.

Use it today

Tonight, describe your day in three short sentences with **is**, **wordt** and **blijft**, for example **Het is koud**, **Ik word moe** and **Het blijft druk op het werk**. Then turn one of them into a phrase with a noun, like **een koude dag**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adjective-after-verb

RULE 144 · LEVEL B1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Adjectives that never take -e

Before a noun, a Dutch adjective usually gets an -e: **de groene jas**, **het oude huis**. A few adjectives never change in that position. The main groups are materials ending in -en (**een houten tafel**, **de gouden ring**), other adjectives ending in an unstressed -en (**de open deur**, **het eigen risico**) and some loanwords (**een prima idee**, **gratis koffie**, **een oranje jas**). Most other adjectives follow the normal rule.

The pattern

> **Adjectives that end in an unstressed -en, and some loanwords, keep the same form before every noun: after de, het or een, without an article, and in the plural.**

- Materials in -en: **houten** (wooden), **gouden** (gold), **zilveren** (silver), **wollen** (woollen), **leren** (leather, not the verb), **glazen** (glass), **stenen** (stone). So: **een houten tafel**, **het houten huis**, **de houten stoelen**.
- Other adjectives in unstressed -en, including many past participles: **open**, **eigen** (own), **tevreden** (satisfied), **gesloten** (closed), **gestolen** (stolen). Examples: **de open deur**, **een tevreden klant**.
- The -en must be the weak ending with the neutral e. If the vowel before the n is stressed, the main rule applies: **de groene jas**, **een gemene opmerking**.
- Some loanwords: **prima**, **gratis**, **extra**, **plastic**, **aluminium**, **kaki**, **sexy**, and colours ending in -e or -a, such as **oranje**, **roze** and **lila**. Examples: **een extra trein**, **een plastic tas**, **een aluminium pan**, **een sexy jurk**. These are examples, not a complete list.
- Most other adjectives follow the main rule, including most loanwords: **een moderne keuken**.

Examples

Sanne heeft bij de kringloopwinkel een **houten** tafel gekocht.	Sanne bought a wooden table at the second-hand shop.
Daan geeft Emma een **gouden** ring, want ze zijn vandaag tien jaar getrouwd.	Daan is giving Emma a gold ring, because they have been married for ten years today.
Op de fiets draagt Fatima een **dikke** jas en een **wollen** muts.	On the bike, Fatima wears a thick coat and a woollen hat.
Door het **open** raam hoorde Mei dat de buren ruzie hadden.	Through the open window, Mei heard that the neighbours were arguing.
Bij de politie vulde Joris een formulier in voor de **gestolen** fiets.	At the police station, Joris filled in a form for the stolen bike.
Ik moet de rekening zelf betalen, omdat mijn **eigen** risico nog niet opgebruikt is.	I have to pay the bill myself, because I haven't used up my deductible yet.
Bij de gemeente kun je **gratis** koffie pakken terwijl je wacht.	At the town hall you can grab free coffee while you wait.
Yara vond het park een **prima** plek om de verjaardag van Bas te vieren.	Yara thought the park was a fine place to celebrate Bas's birthday.
Op Koningsdag dragen veel mensen **oranje** kleren, ook als het regent.	On King's Day many people wear orange clothes, even when it rains.

Why it works this way

The -e is the normal ending an adjective gets in front of a noun. A handy way to see this group: **houten**, **open** and **gesloten** already end in a weak -en that sounds like an ending, so they don't get a second one. That is a memory aid, not a sound law. Most adjectives ending in -er or -el do get -e: **een lekkere appel**, **een simpele vraag**. **Linker** and **rechter** (left and right)

are exceptions: they never get -e and are usually written together with the noun, as in **de linkerhand** and **het rechteroog**.

Prima, **gratis** and **extra** behave like fixed labels: Dutch puts them in front of a noun but gives them no endings. With **oranje** and **roze**, an extra -e would only pile up a second e at the end.

Compare these pairs, where only the ordinary adjective changes:

- **het oude huis** and **het houten huis**
- **een warme trui** and **een wollen trui**
- **de paarse jas** and **de oranje jas**

English speakers usually find this group easy, since English adjectives don't change for the noun. The typical English mistake is using the noun, **goud** or **hout**, where Dutch needs the adjective in -en. German speakers are used to an ending on almost every adjective before a noun ("die offene Tür"), so they tend to add -e here too.

Used as a noun for a person, a word like **volwassen** does take -e: **een volwassene** (an adult). That is a different structure, covered in Adjectives used as nouns.

Remember: in today's Dutch, an adjective with a weak -en at the end, or one of the loanwords above, stays exactly as it is in front of a noun.

Watch out

NOT ~~een goud ring~~
SAY **een gouden ring**
Dutch needs the adjective **gouden**, not the noun **goud**

NOT ~~de houtene stoelen~~
SAY **de houten stoelen**
no -e after the -en of a material, also in the plural

NOT ~~het opene raam~~
SAY **het open raam**
open ends in an unstressed -en

NOT ~~mijn eigene fiets~~
SAY **mijn eigen fiets**
eigen stays the same before a noun

NOT ~~de groen jas~~
SAY **de groene jas**
groen is one stressed syllable, so the main rule applies

Quick check

1. Fill in the adjective that means "made of silver": Mei draagt vandaag een ... ketting.
2. Choose **gesloten** or **geslotene**: Ahmed staat voor de ... deur van de huisartsenpraktijk.
3. Choose **warm** or **warme**: Carlos zoekt een ... jas voor de winter.
4. Fix the adjective: **Ik koop een wol sjaal, want het wordt koud.**

Answers on page 795.

Use it today

Pick five things in your home and describe each one with a material adjective, like **een glazen vaas** or **een katoenen handdoek**. Then put an ordinary adjective in front and apply the normal rule to that one only: **een oude houten kast** (**kast** is a **de** word, so **oud** gets -e), but **een oud houten bed** (**bed** is a **het** word after **een**, so **oud** gets no -e). The material adjective stays the same in both.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adjectives-without-e

RULE 145 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Comparatives: groter, mooier, duurder

To say that one thing is bigger, nicer or more expensive than another, add **-er** to the adjective (the describing word) and use **dan** for than: **Amsterdam is groter dan Utrecht**. Adjectives that end in r add **-der** instead: **duur, duurder**. When two things are the same, use **net zo ... als** or **even ... als** with the plain adjective.

The pattern

The comparative (the form you use to compare) is the adjective plus -er, or plus -der when the adjective ends in r. A difference takes dan; sameness takes net zo ... als or even ... als.

- Most adjectives simply add **-er**, even long ones: **klein, kleiner**; **mooi, mooier**; **moeilijk, moeilijker**.
- Adjectives ending in r add **-der**: **duur, duurder**; **zwaar, zwaarder**; **ver, verder**; **lekker, lekkerder**.
- The usual spelling changes apply. A double aa, ee, oo or uu becomes single when it ends a syllable: **groot, groter** (**gro-ter**). A single consonant after a short stressed vowel doubles: **dik, dikker**; **snel, sneller**. After an unstressed last syllable it does not: **makkelijk, makkelijker**. And f and s often become v and z: **lief, liever**; **vies, viezer**.
- After **net zo** or **even** the adjective stays plain. For a negative, use **niet zo ... als**.
- Before a noun, the normal adjective endings still apply: **een grotere kamer**, **een groter huis**.
- A few common words are irregular: **goed, beter**; **veel, meer**.

Examples

Amsterdam is **groter dan** Utrecht.	Amsterdam is bigger than Utrecht.
De trein naar Leiden is **sneller dan** de bus.	The train to Leiden is faster than the bus.
Deze fiets is **mooier**, maar ook veel **duurder**.	This bike is nicer, but also much more expensive.
De tas van Ahmed is **zwaarder dan** mijn tas.	Ahmed's bag is heavier than my bag.
Carlos woont **verder** van zijn werk **dan** Yara.	Carlos lives further from his work than Yara.
Priya heeft een **grotere** kamer gevonden.	Priya has found a bigger room.
Mei is **net zo oud als** Bas.	Mei is just as old as Bas.
Bij Joris is de koffie **even lekker als** in een café.	At Joris's place, the coffee is just as good as in a café.
Utrecht is **niet zo groot als** Amsterdam.	Utrecht is not as big as Amsterdam.

Why it works this way

English does this too with short words: small, smaller. The difference is that English switches to more for longer words, while Dutch usually keeps adding **-er**: **moeilijker** (more difficult), **gezelliger** (cosier), **interessanter** (more interesting). A smaller group uses **meer** instead, which has its own lesson.

For adjectives that do not end in r, the spelling works like adding **-e**, because **-er** also starts with a vowel and cuts the word into the same syllables: **gro-te, gro-ter**; **dik-ke, dik-ker**. So if you can spell the **-e** form, you can usually spell the comparative by adding an r: **lieve, liever**; **vieze, viezer**.

Think of the d after r as a little bridge between the r and the ending. Because **-der** starts with a consonant, the vowel stays in a closed syllable and keeps both letters: **duur-der**, **zwaar-der**.

Remember: dan and different both start with d; **als** and alike both start with a. A difference gets **dan**, things that are alike get **als**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Amsterdam is groter als Utrecht.**~~
SAY **Amsterdam is groter dan Utrecht.**
after a comparative, standard Dutch uses **dan**; you will hear **als** in casual speech and it is the German habit, but avoid it

NOT ~~**Deze jas is meer duur.**~~
SAY **Deze jas is duurder.**
Dutch adds an ending where English says more

NOT ~~**Mijn tas is zwaarer.**~~
SAY **Mijn tas is zwaarder.**
adjectives ending in r take **-der**

NOT ~~**Ons nieuwe huis is grooter.**~~
SAY **Ons nieuwe huis is groter.**
in **gro-ter** the o ends a syllable, so you write one o

NOT ~~**Fatima is net zo oud dan Yara.**~~
SAY **Fatima is net zo oud als Yara.**
sameness takes **als**

Quick check

1. Fill in the comparative of **duur**: **Deze jas is … dan die van Emma.**

2. Fill in the comparative of **dun**: **Mijn nieuwe telefoon is … dan mijn oude.**
3. Choose **dan** or **als**: **Sanne fietst net zo snel … Daan.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Het is vandaag meer koud dan gisteren.**

Answers on page 795.

Use it today

Supermarkets are full of comparisons waiting to happen. Next time you shop, make three sentences in your head: one with **dan**, one with **net zo … als** and one with **niet zo … als**, such as **Deze appels zijn duurder dan de peren.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/comparatives

RULE 146 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Superlatives: de grootste, het grootst

To say "the biggest" or "the cheapest" in Dutch, you add -st to the adjective: **groot** becomes **grootst**. Before a noun you usually put **de** or **het** in front and add -e: **de grootste stad**, **het mooiste huis**. After a verb you usually use **het** plus the form without -e: **Wie rent het snelst?**

This form is called the superlative (in Dutch: **de overtreffende trap**). It picks out the top of a group: the cheapest coffee, the busiest train, the coldest month. It is one step up from the comparative, where **groot** becomes **groter**.

The pattern

> **Add -st to the adjective. Before a noun, add -e and usually de or het (de grootste stad); after a verb, usually het plus the bare form without -e (Deze is het grootst).**

- Most adjectives simply add -st: **klein**, **kleinst**; **snel**, **snelst**; **duur**, **duurst**; **gezellig**, **gezelligst**.
- The adjective keeps its spelling, because -st starts with a consonant and the syllable stays closed: **groot**, **grootst** (compare **groter**); **dik**, **dikst** (compare **dikker**); **lief**, **liefst**. The same goes with -e: **de grootste**, **de dikste**.
- Adjectives that end in -s add only -t: **vies**, **viest**; **wijs**, **wijst**.
- Before a noun, the superlative gets -e. Usually you use the noun's article: **de grootste stad**, **het mooiste huis**, **de duurste fietsen**. A possessive replaces the article: **haar dikste trui**. Without a possessive, keep the article, even if your language drops it (Arabic says "biggest city" with none).

- After a verb, the usual form is **het** plus the bare form: **Deze is het grootst**, **Wie rent het snelst?**
- Some adjectives use **meest** instead (see Meer and meest), and **goed** becomes **best** (see Goed, beter, best).

Examples

Amsterdam is **de grootste** stad van Nederland.	Amsterdam is the biggest city in the Netherlands.
Fatima woont in **het mooiste** huis van de straat.	Fatima lives in the most beautiful house on the street.
Dit is **de goedkoopste** koffie van de supermarkt.	This is the cheapest coffee in the supermarket.
Priya heeft **de kleinste** kamer van het huis.	Priya has the smallest room in the house.
Utrecht Centraal is **het drukste** station van Nederland.	Utrecht Centraal is the busiest station in the Netherlands.
Het station is om acht uur **het drukst**.	The station is busiest at eight o'clock.
Wie rent **het snelst**?	Who runs the fastest?
Na het voetballen zijn de schoenen van Carlos **het viest**.	After football, Carlos's shoes are the dirtiest.
In januari is het meestal **het koudst**.	It is usually coldest in January.

Why it works this way

Before a noun, a superlative is an ordinary adjective after **de** or **het**, so it gets -e, just like **de grote stad** (see adjective endings). A superlative picks out one particular winner, so it usually comes with **de**, **het** or a possessive like **mijn**, and takes -e. That is why you say **een mooi huis** but **het mooiste huis** and **mijn mooiste huis**.

After a verb, **het snelst** names no thing. It tells you how much: to the top degree. So it stays **het**, even with a plural subject: **De treinen zijn om acht uur het drukst**.

Compare the two station sentences. **Utrecht Centraal is het drukste station** ranks one station against other stations, so there is a noun. **Het station is om acht uur het drukst** compares the station with itself at other times. No noun fits, so you use **het drukst**.

Remember: "the biggest one" is a thing, so it gets **de** or **het** and -e. "Biggest of all" is a degree, so it gets **het** and no ending.

With **zijn**, when you compare things in a group, both work: **Deze tas is het grootst** and **Deze tas is de grootste** (the biggest one). After a verb you will also hear **het snelste** with -e. That is accepted, but the bare form is the usual choice in writing.

Watch out

NOT ~~het mooist huis~~
SAY **het mooiste huis**
before a noun the superlative gets -e, also after **het**

NOT ~~Het station is om acht uur drukst.~~
SAY **Het station is om acht uur het drukst.**
English can drop "the" here, Dutch needs **het**

NOT ~~Wie rent de snelste?~~
SAY **Wie rent het snelst?**
after an action verb no noun fits, so use **het**

NOT ~~de grotste stad~~
SAY **de grootste stad**
-st starts with a consonant, so the long vowel stays written double

NOT ~~de viesste wc~~
SAY **de vieste wc**
an adjective ending in -s adds only -t

Quick check

1. Fill in the superlative of **mooi**: **Dit is de … fiets van de hele winkel.**
2. Choose: **Bas fietst (de snelste / het snelst) van iedereen op kantoor.**
3. Fix the sentence: **Het vriest, dus Mei draagt haar dikkste trui.**
4. Fill in the superlative of **vies**: **Daan heeft de … auto van de hele straat.**

Answers on page 796.

Use it today

In the supermarket, find the cheapest and the most expensive coffee and say it to yourself: **Dit is de goedkoopste koffie, en dit is de duurste.** Then ask a colleague one question with **het**, like **Welke supermarkt is hier het goedkoopst?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/superlatives

RULE 147 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Goed, beter, best and other irregulars

Four very common Dutch words change their whole shape when you compare, instead of simply adding -er and -st: **goed, beter, best**; **veel, meer, meest**; **weinig, minder, minst**; and **graag, liever, liefst**. Learn them as one set of four. You did the same with good, better, best in English, and three of these sets match English almost word for word.

The pattern

The comparative (the "more" form) and the superlative (the "most" form) of goed, veel, weinig and graag are irregular, so you learn them as fixed words.

- **goed, beter, best**: good or well, better, best
- **veel, meer, meest**: much or many, more, most
- **weinig, minder, minst**: little or few, less or fewer, least or fewest
- **graag, liever, liefst**: like to, prefer to, like most of all
- Before a noun, the superlative gets -e, usually with **de** or **het**: **de beste fiets**, **het meeste werk**, **de minste moeite**. This works as in the lesson on superlatives.
- When you say how someone does something, use **het**: **Daan kookt het best. Het beste** is also correct here.
- When they mean more and less, **meer** and **minder** get no -e before a noun: **meer brood**, **minder mensen**.
- **graag**, **liever** and **het liefst** usually go with a verb: **Ik fiets graag** (I like cycling). There is more on liking things.

Examples

Sanne kookt **goed**, maar Daan kookt nog **beter**.	Sanne cooks well, but Daan cooks even better.
Van alle collega's kookt Fatima **het best**.	Of all the colleagues, Fatima cooks best.
Yara heeft **de beste** cijfers van de klas.	Yara has the best marks in the class.
Ahmed werkt **veel**, maar Bas werkt nog **meer**.	Ahmed works a lot, but Bas works even more.
De meeste treinen rijden vandaag op tijd.	Most trains are running on time today.
Emma heeft **weinig** tijd, maar Carlos heeft nog **minder**.	Emma has little time, but Carlos has even less.
Van ons drieën heeft Priya **het minst** betaald.	Of the three of us, Priya paid the least.
Mei fietst **graag** naar haar werk.	Mei likes cycling to work.
Joris neemt **liever** de trein dan de bus.	Joris prefers the train to the bus.
Op mijn verjaardag eet ik **het liefst** pannenkoeken.	On my birthday, pancakes are what I like eating most.

Why it works this way

The words people use most tend to keep old, irregular forms: they are repeated so often that nobody smooths them out. English and Dutch are close relatives and kept the same irregulars: good, better, best; much, more, most; little, less, least.

The odd one out is **graag**. Its comparative and superlative come from **lief** (dear, sweet): what you like better is literally dearer to you. If you speak German, it works like gern, lieber, am liebsten.

Compare:

- **Ik eet graag vis.** I like eating fish.
- **Ik eet liever vis.** I would rather eat fish.
- **Ik eet het liefst vis.** Fish is my favourite thing to eat.
- **Daan is de beste.** Daan is the best one.
- **Daan kookt het best.** Daan cooks best.

One more thing: **best** on its own often means quite or fine. **Het is best koud** means it is quite cold, not the coldest. More in the lesson on intensifiers.

Remember: three sets copy English, and only **graag** needs new forms. Think of **liever** as dearer: **Ik drink liever thee** simply means tea is dearer to you.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Deze fiets is goeder dan mijn oude fiets.**~~
SAY **Deze fiets is beter dan mijn oude fiets.**
goed has no -er form

NOT ~~**Ik drink graager thee.**~~
SAY **Ik drink liever thee.**
the comparative of **graag** is **liever**

NOT ~~**Meeste mensen hier hebben een fiets.**~~
SAY **De meeste mensen hier hebben een fiets.**
English says most people, Dutch needs **de**

NOT ~~**Dit is het best restaurant van Utrecht.**~~
SAY **Dit is het beste restaurant van Utrecht.**
before a noun, the superlative gets -e

Quick check

1. Fill in a form of **goed**: **Het weer is vandaag … dan gisteren.**
2. Fill in a form of **graag**: **Ik neem … de trein dan de auto.**
3. Fill in a form of **weinig**: **Op zondag rijden er … treinen dan op maandag.**
4. Fill in the superlative of **veel**: **… collega's komen met de fiets naar kantoor.**

Answers on page 796.

Use it today

Next time a colleague offers you coffee, answer with **Nee, dank je, ik drink liever thee** (or the other way round). Then tell them your favourite: **Ik drink het liefst warme chocolademelk.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/irregular-comparison

RULE 148 · LEVEL B1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Meer and meest instead of -er and -st

Most Dutch adjectives build their comparative (the "more" form) and superlative (the "most" form) with endings, even long ones: **sneller**, **snelst**, **interessanter**. You use the separate words **meer** (more) and **meest** (most) mainly with past participles used as adjectives (**het meest gelezen boek**) and when you compare two qualities of one person or thing (**meer bang dan boos**); some longer adjectives also allow **meest**, often for emphasis. When in doubt, the endings are the safe choice.

The pattern

> **Ordinary adjectives normally take -er and -st. Past participles used as adjectives usually take meer and meest, and you also use meer to compare two qualities of the same person or thing.**

- Ordinary adjectives, including most long ones: **duur, duurder, het duurst** and **moeilijk, moeilijker, het moeilijkst**.
- Past participles, the verb form in **ik heb gelezen**: **nog meer verrast**, **het meest gelezen boek**.
- Some words that look like participles now behave as ordinary adjectives and take the endings: **bekender**, **beroemdste**, **ingewikkelder**.
- Some longer adjectives allow both forms in the superlative: **de interessantste** or **de meest interessante lezing**, **de geschiktste** or **de meest geschikte kandidaat**. In the comparative, -er is the usual choice.
- Two qualities, one person: **Joris is meer bang dan boos.** You will also hear **eerder bang dan boos**, with the same meaning.
- The adjective after **meer** or **meest** follows the usual -e rules, and **meest** itself stays **meest**: **de meest gestelde vraag**.

For the endings themselves, see Comparatives and Superlatives. For participles before a noun, see Past participles as adjectives.

Examples

Dat is **het meest gelezen** boek van dit jaar.	That is the most widely read book of the year.
Ik ben **nog meer verrast** dan jij, want ik wist er niets van.	I am even more surprised than you, because I knew nothing about it.
Wat is **de meest gestelde** vraag aan de balie van de gemeente?	What is the most frequently asked question at the municipality's front desk?
Van alle collega's was Bas **het meest verbaasd** over het nieuws.	Of all the colleagues, Bas was the most surprised by the news.
Na de vakantie voelt Daan zich **veel meer ontspannen**.	After the holiday Daan feels much more relaxed.
Volgens het team is Priya **de meest geschikte** kandidaat.	According to the team, Priya is the most suitable candidate.
De lezing van Mei was **interessanter** dan ik had verwacht.	Mei's talk was more interesting than I had expected.
Lotte zegt weinig op verjaardagen, maar ze is **meer verlegen dan onvriendelijk**.	Lotte says little at birthday parties, but she is shy rather than unfriendly.
Ahmed was **meer verdrietig dan boos** toen zijn fiets gestolen was.	Ahmed was more sad than angry when his bike was stolen.

Why it works this way

Think of -er and -st as endings you glue onto a plain quality word such as **druk**, **duur** or **leuk**. A past participle is different: it still feels like part of a verb, the result of something that happened. Dutch tends to leave that

verb form alone and puts the degree in a separate word in front, just as it does with the verb itself: **Dit boek wordt het meest gelezen** (This book is read the most).

The **meer ... dan** pattern is logical too. In **Lotte is meer verlegen dan onvriendelijk** you are not comparing Lotte with someone else. You are choosing which word fits her better, so **meer** means something like "rather". Standard Dutch does not use the -er ending for that job.

Your first language can trick you here. English says "more difficult" and "more interesting", and Spanish uses "más" with almost every adjective, but Dutch normally says **moeilijker** and **interessanter**. German speakers face the opposite trap: German often puts the ending on a participle ("überraschter"), while Dutch normally says **meer verrast**.

Speakers also choose **meest** for emphasis, because a separate word can carry stress: **het meest absurde plan** can sound stronger than **het absurdste plan**. Both are correct. You hear this mostly with longer adjectives. With short everyday ones like **snel** or **duur**, the ending is the normal choice: **de snelste route**.

Remember: if you can picture an action behind the word (someone read the book, something surprised you), reach for **meer** or **meest**. If it is simply a quality, like **druk**, **duur** or **moeilijk**, use the endings, unless you are weighing two qualities against each other.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Deze cursus is meer moeilijk dan de vorige.**~~
SAY **Deze cursus is moeilijker dan de vorige.**
moeilijk is an ordinary adjective, so it takes -er

NOT ~~**De trein is meer sneller dan de bus.**~~
SAY **De trein is sneller dan de bus.**
use -er or **meer**, not both

NOT ~~Het is het gelezenste boek van dit jaar.~~
SAY **Het is het meest gelezen boek van dit jaar.**
gelezen is a past participle, so it takes **meest**, not -ste

NOT ~~Dat is de meeste gestelde vraag.~~
SAY **Dat is de meest gestelde vraag.**
meest gets no -e before an adjective

NOT ~~Joris is banger dan boos.~~
SAY **Joris is meer bang dan boos.**
two qualities of one person: use **meer**, not -er

Quick check

1. Choose: **Dat is het (gelezenste / meest gelezen) boek van onze leesclub.**
2. Fix the sentence: **Mijn nieuwe baan is meer leuk dan mijn oude.**
3. Fill in the Dutch word for "more": **Yara was … verrast dan haar broer, want zij wist van niets.**
4. Choose: **Na het gesprek met de verhuurder is Fatima (bozer / meer boos) dan verdrietig.**

Answers on page 796.

Use it today

Tonight, describe your day in three Dutch sentences: one with **het meest** plus a participle (**Ik was het meest verrast door …**), one weighing two of your own feelings (**Ik ben meer … dan …**), and one with an ordinary adjective plus -er. Say them out loud to a partner, a colleague or your cat.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/meer-meest

RULE 149 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Adverbs: no -ly needed

To say how something happens, Dutch uses the plain adjective (the describing word as you find it in the dictionary). English turns quick into quickly, but Dutch adds nothing: **Ze zingt mooi** means she sings beautifully, and **Hij rijdt snel** means he drives fast. A word used like this is an adverb (a word that describes an action), and it gets no -e.

The pattern

> **To say how something happens, use the adjective in its dictionary form. Dutch adds no -ly and no -e.**

- Most adjectives can do this job unchanged: **snel** is fast and quickly, **mooi** is beautiful and beautifully, **rustig** is calm and calmly.
- **goed** means both good and well. Do not use **wel** for well: it is a different word.
- Comparatives work the same way: **langzamer** means slower and more slowly.
- The bare form also goes in front of another adjective: **heel koud** (very cold), **erg duur** (very expensive).
- In the perfect tense, the adverb comes before the participle at the end: **Ik heb goed geslapen.** More on order in time, manner, place.

Examples

Fatima zingt **mooi**.	Fatima sings beautifully.
Daan fietst altijd **snel** naar zijn werk.	Daan always cycles to work quickly.
De trein rijdt vandaag **langzaam**.	The train is running slowly today.

Kunt u wat **langzamer** praten?	Could you speak a bit more slowly?
De huisarts legt alles **duidelijk** uit.	The GP explains everything clearly.
Mijn buurvrouw groet me altijd **vriendelijk**.	My neighbour always greets me in a friendly way.
Je spreekt al **goed** Nederlands!	You already speak Dutch well!
Emma heeft vannacht **goed** geslapen.	Emma slept well last night.
Het is een **heel** koude dag.	It is a very cold day.
Bas heeft een **erg** dure fiets gekocht.	Bas has bought a very expensive bike.

Why it works this way

English uses -ly as a label that says: this word describes an action. Dutch skips the label. When a describing word says how an action happens, it works as an adverb and stays unchanged. Its position is not the clue: in **Hij koopt mooie bloemen**, **mooie** comes right after the verb, but it describes the flowers, so it gets -e.

Think of the -e as a handshake with a noun. In adjective endings you saw that an adjective often adds -e when it stands in front of a noun. An adverb has no noun to shake hands with: it describes an action or another adjective, so it stays bare.

Compare these pairs:

- **Priya heeft een mooie stem.** (Priya has a beautiful voice.) Here **mooie** describes the noun **stem**.
- **Priya zingt mooi.** (Priya sings beautifully.) Here **mooi** describes the singing.
- **een vreselijk dure jas**: a terribly expensive coat
- **een vreselijke, dure jas**: a horrible, expensive coat

In the last pair, one letter changes the meaning. Without -e, **vreselijk** describes **dure**. With -e, it describes the coat itself.

In casual speech you will hear **een hele mooie dag**. Lots of people say it, but in writing and in exams, use **heel**. For more words like this, see heel, erg and echt.

Words such as **duidelijk** and **vriendelijk** end in **-lijk**, which looks a lot like -ly. Here **-lijk** is simply part of the adjective, so **duidelijk** means clear and clearly at once. Spanish speakers can forget about -mente too, and German speakers are in luck: German works the same way.

Remember: no noun, no -e. If a word describes a thing, check the adjective rules. If it describes an action or another adjective, use the bare form, with no -e.

Watch out

NOT ~~Lotte slaapt slechte.~~
SAY **Lotte slaapt slecht.**
slecht says how she sleeps, and there is no noun, so no -e

NOT ~~Joris heeft gefietst snel.~~
SAY **Joris heeft snel gefietst.**
the participle goes last, so the adverb comes before it

NOT ~~Carlos praat langzame en duidelijke.~~
SAY **Carlos praat langzaam en duidelijk.**
both words say how he talks, so both stay plain

NOT ~~Yara heeft een heel mooi jas.~~
SAY **Yara heeft een heel mooie jas.**
heel stays bare, but **mooie** describes **de jas** and needs -e

Quick check

1. Choose: **Mei fietst … naar de supermarkt.** (**voorzichtig** or **voorzichtige**)
2. Choose: **Sanne heeft een … auto.** (**snel** or **snelle**)
3. Choose, for a very expensive phone: **Ahmed heeft een … dure telefoon gekocht.** (**erg** or **erge**)
4. Fix the sentence: **Bas heeft gewerkt hard.**

Answers on page 796.

Use it today

Tonight, write three Dutch sentences about how your day went: how you slept, how you travelled, how someone spoke to you. For example: **Ik heb slecht geslapen** or **Ik ben rustig naar huis gefietst.** Check each one: no -ly thinking, and no -e.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adverbs-no-ly

RULE 150 · LEVEL A1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Graag: the Dutch way to say you like doing something

To say you like doing something, take the verb for the activity and put **graag** after it: **Ik zwem graag** means "I like swimming". Use **liever** for what you prefer and **het liefst** for what you like most. The same word also gives you two polite phrases: **ja, graag** (yes, please) and **graag gedaan** (you're welcome).

The pattern

> **Put graag after the verb to say you like doing something. For prefer and like most, use liever and het liefst in the same place.**

- **graag**: like doing. **liever**: prefer, would rather. **het liefst**: like most of all.
- In a simple sentence, these words usually come right after the verb: **Ik drink graag koffie.**
- In a question, they come after the subject (the person doing it): **Fiets je graag?** More in where adverbs go.
- For don't like, put **niet** before **graag**: **Ik kook niet graag.**
- To compare two things, use **dan** (than).

Examples

Ik **zwem graag**.	I like swimming.
Daan **kookt graag** voor zijn vrienden.	Daan likes cooking for his friends.
Fatima **werkt niet graag** op zaterdag.	Fatima doesn't like working on Saturdays.
Fiets je **graag** naar je werk?	Do you like cycling to work?

Ik **drink liever** thee dan koffie.	I prefer tea to coffee.
Carlos **reist het liefst** met de trein.	Carlos likes travelling by train best.
Ik **wil graag** een koffie.	I'd like a coffee.
"Wil je thee?" "**Ja, graag.**"	"Would you like some tea?" "Yes, please."
"Dank je wel!" "**Graag gedaan.**"	"Thank you!" "You're welcome."

Why it works this way

Graag is an adverb: a word that adds information to a verb. It means roughly "gladly" or "with pleasure", so **Ik zwem graag** is really "I swim with pleasure". English puts the liking in a verb; Dutch keeps the activity verb and adds a word that colours it. **Ik vind zwemmen leuk** is also correct, but **graag** is shorter and very common.

Like good, better, best, **graag** has irregular forms: **liever** and **het liefst** (see irregular comparison). **Liever** also works alone: **Koffie? Nee, liever thee.** German speakers will recognise gern, lieber, am liebsten.

Compare these two:

- **Ik zwem graag.** I like swimming (a habit).
- **Ik wil graag zwemmen.** I would like to swim (a wish).

That polite wish is also how you order in a café: **Ik wil graag een koffie.**

The polite phrases follow the same logic. **Ja, graag** is "yes, with pleasure", a friendly way to accept an offer. **Graag gedaan** is "done with pleasure", the reply to **dank je wel**. Avoid **je bent welkom** here: it means you are welcome as a guest.

Remember: graag, liever, het liefst climbs like good, better, best: like, prefer, like most.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik graag zwem.**~~
SAY **Ik zwem graag.**
the verb comes second, right after **ik**

NOT ~~**Ik graag koffie.**~~
SAY **Ik drink graag koffie.**
graag is not a verb, so you still need one

NOT ~~**Ik drink meer graag thee.**~~
SAY **Ik drink liever thee.**
prefer has its own word: **liever**

NOT ~~**Ik zwem gern.**~~
SAY **Ik zwem graag.**
a German habit: the Dutch word is **graag**

Quick check

1. Fix the word order, keeping **Ahmed** first: **Ahmed graag kookt.**
2. Yara likes tea, but she likes coffee more. Choose: **Yara drinkt … koffie dan thee.** (**graag** / **liever** / **het liefst**)
3. Football is Bas's favourite sport. Choose: **Bas voetbalt …** (**graag** / **liever** / **het liefst**)
4. Joris holds the door for you and you say **Dank je wel!** What does Joris answer? (**Ja, graag.** / **Graag gedaan.**)

Answers on page 796.

Use it today

Tell a colleague or neighbour what you like, prefer and like most, for example **Ik wandel graag, ik fiets liever, maar ik zwem het liefst.** The next time someone offers you coffee, answer **Ja, graag.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/graag

RULE 151 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Heel, erg, echt, best, nogal, vrij

To say very in Dutch, put **heel** or **erg** in front of an adjective (a describing word): **heel mooi**, **erg duur**. **Echt** means really, **best** usually means quite (not best), and **nogal** and **vrij** mean rather or fairly. With these six words you can say exactly how cold, busy or expensive something is.

The pattern

> **Put heel, erg, echt, best, nogal or vrij directly before an adjective to show how strong it is. In careful writing, they keep this basic form, even before a noun.**

- **heel** and **erg**: very. **heel warm**, **erg druk**. With a verb, use **erg** or **heel erg**: **Ik mis je erg.**
- **echt**: really. **Het is echt koud.** It can also stress that something is true: **Ik kom echt.** Very common in speech.
- **best**: quite or pretty, often with a hint of "more than you might think". **Het is best moeilijk.**
- **nogal** and **vrij**: rather or fairly. **Vrij** sounds fairly neutral (**vrij rustig**). **Nogal** can suggest a strong degree or more than you would like (**nogal duur**).
- After **is** or **zijn** with no adjective, **erg** means bad (**Dat is niet erg**, no problem) and **vrij** means free or off work.
- Before an adjective plus noun, speech often says **een hele mooie dag**, while careful writing uses **een heel mooie dag**.

Examples

Het is vandaag **heel** warm.	It is very warm today.

Die nieuwe fiets is **erg** duur.	That new bike is very expensive.
Daan is **echt** blij met zijn nieuwe baan.	Daan is really happy with his new job.
Ik mis mijn familie **heel erg**.	I miss my family very much.
Nederlands is **best** moeilijk.	Dutch is quite difficult.
Dit is **de beste** soep van Amsterdam.	This is the best soup in Amsterdam.
De trein was vanochtend **nogal** vol.	The train was rather full this morning.
De huur in Utrecht is **vrij** hoog.	The rent in Utrecht is fairly high.
Lotte is morgen **vrij**.	Lotte has the day off tomorrow.
We hebben een **heel** mooie dag gehad.	We had a very nice day.

Why it works this way

Think of each word as a volume knob on the adjective, though not every knob has one fixed setting. **Heel** and **erg** usually turn it up high. **Best** and **vrij** often set it to a moderate level: clearly more than a little, but less than very. **Echt** can turn up the degree (**echt koud**) or stress that something is genuinely true (**Ik kom echt.**). **Nogal** means rather, but it can suggest a strong degree, and **nogal duur** often sounds like a complaint.

