

The *Perfekt* Tense

We're finally going to learn to talk about past events in German! You're about to learn what's called the 'present perfect' tense in English, or ***Das Perfekt*** in German. (Don't be confused by the word 'present' -- this is a past tense that talks about past events -- it's the English terminology that's confusing.) Although there are two different past tenses in German (as in English), the *Perfekt* that you are learning is used most often in conversational (spoken) German. You will learn the other past tense (the narrative or simple past tense) in third-semester German.

The first thing we need to talk about when learning to form the *Perfekt* is the difference between strong and weak verbs in German. We have the same difference in English, too. Consider the following examples:

<i>weak (regular):</i>	to play - play <u>ed</u> spielen - gespi <u>el</u> t	to learn - learn <u>ed</u> lernen - gelern <u>t</u>
------------------------	---	--

<i>strong (irregular):</i>	to speak - spok <u>en</u> sprechen - gesproch <u>en</u>	to give - giv <u>en</u> geben - gegeb <u>en</u>
----------------------------	--	--

Like English, German has a group of 'regular' (termed 'weak') verbs that always add a -t ending for the past participle, but another very different group of 'irregular' (termed 'strong') verbs that add an -en. We will be learning both kinds today, but for just now, we're going to focus on the (easier) weak verbs.

To form the past participle of the German *Perfekt* tense for weak (regular) verbs, you need to take the **stem** of the verb (the infinitive minus the *-en* ending) and add a ge- prefix and a -t suffix.

spielen - gespielt
wohnen - gewohnt

machen - gemacht
arbeiten - gearbeitet

fragen - gefragt
reden - geredet

There are two exceptions to this nice regularity. The first is that verbs that have an ending -ieren, like *fotografieren*, *diskutieren*, *studieren*, etc., do **NOT** get a *ge-* prefix. (These verbs can be easily recognized as English-French cognates, and they all end with *-ieren*, so it's a pretty easy group to remember.)

studieren - studiert

manipulieren - manipuliert

reparieren - repariert

The other exception is for inseparable prefixes, like *ver-*, *be-* and *miss-*. When a verb has an inseparable prefix, it does **NOT** get a *ge-* prefix for the participle form.

besuchen - besucht

erleben - erlebt

verkaufen - verkauft

What happens with separable-prefix verbs? As you might expect, the prefix gets 'stuck' back on to the participle at the end, but the *ge-* prefix ends up in the middle of the word:

Wir haben die Tür zugemacht.
Hast du dein Zimmer aufgeräumt?

We closed the door.
Did you clean up your room?

Now that you can form the participle form of the verb, we need to learn the complete syntax for a past tense sentence. To form a complete German past tense sentence, you need to add a helping verb, either ‘haben’ or ‘sein’. Let’s look at the verbs that take ‘haben’:

Ich habe Fußball gespielt.

I played football.

Maria hat zwei Semester Deutsch gelernt.

Maria learned German for two semesters.

Hast du deine Hausaufgaben gemacht?

Did you do your homework?

As you can see, the helping verb (*haben* in these sentences) is conjugated to match the subject, while the participle (*ge-stem-t*) remains constant. Also note that the participle occurs at the very end of the sentence, while the conjugated helping verb is in the normal verb position (second element for statements, first for questions).

Let’s try a few simple sentences for practice. These are all weak (‘regular’) verbs.

1. *to make* = _____

participle = _____

Did you make the bed? = _____

2. *to clean up* = _____

participle = _____

I cleaned up my room yesterday. = _____

3. *to have* = _____
participle = _____
Tom had a party on Monday. = _____
4. *to cost* = _____
participle = _____
How much did your bike cost? = _____
5. *to wait* = _____
participle = _____
I waited 20 minutes! = _____

Now we need to learn about the other type of verb, the **strong verb**. These verbs are harder, because they often change their stem vowel in unpredictable ways, so they need to be memorized. Still, they do build their participle form in a regular fashion: a **ge-** prefix is added, and an **-en** (NOT **-t**) suffix. The stem vowel will often change, but not always. See the separate chart for details on stem vowel changes.

sing - sung
singen - gesungen

fly - flown
fliegen - geflogen

give - given
geben - gegeben

There are a handful of strong verbs that don't just change their vowel, but the whole stem. These irregular verbs just need to be memorized, but fortunately they're the most common verbs (go, come, be, do), so you'll see them a lot and get familiar with them very quickly.

gehen - gegangen

stehen - gestanden

sein - gewesen

The same rules for inseparable prefixes (no ge- added to participle) and separable prefixes (added back on before the ge-) hold true for all verbs, strong, mixed and weak.

weggehen - weggegangen

anrufen - angerufen

verstehen - verstanden

In addition to the strong verbs, there is a very small handful (about six) of verbs that are called 'mixed' verbs, because they act like a mix between strong and weak verbs. They take a ge-+-t form like weak verbs, but their stem vowels change. Again, these verbs just need to be memorized.

denken - gedacht

bringen - gebracht

kennen - gekant

Let's try a few sentences again. These are all strong or mixed verbs, so you'll need to look at your chart/list.

