**Reflexive Pronouns, Verbs (Reflexivpronomen, reflexive Verben)**

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/SichBedanken.JPG |
|   | Thank the person who always believed in you. Yourself. |
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**The Reflexive in English:**

If the subject and direct or indirect object are the same person or thing, English uses a special set of pronouns:

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| --- | --- |
|  myself  |  ourselves |
|  yourself  |  yourselves |
|  himself  |  |
|  herself  |  themselves  |
|  itself  |  |

Thus:

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| I could kick myself. |
| Did he really kill himself? |
| Suit yourself. |
| We bought ourselves a new car. |
| She found herself a new friend. |

Some verbs are reflexive by convention, even though the meaning is not logically reflexive:

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| Behave yourselves. |
| He conducted himself with dignity. |
| She seems to be enjoying herself. |

Note that not all words ending in *-self* are reflexive. They can be an adverb meaning "without others," as in "I'd rather do it myself" (For this function, German uses **"selbst"** [or "selber"]: "Ich mache es lieber selbst").

**The Reflexive in German:**

The reflexive pronouns are different only in the third person and in the formal "Sie" (which is historically derived from the third person plural)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  *Nom.*  |  *Acc.*  |  *Dat.*  |   |  *Nom.*  |  *Acc.*  |  *Dat.*  |
|  ich  |  mich  |  mir  |   |  wir  |  uns  |  uns  |
|  du  |  dich  |  dir  |   |  ihr  |  euch  |  euch  |
|   |   |   |   |  Sie  |  sich  |  sich  |
|  er |  sich  |  sich  |    |   |   |   |
|  sie  |  sich  |  sich  |   |  sie  |  sich  |  sich  |
|  es  |  sich  |  sich  |   |   |   |   |

**Most transitive verbs** can be used reflexively when the meaning calls for it. Note the differences:

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/sichDrehen.JPG |
|   | You can twist and turn yourself as much as you want. With us you're sure to get brown [A tanning parlor]. |
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| Er sieht mich im Spiegel. *He sees me in the mirror.* |
| Er sieht sich im Spiegel. *He sees himself in the mirror.* |
|   |
| Sie wäscht das Kind gründlich. *She washes the child thoroughly.* |
| Sie wäscht sich gründlich. *She washes herself thoroughly.* |
|   |
| Ich liebe nur dich. *I love only you.* |
| Ich liebe nur mich. *I love only myself.* |
|   |
| Setzen Sie es auf den Stuhl. *Set it down on the chair.* |
| Setzen Sie sich auf den Stuhl. *Sit down on the chair.* |
|   |
| Sie verzeiht mir. *She forgives me.* |
| Ich kann mir nicht verzeihen. *I can't forgive myself.* |
|   |
| Sie widerspricht ihrem Chef. *She contradicts her boss.* |
| Du widersprichst dir. *You're contradicting yourself.* |
|   |
| Ich gönne dir ein zweites Stück Kuchen. *I'll allow (grant) you a second piece of cake.* |
| Ich gönne mir einen Ruhetag. *I'll allow myself (treat myself to) a day off.* |

In the plural, the reflexive form can also mean **"each other"** ("one another"):

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|   |
|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/DieGruenen.JPG |
|   | We've come to an agreement. Our contribution to unemployment: cutting governmental positions. |
|   |

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| Wir lieben uns. *We love each other.* |
| Sie küssen sich. *They kiss each other.* |
| Wir hassen uns. *We hate each other.* |
| Ihr vertragt euch gut. *Y'all get along well with each other.* |
| Wir treffen uns jeden Tag. *We meet every day.* |
| Sie streiten sich um die Erbschaft. *They are fighting with each other over the inheritance.* |

**Not all German reflexives have a corresponding construction in English:**

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| Sie ziehen sich schnell an. *They get dressed quickly.* |
| Er kämmt sich. *He combs his hair.* |
| Ich rasiere mich morgens. *I shave in the morning.* |
| Sie schminkt sich nur am Wochenende. *She puts on make-up only on the weekend.* |

**The dative reflexive** can be used to indicate that the action takes place for the subject's benefit:

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| Kaufen Sie sich einen neuen Wagen? *Are you buying yourself a new car?* |
| Ich will mir etwas Schönes finden. *I want to find something nice for myself.* |
| Sie setzt sich die Kontaktlinsen ein. *She puts in her contacts.* |
| Mach dir keine Sorge darüber. *Don't worry yourself about it.* |
| Du sollst dir eine wärmere Jacke anziehen. *You should put on a warmer jacket.* |

