

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL PARTS OF A VERB?

The principal parts of a verb are the forms we need to create all the different tenses

PRESENT	I eat
PRESENT PERFECT	I have eaten
PAST	I ate
PAST PERFECT	I had eaten
FUTURE	I will eat
FUTURE PERFECT	I will have eaten

IN ENGLISH

The principal parts of an English verb are the infinitive (*eat*), the past tense (*ate*), and the past participle (*eaten*). If you know these parts, you can form all the other tenses of a verb (see *What is Meant by Tense?*, p. 69, *What is the Past Tense?*, p. 81, and *What is a Participle?*, p. 89).

English verbs fall into two categories depending on how they form their principal parts:

1. **REGULAR VERBS**—These verbs are called regular because their past tense and past participle forms follow the predictable pattern of adding *-ed*, *-d*, or *-t* to the infinitive.

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
to walk	walked	walked
to seem	seemed	seemed
to burn	burned (burnt)	burned (burnt)

Since the past tense and the past participle of regular verbs are identical, regular verbs have only two distinct principal parts, the infinitive and the past.

2. **IRREGULAR VERBS**—These verbs are called irregular because their principal parts do not follow a regular pattern:

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
to sing	sang	sung
to draw	drew	drawn
to hit	hit	hit
to lie	lay	lain
to ride	rode	ridden

19. PRINCIPAL PARTS OF A VERB

IN GERMAN

Three of the principal parts are the same as in English: the infinitive, the past tense, and the past participle. For the past tense, the principal part is given in the 3rd person singular. German adds a fourth principal part for irregular verbs with stem vowel change in the 2nd and 3rd person singular of the present tense. This form is also given in the 3rd person singular.

<i>to eat</i>	essen	INFINITIVE
<i>eats</i>	isst	PRESENT TENSE (3 rd person sing.)
<i>ate</i>	aß	PAST TENSE (3 rd person sing.)
<i>eaten</i>	gegessen	PAST PARTICIPLE

German verbs fall into two categories depending on how they form their principal parts: weak verbs and strong verbs. A few irregular verbs fall between these two categories. Your German textbook will show you how to form the principal parts of these verbs.

WEAK VERBS

Weak verbs resemble English regular verbs in that the stem of the verb stays the same, despite other modifications to form the principal parts.

STEM—The stem is obtained by dropping the final *-en* from the infinitive (or with a few verbs like *tun* and *ändern* by dropping the final *-n*).

MODIFICATIONS—The various principal parts are formed by adding various prefixes and/or suffixes to the stem.

■ the past tense is formed by adding a *-t-* (or if the verb stem ends in *-d* or *-t*, by adding *-et*) to the stem of the infinitive and then adding the endings for the different persons.

■ the past participle is formed by adding the prefix *ge-* and the suffix *-t* or *-et* to the stem of the verb. Note that a few weak verbs have past participles without the *ge-* prefix.

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE (3 rd per. sing.)	PAST PARTICIPLE
<i>to make</i>	machen	gemacht
<i>to work</i>	arbeiten	gearbeitet
<i>to believe</i>	glauben	geglaubt

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German verbs fall into two categories depending on how they form their principal parts: weak verbs and strong verbs. A few irregular verbs fall between these two categories. Your German textbook will show you how to form the principal parts of these verbs.

WEAK VERBS

Weak verbs resemble English regular verbs in that the stem of the verb stays the same, despite other modifications to form the principal parts.

STEM—The stem is obtained by dropping the final *-en* from the infinitive (or with a few verbs like *tun* and *ändern* by dropping the final *-n*).

MODIFICATIONS—The various principal parts are formed by adding various prefixes and/or suffixes to the stem.

■ the past tense is formed by adding a *-t-* (or if the verb stem ends in *-d* or *-t*, by adding *-et*) to the stem of the infinitive and then adding the endings for the different persons.

■ the past participle is formed by adding the prefix *ge-* and the suffix *-t* or *-et* to the stem of the verb. Note that a few weak verbs have past participles without the *ge-* prefix.

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE (3 rd per. sing.)	PAST PARTICIPLE
<i>to make</i>	machen	gemacht
<i>to work</i>	arbeiten	gearbeitet
<i>to believe</i>	glauben	geglaubt

STRONG VERBS

Strong verbs resemble English irregular verbs in that they have unpredictable principal parts. You will have to memorize these parts as you learn new verbs.

The irregularity of strong verbs is shown in a variety of ways:

- the vowel of the verb stem will often change in the past tense and in the past participle.
- the past tense endings are different than those for weak verbs
- the past participle is usually formed by adding the prefix *ge-*, and it does not end in *-t* but rather in *-en* or *-n*.

	INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
<i>to find</i>	finden	fand	gefunden
<i>to come</i>	kommen	kam	gekommen
<i>to lose</i>	verlieren	verlor	verloren
<i>to sing</i>	singen	sang	gesungen
<i>to do</i>	tun	tat	getan

- when the stem vowel changes in the 2nd and 3rd person singular of the present tense, you will need to know a fourth principal part, the 3rd person singular of the present tense.

	INFINITIVE	PRESENT	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
<i>to run</i>	laufen	läuft	lief	gelaufen
<i>to read</i>	lesen	liest	las	gelesen
<i>to sleep</i>	schlafen	schläft	schief	geschlafen
<i>to take</i>	nehmen	nimmt	nahm	genommen

Only by memorizing the principal parts of the strong verbs can you conjugate them properly in all their tenses.

— REVIEW —

Indicate whether the following German verbs are weak (w: end with *-(e)t*) or strong (s: end with *-(e)n*).

1. kaufen	kaufte-	gekauft	w	s
2. beginnen	begann-	begonnen	w	s
3. liegen	lag-	gelegen	w	s
4. fragen	fragte-	gefragt	w	s
5. sitzen	sah-	gesehen	w	s

WHAT IS MEANT BY TENSE?

The TENSE of a verb indicates when the action of the verb takes place: at the present time, in the past, or in the future.

I am studying	PRESENT
I studied	PAST
I will study	FUTURE

As you can see in the above examples, just by putting the verb in a different tense and without giving any additional information (such as "I am studying *now*," "I studied *yesterday*," "I will study *tomorrow*"), you can indicate when the action of the verb takes place.

Tenses may be classified according to the way they are formed. A SIMPLE TENSE consists of only one verb form (I *studied*), while a COMPOUND TENSE consists of one or more auxiliaries plus the main verb (I *am studying*).

In this section we will only consider tenses of the indicative mood (see *What is Meant by Mood?*, p. 71).

IN ENGLISH

Listed below are the main tenses of the indicative mood whose equivalents you will encounter in German:

PRESENT	
I study	PRESENT
I do study	PRESENT EMPHATIC
I am studying	PRESENT PROGRESSIVE
PAST	
I studied	SIMPLE PAST
I did study	PAST EMPHATIC
I have studied	PRESENT PERFECT
I was studying	PAST PROGRESSIVE
I had studied	PAST PERFECT
FUTURE	
I will study	FUTURE
I will have studied	FUTURE PERFECT

As you can see, there are only two simple tenses (present and simple past). All the other tenses are compound tenses.

IN GERMAN

Listed below are the main tenses of the indicative mood that you will encounter in German.

PRESENT		<i>I study, I do study</i>	PRESENT
ich studiere		<i>I am studying</i>	
PAST			
ich studierte		<i>I studied,</i>	SIMPLE PAST/
ich habe studiert		<i>I was studying</i>	IMPERFECT
ich hatte studiert		<i>I have studied</i>	PRESENT PERFECT
		<i>I had studied</i>	PAST PERFECT
FUTURE			
ich werde studieren		<i>I will study</i>	FUTURE
ich werde studiert haben		<i>I will have studied</i>	FUTURE PERFECT

As you can see, there are fewer present tense forms in German than in English. The compound tenses in German are formed with the auxiliary verbs **haben** (*to have*) or **sein** (*to be*) and **werden** (*to become*) + the main verb (see *What are Auxiliary Verbs?*, p. 76).

This handbook discusses the various tenses and their usage in separate chapters: *What is the Present Tense?*, p. 79; *What is the Past Tense?*, p. 81; *What is the Future Tense?*, p. 87; and *What are the Perfect Tenses?*, p. 83. Verb tenses can be grouped according to the mood in which they are used.

CAREFUL—Do not assume that tenses with the same name are used the same way in English and in German.

WHAT IS MEANT BY MOOD?

The word **MOOD** is a variation of the word *mode*, meaning manner or way. The mood is expressed by a form of the verb that indicates the attitude of the speaker toward what he or she is saying.

As a beginning student of German, you need to know the names of the moods so that you will understand what your German textbook is referring to when it uses these terms.

Verb forms are divided into moods, which, in turn, are then subdivided into one or more tenses. You will learn when to use the various moods as you learn verbs and their tenses.

IN ENGLISH

Verbs can be in one of three moods:

INDICATIVE MOOD—The indicative mood is used to indicate an action of the verb that really happens or is likely to happen. This is the most common mood, and most of the verb forms that you use in everyday conversation belong to the indicative mood.

Robert studies German.

Mary is here.

