

Verb Tenses, Moods, and Voices you should know:

<i>Präsens</i> (present tense):	Ich lerne Deutsch.	Ich gehe nach Hause.
<i>Präteritum</i> (simple past tense):	Ich lernte Deutsch.	Ich ging nach Hause.
<i>Perfekt</i> (perfect or conversational past):	Ich habe Deutsch gelernt.	Ich bin nach Hause gegangen.
<i>Futur</i> (future):	Ich werde Deutsch lernen.	Ich werde nach Hause gehen.
<i>Konjunktiv mit würde</i> (subjunctive with würde):	Ich würde Deutsch lernen.	Ich würde nach Hause gehen.
<i>Konjunktiv II</i> (subjunctive):	Ich lernte Deutsch.	Ich ginge nach Hause.
<i>Passiv Präsens</i> (passive present):	Deutsch wird gelernt.	
<i>Passiv Präteritum</i> (passive simple past):	Deutsch wurde gelernt.	
<i>Passiv Perfekt</i> (passive perfect):	Deutsch ist gelernt worden.	
<i>Passiv mit Modalverb</i> (passive with modal):	Deutsch soll gelernt werden.	
<i>Imperativ</i> (imperative):	Lern Deutsch! Lernt Deutsch! Lernen Sie Deutsch!	

Weak or Strong? -t or -en?

Remember that there are two main types of verbs (weak and strong), plus a category of ‘mixed’ verbs and some others that are completely irregular.

Weak verbs are characterized by -t endings: they add a -te in the simple past tense, and have a ge-....-t form in the past participle. Their stem vowels never change or umlaut -- even in the subjunctive mood, they simply have -te endings. Some common examples of weak verbs are *machen* (*machte, gemacht*), *spielen* (*spielte, gespielt*), *reisen* (*reiste, gereist*), and *stellen* (*stellte, gestellt*). A full conjugation of the simple past endings of weak verbs is:

ich machte	wir machten
du machtest	ihr machtet
er machte	Sie machten

Strong verbs are characterized by a change in the stem vowel: they have no extra endings in the simple past tense (merely a vowel change), and they have a ge-...-en participle. In the subjunctive mood, strong verbs add an umlaut to their simple past stem vowel if possible. Some examples of strong verbs are *kommen* (*kam, gekommen*), *schreiben* (*schrieb, geschrieben*), *fahren* (*fuhr, gefahren*), and *lesen* (*las, gelesen*). A full conjugation of the simple past endings of strong verbs is:

ich ging	wir gingen
du gingst	ihr gingt
er ging	Sie gingen

Mixed verbs show vowel changes, but they also have -t- endings. Some examples of mixed verbs are *bringen* (*brachte, gebracht*), *nennen* (*nannte, genannt*), and *wissen* (*wusste, gewusst*). The modal verbs are also mixed verbs: *können* (*konnte, gekonnt*), *müssen* (*musste, gemusst*), etc. These verbs umlaut in the subjunctive, but not in the simple past tense, and their endings are the same as weak verbs.

Irregular verbs are verbs that have unusual spelling changes or completely different forms for some tenses. Four very common irregular verbs are *sein* (*war, gewesen*), *gehen* (*ging, gegangen*), *haben* (*hatte, gehabt*), and *stehen* (*stand, gestanden*). These verbs simply have to be memorized.

Helping Verb: Haben or Sein?

Remember that the perfect tense (conversational past) in German can have either haben or sein as a helping verb. This has nothing to do with the strong vs. weak distinction; rather, the question which determines whether a verb uses *sein* is: “does the verb show a change from one location to another, or from one condition/state to another?” If yes (*gehen, fahren, einschlafen, sterben*), then the helping verb is *sein* (e.g. *ist gegangen*). There are only a few exceptions to this rule: primarily the verbs *sein* and *bleiben*, both of which need *sein* as a helping verb.

Usage notes: Which tense? Which mood?

The simple past (*Präteritum*) and perfect/conversational past (*Perfekt*) have exactly the same meaning in German. The primary difference is that the perfect tense is used when speaking and relating a series of recent events; the simple past is used far more in writing, in telling stories, and in relating historical timelines. For the final, you will NOT be required to choose between tenses directly: we’ll tell you what tense we’re expecting.

Similarly, the subjunctive with *würde* and the true subjunctive mood both have the same meaning in German. The *würde*-subjunctive is more common overall, especially in speech and when the mood isn’t automatically clear from the verb form (e.g. *lernte* could be ‘learned’ or it could be ‘would learn’ -- if the context doesn’t make it clear, then *würde lernen* should be used).