To indicate **parts of one's own body**, one shows possession with the dative reflexive:[1](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/Reflexive.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnote1)

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| Ich habe mir den Finger verletzt. *I injured my finger.* |
| Er rasiert sich den Kopf. *He shaves his head.* |
| Er kämmt sich die Haare. *He combs his hair.* |
| Sie färbt sich die Haare. *She dyes her hair.* |
| Du sollst dir die Zähne putzen. *You ought to brush your teeth.* |
| Ich wasche mir die Hände in Unschuld. *I will wash my hands in innocency (Psalms 26: 6)* |

**Some verbs take on a different meaning in the reflexive** (dative or accusative). Note the following contrasts:

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| Ich erinnere ihn an seinen Onkel. *I remind him of his uncle.* |
| Ich erinnere mich an seinen Onkel. *I remember his uncle.* |
|   |
| Ich habe ihm meine Frau vorgestellt. *I introduced my wife to him.* |
| Kannst du dir so etwas vorstellen? *Can you imagine such a thing?* |
|   |
| Dein Besuch hat uns gefreut. *We were delighted by your visit.* |
| Wir freuen uns über deinen Besuch. *We are happy about your visit.* |
| Wir freuen uns auf deinen Besuch. *We are looking forward to your visit.* |

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Comparatives/naechst.JPG |
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| Ich fühle den Wind. *I feel the wind.* |
| Ich fühle mich nicht wohl. *I don't feel well.* |
|   |
| Sie trifft ihn in der Stadt. *She meets (or: encounters) him in town.* |
| Sie trifft sich mit ihm. *She meets him (by arrangement).* |
|   |
| Was ärgert dich jetzt? *What's annoying you now?* |
| Ärgern Sie sich immernoch darüber? *Are you still mad about that?* |
|   |
| Du langweilst mich. *You're boring me.* |
| Langweilst du dich? *Are you bored?* |
|   |
| Deine Probleme interessieren mich nicht. *Your problems don't interest me.* |
| Ich interessiere mich für Geschichte. *I'm interested in history.* |
|   |
| Sein Fall beschäftigt uns sehr. *His case is very much on our minds.* |
| Ich beschäftige mich mit meinen Briefmarken. *I occupy myself with my stamps.* |
|   |
| Seine Antwort wundert mich. *His answer surprises me.* |
| Sie wundert sich über seine Antwort. *She is surprised by his answer.* |
|   |
| Seine Probleme kümmern mich nicht. *His problems don't concern me.* |
| Sie kümmert sich um ihr Kind. *She attends to her child.* |
|   |
| Er unterhält uns mit seinen Geschichten. *He entertains us with his stories.* |
| Ich unterhalte mich gern mit ihr. *I like to talk (have a discussion) with her.* |
|   |
| Er hat seine Familie verlassen. *He left his family.* |
| Ich verlasse mich auf dich. *I put my trust in you.* |
|   |
| Sie amüsieren uns mit ihren Skizzen. *They amuse us with their sketches.* |
| Wir haben uns auf der Party gut amüsiert. *We enjoyed ourselves at the party a lot.* |

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/Entspannen.JPG |
|   | Relax. You're on the island for every season. Cyprus |
|   |

And then there are a number of verbs that are (almost) **always reflexive**. Here are some that take the **accusative**:

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| Ruhen Sie sich zuerst aus. *Rest up first.* |
| Ich bedanke mich bei ihm. *I thank him.* |
| Ich muss mich beeilen. *I have to hurry.* |
| Sie bewerben sich um eine Stelle. *They're applying for a position.* |
| Das Kind benimmt sich erstaunlich gut. *The child behaves itself surprisingly well.* |
| Du sollst dich bei ihr entschuldigen. *You should apologize to her.* |
| Ich brauche eine Woche, mich zu erholen. *I need a week to recover.* |
| Wie hast du dich erkältet? *How did you catch cold?* |
| Fürchtest du dich vor dem Hund? *Are you afraid of the dog?* |
| Ich gewöhne mich langsam an seine Stimme. *I'm slowly getting used to his voice.* |
| Wo kann ich mich hinlegen? *Where can I lie down?* |
| Ich kenne mich hier gut aus. *I know my way around here well.* |
| Die Reise hat sich nicht gelohnt. *The trip wasn't worth it.* |
| Er räuspert sich. *He clears his throat.* |
| Sie sollen sich schämen! *You should be ashamed!* |
| Ich will mich nur umsehen (umschauen). *I just want to look around.* |
| Der Zug hat sich verspätet. *The train was late.* |
| Hast du dich nicht mit ihm zum Tennis verabredet? *Didn't you make a date with him to play tennis?* |
| Ich habe mich in meine Kusine verliebt. *I've fallen in love with my cousin.* |