The knob is attached to the adjective, not to the noun. In **een heel mooie dag**, **mooie** gets an -e because of **dag** (see adjective endings), but **heel** only describes **mooie**. A word that describes an adjective is an adverb (a word that says how or how much), and Dutch adverbs take no -e. In speech, the -e often spreads to **heel**: **een hele mooie dag**. That is normal in conversation and chat messages. In a job application or an email to the gemeente, write **heel**. With an -e, **hele** usually means whole: **de hele dag** (see heel, al and alle).

Best is a classic false friend. The English best is **de beste** or **het best** in Dutch (see goed, beter, best).

Remember: best is not the best. When Joris calls a party **best leuk**, the party was quite fun, not the party of the year.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik mis je heel.**~~
SAY **Ik mis je erg.**
as very, **heel** needs an adjective or adverb after it

NOT ~~**Het is veel duur.**~~
SAY **Het is erg duur.**
veel duur is wrong; use **heel** or **erg**. With a comparative, **veel** works: **veel duurder**

NOT ~~**Bas maakt best koffie van het kantoor.**~~
SAY **Bas maakt de beste koffie van het kantoor.**
for the best, say **de beste**

NOT ~~**Ik heb de heel dag gewerkt.**~~
SAY **Ik heb de hele dag gewerkt.**
meaning whole, it is an adjective and gets -e after **de**

Quick check

1. Choose **heel** or **erg**: Ik mis mijn oma … .
2. Mei says: **Het nieuwe kantoor is best groot.** What does she mean? (a) It is the biggest office. (b) It is quite big.
3. Choose **heel** or **veel**: In de supermarkt is het vandaag … druk.
4. In a careful email to the gemeente, choose **heel** or **hele**: Ik heb een … korte vraag over mijn paspoort.

Answers on page 797.

Use it today

Next time a colleague asks **Hoe was je weekend?**, answer with one of these words: **Best leuk**, **Heel rustig** or **Echt gezellig**. Then add one sentence with **nogal** or **vrij**, for example **De trein was nogal vol**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/intensifiers

RULE 152 · LEVEL A1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Altijd, vaak, soms, nooit

To say how often something happens, Dutch uses **altijd** (always), **meestal** (usually), **vaak** (often), **soms** (sometimes), **zelden** (rarely) and **nooit** (never). In a sentence that starts with the subject, these words normally come after the verb, where English usually puts them in front: **Ik fiets vaak** means I often cycle. And because **nooit** already means "not ever", you don't add **niet** to it.

The pattern

> **In a sentence that starts with the subject, put the frequency word after the conjugated verb (the verb form that changes with the person, like fiets or fietst). A short object pronoun such as het, hem or me normally comes between them.**

- From most to least: **altijd**, **meestal**, **vaak**, **soms**, **zelden**, **nooit**. In everyday speech you also hear **bijna nooit** (almost never).
- Subject, verb, frequency word: **Sanne werkt vaak thuis.**
- Verb, short pronoun, frequency word: **Ik zie hem soms.** (More on these pronouns in object pronouns.)
- A second verb usually waits at the end: **Ik moet vaak wachten.**
- A frequency word can also open the sentence. Then the verb still comes second and the subject follows it: **Soms werk ik thuis.** The same happens after other openers: **Op maandag werk ik altijd thuis.** (See inversion.)
- **nooit** already contains "not", so you don't add **niet**.

Examples

Ik fiets **altijd** naar mijn werk.	I always cycle to work.

Sanne neemt **meestal** de trein.	Sanne usually takes the train.
Het regent **vaak** in november.	It often rains in November.
Ahmed werkt **soms** thuis.	Ahmed sometimes works from home.
Mei eet **zelden** vlees.	Mei rarely eats meat.
Joris drinkt **nooit** koffie.	Joris never drinks coffee.
Ik zie **hem vaak** in de supermarkt.	I often see him in the supermarket.
Lotte helpt **me altijd**.	Lotte always helps me.
Bij de huisarts moet ik **vaak** wachten.	At the GP's I often have to wait.

Why it works this way

A Dutch main clause keeps a fixed spot for the conjugated verb: second place (see verb second). In a sentence that starts with the subject, English lets always and often slip in front of the verb. Dutch saves that spot for the verb, so the frequency word waits behind it. If you speak German, this will feel familiar.

Short pronouns like **het**, **hem** and **me** are light and unstressed, so they cling to the verb and get there first.

Meaning matters too. **Ik drink vaak thee** says you drink tea many times. **Ik drink meestal thee** says tea is your usual choice when you drink something.

Joris rookt niet and **Joris rookt nooit** can both tell you Joris is not a smoker; **nooit** adds "at no time". One negative word does the job. If you speak Spanish, you may be used to two negative words in one sentence. In standard Dutch, you don't add **niet** to **nooit** when you mean never.

Remember: verb, little pronoun, how often. **Ik zie hem soms.**

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik altijd fiets naar mijn werk.**~~
SAY **Ik fiets altijd naar mijn werk.**
the verb comes straight after **ik**

NOT ~~**Ik vergeet altijd het.**~~
SAY **Ik vergeet het altijd.**
the short pronoun goes before the frequency word

NOT ~~**Soms ik werk thuis.**~~
SAY **Soms werk ik thuis.**
the verb stays in second place

NOT ~~**Daan rookt nooit niet.**~~
SAY **Daan rookt nooit.**
nooit already means "not ever"

Quick check

1. Fill in the word for "usually": **Priya gaat ... met de trein naar Amsterdam.**
2. Fix the word order, keeping **Yara** first: **Yara altijd komt te laat.**
3. Fix the word order, keeping **ik** first: **Ik vind soms het moeilijk.**
4. Mei never cycles in the rain. Remove one word: **Mei fietst nooit niet in de regen.**

Answers on page 797.

Use it today

Write four true sentences about your week, each with a different frequency word, for example **Ik fiets meestal naar mijn werk** or **Ik kook zelden**. Read them aloud and check that each frequency word comes after the verb.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/frequency-adverbs

RULE 153 · LEVEL B1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Iets leuks, niets nieuws: the extra -s

After **iets**, **niets**, **veel**, **weinig**, **wat** and **genoeg**, an adjective (a describing word like **leuk** or **nieuw**) gets an extra **-s**: **iets leuks** (something nice), **niets nieuws** (nothing new), **veel moois** (lots of beautiful things). If the adjective already ends in **-s**, nothing is added: **iets vies** (something dirty). English has no ending like this, which is exactly why it slips away so easily.

The pattern

> **After iets, niets, veel, weinig, wat and genoeg, an adjective with no noun after it takes -s, unless it already ends in -s.**

- Add only **-s**. The spelling of the adjective does not change: **groot** gives **iets groots**, **lief** gives **iets liefs**, **bijzonder** gives **niets bijzonders**.
- Adjectives that already end in **-s** or **-sch** add nothing: **iets fris**, **iets Nederlands**, **iets praktisch**.
- **Genoeg** triggers the **-s** only when it comes before the adjective: **genoeg leuks** (plenty of fun things), but **groot genoeg** (big enough).
- Comparatives (the **-er** forms, like bigger) take **-s** too: **iets beters**, **niets mooiers**. See Comparatives: groter, mooier, duurder.
- Informal **niks** works like **niets** (**niks bijzonders**), and so does **allerlei** (all kinds of): **allerlei lekkers**.
- A word like **heel** or **echt** before the adjective stays unchanged: **iets heel leuks**.
- With a noun after it, there is no **-s** and the normal adjective-ending rules apply: **veel mooie foto's**, but **veel lekker eten** (**eten** is a het-word). See Adjective endings: when to add -e.

Examples

Ik heb **iets leuks** voor je verjaardag gekocht.	I bought something nice for your birthday.
Is er **iets nieuws** op je werk?	Is there anything new at work?
Het was een rustige dag: er is **niets bijzonders** gebeurd.	It was a quiet day: nothing special happened.
In Maastricht is **veel moois** te zien.	There is a lot of beautiful stuff to see in Maastricht.
Ik ga vroeg slapen, omdat er **weinig interessants** op tv is.	I'm going to bed early because there isn't much of interest on TV.
Sanne neemt op vrijdag **wat lekkers** mee naar kantoor.	On Fridays, Sanne brings something tasty to the office.
Voor kinderen is er in Rotterdam **genoeg leuks** te doen.	There are plenty of fun things for children to do in Rotterdam.
Gelukkig vond de huisarts **niets ernstigs**.	Luckily, the GP found nothing serious.
Bah, Daan heeft in **iets vies** getrapt.	Yuck, Daan stepped in something disgusting.
Fatima zoekt **iets praktisch** voor haar nieuwe keuken.	Fatima is looking for something practical for her new kitchen.

Why it works this way

Think of the **-s** as a label that turns the adjective into stuff. **Iets leuks** is "something of the nice kind", and **veel moois** is "a lot of beautiful stuff". The traditional name is the partitive genitive (a form meaning "part of"): the **-s** is a leftover of the old genitive ending, which meant roughly "of". You already know one word built this way: **iets anders** (something else) is **ander** plus **-s**. More in Ander, andere and anders.

This also tells you when the **-s** stays away. **Iets**, **wat** and **veel** can also say how much of a quality something has: a bit, much. Then the adjective simply describes something; it is not stuff, so there is no **-s**.

- **Heeft u iets groters?** (Do you have something bigger?) versus **Deze jas is iets groter.** (This coat is a bit bigger.)
- **Wil je wat lekkers?** (Would you like something tasty?) versus **De soep is wat zout.** (The soup is a bit salty.)
- **Er is hier veel moois.** (There is a lot of beautiful stuff here.) versus **Het is hier veel mooier.** (It is much nicer here.)

English speakers say "something nice" and write **iets leuk**. German speakers, used to "etwas Neues", may write **iets nieuwe**. Dutch wants neither: just **-s**.

Remember: if the adjective is the thing, add **-s** (**iets groters**). If it says how something is, leave it bare (**iets groter**).

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb iets leuk voor je gekocht.**~~
SAY **Ik heb iets leuks voor je gekocht.**
after **iets**, the adjective needs **-s**

NOT ~~**Ik heb niets nieuwe gehoord.**~~
SAY **Ik heb niets nieuws gehoord.**
the ending is **-s**, not **-e**

NOT ~~**Het weekend was niets bijzonder.**~~
SAY **Het weekend was niets bijzonders.**
nothing special also needs **-s**

NOT ~~**Mijn nieuwe huis is iets kleiners dan het oude.**~~
SAY **Mijn nieuwe huis is iets kleiner dan het oude.**
here **iets** means a bit, so no **-s**

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **lekker**: **Lotte heeft voor de nieuwe buren iets … gebakken.**
2. Choose: **Deze fiets is iets (duurder / duurders) dan die van Joris.**
3. Fill in the right form of **Nederlands**: **Mei wil iets … meenemen voor haar familie in China.**
4. Fix the sentence by changing only the adjective: **Volgens Ahmed gebeurt er in zijn dorp weinig spannende.**

Answers on page 797.

Use it today

On Monday, when a colleague asks **Hoe was je weekend?**, answer with this pattern: **Niets bijzonders**, or better, **Ik heb iets leuks gedaan**, followed by what you did. Then write one sentence about your town with **veel moois** or **genoeg leuks te doen**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/iets-leuks

RULE 154 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Dan, als and zo … als

Use **dan** for "than": **Daan is groter dan Bas** means "Daan is taller than Bas". For "as … as", use **net zo … als** or **even … als**: **Daan is net zo groot als Bas**. And "different from" is **anders dan**.

The pattern

> **Use dan for "than" after a comparative (the -er form, like groter, bigger) and in anders dan (different from). For "as … as", use zo … als or even … als.**

- **groter dan**, **duurder dan**, **beter dan**: bigger than, more expensive than, better than
- **meer dan**, **minder dan**, **liever … dan**: more than, less than, rather … than
- **(net) zo groot als**: (just) as big as; **net** adds "just" or "exactly"
- **even groot als**: as big as; this **even** means "equally", not "for a moment"
- **niet zo groot als**: not as big as
- **anders dan**: different from

Examples

Daan is **groter dan** Bas.	Daan is taller than Bas.
De trein is **sneller dan** de bus.	The train is faster than the bus.
De supermarkt is vandaag **drukker dan** normaal.	The supermarket is busier than usual today.

Priya heeft **meer** vrije dagen **dan** Ahmed.	Priya has more days off than Ahmed.
Ik drink **liever** thee **dan** koffie.	I would rather drink tea than coffee.
Het is vandaag **net zo koud als** gisteren.	Today it is just as cold as yesterday.
Fatima is **even oud als** haar buurvrouw.	Fatima is as old as her neighbour.
Mei fietst **net zo snel als** Carlos.	Mei cycles just as fast as Carlos.
Mijn fiets is **niet zo nieuw als** die van Joris.	My bike is not as new as Joris's bike.
Het leven hier is **anders dan** in Spanje.	Life here is different from life in Spain.

Why it works this way

You compare things all day: prices, the weather, the train and the bus. Dutch splits this job in two.

Dan goes with difference. Words like **groter**, **meer**, **liever** and **anders** already tell you the two sides are not the same, and **dan** brings in the other side. **Als** goes with sameness. It is also the word for "as" in **Ik werk als kok** (I work as a cook), so **zo groot als** maps neatly onto "as big as".

- **Sanne is groter dan Yara.** They are different heights.
- **Sanne is net zo groot als Yara.** They are the same height.

In casual speech you will hear **groter als** and **beter als** a lot, also from people born here. Understand it, but in standard Dutch, in emails and in exams, use **dan** after a comparative. If you speak German, take extra care: German "größer als" is Dutch **groter dan**, and German "so groß wie" is Dutch **zo groot als**.

To build the **-er** forms, see Comparatives: groter, mooier, duurder. **Als** also means "if" or "when", a different job covered in Als, wanneer or toen.

Remember: dan for different, **als** for alike. In a comparison, the word in front decides: a comparative or **anders** takes **dan**, while **zo** or **even** takes **als**. That is why **niet zo duur als** keeps its **als**, even though it describes a difference.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Lotte is ouder als Sanne.**~~
SAY **Lotte is ouder dan Sanne.**
common in casual speech, but standard Dutch uses **dan** after a comparative

NOT ~~**Joris is langer dan mij.**~~
SAY **Joris is langer dan ik.**
standard Dutch uses **ik** here, as in **dan ik ben**

NOT ~~**Emma is net zo lang zoals haar vader.**~~
SAY **Emma is net zo lang als haar vader.**
zoals means "like" or "such as"; "as ... as" is **zo ... als**

NOT ~~**Dit huis is anders van ons oude huis.**~~
SAY **Dit huis is anders dan ons oude huis.**
English says "different from", Dutch says **anders dan**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **De bus is langzamer ... de trein.**
2. Fill in the gap: **Mijn kamer is net zo groot ... jouw kamer.**
3. Choose: **Werken in Nederland is anders (als / dan) werken in India.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed fietst sneller als zijn broer.**

Answers on page 797.

Use it today

Choose two things you know well, like two cities, two supermarkets or your old and new job. Say or write three sentences: one with **-er dan**, one with **net zo … als** and one with **anders dan**, for example **Utrecht is kleiner dan Amsterdam**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/comparing-dan-als

RULE 155 · LEVEL B1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Adjectives used as nouns

Dutch can leave out a noun and let the adjective, the describing word, do its job. **De oude** means the old one, **het mooie is dat …** means the nice thing is that …, and **de rijken** means rich people. Where English needs an extra word like one, people or thing, Dutch usually manages with just the article (**de** or **het**) and the adjective with **-e**.

The pattern

> **Keep the article, drop the noun, and give the adjective its -e. The adjective now works as a noun: de oude, de rijken, het mooie.**

- **The … one.** If the noun is clear from the context, use its article: **de oude** (the old one, about a **fiets**), **het grote** (the big one, about a **huis**). For things, the plural looks the same: **de zwarte** (the black ones, about **schoenen**).
- **People.** With no noun in the context, **de** or **een** plus an adjective usually means a person: **de zieke** (the sick person), **een bekende** (someone you know). For people in general, add **-n**: **de rijken** (rich people), **de doven** (deaf people), **ouderen** (older people, built on **ouder**).
- **An abstract idea.** **Het** plus an adjective means the … thing or the … part: **het mooie is dat …** (the nice thing is that …), **het nieuwe aan dit plan** (what is new about this plan). The **-st** form works too: **het leukste** (the most fun part).
- The usual spelling changes apply: **doof**, **dove**, **doven**.

Examples

Mijn fiets is **de oude** naast de deur.	My bike is the old one next to the door.

Sanne wil het kleine huis, maar Daan wil **het grote**.	Sanne wants the small house, but Daan wants the big one.
Welke schoenen trek je aan? **De zwarte**, denk ik.	Which shoes are you wearing? The black ones, I think.
De huisarts ziet in de winter veel **zieken**.	The GP sees a lot of sick people in winter.
Volgens Ahmed moeten **de rijken** meer belasting betalen.	According to Ahmed, rich people should pay more tax.
De gemeente organiseert elke week een koffieochtend voor **ouderen**.	The municipality organises a coffee morning for older people every week.
Het mooie is dat ik op de fiets naar mijn werk kan.	The nice thing is that I can cycle to work.
Priya vraagt wat **het nieuwe aan dit plan** is.	Priya asks what is new about this plan.
Het vervelende is dat de trein vandaag weer vertraging heeft.	The annoying thing is that the train is delayed again today.

Why it works this way

English needs a support word: the old one, rich people, the annoying thing. Dutch can do without it, because the article and the **-e** ending already show that a noun is meant. Think of **de oude** as **de oude fiets** with **fiets** left out because everyone can see the bike. The article belongs to that invisible noun, so a house becomes **het grote** and a bike stays **de oude**.

When the adjective means people in general, it behaves like a full noun: it gets a plural **-n** and can follow **een** or **veel**, or stand alone: **een zieke**, **veel zieken**, **ouderen**. English the rich has no plural ending; Dutch **de rijken** does, and takes a plural verb: **de rijken betalen**. Compare:

- **Welke tomaten wil je? De rijpe.** (tomatoes on the table: no **-n**)

- **In deze stad hebben de armen het moeilijk.** (poor people in general: **-n**)

The abstract use takes **het** and has no plural. Add **aan** to say what it is about: **het leuke aan Utrecht** (in speech you also hear **van**). It is not the same as **iets nieuws** (something new), which takes **-s**: see iets leuks, niets nieuws.

Remember: English adds a word, Dutch adds an ending. One, people or thing becomes the article plus **-e**, with an extra **-n** for people in general.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ik neem de blauwe één.~~
SAY **Ik neem de blauwe.**
no word for one after the adjective

NOT ~~De rijke betalen meer belasting.~~
SAY **De rijken betalen meer belasting.**
rich people in general: add **-n**

NOT ~~Welke bananen neem je? De gelen.~~
SAY **Welke bananen neem je? De gele.**
bananas are things: no **-n**

NOT ~~Het leuk aan dit werk is de vrijheid.~~
SAY **Het leuke aan dit werk is de vrijheid.**
the adjective needs **-e**

NOT ~~De mooie is dat het gratis is.~~
SAY **Het mooie is dat het gratis is.**
an abstract idea takes **het**

Quick check

1. Choose **de** or **het**: **Ik heb twee boeken geleend. Ik begin met … dikke.**
2. Fill in **doof** as a noun: **De gemeente maakt haar website ook geschikt voor blinden en …**
3. Choose the correct answer to **Welke jas is van Joris?** (a) **De lange één.** (b) **De lange.** (c) **De langen.**
4. Choose **de** or **het**: **… leuke aan mijn werk is dat ik veel buiten ben.**

Answers on page 797.

Use it today

Tell a colleague or neighbour one thing you like about living in the Netherlands, starting with **Het leuke aan … is dat …**, and one thing that annoys you, starting with **Het vervelende is dat …**. The weather is always a safe choice.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adjectives-as-nouns

RULE 156 · LEVEL B1 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Ander, andere and anders

Ander and **andere** mean other or different, and they go with a noun: **een ander huis** (a different house), **een andere keer** (another time). **Anders** means differently, otherwise or else: **Ik doe het anders** (I'll do it differently), **Kom op tijd, anders mis je de trein** (Be on time, otherwise you'll miss the train), **iets anders** (something else).

The pattern

Ander (other, different) is an adjective, so it gets the usual adjective endings: een ander huis, een andere keer. Anders (differently, otherwise, else) keeps the same form.

- **ander** with a singular het-word after **een** or **geen**, or with no article: **een ander huis**, **geen ander idee**, **ander werk**.
- **andere** with de-words, after **de** or **het**, and in the plural: **een andere keer**, **de andere bus**, **het andere formulier**, **andere mensen**.
- **de anderen** (with -n): the others, meaning people.
- **anders** with a verb: differently (**Ik doe het anders**), or different after verbs like **zijn** (**Het is hier anders dan thuis**).
- **anders** at the start of a clause: otherwise, or else (**anders mis je de trein**).
- **iets anders**, **niets anders**, **iemand anders**, **ergens anders**: something, nothing, someone, somewhere else.

Examples

Kunnen we een **andere** keer afspreken? Vandaag komt het slecht uit.	Can we meet another time? Today isn't convenient.
Sanne en Daan wonen nu in een **ander** huis, dichter bij het station.	Sanne and Daan now live in a different house, closer to the station.
Priya zoekt **ander** werk, want ze wil minder reizen.	Priya is looking for other work, because she wants to travel less.
Het **andere** formulier moet je zelf naar de gemeente sturen.	You have to send the other form to the municipality yourself.
Als Joris het **anders** uitlegt, snap ik het meteen.	When Joris explains it differently, I get it straight away.
Neem een regenjas mee, **anders** word je nat op de fiets.	Take a raincoat, otherwise you'll get wet on your bike.
Wil je koffie, of heb je liever **iets anders**?	Would you like coffee, or would you rather have something else?
Sinds Carlos hier woont, is zijn leven heel **anders**.	Since Carlos has lived here, his life has been very different.

Why it works this way

Ander is an ordinary adjective, so it follows the same rules as **groot** or **nieuw**: **een groot huis**, **een ander huis**; **de grote bus**, **de andere bus**. The full system is in Adjective endings.

Anders does a different job: it does not describe a noun. Where English says something else, someone else or or else, Dutch says **anders**, and it also covers differently. The -s in **iets anders** is the same extra -s as in iets leuks. When else means more, as in what else?, Dutch usually says **nog meer**: **Wat heb je nog meer nodig?**

As otherwise, **anders** fills the first place of its clause, so the verb comes straight after it (Verb second).

English another hides two meanings, and Dutch splits them. A few pairs to compare:

- **Ik neem de andere.** (I'll take the other one.) / **Ik doe het anders.** (I'll do it differently.)
- **een andere fiets** (a different bike) / **Mijn fiets is anders.** (My bike is different.)
- **Wil je een ander broodje?** (a different roll, say because yours is stale) / **Wil je nog een broodje?** (one more roll)

Remember: when the word goes with a noun, even an unspoken one as in **Ik neem de andere**, it is **ander** or **andere**. When English would say differently, else, otherwise, or different after a verb, it is **anders**.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ik woon nu in een andere huis.~~
SAY **Ik woon nu in een ander huis.**
huis is a het-word, so no -e after **een**

NOT ~~Het weer is hier heel ander.~~
SAY **Het weer is hier heel anders.**
different after **zijn** is **anders**

NOT ~~Kom op tijd, anders je mist de trein.~~
SAY **Kom op tijd, anders mis je de trein.**
the verb comes straight after **anders**

NOT ~~Wil je iets andere drinken?~~
SAY **Wil je iets anders drinken?**
something else is **iets anders**, with no -e or -es

NOT ~~**Mijn collega denkt er ander over.**~~
SAY **Mijn collega denkt er anders over.**
differently, with a verb, is **anders**

Quick check

1. Fill in **ander**, **andere** or **anders**: Lotte heeft een … baan gevonden, vlak bij huis.
2. Fill in **ander**, **andere** or **anders**: Bas zoekt een … appartement, want dit is te klein.
3. Fill in **ander**, **andere** or **anders**: Ik heb geen zin in pasta. Kunnen we vanavond iets … eten?
4. Fix the sentence: **Bel de huisarts voor tien uur, anders je moet tot morgen wachten.**

Answers on page 798.

Use it today

At the bakery or the market, listen for **Anders nog iets?** (Anything else?) and answer it in Dutch. Then text a friend to move a plan, for example **Zullen we een andere dag gaan fietsen?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/ander-anders

RULE 157 · LEVEL B2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Heel, al and alle: whole and all

For one whole thing, Dutch puts **hele** after the article: **de hele dag** (the whole day), **het hele jaar** (the whole year). Before a place name without an article, you use **heel** on its own: **heel Nederland** (all of the Netherlands). For all of a group or amount, use **alle** before a plural (**alle mensen**), **al** when **het**, **die** or a possessive follows (**al het geld**, **al mijn vrienden**), and **allemaal** later in the sentence (**We zijn er allemaal**).

The pattern

> **Heel means whole: one thing from start to finish. Al, alle and allemaal mean all: every person, thing or bit of a group or amount.**

- **de hele** or **het hele** + singular noun: **de hele dag**, **het hele jaar**. **Hele** takes the normal adjective endings, so you say **een hele dag** but **een heel jaar**.
- **heel** + place name without an article: **heel Nederland**, **heel Utrecht**. Names that have an article use the first pattern: **de hele Randstad**.
- **alle** + plural noun: **alle mensen**, **alle treinen** (plus a few set phrases with uncountable nouns, like **met alle respect**).
- **al** + **het**, **dit**, **dat**, **deze**, **die** or a possessive (my, your, his): **al het geld**, **al die mensen**, **al mijn vrienden**.
- **allemaal** stands on its own, in a main clause usually after the conjugated verb (the verb that changes with the subject): **We zijn er allemaal.**

Examples

Daan heeft **de hele dag** in de trein gezeten.	Daan sat on the train all day.
Mei werkt **het hele jaar** door, behalve in augustus.	Mei works all year round, except in August.
Na de finale was **heel Nederland** oranje.	After the final, the whole of the Netherlands was orange.
Alle treinen naar Utrecht hebben vertraging.	All trains to Utrecht are delayed.
Fatima heeft **al haar collega's** uitgenodigd voor haar verjaardag.	Fatima invited all her colleagues to her birthday.
Al het eten was op voordat Ahmed er was.	All the food was gone before Ahmed got there.
Waar komen **al die fietsen** ineens vandaan?	Where have all those bikes suddenly come from?
Iedereen binnen? Mooi, we zijn er **allemaal**.	Everyone inside? Great, we are all here.
De formulieren van de gemeente? Die heb ik **allemaal** ingevuld.	The forms from the council? I have filled them all in.

Why it works this way

Think about position. **Hele** is an ordinary adjective, so it stands after the article like **mooie** in **de mooie dag** and follows the usual adjective endings. **Al** and **alle** are quantity words: they stand in front of everything, article included.

English mostly helps you: "the whole day" is **de hele dag** word for word, and "all my friends" is **al mijn vrienden**. The trap is "all the" with a plural: Dutch normally drops the article and says **alle treinen** (**al de treinen**

exists, but is much less usual). German speakers have the opposite trap: "alle meine Freunde" becomes **al mijn vrienden**, without the -e.

Some contrast pairs make the difference visible:

- **Ik heb de hele dag gewerkt** (one day, morning to night) versus **Ik heb alle dagen gewerkt** (every day of a period).
- **Ik heb al het geld** (I have all the money) versus **Ik heb het geld al** (I already have the money). That second **al** means already; see al, nog and pas.
- **al het geld** versus **het hele bedrag**: with uncountable things like **geld**, **eten** or **werk**, Dutch usually picks **al het**; **het hele** goes with one countable thing.

Allemaal behaves like "all" in "we are all here": in most sentences it moves away from the subject into the middle of the sentence, often after short words like **er**, **het** or **ze**: **Ik heb ze allemaal gebeld.** It can stay right after the subject only with a full, stressed pronoun, and that sounds emphatic: **Wij allemaal hebben hiervoor gewerkt.** You also meet it as a greeting: **Hallo allemaal** in a group chat, **Beste allen** in a more formal email.

Two side notes. Before an adjective, **heel** means very (**heel druk**), a different job covered in the lesson on intensifiers. And in Belgium you will often hear **heel de dag**; in the Netherlands **de hele dag** is the usual order.

Remember: heel looks at one thing from edge to edge, **alle** counts the members of a group, and **al** in the sense of all leans on a partner right behind it: **het**, **die** or **mijn**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb alle dag gewerkt.**~~
SAY **Ik heb de hele dag gewerkt.**
English "all day" is one whole stretch of time, so **de hele**

NOT ~~alle mijn vrienden~~
SAY **al mijn vrienden**
before a possessive, no -e

NOT ~~Alle de treinen zijn vol.~~
SAY **Alle treinen zijn vol.**
no **de** after **alle**

NOT ~~Hele Nederland kijkt mee.~~
SAY **Heel Nederland kijkt mee.**
place name without an article: **heel**, no -e

NOT ~~We allemaal zijn het eens.~~
SAY **We zijn het allemaal eens.**
the usual order; before the verb, only the full pronoun works: **Wij allemaal zijn het eens**

Quick check

1. Choose **de hele** or **alle**: Lotte heeft … week thuisgewerkt.
2. Choose **al** or **alle**: Carlos heeft … zijn boeken in dozen gedaan.
3. Choose **heel** or **hele**: Het is deze week in … Europa warmer dan normaal.
4. Choose **alle** or **allemaal**: Is iedereen er? Ja, we zijn er …, dus de vergadering kan beginnen.

Answers on page 798.

Use it today

Send a message to a group chat or your colleagues that starts with **Hallo allemaal** and uses **de hele** and **al** or **alle** once each, for example about **de hele week** or **al die regen**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/heel-al-alle

RULE 158 · LEVEL A2 · ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Veel, weinig, een paar, een beetje

The everyday Dutch word for both "many" and "much" is **veel**, and **weinig** covers both "few" and "little". For small amounts, say **een paar** (a few) with things you count and **een beetje** (a little) with things you don't. **Genoeg** (enough) can go before or after the noun: **genoeg tijd** or **tijd genoeg**.

The pattern

Veel (a lot of) and weinig (not much, few) go with plural nouns and with uncountable nouns, the things you measure instead of count, like water or tijd. For small amounts, use een paar (a few) with plural nouns and een beetje (a little) with uncountable nouns.

- **veel** and **weinig**: **veel mensen**, **veel geld**, **weinig auto's**, **weinig tijd**.
- **een paar** + plural noun: **een paar dagen**. Words that stay singular after a number do so here too: **een paar jaar**, **een paar euro**.
- With things that come in twos, **een paar** usually means a pair: **een paar schoenen**. After a number, **paar** usually stays singular: **twee paar sokken**.
- **een beetje** + uncountable noun: **een beetje suiker**, **een beetje hulp** (more in countable and uncountable nouns).
- **genoeg** before or after the noun: **genoeg stoelen** or **stoelen genoeg**. Both are correct; before the noun is the safe default.
- The verb follows the noun: **er zijn veel mensen**, **er is weinig tijd**.

Examples

Er zijn vandaag **veel mensen** in de trein.	There are a lot of people on the train today.
Fatima heeft deze week **weinig tijd**.	Fatima doesn't have much time this week.
Daan heeft **weinig vrienden** in Utrecht.	Daan has few friends in Utrecht.
Daan heeft **een paar vrienden** in Utrecht.	Daan has a few friends in Utrecht.
Priya is **een paar dagen** ziek geweest.	Priya was ill for a few days.
Ahmed zoekt **een paar schoenen** voor de bruiloft.	Ahmed is looking for a pair of shoes for the wedding.
Wil je **een beetje suiker** in je thee?	Would you like a little sugar in your tea?
Ik spreek **een beetje Nederlands**.	I speak a little Dutch.
Hebben we **genoeg melk** voor morgen?	Do we have enough milk for tomorrow?
Geen haast, we hebben **tijd genoeg**.	No rush, we have enough time.

Why it works this way

English sorts amounts by the kind of noun: "many" and "few" for things you count, "much" and "little" for things you don't. Dutch skips that split for the big words. **Veel** and **weinig** are one volume knob that fits both kinds of noun: **veel fietsen**, **veel regen**. The words for "more" and "less" follow the same idea: **meer** is "more", and **minder** is both "less" and "fewer" (see irregular comparison).

For small amounts, Dutch does split, just like English: "a few friends" is **een paar vrienden**, "a little sugar" is **een beetje suiker**. Without "a", English

"few" and "little" tend to sound negative, and so does **weinig**: **weinig vrienden** means not many. **Een paar** and **een beetje**, like "a few" and "a little", sound positive.

If your language changes the word for "many", like German "viele" or Spanish "muchos", keep everyday Dutch simple: **veel mensen**, **weinig mensen**, no -e. You will see **vele** in formal writing, as in **vele jaren**.

Remember: if you could count it on your fingers, use **een paar**. If you pour, scoop or spread it, use **een beetje**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Joris heeft veel van werk.**~~
SAY **Joris heeft veel werk.**
no **van**: English "a lot of" is just **veel**

NOT ~~**Ik koop een beetje appels.**~~
SAY **Ik koop een paar appels.**
you count apples, so use **een paar**

NOT ~~**Een paar collega's is ziek.**~~
SAY **Een paar collega's zijn ziek.**
collega's is plural, so the verb is plural

NOT ~~**Kaartjes? Ik heb nog een paar.**~~
SAY **Kaartjes? Ik heb er nog een paar.**
when you leave out the noun, Dutch needs **er**

NOT ~~**Ik heb teveel gegeten.**~~
SAY **Ik heb te veel gegeten.**
write **te veel** as two words

Quick check

1. Choose **een paar** or **een beetje**: **Mag ik … melk in mijn thee?**
2. Choose **veel** or **weinig**: **Het is erg druk op het station. Er staan … mensen op het perron.**
3. Fill in **is** or **zijn**: **Er … nog een paar broodjes in de keuken.**
4. Which is correct: **We hebben genoeg stoelen**, **We hebben stoelen genoeg**, or both?

Answers on page 798.

Use it today

When a colleague or neighbour leaves for the weekend, wish them **veel plezier**. Then describe your week to someone in one sentence with **veel**, **weinig** and **een paar**, for example: **Ik heb deze week veel werk en weinig tijd, maar ook een paar leuke afspraken.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/quantities

Small words

Prepositions, time, numbers and the particles that make Dutch sound Dutch.

- In, op, aan, bij: where things are
- Naar, uit, door, langs, over
- Om, op, in: talking about time
- Telling the time: half drie means 2:30
- Numbers: eenentwintig, not twenty-one
- Days, months and dates
- Al, nog, pas, nog niet, niet meer
- Geleden, sinds, al and over
- Even, maar, eens: making requests friendly
- Toch, wel, hoor, nou, gewoon
- Particle combinations: maar even, toch maar, nou eens
- Ja, nee, jawel and toch wel
- Ook, alleen, maar, zelfs: focus words
- Adjectives with a fixed preposition
- Met de trein, op de fiets, te voet
- Ten, ter and te in fixed phrases
- Fixed prepositional phrases

RULE 159 · LEVEL A1 · SMALL WORDS

In, op, aan, bij: where things are

Use **in** when something is inside a space, a town or a country, **op** when it is on a surface, **aan** when it hangs on a wall or a hook, and **bij** when it is near something or at someone's place. Many places also come with a fixed word, like **op school** and **op het station**, which you simply learn by heart.

The pattern

Use in for inside, op for on a surface, aan for hanging on something and bij for near or at someone's place. Many places also take a fixed preposition (a small word that shows position), so learn those by heart.