The indicative mood occurs in the present tense (see p. 79), the past tense (see p. 81), and the future tense (see p. 87).

IMPERATIVE MOOD—The imperative mood is used to express a command. The imperative mood does not have different tenses (see p. 73).

Robert, study German now!

Mary, be here on time!

SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD—The subjunctive mood is used to express an attitude or feeling about the action of the verb. The subjunctive mood has different tense forms (see p. 147).

I wish she were here.

If only we knew where they are.

The teacher recommended that they do the exercise.

— REVIEW —

Circle the words that correspond to the German present tense.

1. So John and Vera really do play tennis.
2. Yes, John plays often.
3. In fact, Vera is playing right now too.
4. Our friends are playing with them.
5. Do you play too?

WHAT IS THE PAST TENSE?

The PAST TENSE is used to express an action that occurred in the past.

I saw you yesterday.

IN ENGLISH

There are several verb forms that indicate the past tense

I worked	SIMPLE PAST
I was working	PAST PROGRESSIVE
I used to work	WITH HELPING VERB USED TO
I did work	PAST EMPHATIC
I have worked	PRESENT PERFECT
I had worked	PAST PERFECT

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The simple past is a simple tense; that is, it consists of one word (*worked* in the example above). The other past tenses are compound tenses; that is, they consist of more than one word, an auxiliary plus a main verb (*was working*, *did work*). The present and past perfect tenses are discussed in a separate section (see *What are the Perfect Tenses?*, p. 83).

IN GERMAN

There are two tenses most commonly used for expressing an action in the past: the simple past and the present perfect.

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SIMPLE PAST—The simple past, also called the IMPERFECT (Imperfekt), or the PRÆTERITE (Präteritum), consists of only one word.

Ich arbeitete *I worked*
Ich schwamm *I swam*

PRESENT PERFECT—The present perfect tense (Perfekt) is a compound tense, consisting of two parts: the auxiliary verbs **haben** (*to have*) or **sein** (*to be*) conjugated in the present tense + the past participle of the main verb (see *What are Auxiliary Verbs?*, p. 76 and *What is a Participle?*, p. 89).

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Ich habe gearbeitet *I worked; I have worked*
Ich bin geschwommen *I swam; I have swam*

The formation of both the simple past and the present perfect depends on whether the verb is categorized as a

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strong verb or a weak verb (see p. 67). Your German textbook will explain in detail the formation of these two tenses for both groups of verbs.

CAREFUL—It is important to remember that the simple past and the present perfect have equivalent meanings in German. Their difference is one of style and usage: generally, the simple past is used in written German and the perfect in spoken German.

— **REVIEW** —

Underline the verb form(s) in the following sentences.

■ Indicate whether the verb is in the simple past (SP) or the present perfect (PP).

1. Last summer I went to Germany with my family.

SP	PP
----	----
2. My mother has visited Germany many times.

SP	PP
----	----
3. Our trip was fun and interesting.

SP	PP
----	----
4. We travelled around for two weeks.

SP	PP
----	----
5. I have shown my vacation photos to my German class.

SP	PP
----	----

WHAT ARE THE PERFECT TENSES?

The **PERFECT TENSES** are compound verbs made up of the auxiliary verb *to have* + the past participle of the main verb (see *What is a Participle?*, p. 89).

I *have not seen* him.

auxiliary	past participle
verb	of to see

They *had already gone*.

auxiliary	past participle
verb	of to go

IN ENGLISH

There are three perfect tenses formed with the auxiliary verb *to have* + the past participle of the main verb. The name of each perfect tense is based on the tense used for the auxiliary verb *to have*.

1. **PRESENT PERFECT**—*to have* in the present tense + the past participle of the main verb (See *What is the Present Tense?*, p. 79).

I *have eaten*.

present	past participle
of to eat	

The boys *have washed* the car.

present	past participle
of to wash	

2. **PAST PERFECT (PLUPERFECT)**—*to have* in the simple past + the past participle of the main verb (see *What is the Past Tense?*, p. 81). The past perfect is used to express an action completed in the past before some other past action or event.

I *had eaten* before six.

simple	past participle
past	of to eat

The boys *had washed* the car before the storm.

simple	past participle
past	of to wash

3. **FUTURE PERFECT**—*to have* in the future tense + past participle of the main verb (see *What is the Future Tense?*, p. 87). The future perfect expresses an action which will be completed in the future before some other action or event occurs in the future.