1. *to write* = _____

participle = _____

Yesterday I wrote a letter. = _____

2. *to speak* = _____

participle = _____

My grandfather spoke German. = _____

3. *to drink* = _____

participle = _____

Did you guys drink a lot of beer? = _____

4. *to see* = _____

participle = _____

Whom did you see? = _____

5. *to know (facts)* = _____

participle = _____

I didn't know the answer. = _____

Almost done! The last thing to learn about the *Perfekt* tense is that sometimes ‘haben’ is not the right helping verb to use. Rather, you need to use the helping verb ‘sein’ (*er ist, ich bin*, etc) for verbs that meet both of these criteria:

- a) the verb indicates a change of position or condition, or a crossing of a ‘boundary’
e.g. *gehen, kommen, wandern, sterben* (=to die), *einschlafen* (=to fall asleep)
- b) the verb is intransitive (= does NOT have a direct object)
e.g. *fahren* (*ich bin nach Milwaukee gefahren*,
BUT *ich habe mein Auto gefahren*)

In addition, the three verbs sein (to be) and bleiben (to stay) and passieren (to happen) both take ‘sein’ as a helping verb, although they don’t match the criteria above. Consider these examples:

Anna ist nach Deutschland geflogen.

Anna flew to Germany.

Ich bin um 7 Uhr nach Hause gekommen.

I came home at 7 o’clock.

Bist du schon eingeschlafen?

Have you fallen asleep already?

Paul ist ein fleißiger Student gewesen.

Paul was a hard-working student.

Once again, practice by making complete sentences. All of these verbs take 'sein' as a helping verb, but some are strong verbs (*ge-stem-en*) while others are weak (*ge-stem-t*).

1. *to come* = _____

participle = _____

Sandra didn't come to class. = _____

2. *to travel* = _____

participle = _____

We travelled to Europe last year. = _____

3. *to fly* = _____

participle = _____

Have you ever (=jemals) flown to Australia? = _____

4. *to be* = _____

participle = _____

I have never (=niemals) been in China. = _____

5. *to go* = _____

participle = _____

They went to the movies on Saturday. = _____

Now we need to mix things up. Below are blanked out sentences: some verbs take 'sein' as a helping verb, others 'haben'. Try to determine which helping verb to use.

1. Wir _____ nach Hause gegangen.
2. Paul _____ uns gesehen.
3. Wir _____ Pizza gegessen.
4. _____ ihr um zehn Uhr eingeschlafen?
5. _____ du gestern Fußball gespielt?
6. Tante Uschi _____ Pharmazie studiert.
7. _____ Sie zur Uni gelaufen?
8. Meine Großmutter _____ im Jahre 1978 gestorben.
9. Ich _____ nach Las Vegas gefahren.
10. Sie _____ ihr Fahrrad gefahren.

Finally, let's mix everything together. Below are sentences with missing verbs. Fill in the helping verbs (either 'haben' or 'sein') and also the participles (either strong or weak). Take it slow! It's hard at first, but it will get much better with a little practice.

1. *arbeiten / lernen*: Wir _____ den ganzen Tag
_____, aber wir _____ nichts
_____.

2. *aufstehen / essen*: Ich _____ heute um 6 Uhr
_____, und dann _____ ich Frühstück
_____.
3. *fragen / sagen*: Du _____ mich _____, und ich
_____ "nein" _____.
4. *mitkommen / bleiben*: _____ Georg zur Party
_____? -- Nein, er _____ zu Hause
_____.
5. *passieren / fahren*: Was _____ hier _____? -- Mein
Auto _____ gegen einen Baum _____.
6. *schneien / regnen*: _____ es gestern _____? --
Nein, aber es _____.
7. *tanzen / lachen / trinken*: Auf der Party _____ wir viel
_____, _____ und auch sehr viel
_____.
8. *sprechen / verstehen*: Er _____ mit mir _____,
aber ich _____ ihn nicht _____.

The *Perfekt* Tense

We're finally going to learn to talk about past events in German! You're about to learn what's called the 'present perfect' tense in English, or ***Das Perfekt*** in German. (Don't be confused by the word 'present' -- this is a past tense that talks about past events -- it's the English terminology that's confusing.) Although there are two different past tenses in German (as in English), the *Perfekt* that you are learning is used most often in conversational (spoken) German. You will learn the other past tense (the narrative or simple past tense) in third-semester German.