And some that take the **dative**:

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| Ich will es mir ansehen. *I want to take a look at it.* |
| Er bildet sich ein, ein großer Intellektueller zu sein. *He (falsely) imagines that he is a great intellectual.* |
| Ich muss mir das überlegen. *I'll have to think that over.* |
| Sie hat es sich anders überlegt. *She changed her mind.* |
| Ich kann mir keine teueren Bücher leisten. *I can't afford any expensive books.* |

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/Aendern.JPG |
|   | Either we change ourselves, or the climate will change even faster |
|   |

**Some verbs always require an object, even when no actual object is implied. Then the verb becomes reflexive.** This structure is less common in English than in German, but you do get things like: "The answer suggested itself very quickly." Note the following contrasts:

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| Sie öffnete die Tür. *She opened the door.* |
| Die Tür öffnete sich plötzlich. *The door opened suddenly.* |
|   |
| Er bewegt das Bein. *He moves his leg.* |
| Etwas hat sich bewegt. *Something moved.* |
|   |
| Wir ändern unsre Pläne. *We're changing our plans.* |
| Alles hat sich geändert. *Everything has changed.* |
|   |
| Sie dreht den Spiegel gegen die Wand. *She turns the mirror to the wall.* |
| Die Erde dreht sich um ihre Achse. *The earth turns on its axis.* |
|   |
| Sie verkaufen viele Bücher. *They sell a lot of books.* |
| Diese Bücher verkaufen sich wie warme Semmeln. *These books sell like hotcakes.* |

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/Rentner.JPG |
|   | The new pension legislation: For younger people, much will improve. For most pensioners, everything will stay as it was. |
|   |

The reflexive construction **"sich lassen"** can be used as a substitute for the passive when saying that something can or cannot be done:

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| Eine Lösung lässt sich finden. *A solution can be found.* |
| Das lässt sich leicht machen. *That can be done easily.* |
| Die Tür lässt sich nicht aufmachen. *The door can't be opened.* |
| Der Wagen lässt sich schnell reparieren. *The car can be fixed quickly.* |
| Ein Skandal lässt sich nicht vermeiden. *A scandal can't be avoided.* |

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/Cherokee.JPG |
|   | The Jeep Cherokee in a new design. One more reason to be seen more often in civilization. |
|   |

The prefix **"ver-"**, combined with the reflexive, can often mean that the action is performed wrongly:

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| Ich habe mich verlaufen. *I got lost (on foot).* |
| Ich habe mich verfahren. *I got lost (while driving).* |
| Sie hat sich verschluckt. *She swallowed the wrong way.* |
| Du hast dich vertippt. *You made a typing error.* |
| Haben Sie sich nicht verzählt? *Didn't you count wrong?* |
| Er hat sich versprochen. *He misspoke.* |
| Wir haben uns verrechnet. *We miscalculated.* |

The prefix **"hin-"**, combined with the accusative reflexive phrase **"vor sich"**, can mean that the action is without thought or purpose, often rendered in English as "to oneself," "away," or "along":

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| Er pfeift vor sich hin. *He whistles to himself.* |
| Die alte Frau brummt vor sich hin. *The old lady grumbles to herself.* |
| Du murmelst vor dich him. *You're mumbling to yourself.* |
| Sie quatschen vor sich hin. *They blather away.* |
| Er duselt (döst) vor sich hin. *He's dozing (nodding) away (is half asleep).* |
| Der Jobmarkt kriecht vor sich hin. *The job-market crawls along.* |

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|  | http://www.dartmouth.edu/~german/Grammatik/Reflexives/Vierjahreszeiten.JPG |
|   | Which of our four seasons are you most looking forward to? |
|   |

1 The dative is also used to show possession, especially of body parts, even when the action is not reflexive:

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| Er hat ihr die Nase gebrochen. *He broke her nose.* |
| Ich wasche ihm den Kopf. *"I'll wash his head" (= I'm going to give him a piece of my mind).* |
| Sie putzt ihm die Zähne. *She brushes his teeth.* |