- **in**: inside a space, a town or a country: **in de kast** (in the cupboard), **in Utrecht**, **in Nederland**.
- **op**: on a surface: **op tafel** or **op de tafel**, **op de grond** (on the floor). Also many fixed places: **op school**, **op het werk**, **op het station**.
- **aan**: hanging on something, usually a wall or a hook: **aan de muur**, **aan de kapstok** (on the coat rack). Also fixed: **aan tafel** (sitting at the table).
- **bij**: near something, or at a person's home or practice: **bij de deur**, **bij mijn ouders**, **bij de huisarts**.
- These words say where something is. Going to a place often needs other words: Naar, uit, door, langs, over.

Examples

De melk staat **in de koelkast**.	The milk is in the fridge.
Priya woont **in Utrecht**.	Priya lives in Utrecht.

Mijn sleutels liggen **op tafel**.	My keys are on the table.
Joris is **op het werk**.	Joris is at work.
Mei is **op het station**.	Mei is at the station.
De kalender hangt **aan de muur**.	The calendar is hanging on the wall.
We zitten **aan tafel**.	We are sitting at the table.
Ahmed staat **bij de deur**.	Ahmed is standing by the door.
Lotte slaapt vanavond **bij haar ouders**.	Lotte is sleeping at her parents' place tonight.

Why it works this way

Picture the object and ask how it is held. Walls around it: **in**. A surface it rests on: **op**. A nail or hook it hangs from: **aan**. Just close by: **bij**. A small change in the picture changes the word:

- **De kat zit op tafel.** The cat is on top of the table.
- **We zitten aan tafel.** We are at the table, ready to eat.
- **Yara is in de supermarkt.** Yara is inside the shop.
- **Yara wacht bij de supermarkt.** Yara is waiting near the shop, probably outside.

The fixed places are habit, not logic. Dutch says **op school**, **op het werk**, **op kantoor** (at the office) and **op het station**, but **in de supermarkt** and **in het ziekenhuis**. No rule predicts them, so learn each place with its word as a chunk (a group of words you store as one unit). Fixed prepositional phrases has more.

English "at" has no single Dutch partner: it becomes **op school**, **aan tafel** or **bij de huisarts**. And "on the train" is **in de trein**, because you sit inside it (Met de trein, op de fiets, te voet). German helps a little: **bij** works like "bei" and **aan de muur** is "an der Wand", but "in der Schule" is **op school**. Spanish "en" covers in, on and at, so Spanish speakers often overuse **in**.

Remember: in is a box, **op** is a shelf, **aan** is a hook, **bij** is a neighbour.

Watch out

NOT ~~**De klok hangt op de muur.**~~
SAY **De klok hangt aan de muur.**
something that hangs takes **aan**

NOT ~~**Daan is in school.**~~
SAY **Daan is op school.**
school is a fixed **op** place

NOT ~~**Ik ben in de huisarts.**~~
SAY **Ik ben bij de huisarts.**
at someone's practice: **bij**, you are not inside the doctor

NOT ~~**Mijn telefoon ligt in de tafel.**~~
SAY **Mijn telefoon ligt op de tafel.**
it lies on the surface, not inside

Quick check

1. Choose **in** or **op**: **Fatima woont … Leiden.**
2. Fill in **in**, **op**, **aan** or **bij**: **Bas werkt vandaag niet thuis, maar … kantoor.**
3. Choose **aan** or **op**: **De spiegel hangt … de muur.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Carlos is vandaag in de tandarts.**

Answers on page 798.

Use it today

Walk through your home and say four sentences out loud: something in a cupboard, something on the table, something on the wall and someone or

something by the door. Then tell a friend where you are tonight, for example **Vanavond ben ik bij Sanne.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/place-prepositions

RULE 160 · LEVEL A2 · SMALL WORDS

Naar, uit, door, langs, over

When you describe movement, Dutch uses a small word that shows the route: **naar** (to), **uit** (out of), **door** (through), **langs** (along or past) and **over** (across). **Uit** also tells where you are from (**Ik kom uit Brazilië**), and **over** also means about (**een boek over Amsterdam**). To give a start and an end point, you say **van … naar** (from … to).

The pattern

> **Naar points at where you are going, uit at where you come out of, and door, langs and over describe the route in between. Over can also introduce a topic.**

- **naar**: to a place or a person: **naar huis**, **naar de supermarkt**, **naar oma**
- **uit**: out of something: **uit de trein**; and where you are from: **Ik kom uit Brazilië.**
- **door**: through, in one side and out the other: **door het park**
- **langs**: along or past, with the thing staying beside you: **langs de rivier**
- **over**: across or over the top: **over de brug**; and about a topic: **een boek over Amsterdam**
- **van … naar**: from … to: **van Utrecht naar Leiden**

Examples

Na het werk fiets ik **naar huis**.	After work I cycle home.
Fatima gaat **naar de supermarkt**.	Fatima is going to the supermarket.
Mei stapt **uit de trein**.	Mei gets off the train.

Carlos komt **uit Brazilië**.	Carlos is from Brazil.
Lotte en Ahmed lopen **door het park**.	Lotte and Ahmed are walking through the park.
Bas fietst elke dag **langs de rivier**.	Bas cycles along the river every day.
De bus rijdt **over de brug**.	The bus drives across the bridge.
Yara leest een boek **over Amsterdam**.	Yara is reading a book about Amsterdam.
Joris is **van Utrecht naar Leiden** verhuisd.	Joris has moved from Utrecht to Leiden.

Why it works this way

The previous lesson, In, op, aan, bij: where things are, was about standing still. The prepositions in this lesson (small words before a noun that show place, direction or time) are about moving. Compare:

- **Priya is bij de huisarts.** (She is there now.)
- **Priya gaat naar de huisarts.** (She is on her way.)
- **Daan fietst door het bos.** (He rides through it, between the trees.)
- **Daan fietst langs het bos.** (The forest stays beside him.)

Remember: picture a box on a map. **Uit** is an arrow leaving the box, **door** goes in one side and out the other, **langs** runs beside it, **over** crosses the top, and **naar** points at the place you want to reach. One bike ride can use most of them: **Ik fiets door het park, langs de gracht en over de brug naar het station.**

Uit for origin works with countries, cities and regions: **Ze komt uit Groningen.** With islands you will often hear **van** instead: **Hij komt van Texel.**

Over for a topic works much like English about: **We praten over het weer.** With a time, though, it means in: **over tien minuten** is in ten minutes (about ten minutes is **ongeveer tien minuten**). More in Geleden, sinds, al and over.

With **komen** or **gaan**, **langs** often means a short visit: **Kom je zaterdag langs?** (Will you drop by on Saturday?) That is a separable verb.

With verbs of movement, Dutch often puts **uit**, **door** or **over** after the noun: **Ze loopt de winkel uit.** (She walks out of the shop.) Just recognise this order for now.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik kom van Brazilië.**~~
SAY **Ik kom uit Brazilië.**
where you are from takes **uit** with most countries and cities

NOT ~~**Ik ga thuis.**~~
SAY **Ik ga naar huis.**
thuis means at home; the trip there is **naar huis**

NOT ~~**Ik ga naar Daan's.**~~
SAY **Ik ga naar Daan.**
naar plus a person already means to their place

NOT ~~**We praten van het weer.**~~
SAY **We praten over het weer.**
a topic takes **over**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Waar kom je vandaan, Priya? Ik kom … India.**
2. Choose **door** or **langs**. The path runs beside the canal: **Emma wandelt elke ochtend … de gracht.**

3. Choose **naar** or **uit**: **De trein rijdt van Amsterdam … Utrecht.**
4. Fix the sentence. Sanne tells you what the meeting was about: **We hebben van de planning gepraat.**

Answers on page 798.

Use it today

On your next trip home, describe your route out loud in one Dutch sentence with **van**, **naar** and at least one of **door**, **langs** or **over**. For example: **Ik fiets van mijn werk langs het water naar huis.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/movement-prepositions

RULE 161 · LEVEL A1 · SMALL WORDS

Om, op, in: talking about time

Dutch uses **om** for clock times, **op** for days and dates, and **in** for months, seasons and years: **om acht uur**, **op maandag**, **in juni**. Parts of the day have their own little form with no preposition, such as **'s avonds** (in the evening). And from … until is **van … tot**.

The pattern

> **Use om for a time on the clock, op for a day or a date, and in for a month, a season or a year.**

- **om** + clock time: **om acht uur**, **om twaalf uur**. The word **uur** stays singular. More in telling the time.
- **op** + day or date: **op zaterdag**, **op 5 mei**, **op mijn verjaardag**. With a day of the week, Dutch often drops **op**: **Ik werk zaterdag** usually means this Saturday.
- **in** + month, season or year: **in juni**, **in de winter**, **in 2024**. Seasons keep their article (the word for "the").
- Parts of the day, with no preposition in front: **'s ochtends** (in the morning), **'s middags** (in the afternoon), **'s avonds** (in the evening), **'s nachts** (at night). **'s morgens** means the same as **'s ochtends**. You will also hear **in de ochtend**, but the **'s** forms are the everyday choice.
- **van … tot** means from … until: **van negen tot vijf**. To include the last day, say **tot en met** (up to and including): **van maandag tot en met vrijdag**.

Examples

Mijn trein vertrekt **om acht uur**.	My train leaves at eight o'clock.

Sanne heeft **op vrijdag** vrij.	Sanne is off on Fridays.
Fatima is **op 3 maart** jarig.	Fatima's birthday is on 3 March.
Ahmed heeft **in juli** vakantie.	Ahmed has his holiday in July.
Het regent veel **in de herfst**.	It rains a lot in autumn.
Lotte en Bas trouwen **in 2027**.	Lotte and Bas are getting married in 2027.
Joris drinkt **'s ochtends** koffie.	Joris drinks coffee in the morning.
Yara is **'s middags** thuis.	Yara is at home in the afternoon.
's Avonds kijkt Emma tv.	In the evening, Emma watches TV.
Carlos werkt **van negen tot vijf**.	Carlos works from nine to five.

Why it works this way

Think of zooming out on a calendar. A clock time is a tiny point, a day is one square, and a month, season or year is a big block of squares. English does the same with at, on and in, so only one word really changes: at becomes **om**. A handy picture: **om** can also mean around (**om de hoek**, around the corner), and clock hands go round all day. German speakers get a gift: German um, am and im become **om**, **op** and **in**.

You can combine them: **op maandag om acht uur**, **om tien uur 's avonds**.

The **'s** in **'s avonds** is a fossil, short for **des**, an old form of the word for "the". Treat the whole thing as one fixed word. At the start of a sentence, the **'s** stays small and the next word gets the capital: **'s Avonds**. See when Dutch uses an apostrophe.

Remember: small, medium, large. A clock time gets **om**, a day gets **op**, and a month, season or year gets **in**.

Watch out

NOT ~~De les begint op acht uur.~~
SAY **De les begint om acht uur.**
clock times take **om**

NOT ~~De winkel is open van negen naar zes.~~
SAY **De winkel is open van negen tot zes.**
naar is for going somewhere; until is **tot**

NOT ~~Mijn verjaardag is in 12 juni.~~
SAY **Mijn verjaardag is op 12 juni.**
a day number makes it a date, so **op**

NOT ~~Ik fiets graag in zomer.~~
SAY **Ik fiets graag in de zomer.**
English can drop the, Dutch keeps **de**

NOT ~~Ik sport s'avonds.~~
SAY **Ik sport 's avonds.**
apostrophe first, then s, then a space

Quick check

1. Choose **om**, **op** or **in**: De film begint … negen uur.
2. Choose **om**, **op** or **in**: Priya is … 8 oktober jarig.
3. Choose **om**, **op** or **in**: Het sneeuwt soms … januari.
4. Fill in **'s ochtends**, **'s middags**, **'s avonds** or **'s nachts**: Lotte werkt … in het ziekenhuis. (at night)

Answers on page 799.

Use it today

Check the opening hours of your supermarket and say them out loud: **De supermarkt is open van acht tot tien.** Then tell someone your own week: **Op maandag werk ik van negen tot vijf.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/time-prepositions

RULE 162 · LEVEL A1 · SMALL WORDS

Telling the time: half drie means 2:30

To tell the time in Dutch, say **Het is** plus the time: **Het is drie uur** means "It is three o'clock". The big surprise is **half**: it points forward to the next hour, so **half drie** is 2:30, not 3:30. Around the half hour, Dutch counts from that half: **vijf voor half drie** is 2:25 and **tien over half drie** is 2:40.

The pattern

> **On the everyday clock, half names the hour that is coming: half drie is halfway to three. Minutes near the hour count from the hour, and minutes near the half usually count from the half.**

- Ask: **Hoe laat is het?** ("What time is it?")
- Whole hour: **Het is drie uur** (3:00). For the other everyday times, you normally leave out **uur**.
- Quarters: **kwart over drie** (3:15), **kwart voor drie** (2:45).
- Near the hour: **tien over drie** (3:10), **tien voor vier** (3:50).
- Near the half: **tien voor half vier** (3:20), **vijf voor half vier** (3:25), **half vier** (3:30), **vijf over half vier** (3:35), **tien over half vier** (3:40).
- Timetables and official texts: the 24-hour clock, written **14.30 uur** and read as **veertien uur dertig**.

In daily speech, people usually round to five minutes. You will sometimes hear **twintig over drie** for 3:20, but counting from the half is the usual way in the Netherlands. For the word **om** before a time, see Om, op, in: talking about time.

Examples

Hoe laat is het? Het is **drie uur**.	What time is it? It is three o'clock.
Mijn les begint om **half drie**.	My lesson starts at half past two.
De bus komt om **kwart over vier**.	The bus comes at a quarter past four.
Daan eet om **kwart voor zeven**.	Daan eats at a quarter to seven.
Het is **tien over acht**.	It is ten past eight.
Fatima heeft om **vijf voor half elf** een afspraak bij de huisarts.	Fatima has an appointment with the GP at twenty-five past ten.
Joris fietst om **tien over half zes** naar huis.	Joris cycles home at twenty to six.
Het is **tien voor twaalf**.	It is ten to twelve.
De trein naar Utrecht vertrekt om **14.32 uur**.	The train to Utrecht leaves at 14:32.

Why it works this way

Dutch looks ahead. At 2:30 you are on your way to three o'clock, so the time is **half drie**. German says "halb drei" in the same way. English, Spanish and Arabic do the opposite: they add the half to the hour that has passed, and in British English "half three" even means 3:30.

The half hour is a second landmark. Between twenty past and twenty to, the half is closer than the full hour, so you usually count from it.

Timetables, opening hours and letters from the **gemeente** use the 24-hour clock because it leaves no doubt. In conversation, most people still say **om half drie**, adding **'s middags** ("in the afternoon") when needed. If the number words are still new, see Numbers: eenentwintig, not twenty-one.

Remember: read **half** as "halfway to". **Half drie** is halfway to three, **half acht** is halfway to eight.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik kom om drie en een half.**~~
SAY **Ik kom om half vier.**
for 3:30, say **half** plus the coming hour

NOT ~~**De les begint om half over zeven.**~~
SAY **De les begint om half acht.**
half goes straight before the coming hour, without **over**

NOT ~~**De trein vertrekt op half drie.**~~
SAY **De trein vertrekt om half drie.**
"at" before a clock time is **om**

NOT ~~**Het is drie uren.**~~
SAY **Het is drie uur.**
in clock times **uur** stays singular

Quick check

1. It is 4:30. **Het is half ...**
2. Choose the right word for 7:45: **Het is kwart over / voor acht.**
3. It is 9:25. **Het is vijf voor half ...**
4. Fix the sentence (the film starts at 6:30, keep the word **half**): **De film begint om half over zes.**

Answers on page 799.

Use it today

Every time you check your phone today, say the time out loud in Dutch, rounded to five minutes, for example **Het is tien voor half vier**. At the station or bus stop, read one 24-hour departure time and say it the everyday way too.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/telling-time

RULE 163 · LEVEL A1 · SMALL WORDS

Numbers: eenentwintig, not twenty-one

From 21 on, Dutch says the small number first and the ten second, linked with **en** (and): 21 is **eenentwintig**, literally one-and-twenty, and 35 is **vijfendertig**. You write the whole number as one word. Ordinal numbers (the numbers for order: first, second, third) end in **-de** or **-ste**, depending on the number.

The pattern

> **From 21 to 99, a number that is not a round ten is unit + en + ten, written as one word: vierentwintig (24), achtenvijftig (58).**

- The tens are **twintig**, **dertig**, **veertig**, **vijftig**, **zestig**, **zeventig**, **tachtig**, **negentig**. Check 30, 40 and 80: **dertig**, **veertig**, **tachtig**.
- After **twee** and **drie**, **en** gets a trema: **tweeëntwintig**, **drieëntwintig**, **tweeënveertig**.
- Say **honderd** and **duizend** without **een**: **honderd euro**. In contrast, **miljoen** does take it: **een miljoen**.
- Bigger numbers go from big to small, and the last two digits follow the same pattern: **honderdvierentwintig** (124).
- Write numbers as one word up to and including **duizend**: **tweehonderdvijftig**, **drieduizend**. After **duizend** comes a space: **tweeduizend zesentwintig** (2026).
- Ordinals: **eerste** and **derde** are irregular, **tweede** simply adds **-de**. From 4 to 19, add **-de**: **vierde**, **tiende**, **achttiende**. The one exception is **achtste** (8th).
- From **twintig** to **negenennegentig**, and for **honderd** and **duizend**, add **-ste**: **twintigste**, **eenentwintigste**, **honderdste**. Above **honderd**, the last part decides: **honderdtweede** (102nd).

Examples

Ik ben **eenentwintig**.	I am twenty-one.
Daan woont op nummer **vijfendertig**.	Daan lives at number thirty-five.
Fatima heeft **zevenentwintig** collega's.	Fatima has twenty-seven colleagues.
Mijn buurman is **drieëntachtig**.	My neighbour is eighty-three.
Mijn oma wordt **honderd**.	My grandma is turning a hundred.
Onze school heeft **tweehonderdvijftig** leerlingen.	Our school has two hundred and fifty pupils.
Vandaag is Priya's **eerste** werkdag.	Today is Priya's first day at work.
Joris woont op de **derde** verdieping.	Joris lives on the third floor.
Lotte is de **achtste** in de rij.	Lotte is eighth in the queue.
Sanne viert haar **dertigste** verjaardag.	Sanne is celebrating her thirtieth birthday.

Why it works this way

Dutch builds 21 to 99 the way English once did in "four-and-twenty blackbirds": first the unit, then the ten. German and Arabic count like this too, so speakers of those languages mostly need new words. English and Spanish speakers have to flip the order, and that takes practice, not talent.

The ordinal ending goes on the last part of the number. In Dutch the ten comes last, so twenty-first becomes **eenentwintigste**, literally one-and-twentieth.

The trema is a reading aid. In **tweeentwintig**, three e's would run together. The dots show where a new syllable starts: **twee-en-twintig**. More in The trema in ë and ï.

Listen carefully to the endings, just as in English: **dertien** is 13 and **dertig** is 30, **achttien** is 18 and **tachtig** is 80.

Remember: for 21 to 99, read the last digit first. For 47, your eyes jump to the 7, then back to the 4: **zevenenveertig**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben twintigeen.**~~
SAY **Ik ben eenentwintig.**
the unit comes first

NOT ~~**Mijn opa is tweeëntachtig.**~~
SAY **Mijn opa is tweeëntachtig.**
trema after twee and drie

NOT ~~**De fiets kost een honderd euro.**~~
SAY **De fiets kost honderd euro.**
no een before honderd

NOT ~~**Er zijn twee honderd vijftig stoelen.**~~
SAY **Er zijn tweehonderdvijftig stoelen.**
one word up to duizend

NOT ~~**Ik woon op de achtde verdieping.**~~
SAY **Ik woon op de achtste verdieping.**
acht takes -ste

Quick check

1. Write 24 in words: **Mijn zus is … jaar.**
2. Fix the sentence: **Ahmed woont op nummer tweeëntwintig.**
3. Choose **twintigde** or **twintigste**: **Bas viert zijn … verjaardag.**

4. Write 150 in words: **De jas kost … euro.**

Answers on page 799.

Use it today

On your next walk or bike ride, say the house numbers you pass out loud in Dutch. At home, write your age and your house number in words, trema included if you need one.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/numbers

RULE 164 · LEVEL A1 · SMALL WORDS

Days, months and dates

In Dutch, the days of the week and the months start with a small letter: **maandag**, **januari**. You use **op** before a day or a date (**op dinsdag**, **op 3 april**), and the number comes before the month. Years are said in hundreds (**negentienhonderdnegentig**) or, from 2000 on, with **tweeduizend** plus the number.

The pattern

> **Inside a sentence, days and months are lowercase. Use op before a day or a date: op vrijdag, op 3 april.**

- Days: **maandag, dinsdag, woensdag, donderdag, vrijdag, zaterdag, zondag**.
- Months: **januari, februari, maart, april, mei, juni, juli, augustus, september, oktober, november, december**.
- A month or a year on its own takes **in**: **in mei**, **in 2025**. More in Om, op, in: talking about time.
- For the coming day, people often drop **op**: **Ik bel je dinsdag.**
- A date is number plus month: **3 april**, said **drie april**. Formal speech sometimes uses an ordinal (a number that shows order, like third): **de derde april**.
- Years before 2000 are said in hundreds: **negentienhonderdnegentig**. From 2000 on, the usual form is **tweeduizend vierentwintig**. For recent years you also hear **twintig vierentwintig**.

Examples

Sanne gaat **op zaterdag** naar de markt.	Sanne goes to the market on Saturday.

Is de supermarkt **op zondag** open?	Is the supermarket open on Sunday?
Daan is **op 14 mei** jarig.	It's Daan's birthday on 14 May.
Het is vandaag **dinsdag 3 maart**.	Today is Tuesday 3 March.
Ik heb **op vrijdag 6 juni** een afspraak bij de huisarts.	I have a GP appointment on Friday 6 June.
Yara heeft **in augustus** vakantie.	Yara has time off in August.
De burgemeester opent de nieuwe bibliotheek **op de derde april**.	The mayor is opening the new library on the third of April.
Fatima is geboren in **negentienhonderdnegentig**.	Fatima was born in 1990.
Lotte werkt hier sinds **twintig tweeëntwintig**.	Lotte has worked here since 2022.

Why it works this way

Picture a wall calendar. A day or a date is one square, and you put your finger **op** it. A month is a whole page and a year is the whole calendar: you are **in** them. English works almost the same way (on Monday, in May), so you can mostly trust your instinct.

Remember: one square takes **op**, a whole page takes **in**.

As for the small letters: Dutch treats **maandag** and **mei** as ordinary nouns, like **fiets** or **brood**. They get a capital at the start of a sentence, like any word, and in holiday names such as **Goede Vrijdag**. See Capital letters.

Dates run from small to big: day, month, year. Dutch people write dates in figures the same way, so 3-4-2026 on a letter from the **gemeente** means 3 April, not 4 March.

Years work like English nineteen ninety, except that Dutch keeps the word **honderd** and writes it all as one word. In everyday writing you just use

figures: **in 1990**. For building the numbers themselves, see Numbers.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik werk op Maandag thuis.**~~
SAY **Ik werk op maandag thuis.**
days are lowercase, unlike in English and German

NOT ~~**De afspraak is op mei 12.**~~
SAY **De afspraak is op 12 mei.**
the number comes before the month

NOT ~~**Ik ben op juni jarig.**~~
SAY **Ik ben in juni jarig.**
a month on its own takes **in**

NOT ~~**Mijn verjaardag is in 5 mei.**~~
SAY **Mijn verjaardag is op 5 mei.**
a date takes **op**, just like a day

Quick check

1. Choose **op** or **in**: **Ik ga … juli op vakantie.**
2. Choose **op** or **in**: **Is de bibliotheek … zaterdag open?**
3. Fix the two mistakes: **Mijn verjaardag is op Mei 4.**
4. Write 1985 in words, the way people usually say it: **Sanne is geboren in …**

Answers on page 799.

Use it today

Open your calendar and say three plans for this week out loud, with the day and the date, like **Op donderdag 15 oktober ga ik naar de tandarts.** Then ask a colleague: **Wanneer ben jij jarig?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/days-months-dates

RULE 165 · LEVEL A2 · SMALL WORDS

Al, nog, pas, nog niet, niet meer

Al means "already", **nog** means "still", **nog niet** means "not yet" and **niet meer** means "no longer". **Pas** means "only just" or "not until": **Ik ben pas om tien uur thuis** means I won't be home until ten. **Al** and **pas** also often tell your listener whether a moment feels early or late to you.

The pattern

Al and nog say that something has started or is still going on; nog niet and niet meer say the opposite. Pas says that something comes later, or is less, than you might expect.

- **al**: already. In questions it also means yet: **Ben je al thuis?** (Are you home yet?)
- **nog**: still. (**Nog** has other jobs too, like **nog een koffie**, one more coffee.)
- **nog niet**: not yet, the negative of **al**.
- **niet meer**: no longer, not anymore, the negative of **nog**.
- **pas**: not until with a time (**pas om tien uur**), only with an amount (**Joris is pas drie**), and only just or recently with the perfect tense (**pas verhuisd**).
- Where Dutch needs _geen_ instead of _niet_, you get **nog geen** and **geen ... meer**: **Ik heb nog geen fiets. Er is geen melk meer.**
- These words usually sit in the middle of the sentence, before a participle or words like **klaar** and **thuis**: **Ik heb al gegeten.**

Examples

Ik ben **al** klaar.	I'm already done.

Heb je **al** gegeten?	Have you eaten yet?
Hij slaapt **nog**.	He's still asleep.
Daan woont **nog** bij zijn ouders.	Daan still lives with his parents.
De trein is **nog niet** vertrokken.	The train hasn't left yet.
Sanne werkt **niet meer** bij de gemeente.	Sanne doesn't work for the municipality anymore.
Ik ben **pas** om tien uur thuis.	I won't be home until ten.
Fatima is **pas** verhuisd.	Fatima has only just moved house.
Het is **al** acht uur!	It's eight o'clock already!
Het is **pas** acht uur.	It's only eight o'clock.

Why it works this way

Picture a moment of change: the train leaves, the soup is ready, you move house. **Al** and **nog niet** ask whether that change has happened yet. **Nog** and **niet meer** ask whether the old situation is still going on. That is why they come in pairs:

- **Ben je al klaar? Nee, nog niet.** (Are you done yet? No, not yet.)
- **Woon je nog in Utrecht? Nee, niet meer.** (Do you still live in Utrecht? No, not anymore.)

Remember: when your answer is no, a question with **al** gets **nog niet**, and a question with **nog** gets **niet meer**. A yes answer simply keeps the same word: **Ja, ik woon nog in Utrecht.**

Now the feeling. At eight in the morning, Emma can say **Het is al acht uur!** (hurry, I'm late) or **Het is pas acht uur** (relax, there's time). Same clock, different feeling. **Al** often suggests that something happens sooner, or that a time or number is higher, than you expected; **pas** suggests later or lower:

Ahmed is pas twintig en heeft al een eigen bedrijf. (Ahmed is only twenty and already has his own business.)

English says "not ... until", but Dutch usually just uses **pas**, without **niet**: **De supermarkt gaat pas om acht uur open.** German speakers can map "schon, noch, erst" onto **al**, **nog**, **pas**, but should avoid **eerst** here, because it means first. For Spanish speakers, "ya no" is **niet meer**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb gegeten al**~~
SAY **Ik heb al gegeten**
al goes before the participle, not at the end

NOT ~~**Ik ben niet klaar nog**~~
SAY **Ik ben nog niet klaar**
nog comes before **niet**, and both go before **klaar**

NOT ~~**Het is alleen negen uur**~~
SAY **Het is pas negen uur**
alleen means only in the sense of nothing else; for an early time, use **pas**

NOT ~~**Ik heb nog niet kinderen**~~
SAY **Ik heb nog geen kinderen**
before a noun like this, **niet** becomes **geen**

Quick check

1. Choose **al** or **nog niet**: **Bas heeft ... gegeten, dus hij heeft honger.**
2. Choose **nog** or **niet meer**: **Lotte rookt ..., want ze is vorig jaar gestopt.**
3. Choose **al** or **pas**. You want to say that the time feels early and there is no hurry: **Rustig maar, het is ... half zeven.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Carlos woont niet in Den Haag meer.**

Answers on page 799.

Use it today

Tonight, tell someone at home or a colleague three true things in Dutch: something you have already done today, something you haven't done yet, and something you no longer do. For example: **Ik heb al boodschappen gedaan**, **Ik heb nog niet gekookt**, **Ik rook niet meer**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/al-nog-pas

RULE 166 · LEVEL A2 · SMALL WORDS

Geleden, sinds, al and over

Geleden means ago and comes after the time: **twee jaar geleden**. **Sinds** means since, and **over** plus an amount of time means in, looking forward: **over een week**. For something that started in the past and is still true, Dutch normally uses the present tense (the verb form for now) with **al**: **Ik woon hier al twee jaar** means I have lived here for two years.

The pattern

Put geleden after an amount of time for ago, sinds before a starting point for since, and over before an amount of time for in (the future). For a situation that started in the past and is still going on, Dutch normally uses the present tense with al or sinds.

- **drie dagen geleden**: a finished moment in the past, so the verb is in a past tense, usually the perfect (the past with **hebben** or **zijn**): **Ik ben drie dagen geleden verhuisd.**
- **sinds maandag**, **sinds 2021**, **sinds mijn verjaardag**: **sinds** plus the moment something began.
- **al drie weken**: **al** plus how long it has lasted so far, with the present: **Ik werk hier al drie weken.**
- **al** and **sinds** often team up: **Ik werk hier al sinds maart.**
- **over een uur**, **over twee weken**: counting forward from now. The present tense is usually enough: **Ik heb over twee weken vakantie.** You will sometimes hear **in tien minuten** with this meaning too, but **over** is the usual choice.
- Elsewhere **over** often means about (**een boek over Amsterdam**), but before an amount of time it means in.

Examples

Ik ben drie jaar **geleden** naar Nederland gekomen.	I came to the Netherlands three years ago.
Sanne heeft me een uur **geleden** gebeld.	Sanne called me an hour ago.
Mei woont **sinds** 2022 in Utrecht.	Mei has lived in Utrecht since 2022.
Het regent **al sinds** vanochtend.	It has been raining since this morning.
Ahmed **werkt al** zes maanden bij de bakker.	Ahmed has worked at the baker's for six months.
Hoe lang **leer** je **al** Nederlands?	How long have you been learning Dutch?
Carlos **woont al** twee jaar in Delft.	Carlos has lived in Delft for two years (and still does).
Carlos **heeft** twee jaar in Delft **gewoond**, maar nu woont hij in Leiden.	Carlos lived in Delft for two years, but now he lives in Leiden.
Mijn ouders komen **over** twee weken op bezoek.	My parents are coming to visit in two weeks.
De huisarts kan u **over** tien minuten helpen.	The doctor can see you in ten minutes.

Why it works this way

Picture a timeline with now in the middle. **Geleden** points back to a moment that is over. **Over** points forward to a moment that has not arrived yet. **Al** and **sinds** draw a line from the past up to now, and that line is still running.

Dutch picks the tense by asking one question: is it still true now? If yes, it normally uses the present, and **al** or **sinds** adds the history. This is the

same **al** (already) from Al, nog, pas, nog niet, niet meer: **al twee jaar** is literally already two years. English needs its present perfect here (I have lived), which is why English speakers reach for **ik heb gewoond**. In Dutch, the perfect normally presents the period as finished: **Ik heb twee jaar in Delft gewoond** usually suggests that you no longer live there. German and Spanish also use the present here, so their speakers often find this part easy. You will also hear **sinds twee jaar**, but **al twee jaar** is the safer choice.

The perfect does show up when you count separate events or say that something has not happened: **Sinds januari ben ik twee keer ziek geweest. Ik heb Lotte al weken niet gezien.** Both are normal Dutch.

Remember: geleden looks back, **over** looks forward, and **al** and **sinds** are a bridge from then to now. While you are still standing on the bridge, the present is your default.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben geleden een jaar verhuisd.**~~
SAY **Ik ben een jaar geleden verhuisd.**
geleden comes after the amount of time

NOT ~~**Ik heb hier sinds 2022 gewoond.**~~
SAY **Ik woon hier sinds 2022.**
you still live here, so use the present

NOT ~~**Ik woon hier twee jaar geleden.**~~
SAY **Ik woon hier al twee jaar.**
for how long something has lasted up to now, use **al**

NOT ~~**Twee jaar geleden ik ben naar Nederland gekomen.**~~
SAY **Twee jaar geleden ben ik naar Nederland gekomen.**
when the time phrase comes first, the verb comes second, before the subject

Quick check

For 1 to 3, fill in **geleden**, **sinds** or **over**.

1. **Fatima is drie jaar … naar Nederland gekomen.**
2. **Daan werkt … januari bij de gemeente.**
3. **We hebben nog tijd: de bus komt pas … tien minuten.**
4. Yara still works at the hospital, so this sentence uses the wrong tense. Correct it by changing only the verb: **Yara heeft sinds 2024 in het ziekenhuis gewerkt.**

Answers on page 800.

Use it today

Write three true sentences about your own life: one with **geleden** (when you came here or started a job), one with **al** (how long you have lived or worked here), and one with **over** (something coming up). Then practise your answer to **Hoe lang woon je al in Nederland?** out loud, because you will hear that question a lot.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/ago-since-in

RULE 167 · LEVEL A2 · SMALL WORDS

Even, maar, eens: making requests friendly

Dutch makes requests and invitations friendly with three tiny words. **Even** makes a request small and quick (**Kun je even helpen?**), **maar** gives permission or encouragement (**Kom maar binnen**), and **eens** invites someone to try something (**Kijk eens**). Without them, a Dutch command can sound much blunter than you mean.

The pattern

Put even, maar or eens early in the sentence, usually after the verb and any short pronouns. Even says "just quickly", maar says "go ahead" and eens says "try this".

- **even**: a small favour or a short action. **Wacht even.** In text messages people often write **ff**: **Ben ff weg.**
- **maar**: permission or encouragement. **Ga maar zitten. Zeg het maar.**
- **eens**: an invitation to look, taste or try. **Proef eens.** In speech it often shrinks to **'s**: **Kijk 's.**
- A short pronoun such as **me**, **je** or **het** usually comes before the particle: **Kun je me even helpen?**
- The particle comes before an infinitive (the full verb form, like **zitten**) and before the second part of a separable verb: **Ga maar zitten**, **Kom maar binnen**.
- They work in commands and in questions: **Kom maar. Mag ik even langs?** With **u** it sounds like this: **Gaat u maar zitten.**

Examples

Kun je me **even** helpen met deze doos?	Could you help me with this box for a second?
Wacht **even**, ik pak mijn fiets.	Hang on a moment, I'm getting my bike.
Mag ik **even** langs?	Could I just get past?
Kom **maar** binnen, Sanne.	Come on in, Sanne.
Gaat u **maar** zitten, de huisarts komt zo.	Please take a seat, the GP will be with you shortly.
Zeg het **maar**.	Go ahead, what can I get you?
Kijk **eens**, het sneeuwt!	Look, it's snowing!
Proef **eens**, Priya heeft deze soep gemaakt.	Have a taste, Priya made this soup.
Vraag het **eens** aan Joris.	Why don't you ask Joris?

Why it works this way

The imperative, the command form of a verb, is very bare in Dutch: **Kom. Ga zitten. Help me.** English speakers soften commands with "please", "could you" or "just". Dutch speakers do that too, but very often they simply drop in a particle: a small word that adds tone rather than content. Compare:

- **Ga zitten.** sounds like an instruction to a class. **Ga maar zitten.** means "feel free to sit down".
- **Help me.** sounds urgent, almost like an emergency. **Kun je me even helpen?** asks for a small favour.
- **Kijk naar het bord.** is an order. **Kijk eens naar die hond.** means "have a look at that dog".