The first thing we need to talk about when learning to form the *Perfekt* is the difference between strong and weak verbs in German. We have the same difference in English, too. Consider the following examples:

<i>weak (regular):</i>	to play - play <u>ed</u> spielen - gespi <u>el</u> t	to learn - learn <u>ed</u> lernen - gel <u>er</u> nt
------------------------	---	---

<i>strong (irregular):</i>	to speak - spok <u>en</u> sprechen - gesproch <u>en</u>	to give - giv <u>en</u> geben - gege <u>b</u> en
----------------------------	--	---

Like English, German has a group of 'regular' (termed 'weak') verbs that always add a -t ending for the past participle, but another very different group of 'irregular' (termed 'strong') verbs that add an -en. We will be learning both kinds today, but for just now, we're going to focus on the (easier) weak verbs.

To form the past participle of the German *Perfekt* tense for **weak (regular) verbs**, you need to take the **stem** of the verb (the infinitive minus the *-en* ending) and add a **ge-** prefix and a **-t** suffix.

spielen - gespielt
wohnen - gewohnt

machen - gemacht
arbeiten - gearbeitet

fragen - gefragt
reden - geredet

There are two exceptions to this nice regularity. The first is that verbs that have an ending **-ieren**, like *fotografieren*, *diskutieren*, *studieren*, etc., do **NOT** get a *ge-* prefix. (These verbs can be easily recognized as English-French cognates, and they all end with *-ieren*, so it's a pretty easy group to remember.)

studieren - studiert

manipulieren - manipuliert

reparieren - repariert

The other exception is for inseparable prefixes, like *ver-*, *be-* and *miss-*. When a verb has an inseparable prefix, it does **NOT** get a *ge-* prefix for the participle form.

besuchen - besucht

erleben - erlebt

verkaufen - verkauft

What happens with separable-prefix verbs? As you might expect, the prefix gets 'stuck' back on to the participle at the end, but the *ge-* prefix ends up in the middle of the word:

Wir haben die Tür zugemacht.
Hast du dein Zimmer aufgeräumt?

We closed the door.
Did you clean up your room?

Now that you can form the participle form of the verb, we need to learn the complete syntax for a past tense sentence. To form a complete German past tense sentence, you need to add a helping verb, either ‘haben’ or ‘sein’. Let’s look at the verbs that take ‘haben’:

Ich habe Fußball gespielt.

I played football.

Maria hat zwei Semester Deutsch gelernt.

Maria learned German for two semesters.

Hast du deine Hausaufgaben gemacht?

Did you do your homework?

As you can see, the helping verb (*haben* in these sentences) is conjugated to match the subject, while the participle (*ge-stem-t*) remains constant. Also note that the participle occurs at the very end of the sentence, while the conjugated helping verb is in the normal verb position (second element for statements, first for questions).

Let’s try a few simple sentences for practice. These are all weak (‘regular’) verbs.

1. *to make* = **machen**

participle = **gemacht**

Did you make the bed? = **Hast du das Bett gemacht?**

2. *to clean up* = **aufräumen**

participle = **aufgeräumt**

I cleaned up my room yesterday. = **Ich habe gestern mein Zimmer aufgeräumt.**

3. *to have* = haben
participle = gehabt
Tom had a party on Monday. = Tom hat am Montag eine Party gehabt.
4. *to cost* = kosten
participle = gekostet
How much did your bike cost? = Wieviel hat dein Fahrrad gekostet?
5. *to wait* = warten
participle = gewartet
I waited 20 minutes! = Ich habe 20 Minuten gewartet!

Now we need to learn about the other type of verb, the **strong verb**. These verbs are harder, because they often change their stem vowel in unpredictable ways, so they need to be memorized. Still, they do build their participle form in a regular fashion: a **ge-** prefix is added, and an **-en** (NOT **-t**) suffix. The stem vowel will often change, but not always. See the separate chart for details on stem vowel changes.

sing - sung
singen - gesungen

fly - flown
fliegen - geflogen

give - given
geben - gegeben

There are a handful of strong verbs that don't just change their vowel, but the whole stem. These irregular verbs just need to be memorized, but fortunately they're the most common verbs (go, come, be, do), so you'll see them a lot and get familiar with them very quickly.

gehen - gegangen

stehen - gestanden

sein - gewesen

The same rules for inseparable prefixes (no ge- added to participle) and separable prefixes (added back on before the ge-) hold true for all verbs, strong, mixed and weak.

weggehen - weggegangen

anrufen - angerufen

verstehen - verstanden

In addition to the strong verbs, there is a very small handful (about six) of verbs that are called 'mixed' verbs, because they act like a mix between strong and weak verbs. They take a ge-+-t form like weak verbs, but their stem vowels change. Again, these verbs just need to be memorized.

denken - gedacht

bringen - gebracht

kennen - gekant

Let's try a few sentences again. These are all strong or mixed verbs, so you'll need to look at your chart/list.

