

D. Using Modal Particles

Handout 1: Using Modal Particles

General guidelines for using modal particles (MP) are as follows:

1. Modal particles most frequently occur together *with personal pronouns* because of their interpersonal meaning.

*Ihr könnt uns **ja mal** besuchen.*

2. In general, modal particles *cannot precede pronouns*.

Dann können **ja wir erstmal eine Skizze machen.*

This sentence is ungrammatical because the MP *ja* precedes the pronoun *wir*. The order of these two words must be reversed:

*Dann können wir **ja** erstmal eine Skizze machen.*

3. In clauses with *direct word order* (subject - finite verb - the rest), modal particles *cannot precede the finite verb*.

Du **doch hast in Bayern gelebt, oder?*

This sentence is ungrammatical because the MP *doch* precedes the finite verb *hast*. The order of these two words must be reversed:

*Du hast **doch** in Bayern gelebt, oder?*

4. Some modal particles are *sentence-type-bound*. For example, *ja* occurs only in declarative sentences (including exclamations) and *denn* occurs only in interrogative sentences.

*Wir können **ja** darüber reden.*

*Das ist **ja** genial!!!*

*Wie spät ist es **denn** jetzt bei euch?*

5. The modal particle *mal* occurs in all sentence types, but only if the content of the sentence is related to the future (requests/commands, expression of intentions, direct and indirect requests). The modal particle *mal* frequently goes together with *personal pronouns* (e.g. *ich, du, wir*), *modal verbs* (e.g. *können, müssen*) and verb forms in the *subjunctive mood* (e.g. *würde, hätte*) as well as with adverbs (e.g. *gern, gleich, auch*).

*Wir können uns dann **mal** treffen.*

*Ich werde jetzt **mal** weiter an meinem part schreiben.*

*Na dann frag **mal**!*

6. Different modal particles lend themselves to specific *communicative actions* such as requests, apologies, commands, and refusals. The modal particles *ja*, *doch*, *denn*, *mal* are frequently used in the following communicative actions:

a) ***ja***

Expressing mutual agreement and showing that the matter under discussion is known to both sides:

*Wir können morgen nicht chatten, aber dafür haben wir **ja** die Mails.*

Expressing appraisal of a fact while emphasizing presupposed agreement with the partner:

*Das ist **ja** cool!*

b) ***doch***

Expressing an assertion/appraisal while looking for confirmation from the partner:

*Das ist **doch** super, oder?*

c) ***denn***

Requesting information while emphasizing interest in the partner's response:

*Was machst du **denn** in deiner Freizeit?*

Asking about a partner's well-being in a conversation opening:

*Wie geht es dir **denn**?*

d) ***mal***

Making a friendly request/command:

*Kannst du mir **mal** diesen Link schicken?*

Making a promise while assuring the partner that it is easy to fulfill:

*Ich werde es dir gleich **mal** schicken.*

Expressing a wish:

*Ich möchte **mal** gerne nach Amerika kommen.*

Leave-taking in a conversation closing:

*Wir sehen uns bald **mal** wieder.*

7. Modal particles are often used in *formulaic expressions* such as word combinations that are fixed (idiomatic) and frequently used in certain communicative actions:

In appraisals:

Das + ist + *ja* + Attribute: *Das ist **ja** wunderbar!*

Das + ist + *doch* + Attribute: *Das ist **doch** ärgerlich!*

In mitigated requests/commands:

*Sag' **mal**, ... Gib mir **mal**...*

In conversation/email openings:

*Wie geht es dir/euch **denn**?*

8. Some combinations of modal particles with other particles and adverbs are also formulaic (see *Handout 2 (D_HD2)*):

*Du kannst mir **ja mal** schreiben.*

*Man warte **doch mal** ab.*