Even keeps its "short and quick" meaning outside requests too: **Ik ga even naar de supermarkt** means "I'm just popping to the supermarket". Tone matters, especially with **maar**: it can also sound like "fine, then", as in **Zoek het maar uit** ("sort it out yourself"). If you speak German, **even** and **eens** often do the job of "mal".

Remember: think of three hand gestures. **Even** is one raised finger: "one second". **Maar** is an open palm: "go ahead". **Eens** is a pointing finger: "look at this, try this".

Once these feel natural, you can stack them, as in **Kom maar even kijken**. That is the topic of particle combinations. The next set of small words, toch, wel, hoor, nou and gewoon, adds even more colour.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Kun je even me helpen?**~~
SAY **Kun je me even helpen?**
the short pronoun **me** goes before the particle

NOT ~~**Kom binnen maar.**~~
SAY **Kom maar binnen.**
the particle comes before **binnen**, not at the end like English "then"

NOT ~~**Mag ik maar het zout?**~~
SAY **Mag ik even het zout?**
when you ask for something, use **even**; **maar** gives permission

NOT ~~**Even Bas heeft gedanst.**~~
SAY **Zelfs Bas heeft gedanst.**
English "even" in this sense is **zelfs**

Quick check

1. On a busy train you want to get past someone. Fill in **even**, **maar** or **eens**: **Mag ik … langs?**
2. Daan asks: **Mag ik de laatste stroopwafel?** You say yes, go ahead. Fill in **even**, **maar** or **eens**: **Ja, neem …!**
3. Put the words in the right order to make a question: **helpen / me / even / je / kun**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ga zitten maar, de dokter komt zo.**

Answers on page 800.

Use it today

Use each word once today: ask a colleague **Kun je even kijken?**, let someone go first at the supermarket checkout with **Ga maar voor**, and show a friend something on your phone with **Kijk eens**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/softening-particles

RULE 168 · LEVEL B1 · SMALL WORDS

Toch, wel, hoor, nou, gewoon

These five particles are small words that add tone of voice rather than facts. **Toch** checks something you expect ("right?") or means "anyway", **wel** is the opposite of **niet** ("yes, really"), **hoor** reassures, **nou** means "well" or "come on", and **gewoon** means "just". You will hear them in almost every Dutch conversation.

The pattern

Each word adds an attitude, not new information. Hoor goes at the end (or straight after ja or nee), nou often at the start, and in a main clause (a sentence that stands on its own) toch, wel and gewoon usually sit after the conjugated verb (the verb that changes with the person).

- **toch**: in a statement said as a question (**Je komt toch?**) or as a tag at the end (**Je komt, toch?**), it means "right?": you expect a yes. In a plain statement it often means "anyway" or "still": **Ik ga toch.**
- **wel**: the positive twin of **niet** and **geen**. Stress it and put it where **niet** would stand (Where does niet go?): **Ik kom niet** becomes **Ik kom wel.**
- **hoor**: friendly reassurance after a statement or request: **Het is goed, hoor.** It does not go with questions.
- **nou**: at the start it means "well" or "so": **Nou, ik ga.** After a command it adds impatience, like "come on": **Kom nou!**
- **gewoon**: "just, simply", the no-fuss option: **Doe gewoon normaal.**
- These words follow short pronouns such as **het**: **Ik vind het wel leuk.**

Examples

Je komt **toch** naar mijn verjaardag?	You're coming to my birthday, right?

Het regent, maar Daan fietst **toch** naar zijn werk.	It's raining, but Daan is cycling to work anyway.
Fatima eet geen vlees, maar ze eet **wel** vis.	Fatima doesn't eat meat, but she does eat fish.
Vanavond kan ik niet, maar morgen kan ik **wel**.	I can't make it tonight, but I can tomorrow.
Het is maar een griepje. Je bent zo weer beter, **hoor**.	It's just a bit of flu. You'll be better in no time, don't worry.
Nee **hoor**, je stoort helemaal niet.	Not at all, you're not disturbing me.
Nou, ik ga naar huis. Tot morgen!	Well, I'm off home. See you tomorrow!
Kom **nou**, het is maar een klein bruggetje.	Come on, it's only a little bridge.
Als de trein uitvalt, neem ik **gewoon** de bus.	If the train is cancelled, I'll just take the bus.

Why it works this way

English does this job with tone of voice and extra words like "right?", "do" or "honestly". In Dutch, each particle pushes in its own direction.

Toch pushes against a doubt or an obstacle: in **Je komt toch?** against the small chance that you won't come, in **Daan fietst toch** against the rain.

Wel pushes against **niet**. Stressed **wel** makes sense when a no is in the air. Without stress, it has a softer use, often "I'm sure": **Dat lukt wel.** (That will work out.)

Hoor is a form of **horen** (to hear), a bit like "you hear?". Said warmly, it reassures. Said flatly, **Ja hoor.** can mean "yeah, right", so your tone matters.

Nou marks a turn: the breath before you react, decide or leave. In casual speech it is also another way to say **nu** (now).

Gewoon is also the adjective for "normal" or "ordinary", and as a particle it means the simple way, no drama. It covers "just" in the sense of "simply", not "a moment ago": that is **net**, as in **Ik ben net thuis.**

If you speak German, **toch** will feel like **doch**. To answer yes to a negative question, though, Dutch usually says **jawel** or **toch wel** (Ja, nee, jawel and toch wel).

Remember: toch pushes back against doubt, **wel** pushes back against **niet**, **hoor** pats the listener on the shoulder, **nou** clears its throat, and **gewoon** shrugs.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik wel vind het leuk.**~~
SAY **Ik vind het wel leuk.**
wel follows the verb, in the spot where **niet** would stand

NOT ~~**Het regent, maar toch ik ga fietsen.**~~
SAY **Het regent, maar ik ga toch fietsen.**
when **toch** starts the clause, the verb comes right after it: **toch ga ik**

NOT ~~**Het is hoor geen probleem.**~~
SAY **Het is geen probleem, hoor.**
hoor goes at the end of the sentence

NOT ~~**Kom je morgen ook, hoor?**~~
SAY **Je komt morgen toch ook?**
hoor does not go with questions; **toch** asks for a yes

Quick check

1. Choose **toch** or **hoor**: **Je hebt de sleutel … bij je?** (You've got the key on you, right?)

2. Fix the word order, keeping **Joris** first: **Joris wel heeft een auto.** (Joris does have a car.)
3. Choose **hoor** or **nou**: **Kom …, anders missen we de trein!** (Come on, or we'll miss the train!)
4. Which word means "just, simply" here, **gewoon** or **wel**? **Ik ben niet ziek, ik ben … moe.** (I'm not ill, I'm just tired.)

Answers on page 800.

Use it today

When a colleague or neighbour says sorry or thanks you today, answer with **Geen probleem, hoor.** When you confirm a plan with a friend, end with **toch**: **We zien elkaar om acht uur, toch?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/toch-wel-hoor-nou

RULE 169 · LEVEL B2 · SMALL WORDS

Particle combinations: maar even, toch maar, nou eens

Dutch speakers often combine particles (small words that add tone rather than information), as in **Kom maar even kijken** or **Ga nou eens zitten**. The common pairs come in a fixed order, and together they show how the speaker feels: relaxed, giving in, or running out of patience. Learn the common pairs as chunks and use one or two particles at a time.

You met the single words in Even, maar, eens and Toch, wel, hoor, nou, gewoon. This lesson is about what happens when they meet.

The pattern

> **When particles combine, nou or toch usually comes first, then maar or wel, then eens, and even last. In the common pairs below, the order is fixed.**

- **maar even**: go ahead, it is no trouble (permission plus "just briefly").
- **toch maar**: after all, on second thought (a decision after some doubt).
- **nou eens**: will you just, for once (impatience).
- Other common pairs follow the same order: **toch eens**, **maar eens**, **wel even**, **eens even**.
- With rarer combinations the order is a strong tendency rather than a strict rule, and speakers vary, which is one more reason to learn the common pairs as chunks.
- Unstressed pronouns such as **het**, **me** and **hem** usually come before the whole cluster: **Bel me maar even** (more in Two objects and short pronouns).

- Use one or two. Native speakers sometimes stack three (**Probeer het toch maar eens**), but you rarely need to.

Examples

Kom **maar even** kijken, de nieuwe fiets staat in de gang.	Go ahead, come and have a look, the new bike is in the hallway.
Het gaat regenen, dus we nemen **toch maar** de trein.	It's going to rain, so we'll take the train after all.
Doe dat **toch maar** niet, Joris, de gemeente let daar streng op.	Better not do that after all, Joris, the council is strict about it.
Ga **nou eens** zitten, Fatima, je staat al de hele avond in de keuken.	Sit down for once, Fatima, you've been in the kitchen all evening.
Ik ga **maar eens**, morgen moet ik vroeg op.	Well, I'd better get going, I have to get up early tomorrow.
Ik kijk morgen **wel even** naar je mail.	I'll have a quick look at your email tomorrow, no problem.
Doe **toch eens** normaal, Bas, iedereen kijkt naar ons.	Act normal, will you, Bas, everyone is looking at us.
Kom **eens even** hier, Yara, ik wil je iets laten zien.	Come here a moment, Yara, I want to show you something.

Why it works this way

Picture the cluster as a short path from feeling to action. **Nou** and **toch** comment on the whole situation: impatience, or a contrast with what you expected before. **Maar** says you allow something or give in. **Eens** and **even** make the action itself small and casual, so they sit closest to it. The order is simply a habit of Dutch; this picture is a memory aid that happens to fit the common pairs.

The same instruction changes its whole attitude with these words:

- **Ga zitten.** A plain instruction.
- **Ga maar even zitten.** Take a seat, make yourself comfortable (a friendly host).
- **Ga nou eens zitten.** Will you sit down already (a parent with a restless child).

That is why it pays to recognise them. A colleague who says **Kijk er maar even naar** is softening the instruction and presenting it as a small, no-pressure task. One who writes **Reageer nou eens op mijn mail** is annoyed, and no other word in the sentence tells you so.

English speakers carry this tone with their voice or with "just", "after all" and "will you". Dutch puts much of it into particles, so leaving them out can make you sound more abrupt than you intend.

Remember: mood first, size last. **Nou** and **toch** (how you feel) open the cluster, and **even** (how small the action is) closes it.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Kom even maar kijken.**~~
SAY **Kom maar even kijken.**
maar goes before **even**

NOT ~~**Doe dat maar toch niet.**~~
SAY **Doe dat toch maar niet.**
toch opens the cluster; **maar toch** can mean "but still" when **maar** is a conjunction, which is a different construction

NOT ~~**Ga eens nou zitten.**~~
SAY **Ga nou eens zitten.**
the impatient **nou** comes first

NOT ~~**Bel maar even me als je er bent.**~~

SAY **Bel me maar even als je er bent.**

the short pronoun goes before the particles, unlike English "just call me"

Quick check

1. Put **maar** and **even** in the right order: **Kom … kijken, de foto's van de bruiloft staan online.**
2. Your teenager has ignored three requests to sit down. Which sentence fits? (a) **Ga maar even zitten.** (b) **Ga nou eens zitten.**
3. Fix the word order: **We nemen maar toch de fiets, het is droog geworden.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Zet maar even het op tafel, ik ruim het straks op.**

Answers on page 800.

Use it today

Listen for particle pairs today, on the train, at work or at the supermarket checkout, and label each one: friendly, giving in, or impatient. Then use **maar even** once yourself, for example when a colleague asks to borrow your charger: **Pak hem maar even.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/particle-clusters

RULE 170 · LEVEL A2 · SMALL WORDS

Ja, nee, jawel and toch wel

To agree with a negative question such as **Kom je niet?** (Aren't you coming?), answer **nee**: **Nee, ik kom niet.** To contradict it, answer **jawel** or **toch wel** rather than a bare **ja**: **Jawel, ik kom wel** means yes, I am coming. The same works for negative statements.

The pattern

> **After a negative question or statement, nee agrees with it, and jawel or toch wel contradicts it. A bare ja can be unclear there.**

- A negative question or statement contains a word like **niet**, **geen** or **nooit**.
- Agree: **Ben je niet moe? Nee.** (You are not tired.)
- Disagree: **Ben je niet moe? Jawel.** (You are tired.)
- In the full sentence after **jawel**, **niet** usually becomes **wel**, and **geen** usually becomes **wel een** or **wel** (see Geen or niet?).
- **Toch wel** does the same job and sounds a little more insistent, like "it is, actually".
- **Ja** plus a clear full sentence is also possible (**Ja, ik ben wel moe.**), but **jawel** makes the contradiction clear from the first word.
- After a positive question, nothing changes: **Kom je? Ja.** or **Nee.**

Examples

Ga je niet naar de verjaardag van Daan? **Jawel**, ik ga **wel**.	Aren't you going to Daan's birthday? Yes, I am.
Ben je niet moe? **Nee**, ik ben niet moe.	Aren't you tired? No, I'm not.

Heb je geen fiets? **Jawel**, ik heb **wel** een fiets.	Don't you have a bike? Yes, I do have one.
Werk je niet op vrijdag? **Nee**, dan ben ik vrij.	Don't you work on Fridays? No, I'm off then.
Heeft Fatima geen kinderen? **Jawel**, ze heeft twee dochters.	Doesn't Fatima have children? Yes, she has two daughters.
Heb je de huisarts nog niet gebeld? **Jawel**, ik heb vanochtend al gebeld.	Haven't you called the GP yet? Yes, I called this morning.
Dat kan niet. **Toch wel**, het staat in de brief van de gemeente.	That's not possible. It is, actually: it's in the letter from the council.
Je hebt geen jas bij je. **Toch wel**, hij zit in mijn tas.	You haven't brought a coat. I have, it's in my bag.
Is het niet koud buiten? **Nee**, het valt mee.	Isn't it cold outside? No, it's not too bad.

Why it works this way

A bare **ja** after a negative question is a small riddle. Does it mean "yes, you're right, I'm not coming", or "yes, I am coming"? English and Spanish simply say yes or "sí" and let the rest of the sentence explain. Dutch can do that too, but it prefers a word that settles the question at once.

Jawel is **ja** plus **wel**, with the stress on **wel**. You may know **wel** from Toch, wel, hoor, nou, gewoon: it insists that something is true, against a doubt, and it is the opposite of **niet** and **geen**. So **jawel** means roughly "yes, it is so, whatever you thought". French has the same tool in "si", German in "doch", and formal Arabic in "balā".

Dutch children show the system at its clearest. Their classic argument is a ping-pong of **Welles!** and **Nietes!** (Is so! Is not!) until an adult steps in.

Remember: when a question has **niet** or **geen** in it, think of your full answer. If it would contain **niet** or **geen**, start with **nee**. If it would contain **wel**, start with **jawel**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ja, ik doe.**~~
SAY **Jawel, ik sport wel.**
to **Sport je niet?** when you do: **ik doe** cannot stand alone like "I do", so repeat the verb

NOT ~~**Nee, ik doe niet.**~~
SAY **Nee, ik eet geen vlees.**
to **Eet je geen vlees?**: the same English habit, so repeat the verb here too

NOT ~~**Jawel, ik ben niet moe.**~~
SAY **Nee, ik ben niet moe.**
to agree with **Ben je niet moe?**, use **nee**; **jawel** means you disagree

NOT ~~**Doch, ik kom wel.**~~
SAY **Jawel, ik kom wel.**
to **Kom je niet?**: Dutch **doch** is a formal word for but and cannot be used as a reply like German "doch"

Quick check

1. Mei asks: **Kom je niet naar de vergadering?** You are coming. Which one-word answer is right: **Nee.** or **Jawel.**?
2. Ahmed asks: **Heb je geen honger?** You have just eaten, so you are not hungry. Which one-word answer is right: **Nee.** or **Jawel.**?
3. Joris says to Yara: **Je kunt niet koken.** Yara cooks every day. Fill in the word that is the opposite of **niet**: **Toch ..., ik kook elke dag.**

4. Carlos says: **De trein naar Leiden rijdt vandaag niet.** You have just checked, and it is running. Which reply contradicts Carlos: **Nee, hij rijdt vandaag niet.** or **Toch wel, hij rijdt gewoon.**?

Answers on page 801.

Use it today

Ask a colleague or neighbour one negative question today, such as **Werk je morgen niet?**, and listen for **nee** or **jawel** in the answer. Then answer at least one negative question yourself with **jawel** and a full sentence with **wel**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/answering-jawel

RULE 171 · LEVEL B1 · SMALL WORDS

Ook, alleen, maar, zelfs: focus words

Ook means also or too, **alleen** means only, **zelfs** means even, and **maar**, which you know as but, can mean only before an amount: **Het kost maar vijf euro** (it only costs five euros). These are focus words: small words that point at one part of a sentence, and they usually stand right before that part. Move the word and you change the meaning: **Alleen Anna weet het** (only Anna knows) is very different from **Anna weet het alleen niet** (Anna just doesn't know).

The pattern

> **A focus word usually goes directly before the part of the sentence it is about. If that pair starts the sentence, the verb still comes second.**

- **ook** (also, too) adds something: **Ik wil ook een stuk taart**. With a negative it means either: **ook niet**, **ook geen**. When it is about the subject, it usually comes after the verb: **Priya komt ook**.
- **alleen** (only) shuts out everyone and everything else: **Alleen Anna weet het**. It can also mean just, adding one snag (**Anna weet het alleen niet**), or alone (**Ik woon alleen**).
- **maar** (only) makes a number or amount sound small: **Het kost maar vijf euro**.
- **zelfs** (even) marks the surprising part: **Zelfs de trein was op tijd**.
- If the part comes later in the sentence, the focus word sits later too, right before that part: **Ik werk alleen op maandag thuis**.

Examples

Alleen Fatima heeft een sleutel van het kantoor.	Only Fatima has a key to the office.
Anna wil graag helpen. Ze weet **alleen niet** hoe.	Anna would like to help. She just doesn't know how.
Ik werk **alleen op maandag** thuis.	I only work from home on Mondays.
Een parkeervergunning kost hier **maar vijftig euro** per jaar.	A parking permit only costs fifty euros a year here.
Zelfs de trein was vandaag op tijd.	Even the train was on time today.
Mei spreekt **zelfs een beetje Fries**.	Mei even speaks a bit of Frisian.
Priya komt **ook** naar de verjaardag van Lotte.	Priya is coming to Lotte's birthday too.
Ik heb geen auto en Ahmed heeft **ook geen** auto.	I don't have a car and Ahmed doesn't have one either.

Why it works this way

Picture a focus word as a pointing finger: it usually points at what comes right after it. In **Alleen Anna weet het** it points at Anna, so nobody else knows. **Alleen** also has a second, softer job. In **Anna weet het alleen niet** it means just or the only thing is: it does not shut anyone out, it adds one snag to something positive.

When a focus word stands directly before a part of the sentence, the two can often take the first place together. In a main clause (a sentence that can stand alone), the verb that changes with the person stays in second place (Verb second), so in **Zelfs de trein was op tijd** the group **Zelfs de trein** fills the first slot and **was** follows. In a sentence like I also work, English puts also before the main verb. Dutch puts the verb second, so **ook** comes after it: **Ik werk ook**.

A focus word does not always stand next to its part. When **ook** is about the subject (the person doing the action), everyday Dutch usually says **Priya komt ook**. **Ook Priya komt** is also correct and puts extra weight on Priya as one more guest. In the middle of a sentence, your voice does the pointing: **Ik heb ook een fiets** can mean I have a bike too (like you) or I also have a bike (as well as a car).

Alleen excludes: **Ik drink alleen thee** (no coffee, no wine). **Maar** shrinks: **Ik drink maar één kopje thee per dag**. Before numbers and amounts, **maar** is the usual everyday choice. You also know **maar** as but (En, maar, of, want, dus) and as a softener (Even, maar, eens); before an amount, it usually means only.

Remember: ook adds, **alleen** excludes, **maar** shrinks, **zelfs** surprises.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik neem een cappuccino ook.**~~
SAY **Ik neem ook een cappuccino.**
ook goes before the part it adds, not after it like too

NOT ~~**Ik ook werk in Utrecht.**~~
SAY **Ik werk ook in Utrecht.**
the verb stays in second place, so **ook** follows it

NOT ~~**Even mijn opa heeft een smartphone.**~~
SAY **Zelfs mijn opa heeft een smartphone.**
even means for a moment; the Dutch for even is **zelfs**

NOT ~~**Dit is mijn alleen kans.**~~
SAY **Dit is mijn enige kans.**
before a noun, only in the sense of the one and only is **enige**

Quick check

1. Choose **maar** or **zelfs**: **Het zwembad is lekker goedkoop: een kaartje kost … vier euro.**
2. Fill in the focus word: **Ik heb geen tijd en Yara heeft … geen tijd.** (Yara doesn't have time either.)
3. Fix the sentence and keep **Daan** at the start: **Daan zelfs fietst naar Amsterdam.** (Daan even cycles to Amsterdam.)
4. Choose **Alleen** or **Zelfs**: **… Bas heeft een sleutel van de fietsenstalling, dus iedereen moet op hem wachten.**

Answers on page 801.

Use it today

Send a friend or colleague a short message about your weekend in three sentences: one with **ook**, one with **alleen** and one with **zelfs**, such as **Ik heb zelfs de ramen gelapt**. Before you press send, check that each focus word stands right before the part you mean.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/focus-words

RULE 172 · LEVEL B1 · SMALL WORDS

Adjectives with a fixed preposition

Many Dutch adjectives (describing words) come with a fixed preposition, a small word like **op** or **voor** that belongs to them: you are **trots op** (proud of) your child and **bang voor** (afraid of) the dentist. The preposition is often not the one English uses, so learn each pair as one chunk. When a whole clause (a sentence part with its own verb) follows, you usually add **er**: **Ik ben er trots op dat ik geslaagd ben.**

The pattern

> **The preposition belongs to the adjective and is often not the English one. Before a clause, Dutch usually adds er to the main sentence and keeps the preposition after the adjective.**

- With **op**: **trots op** (proud of), **boos op** (angry with someone), **jaloers op** (jealous of), **gek op** (crazy about)
- With **voor**: **bang voor** (afraid of), **verantwoordelijk voor** (responsible for)
- With **in**: **goed in** (good at), **geïnteresseerd in** (interested in)
- With **met**: **blij met** (happy with)
- With **over**: **tevreden over** (satisfied with; **tevreden met** also occurs)
- Before a clause or **om te**: **Ik ben er niet goed in om nee te zeggen.**

Examples

Sanne is **trots op** haar zoon, want hij heeft zijn zwemdiploma gehaald.	Sanne is proud of her son, because he got his swimming certificate.

Daan is **bang voor** honden, maar hij is **gek op** katten.	Daan is afraid of dogs, but he is crazy about cats.
Fatima is heel **blij met** haar nieuwe fiets.	Fatima is very happy with her new bike.
Mijn buurvrouw is **boos op** me, omdat ik mijn fiets voor haar raam heb gezet.	My neighbour is angry with me because I parked my bike in front of her window.
Priya is erg **goed in** plannen, dus zij maakt het rooster.	Priya is very good at planning, so she makes the rota.
Ben je **geïnteresseerd in** een taalcursus bij de bibliotheek?	Are you interested in a language course at the library?
Lotte is **verantwoordelijk voor** de koffie op kantoor.	Lotte is responsible for the coffee at the office.
Carlos is een beetje **jaloers op** zijn collega, die maar vier dagen per week werkt.	Carlos is a bit jealous of his colleague, who only works four days a week.
De huisarts is **tevreden over** mijn bloeddruk.	The GP is satisfied with my blood pressure.
Emma is **er trots op dat** ze haar inburgeringsexamen in één keer heeft gehaald.	Emma is proud that she passed her civic integration exam at the first attempt.

Why it works this way

In these pairs the preposition has mostly lost its literal meaning: the **op** in **trots op** has nothing to do with "on". Dutch and English simply settled on different words. Some pairs match (**geïnteresseerd in**, **verantwoordelijk voor**), but word-for-word translation will often let you down.

The **er** is about word order. In standard Dutch, the preposition after these adjectives does not stand directly in front of a **dat** clause. Instead, **er** goes

before the adjective as a placeholder, the preposition stays after it, and the clause follows at the end. Before an **om te** phrase, **er** is common too, as in **Ik ben er niet goed in om nee te zeggen.** The same **er** replaces "it" for things: **Ik ben er trots op.** After **er**, **met** becomes **mee**: **Ik ben er blij mee.** See er plus a preposition for more, and verbs with a fixed preposition for the same idea with verbs.

A few adjectives often leave out both **er** and the preposition before a clause, especially **bang**, **blij** and **boos**: **Ik ben bang dat de trein vertraging heeft.** The same happens before **om te**: **Ik ben bang om te vallen.** In speech you will also hear **trots dat**, but **er trots op dat** is the safe choice.

A different preposition can change the meaning:

- **boos op Bas** (angry with Bas) versus **boos over de vertraging** (angry about the delay)
- **blij met je cadeau** (happy with your present) versus **blij voor je** (happy for you)

Remember: strong feelings aimed at someone or something often take **op**: **trots op**, **boos op**, **jaloers op**, **gek op**, and also **verliefd op** (in love with). Picture the feeling landing on its target. This is a hook, not a rule: **bang voor** and **blij met** go their own way.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik ben trots van jou.**~~
SAY **Ik ben trots op jou.**
English "of" is **op** here

NOT ~~**Ze is jaloers van haar zus.**~~
SAY **Ze is jaloers op haar zus.**
jaloers takes **op**

NOT ~~**Hij is boos met zijn baas.**~~
SAY **Hij is boos op zijn baas.**
angry with a person is **boos op**

NOT ~~**Ik ben trots op dat ik Nederlands spreek.**~~
SAY **Ik ben er trots op dat ik Nederlands spreek.**
in standard Dutch the preposition does not go straight before **dat**, so add **er**

NOT ~~**Ik ben blij met het.**~~
SAY **Ik ben er blij mee.**
for "it", use **er**, and **met** becomes **mee**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Yara is jaloers … haar zus, want die heeft een vaste baan.**
2. Choose: **Bas is goed (in / op / aan) koken.**
3. Fix the sentence by adding one word: **Mei is verantwoordelijk voor dat de vergadering op tijd begint.**
4. Choose: **Ahmed heeft een nieuwe telefoon. Is hij er blij (met / mee)?**

Answers on page 801.

Use it today

Today, tell a colleague, partner or neighbour one thing you are **blij met**, for example **Ik ben blij met mijn nieuwe werkplek**. Then write one true sentence that starts with **Ik ben er trots op dat ik** about something you managed in Dutch this week.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/adjective-prepositions

RULE 173 · LEVEL A2 · SMALL WORDS

Met de trein, op de fiets, te voet

To say how you travel in Dutch, you usually use **met** plus the vehicle: **met de trein**, **met de bus**, **met de auto**. For a bike you will hear both **op de fiets** and **met de fiets**. On foot is **te voet** or, in everyday speech, **lopend**.

The pattern

> **Use met + article + vehicle to say how you travel. On a bike you can also say op de fiets, and on foot is te voet or lopend.**

- **met de trein, met de bus, met de auto, met de tram, met het vliegtuig**: the article stays, and it is the normal **de** or **het** of that noun (De or het).
- **op de fiets**: you picture yourself on the saddle, riding. **Ik ga op de fiets.**
- **met de fiets**: the bike as your means of transport, just like a train. For a trip, both are correct. To say you are sitting on it right now, use **op**: **Ik zit op de fiets.**
- **te voet** and **lopend** both mean on foot. **Te voet** sounds a little more formal.
- Often Dutch simply uses a verb: **Ik fiets naar mijn werk. Ik loop naar huis.** (**Lopen** means walk, not run: one of the classic false friends.)

Examples

Ik ga **met de trein** naar Utrecht.	I'm going to Utrecht by train.
Sanne komt **met de bus**, want haar fiets is kapot.	Sanne is coming by bus, because her bike is broken.
Gaan we **met de auto** of **met de fiets**?	Are we going by car or by bike?

Daan gaat elke dag **op de fiets** naar zijn werk.	Daan cycles to work every day.
Yara belt nooit als ze **op de fiets** zit.	Yara never makes phone calls when she's on her bike.
Carlos gaat **met de tram** naar de huisarts.	Carlos takes the tram to the GP.
Emma is **met het vliegtuig** naar Lissabon gegaan.	Emma went to Lisbon by plane.
Het station is dichtbij, dus we gaan **te voet**.	The station is close, so we're going on foot.
Ahmed komt **lopend**, want hij woont om de hoek.	Ahmed is coming on foot, because he lives around the corner.

Why it works this way

Met means with. You travel with the train the same way you write with a pen, **met een pen**: the vehicle is your tool. That is why **met** works for almost any vehicle, the bike included.

Op means on. On a bike, a scooter or a motorbike you really sit on top, so Dutch can show you there: **op de fiets**, **op de scooter**, **op de motor**. You sit inside a bus or a train, so once you have boarded, English "on the train" becomes **in de trein**: **Ik zit al in de bus.** For the trip itself, **met de trein** and **met de bus** stay the normal choice.

Te voet is a fixed leftover from a time when **te** was an everyday preposition of place. You still see that old **te** in **te paard** (on horseback) and in formal phrases like **geboren te Utrecht**. More in Ten, ter and te in fixed phrases.

Remember: met names the vehicle as your tool; **op** works for a bike too and often adds the picture of you riding on the saddle.

Watch out

NOT ~~Ik ga met trein naar Utrecht.~~
SAY **Ik ga met de trein naar Utrecht.**
English "by train" has no article, Dutch keeps **de**.

NOT ~~Bas gaat met de vliegtuig naar Spanje.~~
SAY **Bas gaat met het vliegtuig naar Spanje.**
vliegtuig is a het-word, and **met** does not change that.

NOT ~~Lotte gaat bij de bus naar haar werk.~~
SAY **Lotte gaat met de bus naar haar werk.**
bij looks like "by", but it means at or near.

NOT ~~Ik ga op voet naar het station.~~
SAY **Ik ga lopend naar het station.**
English "on foot" is **te voet** or **lopend**.

Quick check

1. Choose **met**, **te** or **bij**: Fatima gaat elke dag … de bus naar haar werk.
2. Choose **met** or **op**: Joris kan nu niet bellen, want hij zit … de fiets.
3. Fill in one word: Priya gaat altijd te … naar de supermarkt, want die is om de hoek.
4. Fill in **de** or **het**: Mei gaat met … openbaar vervoer naar de gemeente.

Answers on page 801.

Use it today

Next time a colleague or neighbour asks how you got there, answer in Dutch: **Ik ben met de trein gekomen** or **Ik kom altijd op de fiets**. Then ask back: **Hoe kom jij naar je werk?**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/transport-prepositions

RULE 174 · LEVEL C1 · SMALL WORDS

Ten, ter and te in fixed phrases

Ten and **ter** are the little word **te** with an old article glued onto it, left over from a time when Dutch still had cases, as German does. They live on in set expressions such as **ten eerste** (firstly), **ter plaatse** (on the spot) and **te koop** (for sale). You do not need to analyse them: learn each one as a ready-made chunk and you will recognise it in formal texts and on signs.

The pattern

Ten and ter are frozen forms of te plus an old article, and plain te survives in set phrases too. Learn each phrase as one unit of vocabulary.

- **ten** (from old **te den**): **ten eerste** (firstly), **ten slotte** (finally), **ten noorden van** (north of), **ten opzichte van** (compared with).
- **ter** (from old **te der**): **ter plaatse** (on the spot), **ter gelegenheid van** (on the occasion of), **ter inzage** (available for inspection).
- plain **te**: **te koop** (for sale), **te huur** (for rent), **te allen tijde** (at all times), **te voet** (on foot), and in official documents **te** plus a place name: **geboren te Utrecht** (born in Utrecht).
- Nothing is added or changed: no extra **de** or **het**, and old endings stay, so **ter plaatse** keeps its **-e**.
- **Ten eerste** and **ten slotte** fill the first slot of the sentence, so the finite verb comes right after them (verb second).
- Typical habitat: letters from the **gemeente**, contracts, the news, speeches, and signs in windows and front gardens.

Examples

Ten eerste is de huur veel te hoog, en **ten tweede** ligt het appartement pal naast het spoor.	Firstly, the rent is far too high, and secondly, the flat is right next to the railway line.
Ten slotte wil ik Fatima bedanken, zonder wie dit project nooit van de grond was gekomen.	Finally, I would like to thank Fatima, without whom this project would never have got off the ground.
Na de aanrijding op de A12 was de brandweer binnen tien minuten **ter plaatse**.	After the collision on the A12, the fire brigade was on the scene within ten minutes.
Het vakantiepark ligt een paar kilometer **ten noorden van** Zwolle, midden in de bossen.	The holiday park is a few kilometres north of Zwolle, in the middle of the woods.
Ter gelegenheid van Lottes afscheid na dertig jaar trouwe dienst wordt er vrijdag een borrel gehouden.	On the occasion of Lotte's farewell after thirty years of loyal service, there will be drinks on Friday.
In de Jordaan staat een karakteristiek grachtenpand **te koop**, maar de vraagprijs liegt er niet om.	A characterful canal house is for sale in the Jordaan, but the asking price is no joke.
Sinds de bakker is vertrokken, staat het winkelpand al maanden **te huur**.	Since the baker left, the shop premises have been up for rent for months.
De plannen voor het nieuwe fietspad liggen tot 15 november **ter inzage** op het stadskantoor.	The plans for the new cycle path can be inspected at the city office until 15 November.
Ten opzichte van vorig jaar is het aantal fietsdiefstallen in de binnenstad met een kwart gedaald.	Compared with last year, the number of bicycle thefts in the city centre has fallen by a quarter.

Why it works this way

Centuries ago Dutch showed the job of a noun by changing the article, much as German still does. After **te**, the article took its dative form: **den** before masculine and neuter nouns, **der** before feminine ones. **Te den** contracted to **ten** and **te der** to **ter**, just as German turns "zu dem" into "zum" and "zu der" into "zur". As Dutch gradually lost its cases, these chunks were already frozen, so they stayed. Some carry a second fossil, an old **-e** on the noun: **ter plaatse**, **ten slotte**, **ten tijde van**.

That history leaves a rough pattern. **Ter** often comes before abstract nouns in **-ing**, **-heid** or **-tie**, and formal writers still coin new phrases on that model: **ter illustratie**, **ter voorbereiding op**. **Ten** often comes before het-words: **ten behoeve van**, **ten gevolge van**. This is a tendency, not a rule (**ten tijde van** contains the de-word **tijd**), so learn the chunk instead of calculating it.

Plain **te** is the same old preposition, meaning roughly at or in, so do not read **te koop** as too anything. Many more frozen combinations without **te** follow in fixed prepositional phrases.

Remember: ten and **ter** come with the article already packed inside, so nothing else goes in. No **de**, no **het**, and no swapping **ten** for **ter**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ter slotte wil ik iedereen bedanken voor de inzet.**~~
SAY **Ten slotte wil ik iedereen bedanken voor de inzet.**
the fixed chunk is **ten slotte**

NOT ~~**Ten gelegenheid van haar pensioen kreeg Sanne een elektrische fiets.**~~
SAY **Ter gelegenheid van haar pensioen kreeg Sanne een elektrische fiets.**
the fixed chunk is **ter gelegenheid van**

NOT ~~Onze oude auto is voor verkoop.~~
SAY **Onze oude auto is te koop.**
a word-for-word copy of the English for sale

NOT ~~Haarlem ligt west van Amsterdam.~~
SAY **Haarlem ligt ten westen van Amsterdam.**
compass phrases use **ten** plus the form in **-en**

NOT ~~Ten eerste, de huur is veel te hoog.~~
SAY **Ten eerste is de huur veel te hoog.**
ten eerste fills the first slot, so the verb follows at once

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **Die bovenwoning aan de Kerkstraat staat al weken … huur.**
2. Choose **Ten** or **Ter**: **… gelegenheid van het honderdjarig bestaan van de voetbalclub krijgt elk lid een gratis sjaal.**
3. Choose **te**, **ten** or **ter**: **Bij een storing kunt u … allen tijde het servicenummer bellen.**
4. Fix the sentence: **Ten opzicht van vorig jaar zijn de energieprijzen flink gestegen.**

Answers on page 802.

