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HUNGARIAN LESSON

Hungarian Grammar 2 · Chapter 3 · The Dative

🎁 The Dative — A részes eset

*The dative marks the person (or thing) that receives or benefits: I give the book **to my friend**, I bought this **for you**. In Hungarian it is the simple suffix **-nak / -nek**. The same ending also introduces the possessor in Péternek a könyve, and a related ending, **-é**, gives "Peter's" and "mine".*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

The receiver takes **-nak** after back words and **-nek** after front words, with no linking vowel (*a barátomnak, a kertnek*). A possessor may stand in the dative (*Péternek a könyve*) or, more often, stay bare next to the possessed noun (*Péter könyve*). For "Peter's" as a thing in its own right, add **-é**: *Péteré*.

1. The form

The dative is a two-way suffix. The vowel follows *Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 2*, and nothing comes between the stem and *-nak / -nek*.

STEM	GROUP	DATIVE	ENGLISH
barát	back	barát**nak**	to/for the friend
tanár	back	tanár**nak**	to/for the teacher
kert	front	kert**nek**	to/for the garden
könyv	front	könyv**nek**	to/for the book
Péter	front	Péter**nek**	to/for Peter
Anna	back	Annán**ak**	to/for Anna (final *a* lengthens)
házak (plural)	back	házak**nak**	to/for the houses

STEM	GROUP	DATIVE	ENGLISH
barátom (my friend)	back	**barátomnak**	to/for my friend

> **Do not confuse the case with the verb ending**
>
> *-nak / -nek* is also the 3rd person plural of the present tense (**laknak**, they live; **kérnek**, they ask). The difference is the word it sits on: after a noun it is the dative, after a verb stem it is the verb ending. The context almost never leaves room for doubt.

2. The receiver and "for"

The dative does the job of English "to" for a receiver and of "for" for a beneficiary. Verbs of giving, saying, showing, sending and writing all take it. The direct object still takes the accusative from Chapter 2, so one sentence can carry both cases.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Adok egy könyvet a barátomnak.	I give a book to my friend.	indefinite object → *adok*
Adom a könyvet a barátomnak.	I give the book to my friend.	definite object → *adom*
Ezt neked vettem.	I bought this for you.	*neked* = for you
Írok a tanárnak.	I'm writing to the teacher.	no direct object
Megmutatom a képet Annának.	I'll show the picture to Anna.	*kép* is the object

3. Verbs that need the dative

Some verbs always take a dative where English would use a direct object. Learn each with its case, because the English translation does not predict it.

VERB	PATTERN	ENGLISH
segít	**Segítek a barátomnak.**	I help my friend.

VERB	PATTERN	ENGLISH
köszön	Köszönöm a tanárnak.	I thank the teacher.
válaszol	Válaszolok Péternek.	I answer Peter.
hisz	Hiszek neked.	I believe you.
telefonál	Telefonálok az orvosnak.	I phone the doctor.
tetszik	A ház tetszik nekem.	I like the house (it pleases me).
kell	Nekem kell egy telefon.	I need a phone.

> **Watch out: tetszik works backwards**
>
> In *A ház tetszik nekem* the thing liked is the subject (nominative) and the person who likes is the dative. With a plural thing the verb becomes **tetszenek**: **A házak tetszenek nekem.** To say "I like you", use **Tetszel nekem.**

4. The dative pronouns

The personal pronouns have their own dative forms, built on *ne-* plus a personal ending. They are used for emphasis; for ordinary "to me" and "to you" the verb often carries it differently (*Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 9*).

NOMINATIVE	DATIVE	ENGLISH
én	nekem	to/for me
te	neked	to/for you (singular)
ő	neki	to/for him, her
mi	nekünk	to/for us
ti	nektek	to/for you (plural)
ők	nekik	to/for them

NOMINATIVE	DATIVE	ENGLISH
ki?	kinek?	to/for whom?
mi?	minek?	for what?

5. The dative possessor: Péternek a könyve

A noun can show its owner in two ways. The usual one puts the owner right in front of the possessed noun, **bare** (nominative), and the possessed noun takes a possessive ending (Chapter 8). The second puts the owner in the **dative** with the article, and it may stand apart from the possessed noun.

BARE POSSESSOR	DATIVE POSSESSOR	ENGLISH
Péter könyve	Péternek a könyve	Peter's book
a tanár autója	a tanárnak az autója	the teacher's car
a barátom háza	a barátomnak a háza	my friend's house

Choose the dative form when the owner is the focus, when the owner is separated from the possessed noun, or when you want to ask *whose?*: **Kinek a telefonja ez?** (Whose phone is this?). The bare form is the everyday one.