1. *to write* = **schreiben**

participle = **geschrieben**

Yesterday I wrote a letter. = **Gestern habe ich einen Brief geschrieben.**

2. *to speak* = **sprechen**

participle = **gesprochen**

My grandfather spoke German. = **Mein Großvater hat Deutsch gesprochen.**

3. *to drink* = **trinken**

participle = **getrunken**

Did you guys drink a lot of beer? = **Habt ihr viel Bier getrunken?**

4. *to see* = **sehen**

participle = **gesehen**

Whom did you see? = **Wen hast du gesehen?**

5. *to know (facts)* = **wissen**

participle = **gewusst**

I didn't know the answer. = **Ich habe die Antwort nicht gewusst.**

Almost done! The last thing to learn about the *Perfekt* tense is that sometimes ‘haben’ is not the right helping verb to use. Rather, you need to use the helping verb ‘sein’ (*er ist, ich bin*, etc) for verbs that meet both of these criteria:

- a) the verb indicates a change of position or condition, or a crossing of a ‘boundary’
e.g. *gehen, kommen, wandern, sterben* (=to die), *einschlafen* (=to fall asleep)
- b) the verb is intransitive (= does NOT have a direct object)
e.g. *fahren* (*ich bin nach Milwaukee gefahren*,
BUT *ich habe mein Auto gefahren*)

In addition, the three verbs sein (to be) and bleiben (to stay) and passieren (to happen) both take ‘sein’ as a helping verb, although they don’t match the criteria above. Consider these examples:

Anna ist nach Deutschland geflogen.

Anna flew to Germany.

Ich bin um 7 Uhr nach Hause gekommen.

I came home at 7 o’clock.

Bist du schon eingeschlafen?

Have you fallen asleep already?

Paul ist ein fleißiger Student gewesen.

Paul was a hard-working student.

Once again, practice by making complete sentences. All of these verbs take 'sein' as a helping verb, but some are strong verbs (ge-stem-en) while others are weak (ge-stem-t).

1. to come = **kommen**

participle = **gekommen**

Sandra didn't come to class. = **Sandra ist nicht zur Klasse gekommen.**

2. to travel = **reisen**

participle = **gereist**

We travelled to Europe last year. = **Wir sind letztes Jahr nach Europa gereist.**

3. to fly = **fliegen**

participle = **geflogen**

Have you ever (=jemals) flown to Australia? = **Bist du jemals nach Au. geflogen?**

4. to be = **sein**

participle = **gewesen**

I have never (=niemals) been in China. = **Ich bin niemals in China gewesen.**

5. to go = **gehen**

participle = **gegangen**

They went to the movies on Saturday. = **Sie sind am Samstag ins Kino gegangen.**

Now we need to mix things up. Below are blanked out sentences: some verbs take 'sein' as a helping verb, others 'haben'. Try to determine which helping verb to use.

1. Wir sind nach Hause gegangen.
2. Paul hat uns gesehen.
3. Wir haben Pizza gegessen.
4. Seid ihr um zehn Uhr eingeschlafen?
5. Hast du gestern Fußball gespielt?
6. Tante Uschi hat Pharmazie studiert.
7. Sind Sie zur Uni gelaufen?
8. Meine Großmutter ist im Jahre 1978 gestorben.
9. Ich bin nach Las Vegas gefahren.
10. Sie hat ihr Fahrrad gefahren.

Finally, let's mix everything together. Below are sentences with missing verbs. Fill in the helping verbs (either 'haben' or 'sein') and also the participles (either strong or weak). Take it slow! It's hard at first, but it will get much better with a little practice.

1. *arbeiten / lernen*: Wir haben den ganzen Tag
gearbeitet, aber wir haben nichts
gelernt.

2. *aufstehen / essen*: Ich **bin** heute um 6 Uhr
aufgestanden, und dann **habe** ich Frühstück
gegessen.
3. *fragen / sagen*: Du **hast** mich **gefragt**, und ich
habe "nein" **gesagt**.
4. *mitkommen / bleiben*: **Ist** Georg zur Party
mitgekommen? -- Nein, er **ist** zu Hause
geblieben.
5. *passieren / fahren*: Was **ist** hier **passiert**? -- Mein
Auto **ist** gegen einen Baum **gefahren**.
6. *schneien / regnen*: **Hat** es gestern **geschneit**? --
Nein, aber es **hat** **geregnet**.
7. *tanzen / lachen / trinken*: Auf der Party **haben** wir viel
getanzt, **gelacht** und auch sehr viel
getrunken.
8. *sprechen / verstehen*: Er **hat** mit mir **gesprachen**,
aber ich **habe** ihn nicht **verstanden**.