Use it today

This week, collect three phrases with **ten**, **ter** or **te** from **Te koop** signs, a letter from the **gemeente** or a news site. Write each one into a sentence about your own street, such as **Op de hoek staat een bovenwoning te huur.**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/te-ten-ter

RULE 175 · LEVEL B2 · SMALL WORDS

Fixed prepositional phrases

Dutch has many fixed chunks made of a preposition and a noun, such as **op tijd** (on time), **in de war** (confused) and **aan de hand** (going on). The preposition inside them is fixed: you cannot work it out by logic, and it often differs from English. Learn each chunk as one unit, inside a sentence you would really say.

The pattern

> **In a fixed prepositional phrase, the preposition, the article and the noun belong together. Store the whole chunk as if it were one word.**

- **op tijd**: on time, in time
- **op vakantie** (with **gaan** or **zijn**): on holiday, away; **met vakantie** is a correct variant you will also hear
- **in de war** (with **zijn**, **raken** or **brengen**): confused, mixed up
- **in principe**: in principle, normally
- **op het moment**: at the moment, currently; **op dit moment** is a common variant
- **aan de hand** (usually with **er**): going on, the matter
- **in het algemeen**: in general; **over het algemeen** means much the same
- **op zijn minst**: at least, no less than; often **op z'n minst** in speech

The article belongs to the chunk as well, and you cannot predict it: **op tijd** has none, **in de war** has **de**, **op het moment** has **het**. Most chunks work like adverbs (words that say when, how or how much), so if one starts the sentence, the verb comes next: **Op het moment zoekt Daan werk.**

Examples

De trein van 8.14 uur was vandaag gewoon **op tijd**.	The 8:14 train was actually on time today.
Fatima is tot eind augustus **op vakantie**, dus mail maar naar Bas.	Fatima is on holiday until the end of August, so just email Bas.
Sorry, ik ben een beetje **in de war** door al die nieuwe regels.	Sorry, I'm a bit confused by all those new rules.
In principe werk ik op vrijdag thuis, maar deze week kom ik naar kantoor.	In principle I work from home on Fridays, but this week I'm coming to the office.
Daan zoekt **op het moment** een nieuwe baan.	Daan is looking for a new job at the moment.
Je kijkt zo boos. Wat is er **aan de hand**?	You look so angry. What's going on?
In het algemeen krijg je binnen acht weken antwoord van de gemeente.	In general, you get an answer from the municipality within eight weeks.
Voor een appartement in Utrecht betaal je **op zijn minst** 1400 euro per maand.	For a flat in Utrecht you pay at least 1,400 euros a month.

Why it works this way

Think of each chunk as a word with spaces in it. Nobody who asks **Wat is er aan de hand?** pictures a hand: inside the chunk, the preposition has lost its literal meaning. So neither logic nor English tells you whether it is **op** or **in**. The choice is simply part of the phrase.

Some chunks do match English, such as **op vakantie** and **in principe**. That is the trap: once a few match, you start trusting English for the rest. Look-alikes can also differ in use. Dutch speakers use **in principe** a lot in daily

life, usually meaning "normally, unless something changes", so **In principe kan dat** is a polite yes with a small escape hatch.

A small change can change the meaning completely:

- **Joris is op vakantie.** (He is away.) **In de vakantie werkt Joris bij een supermarkt.** (During the holidays he works at a supermarket.)
- **Wat is er aan de hand?** (What's going on?) **De trainer legt het uit aan de hand van een voorbeeld.** (The trainer explains it using an example.)
- **Dat kost op zijn minst vijftig euro.** (No less than fifty euros.) **Het is koud, maar het is tenminste droog.** (At least it's dry: a small comfort, see ten, ter and te in fixed phrases.)

Remember: store the sentence, not the preposition. A list that pairs **op** with "at" will mislead you, while the sentence **Daan zoekt op het moment werk** brings the right preposition along for free. The same habit works for verbs with a fixed preposition and adjectives with a fixed preposition.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik was net in tijd voor de trein.**~~
SAY **Ik was net op tijd voor de trein.**
Dutch normally uses **op tijd** for both "on time" and "in time"

NOT ~~**Volgende week gaan we naar vakantie.**~~
SAY **Volgende week gaan we op vakantie.**
a holiday is not a destination, so no **naar**

NOT ~~**Ik heb het in het moment erg druk.**~~
SAY **Ik heb het op het moment erg druk.**
German "im Moment" and Spanish "en este momento" pull you towards **in**

NOT ~~**In algemeen zijn de huren in Amsterdam hoog.**~~
SAY **In het algemeen zijn de huren in Amsterdam hoog.**
the **het** is part of the chunk, even though English has no article

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap: **De bus was weer niet … tijd, dus Mei kwam te laat op haar werk.**
2. Fill in the gap: **Je bent zo stil vandaag, Ahmed. Is er iets … de hand?**
3. Choose the right preposition: **Priya werkt (in / op) het moment vier dagen per week.**
4. Choose the right option: **Bas is deze week (op vakantie / in de vakantie), dus Yara beantwoordt zijn mails.**

Answers on page 802.

Use it today

Send a colleague or friend a short message about your coming week using **op het moment**, **in principe** and **op tijd**, for example **In principe ben ik vrijdag om vijf uur thuis.** Then copy those three sentences onto a sticky note by your desk, whole sentences only.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/prepositional-phrases

Style and register

Formal and informal Dutch, writing well, and the last mile to sounding natural.

- Formal and informal Dutch
- Writing an email in Dutch: openings and closings
- Spoken shortcuts: 't, 'k, m'n, z'n, d'r
- Nominalisation: turning actions into nouns
- When to use the passive, and when not
- Building words with prefixes: on-, her-, mis-, oud-
- Building words with suffixes: -baar, -loos, -achtig, -ig, -lijk
- Linking ideas in writing: bovendien, echter, kortom
- If only: Als ik het had geweten
- Conditions without als: Mocht je vragen hebben
- Wishes with maar: Was het maar vrijdag
- Wiens, wier, hetgeen: formal relatives
- Dutch in the Netherlands and in Flanders

RULE 176 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Formal and informal Dutch

Dutch has a formal and an informal style, and the main choice is between **u** (formal you) and **jij** (informal you). Official letters add a few stiff words like **gaarne** and **betreffende**, while friends shorten words to **'t**, **'k** and **m'n** in chat. Even formal Dutch prefers short, plain sentences, so polite does not have to mean complicated.

The pattern

> **Choose u or jij for the person first. Then match your words to the situation: set phrases in official letters, spoken shortcuts with friends, and plain, direct sentences almost everywhere else.**

- Use **u** with strangers in formal settings, officials and older people you don't know. Use **jij** or **je** with friends, family, children and, in most workplaces, colleagues (often your manager too). More in U or jij: formal and informal you.
- **u** takes a singular verb, and the verb keeps its t in questions: **u bent**, **werkt u?** The possessive (the word for your) is **uw**.
- Formal letter words you will mostly read rather than write: **gaarne** (a very formal **graag**), **betreffende** (regarding), **wij verzoeken u** (we request that you), **indien** (if). Subject lines often start with **Betreft:**.
- Spoken shortcuts: **'t** for **het**, **'k** for **ik**, **m'n** for **mijn** (my), **z'n** for **zijn** (his), **d'r** for **haar** (her) or **er**. They are fine in chats and casual emails, and out of place in formal letters.

Examples

Kunt u morgenochtend om tien uur langskomen?	Could you come in tomorrow morning at ten?

Kun je morgen om tien uur even langskomen?	Can you pop by tomorrow at ten?
Wij verzoeken u het formulier uiterlijk 1 maart terug te sturen.	We request that you return the form by 1 March at the latest.
Wilt u het formulier uiterlijk 1 maart terugsturen?	Would you return the form by 1 March at the latest?
Betreffende uw aanvraag kunnen wij u het volgende meedelen.	Regarding your application, we can inform you of the following.
Wij ontvangen uw reactie **gaarne** binnen twee weken.	We would appreciate your reply within two weeks.
'k Heb m'n fiets weer eens bij het station laten staan.	I've left my bike at the station again.
Joris is **z'n** sleutels kwijt en **d'r** is niemand thuis.	Joris has lost his keys and there's nobody home.
Sanne vindt **'t** niet erg als we wat later komen.	Sanne doesn't mind if we come a bit later.

Why it works this way

The word for this is register: how formal or informal you sound. Think of Dutch register as two separate dials.

The first dial is the pronoun. English has one word for you, so the hard part is remembering to choose, and then staying consistent: **u** goes with **uw** and **alstublieft**, **jij** goes with **jouw** or **je** and **alsjeblieft**. Over the past decades **jij** has spread to many workplaces, shops and adverts, so **u** now mainly signals distance and respect.

The second dial is style, and here Dutch is fairly direct. Politeness comes from **u**, **graag**, a question instead of an order, and small softeners like **even**. It does not come from long, roundabout sentences. Many organisations deliberately rewrite their letters this way, turning **Wij**

verzoeken u... into **Wilt u...?** Words like **gaarne** and **indien** survive, but in a modern email they can sound old-fashioned. A word-for-word English **Ik vroeg me af of het misschien mogelijk zou zijn om...** may even sound vague, while **Kunt u mij laten weten of...?** is polite and clear.

The shortcuts come straight from speech. At normal speed, **het**, **ik**, **mijn** and **zijn** are pronounced weakly, and **'t**, **'k**, **m'n** and **z'n** simply write that down. That is why they feel natural in a chat with Mei and odd in a letter to the Belastingdienst. More in Spoken shortcuts: 't, 'k, m'n, z'n, d'r.

Remember: Dutch formality is a clean shirt, not a tuxedo. You show respect with **u**, **uw** and a polite question, not with heavy words and long sentences.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Kun u mij even helpen?**~~
SAY **Kunt u mij even helpen?**
the t only drops when jij or je follows the verb

NOT ~~**Zijn u de nieuwe buurvrouw?**~~
SAY **Bent u de nieuwe buurvrouw?**
u takes a singular verb, unlike German Sie

NOT ~~**Wilt u hier je naam invullen?**~~
SAY **Wilt u hier uw naam invullen?**
once you say u, your is uw

NOT ~~**In de bijlage vindt u m'n cv.**~~
SAY **In de bijlage vindt u mijn cv.**
shortcuts do not belong in a job application

NOT ~~'T is koud vandaag.~~
SAY **'t Is koud vandaag.**
the capital goes on the word after the apostrophe

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **werken**: **… u hier al lang?**
2. Choose **je** or **uw**: **Mevrouw El Amrani, wilt u hier … handtekening zetten?**
3. Choose **Betreffende**, **Gaarne** or **Indien**: **… uw klacht van 3 april kunnen wij u het volgende meedelen.**
4. Fill in the spoken shortcut for **haar** in this text to a friend: **Yara is … telefoon weer kwijt.**

Answers on page 802.

Use it today

Take a letter or email from your gemeente, bank or insurer and underline every stiff word, such as **gaarne**, **betreffende** or **indien**. Then rewrite one sentence in plain Dutch that still uses **u**. You will need the same skill in Writing an email in Dutch: openings and closings.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/formal-informal

RULE 177 · LEVEL B1 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Writing an email in Dutch: openings and closings

Start a Dutch email with **Hoi** or **Hallo** for people you know well, **Beste** plus a first name for most everyday and work emails, and **Geachte heer** or **Geachte mevrouw** plus a surname when you need to be formal. Close at the same level with **Groetjes**, **Groet** or **Met vriendelijke groet**, and use your first line to say why you are writing.

The pattern

> **Choose one level of formality for both the opening and the closing, and give your reason for writing in the first line.**

- Informal (friends, family, close colleagues): **Hoi Sanne,** or **Hallo Sanne,** with **Groetjes**.
- Neutral (most work emails, school, a neighbour): **Beste Sanne,** or **Beste mevrouw Bakker,** with **Groet** or **Met vriendelijke groet**.
- Formal (the **gemeente**, a company, a job application): **Geachte heer Visser,** or **Geachte mevrouw Visser,** with **Met vriendelijke groet**. No name? Write **Geachte heer/mevrouw,** instead. Unsure whether to write **heer** or **mevrouw**? Many writers use the full name: **Geachte Sam Visser,** for example.
- Layout: a comma after the opening, then a new line that starts with a capital letter (unlike German). The examples below put both on one line to save space. After the closing, most people put no comma, just their name on the next line.
- Pronoun: **u** after **Geachte**, **je** after **Hoi**. After **Beste**, follow the other person's lead, or use **u** when in doubt (U or jij).

Examples

Hoi Emma, Heb je zin om zaterdag bij ons te eten?	Hi Emma, Do you fancy having dinner at our place on Saturday?
Beste Carlos, Ik mail je omdat ik een vraag heb over het nieuwe rooster.	Dear Carlos, I'm emailing you because I have a question about the new schedule.
Beste mevrouw Bakker, Ik mail u over de ouderavond van dinsdag.	Dear Ms Bakker, I'm emailing you about Tuesday's parents' evening.
Geachte mevrouw Mulder, Ik schrijf u omdat mijn parkeervergunning volgende maand verloopt.	Dear Ms Mulder, I'm writing to you because my parking permit expires next month.
Geachte heer/mevrouw, Graag wil ik een klacht indienen over de schoonmaak van ons trappenhuis.	Dear Sir or Madam, I would like to make a complaint about the cleaning of our stairwell.
Laat even weten of dinsdag je uitkomt. **Groetjes**	Let me know if Tuesday suits you. Cheers
Ik stuur je het verslag morgen. **Groet**	I'll send you the report tomorrow. Regards
Ik hoop dat u mij kunt helpen. **Met vriendelijke groet**	I hope you can help me. Kind regards

Why it works this way

The opening sets the distance between you and your reader, and the closing confirms it. Think of a thermostat: **Hoi** and **Groetjes** are warm, **Beste** and **Groet** are room temperature, **Geachte** is cool. **Met vriendelijke groet** fits both cooler settings, which makes it the safe choice when you are unsure. Formal and informal Dutch helps you pick the setting.

The words themselves help. **Geachte** comes from **achten** (to respect), so it means something like "respected". **Beste** literally means "best" but works

like English "Dear". **Lieve** also translates as "dear", yet Dutch keeps it for people you love.

Dutch readers also tend to like emails that get to the point, so in work and formal emails your reason for writing usually comes first, without a long warm-up.

Remember: one email, one temperature. Set it with the opening and keep it until the closing.

In the exam

The **inburgering** exam and the NT2 state exam often include a short email. A typical task: **Uw buurman, meneer Visser, heeft een pakket voor u aangenomen. Schrijf hem een e-mail. Bedank hem en stel een moment voor om het op te halen.**

Beste meneer Visser, is a good opening here, since **Geachte** would sound stiff for a neighbour. Thank him in your first line (**Bedankt dat u mijn pakket hebt aangenomen.**), cover every point in the task and end with **Met vriendelijke groet** and your name.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Lieve meneer Jansen,**~~
SAY **Geachte heer Jansen,**
to your landlord, **lieve** is far too personal

NOT ~~**Geachte heer Daan,**~~
SAY **Geachte heer Visser,**
to Daan Visser: **heer** and **mevrouw** go with the surname

NOT ~~**Ik hoop dat deze e-mail u goed vindt.**~~
SAY **Ik hoop dat het goed met u gaat.**
the English formula does not translate word for word

NOT ~~Met vriendelijk groet~~
SAY **Met vriendelijke groet**
groet is a **de**-word, so the adjective takes -e

Quick check

1. You are sending a complaint to your housing association and do not know who will read it. Choose the opening: **Hoi,** or **Lieve meneer,** or **Geachte heer/mevrouw,**
2. Your email to your good friend Lotte starts with **Hoi Lotte!** Choose the matching closing: **Groetjes** or **Met vriendelijke groet**.
3. Your email opens with **Geachte mevrouw Bakker**. Fill in one word: **Kunt … mij laten weten wanneer het loket open is?**
4. Choose **omdat** or **want**: **Ik schrijf u … ik volgende maand verhuis.**

Answers on page 802.

Use it today

Write a short email to your landlord, a colleague or a neighbour about something real, such as a broken light or a parcel. Choose the opening first, give your reason in the first line, and check that the closing has the same temperature.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/emails-and-letters

RULE 178 · LEVEL B1 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Spoken shortcuts: 't, 'k, m'n, z'n, d'r

Spoken Dutch swallows its small words, and informal writing often shows this on the page: **'t** is **het**, **'k** is **ik**, **m'n** is **mijn**, **z'n** is **zijn** (his), and **d'r** is **haar** or **er**. You will see them all the time in chats, text messages and song lyrics. They are fine in informal writing, but in formal texts you write the full words.

The pattern

> **When a small word is unstressed (said quickly, without emphasis), informal Dutch writing can show the shortened sound with an apostrophe. Use these short forms only for unstressed words in informal texts.**

- **'t** = **het**, both as the article (the word for "the") and as the pronoun **het** (it): **'t station**, **Ik weet 't niet.**
- **'k** = **ik**: **'k Ben er zo.**
- **m'n** = **mijn** (my): **m'n jas**
- **z'n** = **zijn** only when it means his or its: **z'n auto**
- **d'r** = **haar** or **er** (there). With **haar** it covers both "her bag" and "I called her": **d'r tas**, **Ik heb d'r gebeld.** With **er**: **D'r is geen brood meer.**
- At the start of a sentence, **'t** and **'k** stay lowercase and the next word gets the capital: **'t Regent** is simply **Het regent** with a short **het**. **M'n** and **D'r** just take a capital first letter.
- You will also meet **'n** for **een** (a) and **'m** for **hem** (him). Same idea.

Examples

't Regent zo hard dat ik de bus neem.	It's raining so hard that I'm taking the bus.

Ik wacht bij **'t** station tot Mei er is.	I'm waiting at the station until Mei gets there.
'k Weet niet of Daan vanavond komt.	I don't know if Daan is coming tonight.
M'n fiets is gestolen, dus ik kom lopend.	My bike has been stolen, so I'm coming on foot.
Joris heeft **z'n** sleutels weer op kantoor laten liggen.	Joris has left his keys at the office again.
Yara viert zaterdag **d'r** verjaardag, dus ik koop nog een cadeautje.	Yara is celebrating her birthday on Saturday, so I'm buying a present.
Ik heb **d'r** gisteren gebeld, maar ze nam niet op.	I called her yesterday, but she didn't pick up.
Is **d'r** nog melk, of moet ik even naar de supermarkt?	Is there any milk left, or should I pop to the supermarket?

Why it works this way

Dutch stresses the words that carry meaning and rushes through the small ones. In relaxed speech, **het** sounds like "ut", **mijn** like "mun", **zijn** like "zun", and **ik** can shrink to a single k sound. Unstressed **haar** and **er** can come out as "dur". The short spellings simply record that sound, and the apostrophe marks the swallowed part. Compare the unstressed pronouns **we**, **je** and **ze**: they are the unstressed versions of **wij**, **jij** and **zij**, but they are standard words without an apostrophe, so they are fine in formal texts too.

So think of the full form as the dictionary word and the short form as a voice memo. A message to a friend can sound like a voice memo. A letter to the gemeente, a job application or the writing part of an exam needs dictionary words. Two contrasts:

- **M'n fiets is gestolen.** (text to a friend) versus **Mijn fiets is gestolen.** (report to the police)

- **Daan heeft z'n jas vergeten.** (unstressed) versus **Het was zijn idee, niet het mijne.** (stressed for contrast, so no short form)

If you speak English, take care: these forms feel more casual than contractions such as I'm or don't, which are normal in most work emails. The line is a matter of style rather than a strict rule, and some chatty newspaper columns and adverts use **m'n** and **z'n** on purpose. More on register in formal and informal Dutch.

Remember: the apostrophe is a swallowed sound. Only write it where you would swallow the word when you speak, in a message that sounds like you talking.

Watch out

NOT ~~**We z'n al thuis.**~~
SAY **We zijn al thuis.**
z'n only replaces **zijn** meaning his or its, never the verb

NOT ~~**'T is koud vandaag.**~~
SAY **'t Is koud vandaag.**
the capital goes to the first full word

NOT ~~**Is dit z'n jas of d'r jas?**~~
SAY **Is dit zijn jas of haar jas?**
a contrast needs stress, and short forms cannot carry stress

NOT ~~**In de bijlage vindt u m'n cv.**~~
SAY **In de bijlage vindt u mijn cv.**
a job application calls for full forms

Quick check

1. Choose the correct start of this chat message: **'T is bijna mijn beurt bij de huisarts.** or **'t Is bijna mijn beurt bij de huisarts.**
2. What does **d'r** stand for in **Ik heb d'r fiets even geleend.**: **haar** or **er**?
3. Fix the mistake in this text message: **Bas en Lotte z'n er al, waar blijf jij?**
4. Fill in **mijn** or **m'n** in an email to the gemeente: **Hierbij stuur ik u een kopie van … paspoort.**

Answers on page 803.

Use it today

Send a friend or classmate three short WhatsApp messages in Dutch that use **'t**, **m'n** and **d'r**, for example about the weather, your bike or a neighbour. Then rewrite one of them with full forms, as if you were sending it to the gemeente.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/spoken-contractions

RULE 179 · LEVEL C1 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Nominalisation: turning actions into nouns

Nominalisation means turning an action into a noun: **de gemeente verhoogt de prijzen** becomes **het verhogen van de prijzen** or **de verhoging van de prijzen**. Official Dutch is full of these nouns because they sound neutral and compact. They are also harder to read, so in your own writing a verb is usually the clearer choice.

The pattern

> **Formal Dutch often turns a verb into a noun. The object (what the action is done to) then follows van, and the doer either disappears or follows door.**

- **Infinitive as noun:** put **het** before almost any infinitive (the dictionary form of a verb): **het verhogen**, **het aanvragen**, **het niet tijdig betalen**. These are het-words, and they focus on the activity itself.
- **Derived noun:** many verbs also have a separate noun, often ending in **-ing**: **de verhoging**, **de opzegging**, but also **de aanvraag**, **de ontvangst**, **het besluit**. Nouns made with **-ing** are de-words; the others you learn one by one (see Making nouns from verbs and adjectives).
- **Process or result:** **het verhogen** is the act of raising. **De verhoging** can also be the result, so you can count and measure it: **twee verhogingen**, **de verhoging bedraagt vijf procent**.
- **Who and what:** the object follows **van** (**het verhogen van de huren**), the doer follows **door** (**door de verhuurder**). With verbs that have no object, **van** can introduce the doer: **het blaffen van de hond**.
- **Empty verbs:** a sentence built from nouns still needs a verb, so official Dutch adds verbs that carry little meaning: **plaatsvinden**, **overgaan tot**, **in behandeling nemen**, **uitvoering geven aan**.

Examples

Het verhogen van de huren stuit op veel verzet onder bewoners.	Raising the rents is meeting with a lot of resistance among residents.
De verhoging van de huren bedraagt gemiddeld vijf procent.	The rent increase averages five percent.
Na ontvangst van uw aanvraag nemen wij binnen acht weken een besluit.	Once we receive your application, we will make a decision within eight weeks.
Zodra we je aanvraag hebben ontvangen, beslissen we binnen acht weken.	As soon as we have received your application, we will decide within eight weeks.
Het niet tijdig doorgeven van een verhuizing kan leiden tot een boete.	Failing to report a move on time can result in a fine.
Als je je verhuizing niet op tijd doorgeeft, kun je een boete krijgen.	If you don't report your move on time, you may get a fine.
Ter bevordering van de doorstroming wordt **de aanleg van** een extra fietspad overwogen.	To improve the flow of traffic, the construction of an extra cycle path is being considered.
De gemeente **denkt erover om een extra fietspad aan te leggen**, zodat het verkeer beter doorstroomt.	The council is thinking about building an extra cycle path so that traffic flows better.

Why it works this way

Think of a verb as a small scene: someone does something, at a certain time. Nominalisation packs that scene into a closed box. The doer and the tense disappear, and what is left is a label you can move around: you can make it the subject of a new sentence or tuck it inside another noun.

Dutch has a name for this: **naamwoordstijl** ("noun style"). Officials like it because **het niet tijdig betalen van de aanslag** sounds neutral, blames nobody in particular and fits on one line. The reader, however, has to

unpack every box again: who pays what, and by when? Stack a few boxes, as in **ter bevordering van de doorstroming** plus **de aanleg van**, and you get a sentence that is short on the page but slow in the head. English has the same habit, so if you already distrust officialese in English, you know the cure.

Remember: a noun hides the people, a verb shows them. If your reader needs to know who does what, use a verb: **Als u de aanslag niet op tijd betaalt, krijgt u een herinnering.**

Nominal style still has honest uses. It works in headings and lists, and whenever the action itself is your topic: **Het opzeggen van je abonnement kan online.** It also teams up with the passive (**wordt overwogen**), the subject of the next lesson.

Watch out

NOT ~~het verhogen de prijzen~~
SAY **het verhogen van de prijzen**
an infinitive used as a noun takes its object with **van**

NOT ~~het verhoging van de huur~~
SAY **de verhoging van de huur**
nouns made with **-ing** are de-words, unlike **het verhogen**

NOT ~~Het verhogen van de huren leiden tot verzet.~~
SAY **Het verhogen van de huren leidt tot verzet.**
the subject is **het verhogen**, which is singular

NOT ~~Zwemming is goed voor je rug.~~
SAY **Zwemmen is goed voor je rug.**
Dutch **-ing** does not work like English -ing: for an activity, use the infinitive

NOT ~~het Verhogen van de prijzen~~

SAY **het verhogen van de prijzen**

a German habit: Dutch does not capitalise nouns, not even infinitives used as nouns

Quick check

1. Choose **de** or **het**: **… tijdig aanvragen van een parkeervergunning voorkomt een hoop gedoe.**
2. Choose **van** or **door**: **Het beoordelen van uw aanvraag … de gemeente kan acht weken duren.**
3. Fix the sentence: **De verlaging van de tarieven gaan op 1 januari in.**
4. Choose **verhogen** or **verhogingen**: **Huurders krijgen dit jaar te maken met twee … van de huur.**

Answers on page 803.

Use it today

Open a letter or web page from your **gemeente** and find one sentence with a phrase like **het indienen van** or **na ontvangst van**. Rewrite it with a verb and a clear subject (**Als u … indient**, **Zodra wij … hebben ontvangen**), then read both versions aloud and notice which one you understood first.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/nominalisation

RULE 180 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

When to use the passive, and when not

Use the passive (a sentence in which the subject undergoes the action) when the doer is unknown, obvious or not worth mentioning: **Het pakket is bezorgd** (the parcel has been delivered) tells you all you need. When the doer is you, your team or your reader, an active sentence (one where the subject does the action) with **we**, **je** or **u** is usually clearer and friendlier. Official Dutch letters often overuse the passive, so do not take them as your model for everyday emails.

The pattern

> **Use the passive when the doer is unknown, obvious or unimportant. When the doer is you, your organisation or your reader, say so in an active sentence.**

- Form: **worden** plus the past participle (the form like **gemaakt** or **bezorgd**), or **zijn** plus the participle in the perfect tenses. See The passive with worden.
- Unknown doer: **Mijn fiets is gestolen.**
- Obvious doer: **De verdachte is aangehouden.** (by the police, who else?)
- Unimportant doer, because the result is the news: **De vergadering is verplaatst naar donderdag.**
- Known doer who matters, especially you or your reader: go active. **We hebben de vergadering naar donderdag verplaatst.**

Examples

Mijn fiets **is** gisteren bij het station **gestolen**.	My bike was stolen at the station yesterday.

Je pakket **is bezorgd** bij je buren op nummer 14.	Your parcel was delivered to your neighbours at number 14.
Een 28-jarige man uit Zwolle **is** gisteravond **aangehouden**.	A 28-year-old man from Zwolle was arrested last night.
Het nieuwe station **is ontworpen door** een Deens architectenbureau.	The new station was designed by a Danish architecture firm.
Uw aanvraag **wordt** binnen acht weken **behandeld**.	Your application will be processed within eight weeks.
We behandelen uw aanvraag binnen acht weken.	We will process your application within eight weeks.
Het formulier **kan** online **worden ingevuld**.	The form can be filled in online.
Je kunt het formulier online **invullen**.	You can fill in the form online.
Er is helaas **een fout gemaakt** in uw factuur.	Unfortunately, a mistake was made on your invoice.
We hebben helaas een fout **gemaakt** in uw factuur.	Unfortunately, we made a mistake on your invoice.

Why it works this way

Think of the subject as a spotlight: it shows what the sentence is about. An active sentence lights up the doer: **De buurman heeft mijn fiets gerepareerd.** The passive moves the light to the thing that undergoes the action and lets the doer fade into the dark: **Mijn fiets is gerepareerd.** That is exactly right when the doer adds nothing.

With **door**, the doer comes back, at the end of the sentence, where Dutch tends to put new information. That is why the station example works: the station is the topic, the designer is the news. If neither is true, the active version is usually shorter.

That dark corner is also why many official texts love the passive. Combine it with nouns made from verbs (see Nominalisation) and nobody seems responsible: **Na ontvangst van uw betaling wordt uw aanvraag in behandeling genomen.** Compare **Zodra we uw betaling hebben ontvangen, behandelen we uw aanvraag.** Same facts, but now a person is talking to you. Many Dutch organisations are rewriting their letters in exactly this way. The passive still has its place in formal writing: in reports, news and legal texts, the process or the result often really is the topic.

In your own emails, use **we** for your team and **u** or **je** for your reader. **Je** also works for general instructions, as in the form example (see Men, je and ze). When something has gone wrong, hiding the doer can sound evasive: **Er is een fout gemaakt** almost suggests the mistake made itself, while **We hebben een fout gemaakt** sounds honest.

Remember: ask who does it and whether your reader cares. Nobody knows or nobody cares: passive. You, your team or your reader: active.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Mijn fiets is gisteren gestolen geworden.**~~
SAY **Mijn fiets is gisteren gestolen.**
the perfect passive is **zijn** plus the participle, without **geworden**

NOT ~~**Ik ben een nieuwe laptop gegeven.**~~
SAY **Ik heb een nieuwe laptop gekregen.**
in standard Dutch, the receiver of **geven** does not become the subject of a passive; use **krijgen**

NOT ~~**Het formulier is van mijn huisarts ingevuld.**~~
SAY **Het formulier is door mijn huisarts ingevuld.**
the doer follows **door**, not **van**; German **von** misleads

NOT ~~**Het wordt op kantoor veel geklaagd over de koffie.**~~
SAY **Er wordt op kantoor veel geklaagd over de koffie.**
a passive without a subject uses **er**, not **het**

Quick check

1. Choose **Het** or **Er**: **… wordt op het perron veel gerookt, ook al is het verboden.**
2. Choose **van** or **door**: **De nieuwe parkeerregels zijn … de gemeenteraad goedgekeurd.**
3. Choose **werd** or **kreeg**: **Lotte … te horen dat haar afspraak bij de huisarts was verzet.**
4. Rewrite with **we** and fill in the verb: **Uw bericht wordt zo snel mogelijk beantwoord.** becomes **We … uw bericht zo snel mogelijk.**

Answers on page 803.

Use it today

Take one automatic email or letter you received this week, from your energy supplier, the **gemeente** or a webshop, and underline every **worden** or **zijn** with a participle. Rewrite two of those sentences with **we** and **u** or **je**, and decide which version you would rather receive.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/choosing-the-passive

RULE 181 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Building words with prefixes: on-, her-, mis-, oud-

Dutch often changes the meaning of a word you already know by putting a prefix (a short piece glued to the front of a word) before it. Four of the most useful ones: **on-** usually means not, **her-** means again, **mis-** means wrongly and **oud-** means former. So **onmogelijk** is impossible, **herschrijven** is to rewrite, a **misverstand** is a misunderstanding and an **oud-collega** is a former colleague.

The pattern

> **Put the prefix in front of a word you know: on- makes it negative, her- repeats it, mis- makes it go wrong and oud- puts a person's role in the past.**

- **on-** goes mostly with adjectives (though not with every adjective), sometimes with nouns: **duidelijk** becomes **onduidelijk** (unclear), **bekend** becomes **onbekend** (unknown), **zin** becomes **onzin** (nonsense).
- **her-** goes with verbs and the nouns made from them: **herhalen** (repeat), **heropenen** (reopen), **de herkansing** (the resit). The prefix stays attached (inseparable verbs) and the past participle (the form after **heb** or **is**) has no **ge-**: **herschreven**, **heropend**.
- **mis-** goes with verbs and nouns: **misbruik** (misuse, abuse), **mislukken** (to fail), **misleiden** (to mislead). Most **mis-** verbs also drop **ge-**: **mislukt** (participles without ge-). A few, with the stress on **mis**, are separable: **misgaan** (go wrong) gives **Het gaat mis** and **Het is misgegaan**.
- **oud-** goes before a person or a role: **oud-collega**, **oud-leerling**, **oud-burgemeester**. Write it with a hyphen.

Examples

Het is **onmogelijk** om dat vandaag nog af te krijgen.	It is impossible to get that done today.
De brief van de gemeente was nogal **onduidelijk**, dus Priya heeft gebeld.	The letter from the municipality was rather unclear, so Priya called.
Huizen in Utrecht zijn voor starters bijna **onbetaalbaar** geworden.	Houses in Utrecht have become almost unaffordable for first-time buyers.
Daan moet zijn motivatiebrief **herschrijven** voordat hij hem verstuurt.	Daan has to rewrite his cover letter before he sends it.
Kunt u de vraag even **herhalen**? De verbinding was slecht.	Could you repeat the question? The connection was bad.
Na de verbouwing wordt de bibliotheek in maart **heropend**.	After the renovation, the library will be reopened in March.
Door een **misverstand** over de tijd stond Mei een uur te vroeg op het perron.	Because of a misunderstanding about the time, Mei was on the platform an hour early.
De politie onderzoekt **misbruik** van persoonsgegevens bij een webwinkel.	The police are investigating misuse of personal data at an online shop.
Mijn eerste poging om stroopwafels te bakken is compleet **mislukt**.	My first attempt to bake stroopwafels failed completely.
Op de verjaardag van Sanne kwam Ahmed zijn **oud-collega** Joris tegen.	At Sanne's birthday, Ahmed ran into his former colleague Joris.

Why it works this way

Think of a prefix as a button on a remote control. The word underneath stays the same; the button changes what happens to it. Put pairs side by side and you can hear the switch:

- **Het rooster is duidelijk.** / **Het rooster is onduidelijk.** (clear / unclear)
- **Ik schrijf de mail.** / **Ik herschrijf de mail.** (I write / I rewrite)
- **Hij gebruikt de gegevens.** / **Hij misbruikt de gegevens.** (he uses / he misuses)
- **Joris is een oude collega van me.** / **Joris is een oud-collega van me.** (old, or from years ago / former: he and I are no longer colleagues)

English spreads not over un-, in-, im-, il- and dis-. Dutch mostly uses **on-**: **oneerlijk** (unfair, dishonest), **ongeduldig** (impatient), **onzeker** (uncertain, insecure). Loanwords tend to keep their own prefix: **illegaal**, **inactief**. And English un- can also undo an action (unpack, unlock); Dutch **on-** cannot do that.

