

1 Introduction


The German language has **six different tenses** (three past tenses, one present tense and two future tenses) to **express actions over time**. Thus, learning them is mandatory to master German successfully. Knowing the conjugations of the verb **sein** (to be) and the verb **haben** (to have), as well as the creation of the partizip II will help you a lot, as we need those verbs later.

1.1 Verb „sein“

The verb sein (to be) is one of the most important verbs, as many tenses are based on the conjugation of this verb.

Personalpronomina	Present (Präsens)	Past (Präteritum)
Ich	bin	war
Du	bist	warst
Er Sie (she) Es	ist	war
Wir	sind	waren
Ihr	seid	wart
Sie	sind	waren

Tab. 1 — Conjugation of „sein“ (to be)

①  Fill in the gaps with the right conjugation.

- a) Ich 20 Jahre alt.
- b) Lukas und Tom müde.
- c) Die Schule langweilig.
- d) Deutsch spannend.
- e) Beeil dich! Du zu spät!
- f) Wir im Zug.
- g) Die Häuser schön.
- h) Sie fertig? (3. Person Plural)
- i) Die Aufgabe einfach.

1.2 Verb „haben“ (to have)

The verb "haben" is as important as the verb to be, since it is used to construct tenses. Conjugating this verb is important for the construction of the tenses.

Personalpronomina	Present (Präsens)	Past (Präteritum)
Ich	habe	hatte
Du	hast	hattest
Er Sie (she) Es	hat	hatte
Wir	haben	hatten
Ihr	habt	hattet
Sie	haben	hatten

Tab. 2 — Conjugation of „haben“ (to have)

🔊② ➡ Fill in the gaps with the right conjugation of the verb to have

- a) Die Kinder Ferien.
- b) Diese Schule ist riesig. Sie viele Schüler.
- c) Dieses Auto 8 Zylinder
- d) Tom und Emma ein Auto.
- e) Ihr Auto vier Reifen.
- f) Marcel ein Eis.
- g) Du die Hausaufgaben nicht gemacht.
- h) Frau Müller, Ich meine Hausaufgaben nicht, weil ich krank war.
- i) Die Kinder viele Bälle.

2 Tenses

2.1 Präsens

The "Präsens" (present simple) is a tense which is used to talk about present and future in German. This tense is equal to the English present simple and present progressive as well as the future with will or going to.

It can be simply build by conjugating the verb in the present tense. The conjugation of regular verbs in the present tense is very fundamental for many other grammatical topics. Irregular verbs may be different in the way they are conjugated. Thus, learning them as well as the conjugation pattern of regular verbs is useful. Some basic irregular verbs are:

1. haben
2. geben
3. essen
4. liegen
5. sprechen

Personalpronomina	Ending	Sample verb (lernen)
Ich	-e	lerne
Du	-st	lernst
Er Sie (she) Es	-t	lernt
Wir	-en	lernen
Ihr	-t	lernt
Sie	-en	lernen

Tab. 3 — Creation of many regular verbs

Memorising this table will help you a lot conjugating many regular verbs. By using this table, we can derive the following patterns:

1. The conjugation of the **3rd person sg** is equal to the **2nd person pl**
2. The conjugation of the **1st person pl** is equal to the **3rd person pl**

Knowing this requires you only to memorise the first, second, third and fourth ending.

2.2 Perfekt

The Perfekt (present perfect) is a very important past tense, as it is commonly used by natives to express things in the past. The focus of this past tense is on actions/things that are completed in the recent past. Although its grammatical definition, Germans use this tense to express everything in the past. **This only applies in the spoken language!**

The Perfekt is constructed by the conjugated verb of haben/sein + Partizip II.

2.2.1 When to use „Haben“ and „Sein“

Using the right verb is very important for the Perfekt. Only certain verbs are required to be build with the conjugated form of "sein".
However, there is a simple rule which can be applied.

If you look at the passé Composé in French, you will see the same problem. Some words are conjugated with être (to be) meanwhile others with avoir (to have). In order to make life easier, there is a rule:

If something or someone is moving in terms of moving from a to b, we shall use être (to be). In every other scenario avoir (to have).

The same rule applies for the German language too.

If someone or something is in motion, we shall use the verb sein. If nothing is in motion, then we shall use the verb haben.

Example:

1. Er geht über die Straße. (He is crossing the road -> He is in motion -> perfekt with sein)
2. Marie liebt ihren Freund (Marie loves her boyfriend -> She isn't in motion-> perfekt with haben)



Difference Haben/Sein

The difference between haben and sein is easy. If someone or something is in motion, then it is sein. In all other cases its haben.