I will have eaten.
 future past participle
 of to eat

The boys will have washed the car by Thursday.
 future past participle
 of to wash

IN GERMAN

As in English, there are three perfect tenses in the indicative mood (see *What is Meant by Mood?*, p. 71). The perfect tenses use a form of the auxiliary verb **haben** (*to have*) or **sein** (*to be*) + the past participle of the main verb. You must memorize which verbs require **sein** and which require **haben** as the auxiliary. As in English, the name of the tense reflects the tense of the auxiliary verb.

We are listing the various perfect tenses here so that you can see the pattern they follow. The perfect tenses are not always used in the same way in German as in English. Consult your German textbook in order to learn how to use them properly.

1. **PERFECT (PERFEKT)**—**haben** (*to have*) or **sein** (*to be*) in the present tense + past participle of the main verb.

Wir sind ins Kino gegangen.
 We have gone to the movies.
 present perfect

Wir went to the movies.
 simple past

Wir haben den Film gesehen.
 We have seen the film.
 present perfect

Wir saw the film.
 simple past

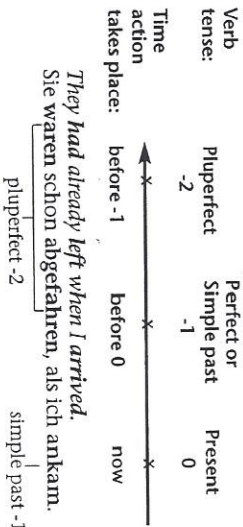
Note that although the perfect in German has a similar structure to the English present perfect, using the simple past in English results in a better translation.

2. **PAST PERFECT OR PLUPERFECT (PLUSQUAMPERFEKT)**—**haben** (*to have*) or **sein** (*to be*) in the simple past tense + past participle of the main verb.

Wir waren schon ins Kino gegangen.
 simple past of sein (*to be*) past participle of gehen (*to go*)
 We had already gone to the movies.

Wir hatten den Film schon gesehen.
 simple past of haben (*to have*) past participle of sehen (*to see*)
 We had already seen the film.

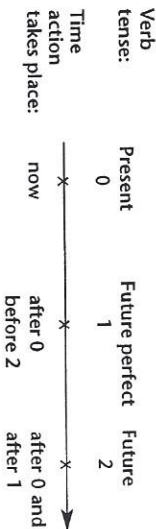
Generally, the German past perfect is used the same way as the past perfect in English: to express an action or condition that ended before some other past action or condition which may or may not be stated. Notice how we can express the sequence of events by using different tenses.



3. **FUTURE PERFECT TENSE**—**haben** (*to have*) or **sein** (*to be*) in the future tense + past participle of the main verb.

Wir werden den Film gesehen haben.
 future tense of haben (*to have*)
 We will have seen the film.

Generally, the German future perfect is used the same way as the future perfect in English: to express an action which will be completed in the future before some other future action or event, which may or may not be stated. Notice how we can express the sequence of events by using different tenses.



They will have left before I arrive.

Sie werden abgefahren sein, bevor ich ankomme.

future perfect (1) event in the future (2)

Both action (1) and event (2) will occur at some future time, but action (1) will be completed before event (2) takes place. Therefore, action (1) is in the future perfect tense.

You will have to learn to recognize these tenses because they indicate the sequence in which events take place.

— REVIEW —

Circle the tense of the verb in italics: perfect (P), pluperfect (PP), or future perfect (FP).

- 1. We *had* already *gone* when Katie arrived. P PP FP
- 2. Barbara *hasn't left* yet. P PP FP
- 3. I *will have graduated* by next summer. P PP FP
- 4. *Have you seen* my new car? P PP FP

WHAT IS THE FUTURE TENSE?

The FUTURE TENSE indicates that an action will take place some time in the future.

I *will return* the book as soon as I've read it.
future

IN ENGLISH

The future tense is formed with the auxiliary *will* or *shall* + the dictionary form of the main verb. In conversation *shall* and *will* are often shortened to 'll.

Paul and Mary *will do* their homework tomorrow.
I'll leave tonight.

An action that will take place in the future can also be expressed in the present tense with an adverb of future time or an expression of future time.

Maria is *meeting* Paul tomorrow.
present progressive adverb
Paul goes to Berlin *next week*.
present expression of future time

IN GERMAN

The future tense is formed with the auxiliary verb *werden* (*to become*) + the infinitive of the main verb. The verb *werden* is conjugated to agree with the subject and the infinitive remains unchanged. The infinitive is placed at the end of the sentence.

Maria und Paul *werden* ihre Hausaufgabe *schreiben*.
3rd per. pl. infinitive
Maria and Paul *will write* their homework.
Ich *werde* heute *abend* *ausgehen*.
1st per. sing. infinitive
I *shall go out* tonight.

As in English, an action that will take place in the future can also be expressed in the present tense with an adverb or an expression of future time.