Register matters too. **Her-** words often sound written and official: a letter from the gemeente announces that your street will be **heringericht**, while at home you would more likely say **opnieuw ingericht**. For many verbs, **opnieuw** or **nog een keer** sounds more natural in conversation.

This is also why prefixes help you read. Cover the prefix, read the word you know, then add the meaning back: **onbereikbaar** is **bereikbaar** (reachable) switched off. A **herkansing** is a **kans** (chance) again: a resit. Treat this as a strong first guess, not a guarantee. An **onweer** is a thunderstorm, and **onkosten** are expenses. **Ontvangen** (receive) has a different prefix, **ont-**. And **herfst** (autumn) and **mist** (fog) have no prefix at all. You will meet the endings that build words in suffixes.

Remember: on- says no, **her-** says again, **mis-** says oops, **oud-** says used to.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Lotte moet haar koffer nog onpakken.**~~
SAY **Lotte moet haar koffer nog uitpakken.**
on- does not undo an action the way English un- does

NOT ~~Ik schrijf de offerte morgen her.~~
SAY **Ik herschrijf de offerte morgen.**
her- stays attached to the verb

NOT ~~Mijn eerste poging is helemaal gemislukt.~~
SAY **Mijn eerste poging is helemaal mislukt.**
mislukken takes no **ge-**

NOT ~~Ik kwam in de supermarkt mijn oud collega Bas tegen.~~
SAY **Ik kwam in de supermarkt mijn oud-collega Bas tegen.**
write **oud-** for former with a hyphen

NOT ~~Mijn oud-huis stond in Zwolle.~~
SAY **Mijn vorige huis stond in Zwolle.**
oud- meaning former goes with people and their roles, not with things

Quick check

1. Choose the right prefix: **De uitleg in de mail was …duidelijk, dus Yara heeft de klantenservice gebeld.** (**on**, **her** or **mis**)
2. Fix the sentence: **Bas heeft zijn cv gisteren geherschreven.**
3. Choose: **Carlos dacht dat de vergadering om tien uur begon, maar die begon om negen uur. Dat was een …** (**misbruik** or **misverstand**)
4. Choose the correct spelling: **In de trein kwam Emma haar … tegen.** (**oud collega**, **oud-collega** or **oudcollega**)

Answers on page 803.

Use it today

Open the last letter or email from your gemeente, bank or employer and circle every word that starts with **on-**, **her-** or **mis-**. Cover the prefix, guess the meaning from the word underneath, and only then look it up.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/prefixes

RULE 182 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Building words with suffixes: -baar, -loos, -achtig, -ig, -lijk

Dutch builds many adjectives (describing words) by adding a suffix, an ending, to a word you already know. **-baar** on a verb usually means "can be done" (**drinkbaar**, **bereikbaar**), **-loos** means "without" (**werkloos**, **draadloos**) and **-achtig** means "like" or "-ish" (**kinderachtig**). **-ig** and **-lijk** mostly just make an adjective: **zonnig**, **vriendelijk**.

The pattern

> **Read the ending: -baar on a verb stem means "can be ...ed", -loos means "without" and -achtig means "like" or "-ish". -ig and -lijk mostly just make an adjective.**

- **-baar**: mostly a verb stem (the **ik** form) plus **baar**: **bereiken** → **bereikbaar**, **betalen** → **betaalbaar**.
- **-loos**: noun plus **loos**: **werk** → **werkloos** (unemployed), **draad** → **draadloos**. A few add an **e**: **hopeloos**, **eindeloos**.
- **-achtig**: noun or adjective plus **achtig**: **griep** → **griepachtig** (flu-like), **rood** → **roodachtig** (reddish), **kind** → **kinderachtig**.
- **-ig** and **-lijk**: often on a noun: **zon** → **zonnig**, **gevaar** → **gevaarlijk**, **vriend** → **vriendelijk**.
- Add **on-** and many flip to the opposite: **onbetaalbaar**, **onvriendelijk** (see Building words with prefixes).

Examples

Het kraanwater is in heel Nederland **drinkbaar**.	Tap water is drinkable everywhere in the Netherlands.

Ik ben morgen niet **bereikbaar**, dus mail Fatima als het dringend is.	I can't be reached tomorrow, so email Fatima if it's urgent.
Daan is sinds maart **werkloos**.	Daan has been unemployed since March.
Doe niet zo **kinderachtig**, Bas: het is maar een spelletje.	Don't be so childish, Bas: it's only a game.
Lotte keek met **kinderlijk** plezier naar het vuurwerk.	Lotte watched the fireworks with childlike delight.
Morgen wordt het eindelijk weer **zonnig**.	Tomorrow it will finally be sunny again.
De medewerker van de gemeente was heel **vriendelijk**.	The council employee was very friendly.

Why it works this way

Think of the suffix as a label that tells you what kind of word you have, so read long words from the right. **Onbereikbaar** is "not + reach + can be": you cannot be reached. That habit alone makes Dutch texts faster to read.

English helps: **-baar** is close to -able, **-loos** to -less, **-ig** to -y and **-lijk** to -ly. The match is not one to one: **werkloos** means unemployed, and **dankbaar** (built on the noun **dank**) means grateful.

Spelling depends on how the ending starts. **-ig** starts with a vowel, so the rules for open and closed syllables apply. If a stressed short vowel stays short, the single consonant after it doubles (**zonnig**, **vettig**). A long vowel written with two letters drops one (**room** → **romig**). After an unstressed vowel nothing doubles (**hongerig**). **-baar** and **-loos** start with a consonant, so the base is spelled as at the end of a word (**leesbaar**, **draadloos**), unless an extra **e** comes in between (**hopeloos**). **-lijk** sometimes adds an **e** and sometimes not (**vriendelijk**, but **gevaarlijk**), so learn each word whole.

When the adjective takes an **-e**, **-loos** becomes **-loze**: **een draadloze muis**, but **een draadloos netwerk** (see adjective spelling).

Remember: one base, three endings, three meanings: **kinderloos** (without children), **kinderachtig** (childish, in an annoying way) and **kinderlijk** (childlike, usually innocent).

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik heb een draadlose koptelefoon.**~~
SAY **Ik heb een draadloze koptelefoon.**
with an **-e**, **-loos** becomes **-loze**

NOT ~~**Morgen wordt het zonig.**~~
SAY **Morgen wordt het zonnig.**
stressed short **o**, so the **n** doubles

NOT ~~**De huur is niet meer betalbaar.**~~
SAY **De huur is niet meer betaalbaar.**
-baar goes on the stem **betaal**

NOT ~~**Deze bank zit heel comfortbaar.**~~
SAY **Deze bank zit heel comfortabel.**
not every -able word becomes **-baar**

Quick check

1. Fill in the gap with one adjective made from **bereiken**: **Mijn telefoon ligt thuis, dus ik ben vanmiddag niet …**
2. Choose: **Sanne en Carlos willen geen kinderen: ze zijn bewust …** (**kinderachtig** / **kinderlijk** / **kinderloos**)
3. Fix the sentence: **Na de verbouwing was alles in huis heel stofig.**
4. Fill in the gap with one adjective made from **gevaar**: **Fietsen zonder licht is in het donker erg …**

Answers on page 804.

Use it today

Write your next out-of-office message in Dutch: **Ik ben vrijdag niet bereikbaar. Voor dringende vragen kunt u terecht bij Joris.** Then check the milk in your fridge and work out **houdbaar** from its parts.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/suffixes

RULE 183 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Linking ideas in writing: bovendien, echter, kortom

To add a point in written Dutch, use **bovendien** (moreover) or **daarnaast** (in addition); to contrast, use **echter** (however) or **daarentegen** (on the other hand); to wrap up, use **kortom** (in short) or **al met al** (all in all). **Ten eerste** (firstly) and **ten slotte** (finally) number your arguments. Most of these words are followed straight by the verb when they open a sentence, while **echter** usually sits after the verb: **Het plan is echter duur.**

The pattern

> **These linking adverbs (words that connect a sentence to the one before it) show your reader where the text is going. When one opens a sentence, the conjugated verb (the verb that changes with the subject) usually follows it directly.**

- **Adding:** **bovendien** and **daarnaast**: **Bovendien is het goedkoper.**
- **Contrasting:** **echter** usually stands in the middle of the sentence, after the verb: **Het plan is echter duur. Daarentegen** sets two people or things against each other and also tends to come after the verb.
- **Concluding:** **kortom** is usually followed by a comma and normal word order; **al met al** takes the verb right after it.
- **Listing:** **ten eerste**, **ten tweede**, **ten derde**, **ten slotte**, each followed by the verb.

Useful extras for exam writing

Exam writing tasks, for example in the NT2 exams, often ask for an opinion with reasons. Keep these ready too:

- Adding: **ook**, **verder** (furthermore)
- Contrasting: **maar**, **toch** (still, even so), **aan de ene kant** and **aan de andere kant** (on the one hand, on the other hand)
- Cause and result: **daarom** (that's why), **dus** (so)
- Closing: **tot slot** (to finish)

A few well-placed linking words do more than one in every sentence.

Examples

De nieuwe wijk ligt dicht bij het station. **Bovendien** zijn de huren er lager.	The new neighbourhood is close to the station. What's more, the rents are lower there.
Ik werk vier dagen per week. **Daarnaast** volg ik een avondcursus Nederlands.	I work four days a week. In addition, I'm taking an evening course in Dutch.
Het voorstel van de gemeente is goed doordacht. Het is **echter** erg duur.	The municipality's proposal is well thought out. However, it is very expensive.
Fatima wil een groot feest geven. Ahmed viert zijn verjaardag **daarentegen** liever rustig thuis.	Fatima wants to throw a big party. Ahmed, on the other hand, prefers to celebrate his birthday quietly at home.
Ten eerste is de fiets sneller dan de bus. **Ten tweede** is hij goedkoper.	Firstly, the bike is faster than the bus. Secondly, it is cheaper.
Ten slotte wil ik u bedanken voor uw snelle reactie.	Finally, I would like to thank you for your quick reply.
De trein had vertraging en het regende. **Kortom**, ik kwam een uur te laat op mijn werk.	The train was delayed and it was raining. In short, I was an hour late for work.
Al met al was het een geslaagde buurtbarbecue.	All in all, it was a successful neighbourhood barbecue.

We moeten Lotte even helpen. Ze werkt hier **tenslotte** pas een week.	We should give Lotte a hand. After all, she has only been working here for a week.

Why it works this way

These words are adverbs: words like **morgen** or **vaak** that add information inside the sentence. A conjunction, a joining word like **maar** or **en**, stands outside the sentence, so the word order stays normal: **Maar het plan is duur.** An adverb counts as a full part of the sentence. When it takes the first slot, the verb second rule puts the verb right after it, just as with **daarom** and **toch** (linking words that invert).

Kortom is the odd one out. It usually works like a label in front of the sentence, so a comma follows and the sentence starts afresh: **Kortom, we moeten verhuizen.**

Picture your text as a Dutch cycle route. **Bovendien** and **daarnaast** say keep going, **echter** and **daarentegen** say the road turns, **ten eerste** to **ten slotte** are the numbered **knooppunten**, and **kortom** tells the reader they have arrived.

As a tendency, **bovendien** adds an extra argument for the same point (what's more), while **daarnaast** adds a separate fact (besides that). In everyday writing they often swap without any problem.

Echter and **daarentegen** belong to written, fairly formal Dutch. In conversation, people mostly say **maar** or **aan de andere kant**; an **echter** over the garden fence sounds like a letter from **de gemeente**. In formal writing, **echter** has two other possible positions: right after a fronted subject for a sharp contrast (**Joris echter was niet overtuigd.**), or at the very start, followed by a comma and normal word order (**Echter, de trein had vertraging.**). Both are correct, but the position after the verb is the most common and the safest choice.

Remember: echter goes where English puts a mid-sentence however. "The plan is, however, expensive" becomes **Het plan is echter duur**, without the commas.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Bovendien het huis is te klein.**~~
SAY **Bovendien is het huis te klein.**
bovendien fills the first place, so the verb comes next

NOT ~~**Het plan is goed, echter het is te duur.**~~
SAY **Het plan is goed, maar het is te duur.**
echter cannot join two sentences after a comma the way **maar** does

NOT ~~**Tenslotte wil ik u bedanken voor uw hulp.**~~
SAY **Ten slotte wil ik u bedanken voor uw hulp.**
finally is two words; **tenslotte** means after all

NOT ~~**Op de andere hand is een huurhuis flexibeler.**~~
SAY **Aan de andere kant is een huurhuis flexibeler.**
Dutch uses **kant**, side, not hand

Quick check

1. Choose **bovendien** or **daarentegen**: **Joris is blij met zijn nieuwe appartement. Het is ruim en licht. ... is de huur lager dan hij had verwacht.**
2. Fix the word order and keep **al met al** at the start: **Al met al het was een nuttige vergadering.**
3. Add **echter** to the second sentence, directly after the verb: **Mei wilde de trein van acht uur nemen. De trein was vol.**
4. Sanne ends her farewell speech. Choose **ten slotte** or **tenslotte**: **... wil ik jullie allemaal bedanken voor de fijne samenwerking.**

Answers on page 804.

Use it today

Write a five-sentence message to a friend about your neighbourhood: two good points with **ten eerste** and **bovendien**, one drawback with **echter**, and a final verdict with **kortom**. Then check that every verb stands where this lesson puts it.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/linking-ideas

RULE 184 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

If only: Als ik het had geweten

To talk about something that did not happen in the past, put the **als**-clause in the past perfect, the tense with **had** or **was**: **als ik het had geweten** (if I had known). In the main clause, the part that could stand on its own, use **zou** plus a participle (the form like **gekomen**) plus **hebben** or **zijn**, or simply use the past perfect again: **zou ik gekomen zijn** or **was ik gekomen**. Both mean "I would have come", and both are correct and common.

This is the grammar of regret, relief and excuses: the train you missed, the birthday you forgot, the job you nearly got.

The pattern

> **For an unreal past, use als + had or was + participle. In the main clause, use zou + participle + hebben or zijn, or just had or was + participle.**

- The past perfect normally means "earlier than another past moment". In this pattern it marks something that did not happen.
- In the **als**-clause the verbs go to the end: **als je me had gebeld** or **als je me gebeld had**.
- In the main clause, choose **zou ik gekomen zijn** (or **zou ik zijn gekomen**) or simply **was ik gekomen**.
- **Hebben** or **zijn** is the same choice as in the perfect tense: **komen**, **gaan**, **vertrekken** and **worden** take **zijn**.
- When the **als**-clause comes first, the main clause starts with its verb, or with **dan** plus the verb. The **als**-clause can also come second: **Ik had gebeld als ik het had geweten.**

Examples

Als ik het **had geweten**, **was** ik eerder **gekomen**.	If I had known, I would have come earlier.
Als ik het **had geweten**, **zou** ik eerder **gekomen zijn**.	If I had known, I would have come earlier.
Als de trein niet **was uitgevallen**, **waren** we op tijd voor de vergadering **geweest**.	If the train hadn't been cancelled, we would have been on time for the meeting.
Daan **had** de baan **gekregen** als hij zijn cv eerder **had opgestuurd**.	Daan would have got the job if he had sent his CV earlier.
Als Fatima meer tijd **had gehad**, **zou** ze de cursus **hebben afgemaakt**.	If Fatima had had more time, she would have finished the course.
Als het niet zo hard **had gewaaid**, **was** Bas op de fiets **gegaan**.	If it hadn't been so windy, Bas would have gone by bike.
Als je me **had gebeld**, **had** ik je van het station **opgehaald**.	If you had called me, I would have picked you up from the station.
Ik **zou** het niet **hebben gezegd** als ik **had geweten** dat ze erbij was.	I wouldn't have said it if I had known she was there.
Als Priya de brief van de gemeente **had gelezen**, **had** ze de afspraak niet **gemist**.	If Priya had read the letter from the municipality, she wouldn't have missed the appointment.

Why it works this way

Dutch, like English, takes a step back in time to show that something is not real. For the present, that step lands on the simple past: **Als ik tijd had, zou ik komen** (but I don't have time). For the past, the only step left is the past perfect. So **had** and **was** do two jobs: a real earlier past (**de trein was al vertrokken toen ik aankwam**) and an unreal past (**als de trein nog niet was vertrokken, had ik hem gehaald**). Even after **als**, the past

perfect can describe a real past that the speaker is unsure about, so the context decides. A main clause like **was ik gekomen** or **zou ik gekomen zijn** makes the unreal meaning clear.

That is also why the main clause can simply repeat the past perfect: **had ik gebeld** is already one step away from reality, so **zou** adds nothing new. The two options mean the same. The short version is very common in conversation, and the **zou** version is just as standard, in speech and in writing.

If you speak German, this will feel familiar ("wenn ich es gewusst hätte, wäre ich gekommen"), except that Dutch uses its ordinary past forms, with no special subjunctive. If you speak English, resist copying "if I would have known": **als ik het zou hebben geweten** is not wrong, but it is heavy, and most speakers keep **zou** out of the **als**-clause. Dutch can also drop **als** altogether: **Had ik het geweten, dan was ik gekomen**. More on that in conditions without als.

Remember: one step back in time is one step away from reality. For the past, that step lands on **had** or **was**, and you may use it on both sides of the comma.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Als ik het had geweten, ik was eerder gekomen.**~~
SAY **Als ik het had geweten, was ik eerder gekomen.**
the **als**-clause fills the first place, so the verb follows straight after the comma

NOT ~~**Als je had me gebeld, had ik je opgehaald.**~~
SAY **Als je me had gebeld, had ik je opgehaald.**
in the **als**-clause the verbs go to the end

NOT ~~Als we eerder hadden vertrokken, hadden we de trein gehaald.~~
SAY **Als we eerder waren vertrokken, hadden we de trein gehaald.**
vertrekken takes **zijn**, here too

NOT ~~Als ik de uitnodiging had gekregen, zou ik gekomen hebben.~~
SAY **Als ik de uitnodiging had gekregen, zou ik gekomen zijn.**
komen takes **zijn**, so use **zou** plus **zijn**

NOT ~~Als Joris zijn fietsverlichting had aangezet, zou hij geen boete gekregen.~~
SAY **Als Joris zijn fietsverlichting had aangezet, zou hij geen boete hebben gekregen.**
zou does not replace **had**: it still needs **hebben** or **zijn**, or drop **zou** and say **had hij geen boete gekregen**

Quick check

1. Choose **had** or **was**: **Als Mei niet ziek … geworden, was ze naar de verjaardag van haar buurman gegaan.**
2. Fill in one word: **Als Sanne het adres had gehad, … ze Lotte een kaartje hebben gestuurd.**
3. Rewrite the main clause with the past perfect instead of **zou**: **Als het niet had geregend, zouden we buiten hebben gegeten.**
4. Fix the word order: **Als Ahmed eerder was vertrokken, hij had de bus gehaald.**

Answers on page 804.

Use it today

Think of one small thing that went wrong this week, like a missed train or a forgotten birthday. Say or write it twice: once with **zou** (**Als ik mijn wekker had gezet, zou ik de trein hebben gehaald**) and once with the past perfect (**Als ik mijn wekker had gezet, had ik de trein gehaald**).

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/unreal-past

RULE 185 · LEVEL C1 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Conditions without als: Mocht je vragen hebben

Dutch can drop **als** and open a condition with the verb instead: **Heb je vragen, bel me dan** means "If you have questions, call me". For a polite "should you", the standard choice is **mocht**: **Mocht u vragen hebben, neem dan contact met ons op**. You will meet it in emails from employers, schools, landlords and the **gemeente** (the municipality).

The pattern

> **To say "if" without als, put the conjugated verb (the form that matches the subject) first, followed by the subject (who or what the sentence is about). The main clause usually picks it up with dan ("then").**

- Present tense for real conditions: **als je tijd hebt** becomes **heb je tijd**.
- Past perfect (the "had done" tense) for things that did not happen: **als ik het had geweten** becomes **had ik het geweten**, with the meaning you know from If only: Als ik het had geweten.
- **Mocht** with a singular subject, **mochten** with a plural one, plus an infinitive (the dictionary form, like **hebben**) at the end: **Mocht u vragen hebben**, **Mochten er vragen zijn**.
- If **dan** opens the main clause, the verb comes straight after it: **dan kunt u bellen**. An imperative (command form) stays at the front instead, with **dan** after it: **neem dan contact op**.
- Add **maar** and drop the main clause, and you have a wish: **Had ik het maar geweten**. More in Wishes with maar.

Examples

Heb je zaterdag tijd, **dan** kunnen we Sanne helpen met verhuizen.	If you have time on Saturday, we can help Sanne move house.
Mocht u onverhoopt verhinderd zijn, laat het ons **dan** uiterlijk vrijdag weten.	Should you unexpectedly be unable to come, please let us know by Friday at the latest.
Mochten er na het lezen van deze brief nog vragen zijn, **dan** kunt u contact opnemen met de afdeling Burgerzaken.	Should any questions remain after reading this letter, you can contact the Civil Affairs department.
Houden de klachten langer dan een week **aan**, neem **dan** contact op met uw huisarts.	If the symptoms last longer than a week, contact your GP.
Mocht mijn trein vertraging **hebben**, **dan** app ik je even.	If my train happens to be delayed, I'll send you a quick message.
Had ik geweten dat er geen treinen reden, **dan was ik** met de fiets gegaan.	Had I known there were no trains running, I would have cycled.
Was Daan niet zo koppig **geweest**, **dan** stonden we nu niet in de file.	If Daan hadn't been so stubborn, we wouldn't be stuck in traffic now.
Had ik dat **maar** eerder geweten!	If only I had known that sooner!
Was ik maar thuisgebleven.	If only I had stayed at home.

Why it works this way

A verb-first condition has the shape of a yes or no question. Picture two lines in a chat: **Heb je vragen? Bel me dan.** Swap the question mark for a comma and the question becomes a condition, with **dan** as its answer.

Remember: a verb-first condition is a question that answers itself. **Heb ik zondag tijd?** only wonders; **Heb ik zondag tijd, dan help ik je met de tuin** makes a promise.

Formal English does this in a few fixed phrases, such as "had I known" and "should you need anything". Dutch uses the pattern much more freely, in the present tense and in everyday speech too.

Mocht is the past form of **mogen**, but in a condition it has nothing to do with permission or the past: **Mocht het morgen regenen** is about tomorrow. The past form adds distance, much like English "should": possible, but not something you expect. That polite distance is why it closes so many Dutch emails. Compare:

- **Als u vragen heeft, kunt u bellen.** (neutral)
- **Mocht u vragen hebben, dan kunt u bellen.** (just in case: politer and a little more formal)
- **Mocht u daar parkeren?** (a real question: were you allowed to park there?)

German speakers can map "Sollten Sie Fragen haben" onto **Mocht u vragen hebben**. In Belgium you will also see **moest** in this sense; in the Netherlands, use **mocht**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Mocht u vragen hebben, dan neem contact met ons op.**~~
SAY **Mocht u vragen hebben, neem dan contact met ons op.**
an imperative stays first, so **dan** follows it

NOT ~~**Mocht u vragen hebben, dan u kunt ons bellen.**~~
SAY **Mocht u vragen hebben, dan kunt u ons bellen.**
after **dan** the verb comes before the subject

NOT ~~Mocht er nog vragen zijn, dan horen wij dat graag.~~
SAY **Mochten er nog vragen zijn, dan horen wij dat graag.**
the subject is **vragen**, so the verb is plural

NOT ~~Had ik geweten, dan was ik eerder vertrokken.~~
SAY **Had ik het geweten, dan was ik eerder vertrokken.**
unlike English known, **weten** needs an object such as **het**

Quick check

1. Choose **mocht** or **mochten**: **… er problemen zijn met uw bestelling, dan horen wij dat graag.**
2. Fill in one word: **… ik je adres gehad, dan had ik je een kaart gestuurd voor je verjaardag.**
3. Fix the word order: **Mocht de lift het niet doen, dan u moet de trap nemen.**
4. Condition or permission? **Mocht Bas gisteren eerder naar huis?**

Answers on page 804.

Use it today

In your next email to a colleague, your landlord or the **gemeente**, end with a **mocht** sentence of your own, for example **Mocht het dinsdag niet uitkomen, laat het me dan even weten.** Then plan your weekend aloud in verb-first form: **Is het zaterdag droog, dan …**

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/conditionals-without-als

RULE 186 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Wishes with maar: Was het maar vrijdag

To make a wish in Dutch, put a past-tense verb first and add **maar**: **Was het maar vrijdag** (If only it were Friday). For regret, use **had** or **was** plus a past participle (the verb form in **ik heb geslapen**): **Had ik maar meer geslapen** (I wish I had slept more). With **als** and a present-tense verb, **maar** often sets a condition: **Als je maar op tijd bent** means "as long as you're on time".

The pattern

> **For a wish or a regret, start with a past-tense verb, then the subject, then maar. For a condition or a hope, use als, the subject and maar, with a present-tense verb at the end.**

- **Wish about now:** use the simple past. **Had ik maar een tuin.** (If only I had a garden.)
- **Regret about the past:** use **had** or **was** plus the past participle. Pick the helper verb the main verb takes in the perfect: **Had ik maar meer geslapen**, **Was ik maar thuisgebleven**. See Hebben or zijn in the perfect tense.
- **Where maar goes:** usually right after the subject, or after a short pronoun that follows it, such as **het** or **hem**: **Wist ik het maar** (If only I knew). It can also come before a subject that is not a short pronoun (**Had maar iedereen zo'n buurvrouw**), but right after the subject is the most common order.
- **The same wish with als: Als ik maar een tuin had.** The verb moves to the end, as in other clauses with **als**.
- **Condition or hope:** with a present-tense verb, **als ... maar** can express a condition ("as long as"), a warning ("just make sure"), or, on its own, a hope: **Als het maar droog blijft!** (Let's hope it stays dry!)

Examples

Was het maar vrijdag.	If only it were Friday.
Had ik maar meer geslapen vannacht.	I wish I had slept more last night.
Kon Mei **maar** vaker vanuit huis werken.	If only Mei could work from home more often.
Wist ik maar waar ik mijn fietssleutel had gelaten.	If only I knew where I had left my bike key.
Was ik maar eerder vertrokken, dan had ik de trein nog gehaald.	If only I had left earlier, I would still have caught the train.
Als ik maar wat meer tijd **had**.	If only I had a bit more time.
Het maakt niet uit wat je aantrekt, **als je maar** op tijd **bent**.	It doesn't matter what you wear, as long as you're on time.
Joris mag mijn auto lenen, **als hij hem maar** voltankt.	Joris can borrow my car, as long as he fills it up.
We fietsen zaterdag naar Utrecht. **Als het maar** droog **blijft**!	We're cycling to Utrecht on Saturday. Let's hope it stays dry!

Why it works this way

A wish is half of an unreal if-sentence. Take **Als ik meer tijd had, zou ik vaker sporten** (If I had more time, I would exercise more). Drop the second half, add **maar**, and what is left is a sigh: **Als ik maar meer tijd had.**

As you saw in Conditions without als, Dutch can also drop **als** and put the verb first. That gives the short form: **Had ik maar meer tijd.** The past tense does the same job as in English "if only I had": it tells the listener the situation is not real. For the complete if-sentence, see If only: Als ik het had geweten.

With a present-tense verb, nothing is unreal. **Als je maar op tijd bent** is a real condition, and **maar** says that this is the one thing that matters. On its

own, it works as a friendly warning (Just make sure you're on time!) or as a hope: **Als het maar niet gaat regenen** (I just hope it doesn't rain).

Two contrast pairs make the difference visible:

- **Had ik maar meer tijd.** is about now. **Had ik maar meer tijd gehad.** is about a moment that is over.
- **Als de trein maar rijdt.** means you hope it runs, and it might. **Reed de trein maar.** means it is not running.

In speech, **nou** often joins in for extra impatience: **Was het nou maar vrijdag.** If you prefer a full clause, **Ik wou dat het vrijdag was** says the same thing.

Remember: here **maar** does not mean "but", it means "only". Old-fashioned English even uses the same order: "Had I only known" is **Had ik het maar geweten**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Ik wens het was vrijdag.**~~
SAY **Was het maar vrijdag.**
for an unreal wish, use the **maar** form or **Ik wou dat het vrijdag was**; a common use of **wensen** is wishing someone something: **Ik wens je veel succes**

NOT ~~**Had ik maar thuisgebleven.**~~
SAY **Was ik maar thuisgebleven.**
thuisblijven takes **zijn** in the perfect, so the regret takes **was**

NOT ~~**Woon ik maar dichter bij mijn werk.**~~
SAY **Woonde ik maar dichter bij mijn werk.**
a wish about now still needs the past tense

NOT ~~**Als je maar bent op tijd.**~~
SAY **Als je maar op tijd bent.**
after **als**, the verb goes to the end

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **hebben** (a wish about now): **Mijn fiets is weer kapot. … ik maar een nieuwe fiets.**
2. Fill in **had** or **was**: **Daan heeft de trein gemist. … hij maar eerder van huis gegaan.**
3. Rewrite with **maar** directly after the subject: **Als maar de bus op tijd komt!**
4. Choose the meaning of **Je mag morgen thuiswerken, als je maar bereikbaar bent.** a) "If only you were reachable." b) "As long as you can be reached."

Answers on page 805.

Use it today

Before bed tonight, say three sentences out loud: one wish about now (**Was ik maar…**), one regret about today (**Had ik maar…** or **Was ik maar…**), and one condition for a housemate or colleague (**…, als je maar…**).

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/wishes-with-maar

RULE 187 · LEVEL C1 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Wiens, wier, hetgeen: formal relatives

Wiens and **wier** are the formal Dutch words for whose; in speech, most people simply say **van wie**. Use **wiens** when the owner is masculine or a neuter **het** word (**de man wiens auto gestolen is**), and **wier** when the owner is feminine or plural (**de vrouw wier zoon in Leiden studeert**). **Hetgeen** is a formal word for **wat** (what, that which), used mainly to refer back to a whole clause, and you will meet all three mostly in official letters, newspapers and novels.

The pattern

> **In formal writing, whose is wiens when the owner is masculine or neuter and wier when the owner is feminine or plural. In speech, people say van wie plus the article for a person, and usually wat where formal texts write hetgeen.**

- **Wiens** and **wier** are relative pronouns: words like who and which that hook a clause onto a noun. The noun after **wiens** or **wier** takes no article: **de man wiens auto**.
- The owner decides, never the thing owned: **de man wiens dochter**, **de vrouw wier man**.
- With people, the real person usually counts: a female **huisarts** gets **wier**. With **het meisje** you will see both words.
- They are mostly used for people. For things, Dutch normally says **waarvan**: **het huis waarvan het dak lekt** (see Waarmee, waarover, waaraan).
- A preposition moves to the front: **de buurman met wiens ladder ik de goot heb schoongemaakt**.

- **Hetgeen** points back to a whole clause or stands on its own: **hetgeen ik al zei** (what I already said). It does not point back to a single noun.

Examples

De man **wiens** fiets bij het station was gestolen, deed meteen aangifte.	The man whose bike had been stolen at the station reported it to the police straight away.
Fatima, **wier** zoon net zijn rijbewijs heeft gehaald, slaapt sinds kort een stuk slechter.	Fatima, whose son has just passed his driving test, has been sleeping a lot worse lately.
Het bestuurslid **wiens** termijn in juni afloopt, stelt zich niet herkiesbaar.	The board member whose term ends in June is not standing for re-election.
Bewoners **wier** woning door de storm is beschadigd, kunnen bij de gemeente een tegemoetkoming aanvragen.	Residents whose homes were damaged in the storm can apply to the municipality for compensation.
Ze dacht aan haar grootmoeder, **wier** handen altijd naar groene zeep roken.	She thought of her grandmother, whose hands always smelled of green soap.
Dat is de collega **van wie de** laptop in de trein is blijven liggen.	That's the colleague whose laptop got left behind on the train.
Bas zegde de afspraak op het laatste moment af, **hetgeen** niemand meer verbaasde.	Bas cancelled the appointment at the last minute, which no longer surprised anyone.
Het onderzoek bevestigt **hetgeen** omwonenden al jaren beweren.	The study confirms what local residents have been saying for years.

Why it works this way

Wiens and **wier** are relative versions of possessives you already use. Ask which word the owner would get in a plain sentence: **De man is zijn fiets**

kwijt gives **wiens**; **Fatima mist haar zoon** and **De buren laten hun hond uit** give **wier**. That is also why a female GP gets **wier**: you would say **haar praktijk**. If **zijn**, **haar** and **hun** still wobble, revisit Possessive pronouns.

Remember: where a plain sentence would have **zijn**, write **wiens**; where it would have **haar** or **hun**, write **wier**.

Both words are leftovers of old case endings, which is why they sound bookish now. If you speak German, they work much like "dessen" and "deren". In conversation, Dutch speakers say **van wie** for people and keep **waarvan** mainly for things; when the owner is a person, **van wie** is the safe choice in both speech and writing (more in Wie, wat and waar- in relative clauses).

Hetgeen means roughly **datgene wat**, that which: it is **wat** in a suit and tie. It works where **wat** refers back to a whole clause or has nothing in front of it. After a noun, keep **die** or **dat** (see Relative pronouns: die and dat). With a preposition, Dutch switches to a word with **waar-**: **De server viel uit, waardoor honderden klanten niet konden betalen.**

Watch out

NOT ~~**De vrouw wiens zoon in Leiden studeert, werkt bij de gemeente.**~~
SAY **De vrouw wier zoon in Leiden studeert, werkt bij de gemeente.**
the owner decides, and she is a woman

NOT ~~**Dat is de man wie auto gestolen is.**~~
SAY **Dat is de man wiens auto gestolen is.**
wie on its own is not possessive

NOT ~~**Ik ken de buren van wie hond zo hard blaft.**~~
SAY **Ik ken de buren van wie de hond zo hard blaft.**
after **van wie**, the noun keeps its article

NOT ~~de buurman wiens ladder ik de goot mee heb schoongemaakt~~
SAY **de buurman met wiens ladder ik de goot heb schoongemaakt**
the preposition goes in front of **wiens**, not at the end

NOT ~~Het voorstel hetgeen de gemeente presenteerde, is afgewezen.~~
SAY **Het voorstel dat de gemeente presenteerde, is afgewezen.**
hetgeen cannot point back to a noun

Quick check

1. Choose **wiens** or **wier**: Meneer De Vries, … auto al de hele ochtend op de stoep staat, is onze nieuwe buurman.
2. Choose **wiens** or **wier**: De reizigers … trein in Utrecht was uitgevallen, kregen een taxi naar Arnhem.
3. Choose **dat** or **hetgeen**: Het college verhoogt de parkeertarieven opnieuw, … tot veel boze reacties leidt.
4. Rewrite for speech with **van wie**: Ken jij de buurvrouw wier kat al drie dagen kwijt is?

Answers on page 805.

Use it today

Take a letter from your **gemeente**, your landlord or your health insurer, or a long newspaper article, and hunt for **wiens**, **wier** and **hetgeen**. Then say each sentence out loud the way you would tell it to a colleague, with **van wie** or **wat**.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/formal-relatives

RULE 188 · LEVEL B2 · STYLE AND REGISTER

Dutch in the Netherlands and in Flanders

Dutch in the Netherlands and Dutch in Flanders are one language, with the same spelling and almost all the same grammar. The differences are like those between British and American English: accent, some words and a few habits of informal speech. Both are correct Dutch, so the standard you learn in Utrecht also works in Ghent.