The dative possessor also expresses **having** with *van*. **Van egy házam** already says "I have a house", and adding the dative pronoun makes it emphatic: **Nekem van egy házam** (I have a house, as for me). Without a pronoun, **Péternek van egy autója** is the normal form for a named owner.

6. The -é of "Peter's" and "mine"

To say *the thing that belongs to someone* without naming the thing, add **-é** to the owner. The suffix does not change for harmony, and after a final *a* or *e* that vowel lengthens.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Ez a könyv Péteré.	This book is Peter's.	-é after a consonant
Az autó a tanáré.	The car is the teacher's.	-é after a consonant
Ez a telefon Annáé.	This phone is Anna's.	*a* lengthens
Ezek a könyvek Péteréi.	These books are Peter's.	plural things: *-éi*
Kié ez a kabát?	Whose is this coat?	*ki + é*

The pronouns have set forms for the same idea:

PRONOUN	FORM	MEANING
én	**az enyém**	mine
te	**a tiéd**	yours (singular)
ő	**az övé**	his, hers
mi	**a miénk**	ours
ti	**a tiétek**	yours (plural)
ők	**az övék**	theirs

7. Called something: -nak / -nek in names

The dative also appears when you say what someone or something is called: the name takes *-nak / -nek* before *hívnak* (they call).

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH
Philipnek hívnak.	I'm called Philip.
Engem Annának hívnak.	I'm called Anna.
Hogy hívnak?	What are you called?

Watch out: dative or direction?

-nak / -nek is for a receiver; going *to* a person or place uses a different case. **Adok a barátomnak** means I give something to my friend; **Megyek a barátomhoz** means I go to my friend's place. Chapter 5 covers *-hoz / -hez / -höz*.

In Use — Használatban

The dative in short exchanges.

① Who is it for?

A:

Kinek adod a könyvet?

Who are you giving the book to?

B:

A barátomnak. Ezt neki vettem.

To my friend. I bought this for him/her.

② Whose is it?

A:

Kié ez a telefon?

Whose is this phone?

B:

Az enyém. És az az autó a szomszédé.

It's mine. And that car is the neighbour's.

③ Names

A:

Hogy hívnak?

What are you called?

B:

Philipnek hívnak. És téged?

I'm called Philip. And you?

A:

Engem Annának hívnak.

I'm called Anna.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	FORM	EXAMPLE
Receiver, "for"	-nak / -nek	**a barátomnak · a kertnek**
Dative pronouns	nekem, neked, neki, nekünk, nektek, nekik	**Neked vettem.**
Possessor	bare, or dative + article	**Péter könyve · Péternek a könyve**
"Peter's" (alone)	-é (-éi for plural things)	**Péteré · Annáé**
Mine, yours…	az enyém, a tiéd, az övé, a miénk, a tiétek, az övék	**Ez az enyém.**
Called	name + -nak / -nek + hívnak	**Philipnek hívnak.**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Put *ház* in the dative.

▼ Show answer

háznak. Back vowel: *-nak*.

2. Put *kert* in the dative.

▼ Show answer

kertnek. Front vowel: *-nek*.

3. Put *barátom* (my friend) in the dative.

▼ Show answer

barátomnak.

4. Put *Anna* in the dative.

▼ Show answer

Annának. The final *a* lengthens.

5. Say "to me" and "to them" as pronouns.

▼ Show answer

nekem and **nekik**.

6. Say "I help my teacher".

▼ Show answer

Segítek a tanáromnak. *Segít* takes the dative.

7. Say "Peter's book" in the bare form and the dative form.

▼ Show answer

Péter könyve and **Péternek a könyve**.

8. Say "This phone is mine."

▼ Show answer

Ez a telefon az enyém.

9. Say "This phone is Anna's."

▼ Show answer

Ez a telefon Annáé. *-é* with the final *a* lengthened.

10. Fix the sentence: *Megyek a barátomnak* (I'm going to my friend's).

▼ Show answer

Megyek a barátomhoz. Going to a place or person uses *-hoz / -hez / -höz*, not the dative.

Coming up in Chapter 4: Where? In, On, At. The three "static" place cases: *-ban / -ben*, *-on / -en / -ön* and *-nál / -nél*, and which one a town, a country or a building takes.