The pattern

> **Standard Dutch is shared by both countries. Flemish informal speech adds its own word for you, a different diminutive and some typical words, and you mainly need to recognise them.**

- **You**: in casual speech, many Flemish speakers say **ge** or the stronger **gij** instead of **je** and **jij**, for one person or a group. The object form is **u** and the word for your is **uw**, as with polite u.
- **Small things**: next to the usual diminutive (the "little" form of a noun) with **-je**, Flemish speech uses **-ke**: **een manneke**, **een boekske**. Parts of the southern Netherlands use it too.
- **Things as she**: Flemish speakers often use **ze** (stressed: **zij**) and **haar** for de-words that dictionaries mark as feminine, such as **de deur**, **de soep** and nouns ending in **-ing**. In the Netherlands, de-words that are things usually get hij and hem.
- **Words**: some Belgian words are standard there, like **de gsm** (in the Netherlands **de mobiel**). Others, like **goesting** (**zin**: desire), **amai** (wow) and **allez** (come on), belong to informal speech.
- **Writing**: in formal writing, people in Flanders use **je**, **jij**, **u** and **-je**, just like people in the Netherlands.

Examples

Heb je zaterdag tijd om me te helpen met verhuizen?	Do you have time on Saturday to help me move? (Netherlands)
Hebt ge zaterdag tijd om me te helpen met verhuizen?	Do you have time on Saturday to help me move? (Flanders)
Waar is de afstandsbediening? Ik kan **hem** nergens vinden.	Where is the remote? I can't find it anywhere. (Netherlands)
Waar is de afstandsbediening? Ik kan **ze** nergens vinden.	Where is the remote? I can't find it anywhere. (Flanders)
Ik heb echt geen **goesting** om vanavond nog te koken.	I really don't feel like cooking tonight. (Flanders)
Amai, de trein naar Antwerpen zit weer helemaal vol!	Wow, the train to Antwerp is completely full again! (Flanders)
Allez, Yara, we gaan, anders missen we de bus!	Come on, Yara, let's go, or we'll miss the bus! (Flanders)
Wat een lief **manneke**! Hoe oud is hij?	What a sweet little boy! How old is he? (Flanders)
Ik zie u graag, dat weet ge toch?	I love you, you know that, right? (Flanders)

Why it works this way

Gij is not a strange extra word. It is the old Dutch word for you. In the Netherlands, **jij** and **je** took over in everyday speech, while **u** and **uw** live on in the polite forms. Flemish speech kept the whole set for daily use: **gij** or **ge** as subject, **u** as object, **uw** for your.

That makes much of the grammar familiar. In the present tense, **gij** usually takes the same verb form as polite **u**: **Hebt u tijd?** becomes **Hebt ge tijd?** and **Komt u ook?** becomes **Komt gij ook?** The **-t** stays, also when the verb comes first. This differs from **jij**, which loses its **-t** after the verb (Werk jij?).

A few irregular verbs have their own **gij** form: **u bent** but **gij zijt**, **u mag** but **gij moogt**. The past tense can differ too: **u was** but **gij waart**. Like English you, **gij** works for one person or a whole group.

The **ze** for **de deur** has a similar logic. Dutch dictionaries still mark many de-words as masculine or feminine. Most speakers in the Netherlands no longer hear that difference for things, so **de deur** and **de stoel** both become **hij**. Many Flemish speakers still feel it: **de deur** is **ze**, **de stoel** is **hij**.

If you live in the Netherlands, you mainly need to recognise these forms. In Flanders, using them in casual talk sounds natural, but keep **je**, **jij** and **u** for anything formal.

Remember: in the present tense, **gij** usually copies **u**. Keep the **-t**, use **u** and **uw**, and learn the odd ones out: **gij zijt** and **gij moogt**.

Watch out

NOT ~~**Heb ge vanavond tijd?**~~
SAY **Hebt ge vanavond tijd?**
in the present tense, the verb keeps its **-t** with **ge** and **gij**, even when it comes first

NOT ~~**Waar hebt ge jouw auto geparkeerd?**~~
SAY **Waar hebt ge uw auto geparkeerd?**
the word for your that goes with **ge** is **uw**

NOT ~~**Jij zijt altijd zo vroeg op kantoor.**~~
SAY **Jij bent altijd zo vroeg op kantoor.**
zijt is the **gij** form; with **jij** it is **bent**

NOT ~~**De afstandsbediening? Ik kan het niet vinden.**~~
SAY **De afstandsbediening? Ik kan hem niet vinden.**
a de-word thing is **hem** in the Netherlands and often **ze** in Flanders, not **het**

Quick check

1. Fill in the right form of **gaan** (Flemish speech): **… ge morgen ook naar de vergadering?**
2. Choose the form that goes with **ge**: **Ge hebt gelijk, ik bel (jou / u) morgen terug.**
3. Choose the word someone in the Netherlands would use instead of **goesting**: **Ik heb geen (zin / tijd) om te koken.**
4. Choose (Sanne lives in Utrecht): **Mijn fiets is gestolen en ik had (hem / het) pas een week.**

Answers on page 805.

Use it today

Watch ten minutes of a Flemish TV series or podcast and write down every **ge**, **gij**, **amai** and word ending in **-ke** you hear. Then rewrite two of those sentences the way Daan from Amsterdam would say them.

Online: dutchfluency.com/grammar/dutch-and-flemish

Answers

Key 1 · How to learn Dutch grammar so it sticks

1. **Ik wil graag een thee.** (**graag** follows **wil** directly.)
2. **Mag ik twee broodjes?** (no extra **hebben** needed in this chunk)
3. Saying it from memory (retrieval strengthens memory, rereading only feels familiar).
4. Ten minutes on six days (spaced practice beats one long session).

Key 2 · Grammar words you need, in English and Dutch

1. **het lidwoord** (**woord** is a het-word)
2. **Joris** (the verb **fietst** says something about Joris)
3. **fietsen** (the dictionary form of the verb in **ik fiets**; the spelling can change in other verbs, as in **ik woon** and **wonen**)
4. **dat Bas ziek is** (it starts with **dat** and the verb **is** goes to the end)

Key 3 · Dutch for English speakers: what is easy and what is hard

1. **werkt** (a name works like **hij** or **zij**, so add **-t**)
2. **ga ik** (after **Morgen**, the verb comes second)
3. **Ahmed wil koffie drinken.** (the second verb goes to the end)
4. **Het** (**huis** takes **het**)

Key 4 · False friends between Dutch and English

1. **uiteindelijk** (it means in the end; **eventueel** means possibly)
2. (b) (**door** before the one who does the action means by)
3. **Wij noemen onze hond Max.** (naming is **noemen**; **bellen** needs a phone or a bell)
4. (b) (**actueel** means current, not actually)

Key 5 · The Dutch alphabet and how to spell your name

1. **dee, aa, aa, en** (the Dutch a is **aa**; **ee** would be an e).
2. **ie** (the Dutch name of i is **ie**).
3. **Fatima gaat naar IJsland.** (a name starting with **ij** gets a capital on both letters).
4. **jee** (**gee** is the g, with the rough Dutch g).

Key 6 · Short and long vowels

1. **man** (short **a**; the moon has no job at the **gemeente**)
2. **boom** (long **oo** means tree; a **bom** is a bomb)
3. **Mijn zoon is drie jaar.** (long **oo** means son; **zon** is the sun)
4. **ziet** (long **ie** means sees; **zit** means sits)

Key 7 · Why maan becomes manen: open and closed syllables

1. **ramen**: **ra-men** is open, so one **a**.
2. **slaap**: the syllable ends in **p**, so the long **a** needs two letters.
3. **gele**: **ge-le** is open.
4. **Yara en Carlos maken soep.**: **ma-ken** is open.

Key 8 · Doubling consonants after a short vowel

1. **bussen** (short **u**, so the **s** doubles)
2. **bakken** (short **a**, so the **k** doubles)
3. **Ik stop om vijf uur.** (the stem **stop** ends in one **p**)
4. **zingen** (**ng** never doubles)

Key 9 · ui, eu, ij, ei, ou, au, oe, ie

1. **tijd** (this word uses **ij**; the sound alone cannot tell you)
2. **koud** (it rhymes with **oud**; **kaud** is not a word)
3. **thuis** (the same **ui** as in **huis**)
4. **Priya komt niet.** (the ee sound of see is written **ie** in Dutch)

Key 10 · The Dutch g and ch

1. **Joris zegt hallo.** The verb is **zeggen**, so you write g.
2. **Dat is typisch Nederlands.** You hear **ies**, but you write **isch**.
3. The second. The first **g** is the normal Dutch rasp.
4. **school**. **Sjaal** starts with sh, and **snel** has no rasp at all.

Key 11 · Why d sounds like t at the end of a word

1. **honden** (in the plural the d is heard again, so it is written)
2. d: **woord** (the plural **woorden** shows it)
3. **Ik word moe.** (from **worden**: you hear t, you write d)
4. p (a final b loses its buzz, but you still write **web**)

Key 12 · v and f, z and s: huis and huizen

1. **brieven** (f becomes v before **-en**)
2. **huizen** (s becomes z before **-en**)
3. **Wij lezen elke avond.** (with **wij** the verb ends in **-en**, and the z comes back)
4. **verhuist** (**-t** is a consonant, so the s stays)

Key 13 · The neutral e and the endings -en, -ig and -lijk

1. **Daan en Mei fietsen naar het station.** (in writing, **-en** keeps its n)
2. **natuurlijk** (the "luk" ending is spelled **-lijk**)
3. **twintig** (the "uch" ending is spelled **-ig**)
4. (b) (a weak **e** is a relaxed "uh")

Key 14 · The Dutch r

1. **brood**: a **boot** is a boat; the r makes it bread.
2. **deur**: its r ends the syllable, while in **rood** and **deu-ren** the r starts one.
3. **Mijn kopje is leeg. Ik wil meer koffie.** (**mee** means along, **meer** means more)
4. Yes: throaty at the start and soft at the end is a common, consistent combination.

Key 15 · Word stress

1. **tel** (**ver-** is unstressed, so the root takes the stress).
2. **UITnodigen** (**uit** is separable: **Ik nodig je uit**).
3. **rij** (**-ij** is one of the endings that take the stress).
4. **Ik heb een caDEAU voor Emma.** (**cadeau** is a French loanword stressed at the end).

Key 16 · The trema in ë and ï, and the hyphen

1. **ideeën**: **ee** plus **en** would melt together, so the third **e** gets the dots.
2. **geïnteresseerd**: **ge-** is a prefix, so the word takes a trema, and **ei** must not sound like **klein**.
3. **Joris heeft gisteren een auto-ongeluk gehad.**: **auto** and **ongeluk** form a compound, and **oo** would be read as one sound, so a hyphen.
4. **België**: **ie** would sound like **drie**, while **ia** and **io** are not vowel teams in Dutch.

Key 17 · Capital letters

1. **Het is vaak koud in februari.** (months are lowercase)
2. **Chinees** (languages take a capital)
3. **IJsland** (both letters of **ij** become capitals)
4. **Kunt u de huisarts bellen?** (the polite **u** and ordinary nouns are lowercase)

Key 18 · When Dutch uses an apostrophe

1. **mango's** (**mango** ends in a single **o**, so the apostrophe keeps it long)
2. **Daans** (a name ending in a consonant takes only **-s**)
3. **Ik sport 's avonds.** (a fixed time word with **'s**)
4. **We hebben thuis twee tv's.** (you say **tv** letter by letter, so it gets **'s**)

Key 19 · How sounds blend in fast speech

1. **Heb je** (the **b** sounds like **p** and **je** melts onto the verb).
2. **hij** (**heeftie** is **heeft hij** with the **h** dropped).
3. **Ik leg de sleutel op de tafel.** (the **p** sounds like **b** before **de**, but you write **p**)
4. The evening news (newsreaders speak carefully, so they blend less).

Key 20 · Writing compound words

1. **hondenmand**: the plural of **hond** is **honden**.
2. **We hebben morgen om tien uur een teamvergadering.**: one thing, one word.
3. **Joris werkt bij een radio-omroep in Hilversum.**: the two o's would merge.
4. **Ahmed werkt in Eindhoven, in Noord-Brabant.**: a direction word before a region name.

Key 21 · De or het: the two words for "the"

1. **De** (**huizen** is plural, and every plural takes **de**)
2. **Het** (**broodje** is a singular diminutive, so it takes **het**)
3. **Het water is koud.** (**water** is a **het**-word)
4. **het** (**station** is a **het**-word)

Key 22 · Een: the word for "a"

1. **Ik koop appels.** (**een** has no plural)
2. "Daan has one brother" (the accents mark the number)
3. **Bas heeft een fiets.** (one bike needs **een**)
4. **een raam** (nouns with **het** also take **een**)

Key 23 · When Dutch uses no article

1. **een**: **Sanne is een aardige huisarts.** (the adjective **aardige** brings **een** back)
2. **Honden zijn trouw.** (dogs in general, no article)
3. Nothing: **Ik ga vroeg naar bed.** (fixed phrase)
4. **niet**: **Emma werkt vandaag thuis, dus ze is niet op kantoor.** (fixed place phrases take **niet**, not **geen**)

Key 24 · Plurals with -en

1. **straten** (one **a** is enough in **stra-ten**)
2. **lessen** (the double **s** keeps the **e** short)
3. **prijzen** (the **s** becomes **z** after **ij**)
4. **Fatima gaat dit weekend naar twee feesten.** (two consonants follow, so **ee** stays)

Key 25 · Plurals with -s

1. **sleutels** (unstressed **-el**)
2. **pizza's** (single final a)
3. **broodjes** (diminutives take **-s**)
4. **Ahmed werkt met drie laptops.** (no apostrophe after a consonant)

Key 26 · Irregular plurals

1. **steden** (vowel change, no doubled d)
2. **kinderen** (**kind** takes **-eren**)
3. **Er zijn veel mogelijkheden.** (**-heid** becomes **-heden**)
4. **koeien** (a one-off to learn by heart)

Key 27 · Diminutives: -je, -tje, -pje, -etje, -kje

1. **het boompje** (long vowel plus m gives **-pje**, and a singular diminutive always takes **het**)
2. **sterretje** (short stressed vowel plus r: double the r and add **-etje**)
3. **Ik heb mijn telefoon op het tafeltje gelegd.** (a singular diminutive is a **het** word)
4. **autootjes** (double the final o, add **-tje**, then **-s** for the plural)

Key 28 · What diminutives really mean

1. (b): **een rondje geven** means paying for a round of drinks.
2. **leuk**: **etentje** is a het-word, so no **-e** after **een**.
3. **Mag ik een kopje thee?**: no **van** between the cup and what is in it.
4. (b): **een vraagje** plays the question down, so it sounds quick and easy.

Key 29 · Clues that a noun is a het-word

1. **Het** (**kopje** is a diminutive, so **de kop** no longer counts)
2. **Het** (**gesprek** starts with the unstressed prefix **ge-**)
3. **Het museum is op maandag dicht.** (most **-um** words are het-words)
4. **de** (**datum** is the famous **-um** exception)

Key 30 · Clues that a noun is a de-word

1. **De** (nouns built with **-ing** take **de**)
2. **Het** (singular diminutives take **het**, even for people)
3. **De boeken van Mei liggen op tafel.** (every plural takes **de**)
4. **de** (nouns built with **-heid** take **de**)

Key 31 · Compound nouns take the article of the last part

1. **het treinstation**: the head is **het station**.
2. **de waterfles**: the head is **de fles**; **water** only says what is in it.
3. **de boekenkast**: **de kast** decides, not **het boek**.
4. **Emma zwemt elke zaterdag in het zwembad.**: the head is **het bad**.

Key 32 · How to actually learn de and het

1. **Het huisje van Emma is klein.** (singular diminutives like **huisje** take **het**)
2. **De bakfiets van Bas is rood.** (the last part decides, and it is **de fiets**)
3. **De vergaderingen beginnen om negen uur.** (every plural takes **de**)
4. (b) **De woning van Yara heeft drie kamers.** (nouns made with **-ing** are de-words)

Key 33 · Countable and uncountable nouns

1. Leave it empty: **Joris heeft geld nodig voor de markt.** (**geld** is uncountable, so no **een**)
2. **Mag ik een glas water?** (no **van** between a container and what is in it)
3. **adviezen** (**advies** is countable in Dutch)
4. **informatie** (it has no plural)

Key 34 · Showing possession: van, -s and zijn/haar

1. **Daans** (Daan ends in a consonant, so just add -s)
2. **Emma's** (Emma ends in a, so the apostrophe keeps the vowel long)
3. **Bas' fiets staat buiten.** (Bas already ends in an s, so only an apostrophe)
4. **d'r** (**een vriendin** is a woman, so it is her mother)

Key 35 · Making nouns from verbs and adjectives

1. **Het**: an infinitive used as a noun always takes **het**.
2. **veiligheid**: adjective plus **-heid** names the quality.
3. **diepte**: measures use **-te**, and **diepheid** is not used.
4. **Carlos is een snelle fietser.**: a person who does something gets **-er**.

Key 36 · Male and female forms: leraar and lerares

1. **schrijfster**: **schrijver** takes **-ster**, added to **schrijf**, the stem of **schrijven**.
2. **zangeres**: **zanger** takes **-es**.
3. **De**: female forms like **verkoopster** take **de**.
4. **Ik ga vanavond met twee vriendinnen naar de film.** The stressed short **i** in **-in** needs a double **n** before **-en**.

Key 37 · Group nouns and verb agreement

1. **is** (**het publiek** is a singular group noun)
2. **zijn** (**mensen** is a plural)
3. **De klas gaat morgen naar Utrecht.** (**de klas** takes a singular verb)
4. **heeft** (**het team** is singular, also at the end of a subordinate clause)

Key 38 · Nouns with two plurals or only a plural

1. **bladen**: these are magazines, and **bladeren** is not used for magazines.
2. **zijn**: **kosten** is plural.
3. **benen**: these are legs, and **beenderen** is not used for legs.
4. **Mijn bril is weer zoek. De bril** is singular in Dutch, even though English says glasses.

Key 39 · Subject pronouns: ik, jij, hij, zij

1. **jullie** (two people, and **wonen** is the plural verb)
2. **is** (Lotte is one person, so **ze** means she)
3. **fietsen** (two people, so **ze** means they and the verb ends in **-en**)
4. **u** (the polite you, with the singular verb **werkt**)

Key 40 · Jij or je? Stressed and unstressed pronouns

1. **jij** (a pronoun on its own carries the stress)
2. **je** (no contrast, and the object form is **je** or **jou**)
3. **Geef het aan mij, niet aan Joris.** (the contrast with Joris needs the stressed form)
4. They (for she, the verb would be **fietst**)

Key 41 · U or jij: formal and informal you

1. **bent**: **u** takes the **jij** form of **zijn**.
2. **u**: with **jij** as the subject after the verb, the **t** drops (**Woon jij hier?**), so only **u** fits.
3. **komt**: **u** keeps the singular verb, even for two people.
4. **Wilt u koffie?**: in everyday writing, **u** has a small letter.

Key 42 · Object pronouns: me, je, hem, haar

1. **hem** (**de fiets** is a de-word for a thing, so **hem**)
2. **jou** (**voor** is a preposition, so you need the object form)
3. **ons** (after **bij**, **wij** becomes **ons**)
4. **Ik zie hem elke dag.** (Ahmed receives the action, so **hij** becomes **hem**)

Key 43 · Hen, hun or ze: them

1. **hen**: after a preposition, always **hen**.
2. **hun**: they receive the schedule, and the "to" is hidden.
3. **hen**: you thank them directly; **bedanken** takes a direct object.
4. **ze**: gloves are things, and **hen** and **hun** are for people.

Key 44 · Hij, het or zij for things

1. **Hij** (it is **de bus**, a de-word).
2. **het** (**cadeautje** is a singular diminutive, and singular diminutives are het-words).
3. **Ik verkoop hem.** (it is **de laptop**, and as an object **hij** becomes **hem**)
4. **Dat** (it is **het station**, so **dat**, not **die**).

Key 45 · Possessive pronouns: mijn, jouw, zijn, haar

1. **zijn** (Dutch uses **zijn** for its)
2. **uw** (the polite your that goes with **u**)
3. **Dat is ons huis.** (**huis** is a het-word, so **ons**)
4. **hun** (two owners)

Key 46 · Ons or onze?

1. **onze** (it is **de buurman**)
2. **Ons** (it is **het bedrijf**)
3. **onze** (**vrienden** is plural)
4. **Ons meisje is vandaag jarig.** (singular diminutives are het-words: **het meisje**)

Key 47 · Mine and yours: van mij and de mijne

1. **haar** (your sister is the owner, and after **van** the object form **haar** follows)
2. **de jouwe** (it replaces **de fiets**)
3. **dat** (it replaces **het huis**)
4. **Lotte is een goede vriendin van mij.** (after **van** comes **mij**, never **mijn**)

Key 48 · Reflexive pronouns: me, je, zich

1. **je** (the reflexive form for **jij** is **je**, not **jou**)
2. **ons** (the reflexive form for **wij**; **zich vergissen** never takes **-zelf**)
3. **Daan voelt zich vandaag niet zo lekker.** (after **hij** the mirror word is **zich**)
4. **zichzelf** (she looks at herself, and after **naar** the long form is the normal choice)

Key 49 · Reflexive verbs: zich vergissen, zich voelen

1. **zich** (**mijn buren** is **zij**, and **zij** takes **zich**)
2. **heeft** (reflexive verbs take **hebben** in the perfect)
3. **Wij moeten ons haasten, de trein vertrekt zo.** (pronoun right after the conjugated verb, infinitive at the end)
4. **Lotte herinnert zich de afspraak niet.** (to remember, you need the pronoun)

Key 50 · Elkaar: each other

1. **elkaar**: they know each other, not themselves.
2. **elkaar**: it means each other and has the same form after **jullie** as after any other subject.
3. **Mijn ouders houden na veertig jaar nog steeds van elkaar.** To love is **houden van**, and it keeps its **van**.
4. **elkaar**: **mekaar** is too informal for a work email.

Key 51 · Deze, die, dit, dat

1. **Deze**: **koffie** is a de-word, and it is close to you.
2. **Dat**: **huis** is a het-word, and it is far away.
3. **Deze**: plurals always take **deze** or **die**.
4. **Dat kopje is van Bas.**: **kopje** is a singular diminutive, so it is **het kopje**.

Key 52 · Dit is, dat is, het is

1. **dit**: you are introducing someone, so **dit**, even though **collega** is a de-word.
2. **zijn**: **kinderen** is plural, so the verb is plural too.
3. **Het**: the time is a situation, there is nothing to point at.
4. **Dat**: Ahmed reacts to Mei's news as a whole idea, and **dat** points back at it.

Key 53 · Die and dat instead of hij and het in speech

1. **Die**: **afstandsbediening** is a de-word.
2. **Die**: you refer back to two people, so plural.
3. **Dat**: **rooster** is a het-word.
4. **Dat is vervelend.**: you are reacting to a situation, not to a de-word.

Key 54 · Relative pronouns: die and dat

1. **dat**: **pakketje** is a diminutive, and diminutives are always het-words.
2. **die**: **treinen** is plural, and plurals always take **die**.
3. **De film die ik gisteren zag, was saai.** Dutch cannot leave out **die**.
4. **Lotte heeft een baan die heel leuk is.** The verb goes to the end of the relative clause.

Key 55 · Wie, wat and waar- in relative clauses

1. **wie** (a person after the preposition **bij**)
2. **waaraan** (a thing after a preposition: **waar** plus **aan**)
3. **wat** (it refers back to the whole sentence, not to one noun)
4. **Dat is de beste pizza die ik ooit heb gegeten.** (there is a real noun, **de pizza**, so **die**)

Key 56 · Waarmee, waarover, waaraan

1. **Waarvan** (a thing, and **gemaakt van** needs **van**)
2. **Op wie** (Lotte is a person)
3. **Waar heeft Bas het steeds over?** (the usual form of **over wat** is **waar ... over**)
4. **mee** (**bezig met**, and **met** becomes **mee** even when split)

Key 57 · Iemand, niemand, iets, niets, alles, iedereen

1. **is** (**iedereen** takes a singular verb)
2. **lekkers** (an adjective after **iets** gets **-s**)
3. **iedereen** (you invite people, and **iedereen** is about people)
4. **Ik ken niemand in deze straat.** (remove **niet**: **niemand** already means no one)

Key 58 · Men, je and ze: people in general

1. **Men zegt dat de economie dit jaar groeit.** (**men** takes a singular verb)
2. **zich** (the -self word that goes with **men**)
3. **Ze bouwen** (plural verb, because **ze** means "they" here)
4. **je** (**men** can only be the subject)

Key 59 · Het as an empty subject: het regent

1. **het** (a weather statement needs **het** as its subject)
2. **Vandaag is het erg koud.** (**het** follows the verb but stays)
3. **Het** (the fixed phrase is **het spijt me**)
4. **Het is jammer dat Bas niet komt.** (after **dat**, the verb goes to the end)

Key 60 · Question words: wie, wat, waar, wanneer, hoe, waarom

1. **Hoeveel** (the reply is a number)
2. **Welke** (**fiets** is a **de** word)
3. **Waar werkt Sanne?** (the verb comes straight after the question word)
4. **Waarom** (the reply gives a reason with **omdat**, because)

Key 61 · Welk or welke, and wat voor

1. **welke**: **huisarts** is a de-word (**de huisarts**).
2. **welk**: **broodje** is a diminutive, so a singular het-word.
3. **welke**: **kinderen** is a plural, and plurals take **welke**.
4. **wat voor** (or **wat voor een**): you want a description of the dog, not a choice from a group.

Key 62 · Zo'n, zulk and zulke: such

1. **Zulke**: **informatie** is an uncountable de-word.
2. **zulke**: **collega's** is a plural.
3. **zulk**: **weer** is an uncountable het-word.
4. **Ahmed woont in zo'n mooi dorp.** You can say **een dorp**, so **zo'n**, even though **dorp** is a het-word.

Key 63 · Finding the stem of a verb

1. **woon** (the long **o** in **wo-nen** needs two letters in the stem)
2. **bel** (the double **l** becomes single)
3. **verhuis** (**z** becomes **s** at the end)
4. **Ik schrijf een kaart voor Bas.** (**v** becomes **f** at the end)

Key 64 · The present tense: ik werk, jij werkt, wij werken

1. **werk**: **ik** takes the bare stem.
2. **zit**: the stem **zit** already ends in **t**, so you add nothing.
3. **wonen**: **Mei en ik** works like **wij**, so you use the infinitive.
4. **Jij fietst elke dag naar je werk.** The stem **fiets** ends in **s**, not **t**, so **jij** adds **t**.

Key 65 · Werk jij? Where the t disappears

1. **Werk**: **jij** follows the verb, so the **-t** drops.
2. **fietst**: **Sanne** works like **zij** (she), so the **-t** stays.
3. **Woont**: **u** keeps the **-t**.
4. **Waar woon je?**: **je** comes right after the verb, so no **-t**.

Key 66 · Zijn and hebben in the present

1. **heeft** (Sanne is one person, like **zij**)
2. **Ben** (**jij** follows the verb, so the **t** drops)
3. **zijn** (two people, so the plural form)
4. **Heb jij een paraplu?** (no **t** when **jij** follows the verb)

Key 67 · Gaan, doen, komen, willen, kunnen, zullen and mogen

1. **gaat** (one person, so **ga** plus t, written with **aa**)
2. **kom** (the **ik** form is the short **kom**)
3. **kan** (Yara is a **zij**, and **zij** takes **kan**)
4. **Hij zal je morgen helpen.** (no t after **hij** with **zullen**)

Key 68 · D, t or dt: spelling verbs in the present

1. **Joris wordt volgende maand vader.** (**Joris loopt**, so stem **word** plus t.)
2. **word** (**jij** comes after the verb: **loop jij**, no t.)
3. **Vindt** (**u** keeps the t: **loopt u**.)
4. **gebeurd** (after **is** you need the participle: **is gelopen**.)

Key 69 · Modal verbs: kunnen, moeten, willen, mogen, zullen

1. **wil**: with **hij** or a name like Bas, **willen** has no **-t**.
2. **Mag**: **ik mag**, and in a question the modal comes first.
3. **Wij moeten werken.**: no **te** after a modal.
4. **Ahmed kan goed koken.**: the modal comes second, the infinitive goes to the end.

Key 70 · Niet hoeven te: you don't have to

1. **hoeft**: **niet** plus **te** calls for **hoeven**, and **Bas** takes the **hij** form.
2. **moet**: the sentence is positive and has no **te**.
3. **Je hoeft niet te komen.**: it is simply not necessary; **Je moet niet komen** would sound like a ban.
4. **Mei hoeft vanavond niet te koken.**: "no need" is **hoeven**, and **moeten** takes no **te**.

Key 71 · Kunnen, mogen and durven

1. **kan** (**hij kan** has no **-t**)
2. **mag** (**je mag**, no **-t**)
3. **durft** (it is about fear, and after **kunnen** the infinitive has no **te**)
4. **mag** (**mogen** with a person means to like)

Key 72 · Separable verbs: opbellen, meenemen

1. **Joris belt zijn moeder terug.** (the prefix goes to the end)
2. **Emma neemt haar fiets mee.** (verb second, prefix at the end)
3. **uitzetten** (after **wil**, the infinitive stays whole)
4. **uit** (the prefix carries the stress: **UITgaan**)

Key 73 · Inseparable verbs: be-, ver-, ont-, her-, ge-, er-

1. **verkocht** (**kopen** gives **gekocht**; with **ver-** the **ge-** disappears)
2. **Wij verhuizen in mei.** (**ver-** never splits off)
3. **Carlos heeft de vraag niet begrepen.** (no extra **ge-** in front of **be-**)
4. **vertelt** (present tense: stem **vertel** plus **t**)

Key 74 · One verb, two meanings: when stress decides

1. **ondergaan**: undergo is inseparable, so the participle has no **ge-**.
2. **komen vaak voor**: occur is separable, so **voor** splits off in a main clause.
3. **overkomen**: happen to is inseparable, so no **ge-**.
4. **Om stress te voorkomen, plant Sanne haar week op zondag.** Prevent never splits, so **te** goes in front of the whole verb.

Key 75 · The imperative: Kom binnen!

1. **Kom**: for **jij**, use the stem alone.
2. **Gaat**: with **u**, use the **u** form (**u gaat**).
3. **maar**: **maar** gives permission.
4. **eten**: signs like this use the infinitive.

Key 76 · Aan het + infinitive: I am doing it right now

1. **Daan is de pizza aan het maken.** (the object goes before **aan het**)
2. **te** (posture verb + **te** + infinitive)
3. **ligt** (she is lying in bed)
4. **op te ruimen** (**te** splits a separable verb after a posture verb)

Key 77 · The perfect tense: ik heb gewerkt

1. **hebt** (with **jij** in front, **hebben** becomes **hebt**)
2. **Gisteren heb ik soep gekookt.** (**heb** stays in position two, so **ik** comes after it)
3. **Fatima heeft de huisarts gebeld.** (the participle goes to the end)
4. **is** (**gaan** uses **zijn** in the perfect)

Key 78 · Regular past participles: ge- plus stem plus t or d

1. **gekookt**: the stem **kook** ends in k, which is in **'t kofschip**.
2. **gehoord**: the stem **hoor** ends in r, so d.
3. **gespeeld**: the stem **speel** ends in l, so d.
4. **Carlos heeft een fiets gehuurd.** The participle goes to the end.

Key 79 · 't kofschip: choosing t or d

1. **gespeeld**: the stem **speel** ends in **l**, which is not on the ship.
2. **stopte**: the stem **stop** ends in **p**.
3. **reisde**: the infinitive **reizen** has a **z**.
4. **Ahmed heeft zijn moeder gebeld.**: the stem **bel** ends in **l**, so **-d**.

Key 80 · Irregular past participles

1. **gekomen** (**ge-** plus the infinitive)
2. **gezocht** (**zoeken** is a **-cht** verb)
3. **gegaan** (**ge-** plus the infinitive, like **gezien**)
4. **Bas heeft zijn buurvrouw naar het ziekenhuis gebracht.** (**brengen** is a **-cht** verb, so **'t kofschip** does not help)

Key 81 · Hebben or zijn in the perfect tense

1. **is** (a destination: Daan cycled to Amsterdam)
2. **heeft** (no destination, just the activity)
3. **De les is om negen uur begonnen.** (**beginnen** takes **zijn**)
4. **is** (**verhuizen** is a change of place)

Key 82 · Participles without ge-

1. **betaald**: **be-** is an unstressed prefix, so no **ge-**.
2. **meegenomen**: **mee** splits off, so **ge-** goes after it.
3. **Sorry, ik ben je naam vergeten.** The prefix **ver-** leaves no room for **ge-**.
4. **gerepareerd**: **repareren** is a loan verb without one of the six prefixes, so it gets **ge-**.

Key 83 · The simple past of regular verbs: -te and -de

1. **kookte**: **koken** has a **k** before **-en**, and the stem **kook** keeps its double **o**.
2. **wachtten**: stem **wacht** plus **-ten** for two people.
3. **speelden**: **l** is not in **'t kofschip**.
4. **Joris reisde vorig jaar door Spanje.** (**reizen** has a **z**, so **-de**)

Key 84 · The simple past of irregular verbs

1. **dronk**: Mei is one person, so nothing is added.
2. **gingen**: two people, so the plural form.
3. **waren**: **Sanne en Joris** is plural, so not **was**.
4. **Bas nam de fiets naar zijn werk.** (**nemen** is irregular: **nam**, not **nemde**)

Key 85 · Patterns in irregular verbs

1. **schreef**: the **ij, ee, ee** family, singular because the subject is **Priya**.
2. **gelezen**: the **e, a, e** family, so the participle goes back to **e**.
3. **gebroken**: the **e, a, o** family, like **nemen, genomen**.
4. **Mei is vorig jaar naar Japan gevlogen.**: **vliegen** is in the **ie, oo, oo** family (**vloog, gevlogen**).

Key 86 · Perfect or simple past: which one when

1. **heeft** (fresh news in conversation, so the perfect: **heeft** … **gebroken**)
2. **ging** (a past habit with **vroeger** takes the simple past)
3. **Toen we in Delft woonden, fietsten we overal naartoe.** (a past situation after **toen** takes the simple past)
4. **was** (the story opened in the perfect; the description continues in the simple past)

Key 87 · The past perfect: ik had gegeten

1. **waren**: **gaan** takes **zijn**, and **haar gasten** is plural.
2. **had**: **beantwoorden** takes **hebben**, and **Bas** is one person.
3. **Toen Carlos aankwam, was het feest al begonnen.** The verb comes straight after the **toen** clause.
4. **Emma was al naar bed gegaan toen haar telefoon ging. Gaan** takes **zijn**, so **had gegaan** is wrong.

Key 88 · Talking about the future with gaan

1. **gaat** (Fatima is one person, so **gaat** with a t)
2. **Ga** (the t drops when **je** comes right after the verb)
3. **Ik ga een taart kopen.** (the infinitive goes to the end)
4. **Vrijdag gaat Lotte boodschappen doen.** (the verb comes second, straight after the time word)

Key 89 · Zullen: promises, suggestions and assumptions

1. **zal**: the ik form of **zullen** is **zal**, not **zul**.
2. **zullen**: **we** needs the plural form, and this is a suggestion.
3. **Carlos zal je vanavond bellen.** The infinitive goes to the end.
4. **Joris zal wel ziek zijn. Zal wel** makes it a guess, and **is** becomes the infinitive **zijn** at the end.

Key 90 · Zou and zouden: would

1. **zouden**: **Mei en Joris** is a plural subject.
2. **Als ik in Utrecht woonde, zou ik elke dag naar mijn werk fietsen.** After a subordinate clause at the start, the main clause starts with its verb.
3. **zou**: you are giving advice. **Ik zal ...** would announce your own plan.
4. **zouden**: news style for an unconfirmed claim, with a plural subject.

Key 91 · Infinitives with te

1. **kopen** (after the modal **willen**, no **te**)
2. **hoef** (after **moeten** there is never **te**; after **hoeven** there is)
3. **mee te nemen** (**te** goes between the two parts of a separable verb)
4. **Emma ligt al de hele middag op de bank te slapen.** (**liggen** + **te** for an ongoing action)

Key 92 · Om te: in order to

1. **om**: it is followed by **te** plus an infinitive; **omdat** needs a subject and a conjugated verb.
2. **vertrekt**: the **om** group fills the first place, so the verb comes next.
3. **Carlos gaat naar het station om oma op te halen.** (**te** goes between **op** and **halen**)
4. **Joris spaart geld om een nieuwe fiets te kopen.** (the object goes between **om** and **te**)

Key 93 · Laten: let, and having something done

1. **laat** (the **ik** form in the present tense)
2. Someone else (**laten** plus an infinitive means Ahmed has it done, for example at a car wash)
3. **Laten** (with **we** the verb is **laten**)
4. **Mei heeft haar laptop laten repareren.** (with a second verb, the perfect uses **laten**, not **gelaten**)

Key 94 · Worden: become, and the passive

1. **wordt**: **Lotte** is one person, so stem plus t.
2. **werden**: the subject **de kinderen** is plural.
3. **Ahmed is vorig jaar vader geworden.** (**worden** takes **zijn** in the perfect)
4. **Word**: the subject **jij** comes right after the verb, so the t drops.

Key 95 · The passive with worden

1. **wordt**: **de nieuwe fietsenstalling** is singular.
2. **werden**: two bikes, past tense, so the plural **werden**.
3. **door**: it introduces the doer.
4. **Vandaag wordt mijn salaris overgemaakt.** The verb comes second, right after **Vandaag**.

Key 96 · The passive in the perfect: is gebouwd

1. **Het zwembad is vorig jaar geopend.** (**zijn** plus participle, no **geworden**)
2. **Onze buren zijn gisteren door de politie gewaarschuwd.** (standard Dutch leaves out **geworden**)
3. **was** (the cancelling happened before she arrived, so past perfect)
4. A state: the till is closed right now, which is why you are sent to the next one; nothing is said about when it was closed.

Key 97 · Er wordt gedanst: the passive without a subject

1. **werd** (the simple past of **worden** is irregular)
2. **Er** (this pattern uses **er** as the placeholder, never **het**)
3. **Er mag op het perron niet gefietst worden.** (after a modal, **worden** stays an infinitive)
4. **vergaderd** (no **ge-** because of the unstressed prefix **ver-**, and **-d** because the stem ends in **r**)

Key 98 · Verbs with a fixed preposition

1. **op** (**wachten op**: she is waiting for him to arrive)
2. **over** (the topic comes after **praten over**)
3. **voor** (**zorgen voor** also means making sure something is there)
4. **Mei interesseert zich voor Nederlandse geschiedenis.** (this verb needs **zich**)

Key 99 · Verb clusters: heb kunnen komen

1. **kunnen**: **slapen** depends on it, so the modal stays an infinitive.
2. **gaan**: with another infinitive, **gaan** keeps its infinitive form.
3. **heeft moeten verkopen**: finite verb first, then each verb before the one it steers.
4. **gewild**: there is no second infinitive, so the normal participle returns.

Key 100 · Zien, horen, voelen plus an infinitive

1. **rennen**: a plain infinitive, without **te** and without **-end**.
2. **heeft**: **zien** takes **hebben**, whatever verb follows it.
3. **haar**: the person you hear is the object of **horen**.
4. **Tijdens de storm heb ik het hele huis voelen trillen.** With a second verb, **voelen** stays an infinitive.

Key 101 · The present participle: lachend, slapend

1. **huilende**: **baby** is a de-word, so the participle gets **-e** after **een**.
2. **passend**: **cadeau** is a het-word, and after **een** it takes no ending.
3. **zingend**: it describes what Yara did while cycling, so you need the participle.
4. **Fietsen in de regen vind ik vreselijk.** The activity is the object here, so you need the infinitive.

Key 102 · Past participles as adjectives

1. **gebroken**: participles that end in -en do not add -e.
2. **geschilderde**: **bank** is a de-word, so the participle gets -e.
3. **Daan eet het gekookte ei met een beetje zout.** After **het**, the participle needs -e.
4. **gekookt**: the boiling is over, and **water** is a het-word without an article, so no -e.

Key 103 · Must have, should have, could have

1. **zijn**: **vertrekken** takes **zijn** in the perfect (**ze zijn vertrokken**); here the helper simply comes before the participle.
2. **had**: leaving at eight never happened; **heeft moeten** would mean she really had to leave then and did.
3. **Je had mij moeten waarschuwen.** Only **had** stays in second place; the object goes before the verbs at the end.
4. **kunnen**: **Dat zou kunnen** means "that's possible"; **Dat zou moeten** means "that's supposed to be the case".

Key 104 · Old verb forms in fixed phrases: Leve de koning!

1. **zij** (**zij het** means albeit)
2. **leve** (**leeft** makes a statement and **leef** is an order; the cheer needs the old wish form)
3. **gaat** (outside the fixed farewell **Het ga je goed**, use the normal present)
4. **Volgens de huismeester werkt de lift morgen weer.** (modern Dutch passes on information with the normal present)

Key 105 · Verb second: the golden rule

1. **Morgen gaat Joris naar de huisarts.** (**morgen** is position one, so the verb comes next)
2. **komt** (**mijn broer uit Rotterdam** is one element)
3. **Lotte wil morgen zwemmen.** (the conjugated verb **wil** is second, **zwemmen** goes to the end)
4. **koop** (**die tas** is position one, then the verb, then the subject **ik**)

Key 106 · Inversion: Morgen ga ik

1. **doe ik**: **vanmiddag** is first, so the verb comes next and **ik** follows.
2. **Morgen gaat Mei naar de huisarts.** The verb stays second, so **Mei** moves behind it.
3. **fiets**: **jij** follows the verb, so the ending **-t** drops.
4. **Op vrijdag eet ik pizza.** Dutch needs the subject, right after the verb.

Key 107 · Yes or no questions: the verb comes first

1. **Werk**: the subject **jij** follows the verb, so the -t drops.
2. **Komt**: with **u**, the t stays.
3. **Ben jij de nieuwe buurvrouw?**: **zijn** loses its t too.
4. **Fietst Sanne naar haar werk?**: verb first, and the t stays because the subject is Sanne.

Key 108 · Questions with a question word

1. **Hoe laat vertrekt Mei?** (**hoe laat** is one block, then the verb, then the subject)
2. **werk** (**je** comes after the verb, so the -t drops)
3. **Waar** (a bus is a thing, and the question has a preposition)
4. **wie** (Bas is a person, so the preposition stays with **wie**)

Key 109 · The verb bracket: two verbs, two places

1. **Bas heeft een nieuwe fiets gekocht.** (participle at the end)
2. **kopen** (after **wil** you need the infinitive)
3. **neem** and **mee**: **Ik neem vandaag een paraplu mee.** (the prefix breaks off)
4. (a) (after **moet**, the separable verb stays in one piece)

Key 110 · Time, manner, place

1. **Sanne is vorige week naar Groningen gegaan.** The time comes before the place.
2. **gisteren thuis**: time before place.
3. (b): with the time first, the verb stays in second place and the subject follows.
4. **zondag met de trein**: time, then manner, with the place already at the end.

Key 111 · Where does niet go?

1. **Emma heeft de rekening niet betaald.** (the participle goes last, with **niet** just before it)
2. **De trein is niet laat.** (**niet** goes before the adjective)
3. **Carlos werkt vandaag niet.** (after the verb and after the time word)
4. **niet** (directly before the one person you deny, with **maar** and the right person after it)

Key 112 · Geen or niet?

1. **geen** (it replaces **een**: **een fiets** becomes **geen fiets**)
2. **niet** (**warm** is an adjective)
3. **niet** (**zijn** already stands before **fiets**)
4. **Carlos heeft geen kinderen.** (a plural without an article takes **geen**)

Key 113 · En, maar, of, want, dus

1. **Ik ga vroeg naar bed, want ik ben moe.** (after **want** you cannot leave out just the subject)
2. **maar** (the second part is a contrast)
3. **We eten eerst en dan gaan we naar de film.** (**dan** takes first place, so the verb comes next)
4. (c) (after **dus** both orders are correct)

Key 114 · Subordinate clauses: the verb goes to the end

1. **Yara gaat naar de huisarts omdat ze koorts heeft.** (after **omdat** the verb goes to the end)
2. **Weet jij of Lotte morgen komt?** (**of** meaning whether sends **komt** to the end)
3. **want** (**het regent heel hard** has normal order; with **omdat** it would be **omdat het heel hard regent**)
4. **Mei zegt dat de supermarkt druk is.** (subject right after **dat**, verb last)

Key 115 · Omdat or want: two ways to say because

1. **ben ziek** (after **want** the order stays normal, with the verb in second place)
2. **Lotte blijft thuis omdat ze moe is.** (**omdat** sends **is** to the end)
3. **Omdat** (the verb **is** is at the end, and a **want** clause cannot come first)
4. **opstaat** (at the end of an **omdat** clause, **opstaan** is one word again)

Key 116 · When the subordinate clause comes first

1. **Omdat**: a **want** clause can't come first, and **want** doesn't send the verb to the end.
2. **moest hij**: the **omdat** clause is position one, so the verb comes next.
3. **Toen Lotte thuiskwam, zag ze dat haar fiets weg was.** The verb comes straight after the comma.
4. **heb**: **je** follows the verb, so the -t drops.

Key 117 · Als, wanneer or toen: when and if

1. **Toen**: one moment in the past (last week).
2. **Als**: a condition about tomorrow, and **toen** only looks back at the past.
3. **Toen Ahmed ziek was, bleef hij thuis.** The verb **was** goes to the end of the **toen** clause.
4. **Wanneer**: of the three, only the question word can start a direct question.

Key 118 · Dat clauses: Ik denk dat...

1. **dat**: Dutch cannot leave it out.
2. **hij ziek is**: subject first, verb last.
3. **Ik weet dat Mei een nieuwe fiets heeft.** The verb **heeft** moves to the end.
4. **meekomt**: the separable verb is one word again at the end.

Key 119 · Indirect questions: Weet jij of...?

1. **of**: it is a yes or no question inside the sentence.
2. **Ik weet niet waar het station is.** After **waar**, the verb goes to the end.
3. **Kunt u me vertellen hoe laat de laatste trein vertrekt?** The question words stay at the front, the verb moves to the end.
4. **werkt**: **jij** comes before the verb here, so the **-t** stays.

Key 120 · Relative clauses inside a sentence

1. **De vrouw die een rode jas draagt, is onze nieuwe huisarts.** The verb **draagt** closes the relative clause.
2. **is erg lang**: the main verb comes straight after the relative clause.
3. **dat**: it is **het pakket**, a het-word.
4. **Mijn zus, die in Groningen woont, komt zaterdag langs.** With only one sister, the clause adds extra information, so it goes between commas.

Key 121 · The order of verbs at the end

1. (b): **nog boodschappen** goes before the block, and **moet doen** stays together.
2. **heeft kunnen halen**: conjugated verb first, main verb last, and **kunnen** as an infinitive.
3. Right: with **hebben** plus a participle both orders work, so **al heeft betaald** is equally good.
4. **Ik vind het jammer dat Sanne niet heeft kunnen komen.** (**niet** goes in front of the block)

Key 122 · Separable verbs in subordinate clauses

1. **aankomt** (present tense, one verb, so prefix and verb join at the end)
2. **Mei vertelt dat ze om zeven uur opstaat.** (the verb goes to the end and joins **op**)
3. **ophalen** (after the modal **kan**, the separable verb stays whole)
4. **teruggebeld** (the participle is one word: **terug** plus **gebeld**)

Key 123 · Two objects and short pronouns

1. **Joris heeft het vorige week ingevuld.** (**het** goes before the time word)
2. **aan** (giving something to someone uses **aan**)
3. **Yara stuurt haar broer een berichtje.** (without **aan**, the person comes first)
4. **Ik geef het aan de buurman.** (**het** cannot follow a noun object)

Key 124 · The four jobs of er

1. **er** (a number without its noun needs **er**)
2. **Er** (it announces something new: **een pakketje**)
3. **Sanne heeft een nieuwe laptop en ze werkt er graag mee.** (**met het** becomes **er … mee**)
4. Place (**er** means "there", in Maastricht)

Key 125 · Er is and er zijn: there is, there are

1. **zijn**: **veel toeristen** is plural.
2. **is**: **brood** is an uncountable amount here, so the verb is singular.
3. **hangt**: a lamp above a table hangs.
4. **Zaterdag is er een barbecue bij Daan.** The verb stays in second place.

Key 126 · Er with numbers: Ik heb er drie

1. **er**: **collega's** is left out after **twaalf**, so **er** takes its place.
2. **ze**: **allemaal** means the whole group, not an open amount.
3. **Mijn buurvrouw heeft drie katten en ik heb er geen.** (**geen** without its noun needs **er**)
4. **er**: the two would stand side by side, so one **er** does both jobs.

Key 127 · Erop, ervan, daarmee: er plus a preposition

1. **ermee**: **met** becomes **mee** after **er**.
2. **met haar**: Lotte is a person, so you keep the pronoun.
3. **Daar**: in this job **er** cannot start a sentence, **daar** can.
4. **ertoe**: **tot** becomes **toe** after **er**.

Key 128 · Splitting er and its preposition

1. **Waar** (with a preposition, **wat** becomes **waar**, and **over** stays at the end)
2. **in** (the expression is **zin hebben in**; with no final verb, the preposition ends the clause)
3. **Mei heeft er al een uur op gewacht.** (the preposition comes before **gewacht**, not after it)
4. **Daar** (the first position needs stressed **daar**, not unstressed **er**)

Key 129 · Starting with the object for emphasis or contrast

1. **Die jas heb ik gisteren in de uitverkoop gekocht.** (the verb stays second, so **ik** follows it)
2. **dat** (object **het** cannot stand in position one)
3. **De huur betaal ik altijd op de eerste van de maand.** (object first, then the verb, then the subject)
4. **ben ik** (**Met de trein** fills position one, so the subject follows the verb)

Key 130 · Where adverbs go: al, nog, graag, vaak, ook

1. **het al**: **Heb je het al gelezen?** The short pronoun goes before the adverb.
2. **Ik werk ook bij de gemeente.** The verb stays second and **ook** follows it.
3. **graag kookt**: in a **dat** clause the verb goes to the end, and **graag** stays in front of it.
4. **ze vaak**: **ze** is a short pronoun, so it comes before **vaak**.

Key 131 · What can come after the final verbs

1. **Daan heeft gemaild dat hij later komt.** (a **dat** clause follows the final verb)
2. (c): **Emma heeft gisteren een tweedehands fiets gekocht.** (the object goes before the final verb; a and b are correct)
3. **Ahmed heeft de huisarts niet gebeld.** (**niet** stays before the final verb)
4. **Yara gaat naar de bibliotheek om een kookboek te lenen.** (the object comes before **te** plus verb)

Key 132 · Questions with a preposition

1. **Naar**: the verb is **luisteren naar**, and in the split form the preposition goes at the end.
2. **Met wie**: the answer is a person.
3. **Waarmee ga je naar je werk, met de bus of met de fiets?**: **met** becomes **mee** after **waar**.
4. **Van**: **van wie** asks who something belongs to.

Key 133 · Zowel … als, niet alleen … maar ook

1. **als** (the partner of **zowel** is **als**)
2. **Het wordt óf bij haar thuis óf in het café om de hoek.** (she will pick one of the two places)
3. **Niet alleen sneeuwt het, het is ook glad op de fietspaden.** (**niet alleen** fills the first position, so the verb comes next)
4. **niet alleen** (it matches **maar ook** later in the sentence)

Key 134 · Daarom, toch, dan, daarna: linking words that invert

1. **neem ik** (**daarom** fills position one, so the verb comes next)
2. **ik ben** (**want** is glue and does not cause inversion)
3. **Eerst doet Joris boodschappen en daarna kookt hij voor Mei.** (**en** is glue, **daarna** fills position one, so the verb comes next)
4. (c) (it should be **daarom ga ik lopen**; a and b are both correct because **dus** allows both orders)

Key 135 · Hoe meer, hoe beter

1. **beter** (the comparative of **goed** is irregular)
2. **Hoe langer de vergadering duurt, hoe minder ik onthoud.** (the first half sends the verb to the end)
3. **komt Joris thuis** (after **des te** the verb follows the comparative, and **thuiskomen** splits in a main clause)
4. **hoe** (the verb **uitgeeft** is at the end; with **des te** it would be **geeft ze uit**)

Key 136 · Hoewel, ook al, zelfs als: although and even if

1. **reageerde de gemeente** (the **hoewel** clause fills place one, so the verb follows)
2. **is de bus** (after **ook al**, the verb comes first)
3. **doorwerkt** (like **als**, **zelfs als** sends the verb to the end, where a separable verb stays in one piece)
4. **Hoewel het regent, gaat de wedstrijd gewoon door.** (after **hoewel**, the subject comes first and the verb goes to the end)

Key 137 · Zodat, opdat, zo … dat

1. **dat** (after **zo** plus an adjective you use **dat**)
2. **Neem een paraplu mee, zodat je niet nat wordt.** (the verb goes to the end of the **zodat** clause)
3. **zodat** (this is a result, and **opdat** only expresses purpose)
4. **zodat** (a full clause with its own subject follows; **om** needs **te** plus an infinitive)

Key 138 · Voordat, nadat, terwijl, sinds, totdat, zodra

1. **Ik eet altijd een boterham voordat ik naar de sportschool ga.** The verb **ga** goes to the end.
2. **Zodra het droog is, gaan wij fietsen.** The time clause fills the first place, so the verb comes next.
3. **sinds**: the new job is the starting point and you still live there; with **totdat**, the present **woon** would not fit.
4. **terwijl**: it shows a contrast, like whereas.

Key 139 · Reporting what someone said

1. **of** (a yes or no question is reported with **of**)
2. **Ahmed vroeg hoe laat de vergadering begon.** (no question order: subject first, verb at the end)
3. **zijn** (the keys are Bas's, so his **mijn** becomes **zijn**)
4. **de volgende dag** (Priya's **morgen** was Tuesday; said on Thursday, **morgen** would mean Friday)

Key 140 · Leaving words out in spoken Dutch

1. **heb** (repeat the verb of the question; in full: **Ja, dat heb ik.**)
2. **Dat** (it stands for the whole task of taking the children)
3. **ik** (it comes after the verb, outside the first slot)
4. (b) (Joris is answering; **Kan wel** is short for **Dat kan wel**)

Key 141 · Adjective endings: when to add -e

1. **klein** (**het dorp** is a singular het-word after **een**)
2. **dure** (**de fiets** is a de-word, so -e, even after **geen**)
3. **vers** (**het brood**, singular, with no article)
4. **Dit is ons nieuwe huis.** (**ons** is a possessive, so the -e comes back)

Key 142 · Spelling changes when an adjective gets -e

1. **dure**: the **u** ends the syllable (**du-re**), so one **u** is enough.
2. **dunne**: short stressed **u** plus one **n**, so double the **n**.
3. **lieve**: after **ie**, the **f** becomes **v**.
4. **Yara koopt een houten tafel.** Unstressed **-en** gets no **-e**.

Key 143 · Adjectives after zijn, worden and blijven

1. **vol**: it comes after **is**, so no -e.
2. **snelle**: the adjective stands before the de-word **fiets**, so it gets -e, and the l doubles after the short vowel.
3. **boos**: after **wordt** the adjective stays bare.
4. **De bananen worden bruin.** A plural subject changes nothing after **worden**.

Key 144 · Adjectives that never take -e

1. **zilveren** (a material adjective in -en, so no extra -e)
2. **gesloten** (a past participle ending in unstressed -en stays the same)
3. **warme** (**warm** follows the main rule: **jas** is a **de** word, so the adjective gets -e after **een**)
4. **Ik koop een wollen sjaal, want het wordt koud.** (the material adjective is **wollen**, with double l and no -e)

Key 145 · Comparatives: groter, mooier, duurder

1. **duurder** (**duur** ends in r, so it takes **-der**)
2. **dunner** (short stressed u plus one consonant, so the n doubles)
3. **als** (the speeds are the same, so **net zo … als**)
4. **Het is vandaag kouder dan gisteren.** (**koud** just takes **-er**; Dutch does not use **meer** here)

Key 146 · Superlatives: de grootste, het grootst

1. **mooiste** (before a noun after **de**: -st plus -e)
2. **het snelst** (after the verb **fietst** no noun fits)
3. **Het vriest, dus Mei draagt haar dikste trui.** (no doubled consonant before -st)
4. **vieste** (**vies** ends in -s, so add only -t, then -e before the noun)

Key 147 · Goed, beter, best and other irregulars

1. **beter** (**goed** has no -er form, and **dan** needs a comparative)
2. **liever** (the comparative of **graag**)
3. **minder** (the comparative of **weinig**, for both less and fewer)
4. **De meeste** (before a plural noun, the superlative needs **de** and -e)

Key 148 · Meer and meest instead of -er and -st

1. **meest gelezen**: **gelezen** is a past participle.
2. **Mijn nieuwe baan is leuker dan mijn oude. Leuk** is an ordinary adjective, so it takes -er.
3. **meer**: **verrast** is a past participle, so the degree goes in front.
4. **meer boos**: you compare two feelings of the same person.

Key 149 · Adverbs: no -ly needed

1. **voorzichtig**: it says how Mei cycles, so no -e.
2. **snelle**: it describes the noun **auto**, a de-word after **een**, so it gets -e.
3. **erg**: it describes **dure**, not the phone, so it stays bare.
4. **Bas heeft hard gewerkt.** The adverb comes before the participle at the end.

Key 150 · Graag: the Dutch way to say you like doing something

1. **Ahmed kookt graag.** (the verb comes second, **graag** follows it)
2. **liever** (comparing two things with **dan** needs prefer)
3. **het liefst** (favourite means like most of all)
4. **Graag gedaan.** (the reply to thanks; **ja, graag** accepts an offer)

Key 151 · Heel, erg, echt, best, nogal, vrij

1. **erg**: with a verb, **heel** cannot stand alone.
2. (b): **best** before an adjective like **groot** means quite.
3. **heel**: say **heel druk**, not **veel druk**. **Veel** only works with a comparative here: **veel drukker**.
4. **heel**: in careful writing, the intensifier keeps its basic form.

Key 152 · Altijd, vaak, soms, nooit

1. **meestal** (usually; it follows the verb **gaat**)
2. **Yara komt altijd te laat.** (verb second, frequency word right after it)
3. **Ik vind het soms moeilijk.** (the short pronoun **het** comes before **soms**)
4. **Mei fietst nooit in de regen.** (remove **niet**: **nooit** is already negative)

Key 153 · Iets leuks, niets nieuws: the extra -s

1. **lekkers**: after **iets**, the adjective takes **-s**.
2. **duurder**: **iets** means a bit here, and the sentence compares with **dan**.
3. **Nederlands**: it already ends in **-s**, so nothing is added.
4. **Volgens Ahmed gebeurt er in zijn dorp weinig spannends.**: after **weinig**, an adjective without a noun takes **-s**, not **-e**.

Key 154 · Dan, als and zo ... als

1. **dan**: **langzamer** is a comparative.
2. **als**: "just as big as" is **net zo groot als**.
3. **dan**: "different from" is **anders dan**.
4. **Ahmed fietst sneller dan zijn broer.** Standard Dutch uses **dan** after **sneller**.

Key 155 · Adjectives used as nouns

1. **het**: you leave out **boek**, and it is **het boek**.
2. **doven**: people in general get **-n**, and **f** changes to **v** as in **dove**.
3. (b) **De lange.** Dutch has no word for one after the adjective, and a coat is a thing, so no **-n**.
4. **Het**: an abstract idea takes **het**.

Key 156 · Ander, andere and anders

1. **andere**: **baan** is a de-word, so **ander** gets -e.
2. **ander**: **appartement** is a het-word, and after **een** there is no -e.
3. **anders**: something else is **iets anders**.
4. **Bel de huisarts voor tien uur, anders moet je tot morgen wachten.** The verb follows **anders** directly.

Key 157 · Heel, al and alle: whole and all

1. **de hele**: one week from start to finish; **alle** would need a plural.
2. **al**: a possessive (**zijn**) follows.
3. **heel**: a place name without an article.
4. **allemaal**: it stands on its own after the verb; **alle** goes before a plural noun.

Key 158 · Veel, weinig, een paar, een beetje

1. **een beetje**: **melk** is uncountable.
2. **veel**: **druk** means busy, so there are a lot of people.
3. **zijn**: **broodjes** is plural, whatever the **een** in **een paar** suggests.
4. Both: **genoeg** can go before or after the noun.

Key 159 · In, op, aan, bij: where things are

1. **in**: Leiden is a city, so **in**.
2. **op**: **op kantoor** is a fixed chunk, like **op school**.
3. **aan**: a mirror hangs on the wall.
4. **Carlos is vandaag bij de tandarts.** (at someone's practice: **bij**)

Key 160 · Naar, uit, door, langs, over

1. **uit**: where you are from, here a country.
2. **langs**: the path stays beside the canal; **door** would take Emma through the water.
3. **naar**: **van … naar** means from … to.
4. **We hebben over de planning gepraat.** A topic takes **over**.

Key 161 · Om, op, in: talking about time

1. **om** (a clock time)
2. **op** (a date)
3. **in** (a month)
4. **'s nachts** (at night)

Key 162 · Telling the time: half drie means 2:30

1. **vijf** (half looks ahead to the next hour)
2. **voor** (7:45 is a quarter before eight)
3. **tien** (9:25 is five minutes before **half tien**)
4. **De film begint om half zeven.** (6:30 is halfway to seven)

Key 163 · Numbers: eenentwintig, not twenty-one

1. **vierentwintig**: unit first, then **en**, then the ten, in one word.
2. **tweeëntwintig**: after **twee**, **en** needs a trema.
3. **twintigste**: from **twintig**, ordinals end in **-ste**.
4. **honderdvijftig**: no **een** before **honderd**, and one word.

Key 164 · Days, months and dates

1. **in**: a month on its own takes **in**.
2. **op**: a day takes **op**.
3. **Mijn verjaardag is op 4 mei.** The month is lowercase and the number comes first.
4. **negentienhonderdvijfentachtig**: years before 2000 are said in hundreds, as one word.

Key 165 · Al, nog, pas, nog niet, niet meer

1. **nog niet**: he hasn't eaten yet, so he's hungry.
2. **niet meer**: she quit, so she no longer smokes.
3. **pas**: it makes half past six feel early (**al** would make it feel late).
4. **Carlos woont niet meer in Den Haag.** (**niet meer** goes before **in Den Haag**, not at the end.)

Key 166 · Geleden, sinds, al and over

1. **geleden**: it follows the amount of time and points to a finished moment.
2. **sinds**: **januari** is a starting point, not an amount of time.
3. **over**: the bus comes in the future, counted from now.
4. **Yara werkt sinds 2024 in het ziekenhuis.**: she still works there, so the perfect **heeft gewerkt** becomes the present **werkt**.

Key 167 · Even, maar, eens: making requests friendly

1. **even**: you are asking for something small and quick.
2. **maar**: you are giving permission.
3. **Kun je me even helpen?** The short pronoun **me** comes before **even**.
4. **Ga maar zitten, de dokter komt zo.** The particle comes before the infinitive **zitten**.

Key 168 · Toch, wel, hoor, nou, gewoon

1. **toch**: you expect a yes, and **hoor** does not go with questions.
2. **Joris heeft wel een auto.** The verb stays second and **wel** follows it.
3. **nou**: after a command it means "come on".
4. **gewoon**: it means "just, simply". **Ik ben wel moe** is also correct Dutch, but it means "I am tired, though", a contrast with not being ill.

Key 169 · Particle combinations: maar even, toch maar, nou eens

1. **maar even** (**maar** comes before **even**).
2. (b), because **nou eens** signals impatience, while **maar even** is a friendly invitation.
3. **We nemen toch maar de fiets, het is droog geworden.** (**toch** comes before **maar**)
4. **Zet het maar even op tafel, ik ruim het straks op.** (the pronoun **het** comes before the particles)

Key 170 · Ja, nee, jawel and toch wel

1. **Jawel.**: you contradict **niet**, because you are coming. A bare **Nee.** would mean you are staying away.
2. **Nee.**: you agree with the negative. **Jawel.** would mean you are hungry.
3. **wel**: **toch wel** contradicts **niet**.
4. **Toch wel, hij rijdt gewoon.**: it contradicts Carlos, while the other reply agrees.

Key 171 · Ook, alleen, maar, zelfs: focus words

1. **maar**: before an amount, it means only and makes the price sound small.
2. **ook**: with **geen** or **niet**, **ook** means either.
3. **Daan fietst zelfs naar Amsterdam.** The verb stays second, and **zelfs** points at the surprising part.
4. **Alleen**: Bas is the only one with a key, so the others have to wait.

Key 172 · Adjectives with a fixed preposition

1. **op**: you are **jaloers op** someone, even though English says "of".
2. **in**: "good at" is **goed in**.
3. Add **er**: **Mei is er verantwoordelijk voor dat de vergadering op tijd begint.** The clause needs **er** as a placeholder.
4. **mee**: after **er**, **met** becomes **mee**.

Key 173 · Met de trein, op de fiets, te voet

1. **met**: the normal word for travelling by bus, train or car.
2. **op**: he is sitting on the bike right now.
3. **voet**: **te voet** is the fixed phrase for on foot.
4. **het**: it is **het openbaar vervoer** (**vervoer** is a het-word), and **met** keeps the article.

Key 174 · Ten, ter and te in fixed phrases

1. **te**: the fixed chunk is **te huur**, just like on the signs.
2. **Ter**: the chunk is **ter gelegenheid van**, and nouns in **-heid** tend to take **ter**.
3. **te**: **te allen tijde** uses plain **te**; the old ending sits on **allen**.
4. **Ten opzichte van vorig jaar zijn de energieprijzen flink gestegen.** The chunk keeps its old **-e**: **opzichte**.

Key 175 · Fixed prepositional phrases

1. **op**: the chunk is **op tijd**.
2. **aan**: **Is er iets aan de hand?** asks whether something is wrong.
3. **op**: the chunk is **op het moment**, meaning currently.
4. **op vakantie**: Bas is away. **In de vakantie** means during the holidays.

Key 176 · Formal and informal Dutch

1. **Werkt**: after **u** the verb keeps its t, also in questions.
2. **uw**: once you say **u**, the word for your is **uw**.
3. **Betreffende**: it means regarding; **gaarne** means gladly and **indien** means if.
4. **d'r**: the spoken shortcut for **haar** (her).

Key 177 · Writing an email in Dutch: openings and closings

1. **Geachte heer/mevrouw,** (formal, and you do not know the reader's name)
2. **Groetjes** (a warm opening needs a warm closing)
3. **u** (**Geachte** is formal, and **kunt** goes with **u**)
4. **omdat** (the verb stands at the end; with **want** it would be **want ik verhuis volgende maand**)

Key 178 · Spoken shortcuts: 't, 'k, m'n, z'n, d'r

1. **'t Is bijna mijn beurt bij de huisarts.** (after **'t** at the start, the next word takes the capital)
2. **haar** (it says whose bike it is: her bike)
3. **Bas en Lotte zijn er al, waar blijf jij?** (**z'n** cannot replace the verb **zijn**)
4. **mijn** (a letter to the gemeente is formal, so use the full form)

Key 179 · Nominalisation: turning actions into nouns

1. **Het**: an infinitive used as a noun is a het-word.
2. **door**: the doer takes **door**, and **van** already introduces the object.
3. **De verlaging van de tarieven gaat op 1 januari in.** The subject is **de verlaging**, which is singular.
4. **verhogingen**: the infinitive noun has no plural here, while the **-ing** noun can be counted.

Key 180 · When to use the passive, and when not

1. **Er**: a passive without a subject starts with **er** when nothing else comes first; **het** is not possible.
2. **door**: the doer in a passive follows **door**.
3. **kreeg**: **te horen krijgen** is the fixed expression for being told something; **worden** does not combine with **te horen**.
4. **beantwoorden**: **We beantwoorden uw bericht zo snel mogelijk.** The doer is your team, so name it.

Key 181 · Building words with prefixes: on-, her-, mis-, oud-

1. **on**: **onduidelijk** means unclear; **herduidelijk** and **misduidelijk** do not exist.
2. **Bas heeft zijn cv gisteren herschreven.** Verbs with **her-** take no **ge-**.
3. **misverstand**: Carlos understood the time wrongly; **misbruik** means misuse.
4. **oud-collega**: **oud-** meaning former is written with a hyphen.

Key 182 · Building words with suffixes: -baar, -loos, -achtig, -ig, -lijk

1. **bereikbaar**: verb stem plus **-baar**, "can be reached".
2. **kinderloos**: without children, by choice.
3. **Na de verbouwing was alles in huis heel stoffig.**: stressed short **o** before one consonant, so the **f** doubles.
4. **gevaarlijk**: **gevaar** plus **-lijk**, with no extra **e**.

Key 183 · Linking ideas in writing: bovendien, echter, kortom

1. **Bovendien**: both facts are plus points for the flat, so there is nothing to contrast.
2. **Al met al was het een nuttige vergadering.** The verb follows **al met al** directly.
3. **De trein was echter vol. Echter** comes straight after the verb **was**.
4. **Ten slotte**: two words means finally; **tenslotte** means after all.

Key 184 · If only: Als ik het had geweten

1. **was** (**worden** takes **zijn**, so **was geworden**)
2. **zou** (**zou** + **hebben** + participle, and **ze** is Sanne, so singular)
3. **Als het niet had geregend, hadden we buiten gegeten.** (same meaning, no **zou** needed)
4. **Als Ahmed eerder was vertrokken, had hij de bus gehaald.** (after the **als**-clause the verb comes first)

Key 185 · Conditions without als: Mocht je vragen hebben

1. **Mochten**: the subject is **problemen**, which is plural.
2. **Had**: a verb-first past perfect for something that did not happen.
3. **Mocht de lift het niet doen, dan moet u de trap nemen.** After **dan** the verb comes before the subject.
4. Permission: it is a question with no main clause, so it means "Was Bas allowed to go home early yesterday?"

Key 186 · Wishes with maar: Was het maar vrijdag

1. **Had**: a wish about now uses the simple past of **hebben**.
2. **Was**: **gaan** takes **zijn** in the perfect (**hij is gegaan**).
3. **Als de bus maar op tijd komt!**: **maar** now follows the subject **de bus**, the most common order (the original is also possible), and the verb stays at the end.
4. b: here **als je maar bereikbaar bent** states the condition for being allowed to work from home: you must be reachable.

Key 187 · Wiens, wier, hetgeen: formal relatives

1. **wiens**: the owner is a man, and you would say **zijn auto**.
2. **wier**: the owners are plural, and you would say **hun trein**.
3. **hetgeen**: it points back to the whole first clause, which **dat** cannot do.
4. **Ken jij de buurvrouw van wie de kat al drie dagen kwijt is?** (**van wie** plus the article **de**)

Key 188 · Dutch in the Netherlands and in Flanders

1. **Gaat**: in the present tense, the verb keeps its **-t** with **ge**, also at the start of a question.
2. **u**: the object form that belongs to **ge** and **gij** is **u**.
3. **zin**: **goesting** means desire, which is **zin** in the Netherlands.
4. **hem**: **de fiets** is a de-word thing, so in the Netherlands it is **hem**.