2.2.2 Partizip II

The partizip II (past participle) is generally formed according to following structure:

2.2.2.1 Regular Verbs

With regular verbs, you only need to determine the verb stem (Verbstamm). After that you add **ge** as a prefix and **t** as a suffix.

1. lernen - ge+lern+t
2. kaufen - ge+kauf+t

2.2.2.2 Irregular Verbs

Irregular verbs are a bit more complex, but *this will only scratch the surface*.

A strong verb *basically* has **ge** as a prefix and **en** as suffix. Also the verb stem will be changed into the past simple and or the participle.

1. sehen - gesehen
2. laufen -ge+lauf+en

2.2.3 Construction

The construction of the Perfekt is easy:

haben/sein + Partizip II

Remember: The partizip II is always the last word.

🔗 ③ ➡ Built the Perfekt Tense

- a) Max und Emma nach Hause (laufen)
- b) Nico sein Eis (schlecken)
- c) Wir die Hausaufgaben (machen)
- d) Die Schüler das Buch fertig (lesen)
- e) Daniel sehr viel Wein (trinken)
- f) Diese Hausaufgabe keiner (machen)
- g) Ich meine Hausaufgaben (erledigen)

2.3 Präteritum or Imperfekt

The Präteritum is equivalent to the simple past. Although its rare use in the spoken language, the Imperfekt is used in many writing situations. Thus, learning it is useful.

Recipe for building the Imperfekt

1. Decide whether your verb stem is weak or strong
2. Remove the -en of the infinitive form
3. Identify the personal pronoun
4. Look the suffix in the table up

Personalpronomina	weak verbs	strong verbs
Ich	-te	---
Du	-test	-st
Er Sie (she) Es	-te	---
Wir	-ten	-en
Ihr	-tet	-t
Sie	-ten	-en

Tab. 4 — List of different suffixes

 Imperfekt

- a) Max und Emma nach Hause (laufen)
- b) Nico sein Eis (schlecken)
- c) Wir die Hausaufgaben (machen)
- d) Die Schüler das Buch fertig (lesen)
- e) Daniel sehr viel Wein (trinken)
- f) Diese Hausaufgabe keiner (machen)
- g) Ich meine Hausaufgaben (erledigen)

2.4 Plusquamperfekt (PQP)

The Plusquamperfekt (PQP, past perfect tense) is used to express activities that took place before a certain point in time in the past. It is the German equivalent of the English past perfect tense. We use this tense in narratives together with the simple past to refer to something that happened before a past event.

However, this tense isn't commonly used in the spoken language as the Perfekt tense is used for express nearly every past action **in the spoken language**.

In order to master German, you should learn this tense too.

The PQP is equivalently structured like the perfekt tense, despite of the tense of **haben/sein**. All other rules still apply!!

past of sein/past of haben + Partizip II

Personalpronomina	Haben (past)	Sein (past)
Ich	hatte	war
Du	hattest	warst
Er Sie (she) Es	hatte	war
Wir	hatten	waren
Ihr	hattet	wart
Sie	hatten	waren

Tab. 5 — Conjugation of Haben and sein in the past

🔗 ⑤ ➔ Built the past perfect

- a) Max und Emma nach Hause (laufen)
- b) Nico sein Eis (schlecken)
- c) Wir die Hausaufgaben (machen)
- d) Die Schüler das Buch fertig (lesen)
- e) Daniel sehr viel Wein (trinken)
- f) Diese Hausaufgabe keiner (machen)
- g) Ich meine Hausaufgaben (erledigen)

2.5 Futur I

The Futur I is a future tense which describes actions, intentions and plans in the near future. Although the present tense is used for expressing things in the future, Futur I is also a huge part of the German language. It is comparable or equivalent to the English tenses present simple, will future (future simple) or going-to future.

The creation of this tense is incredibly simple:

It consists out of the conjugated form of werden and the infinitive verb form.

werden+ Infinitive

Remember: The infinitive form is mostly the last word.

Personalpronomina	Present (Präsens)	Past (Präteritum)
Ich	bin	war
Du	bist	warst
Er Sie (she) Es	ist	war
Wir	sind	waren
Ihr	seid	wart
Sie	sind	waren

Tab. 6 — Conjugation of „werden“ (to be)

 Built the futur I

- a) Emil und sein bester Freund großen Ärger bekommen.
- b) Ich ein Eis essen.
- c) Ich morgen auf ein Rammstein Konzert gehen. Dort es sehr laut.
- d) Helios die Hausaufgaben korrigieren.
- e) Du nicht diesen Knopf drücken. *Drückt den Knopf*
- f) Mathias und Emil in Aachen feiern.
- g) Bei dieser Achterbahn mir übel.

2.6 Futur II

The Futur II or the Vollendete Zukunft is a future tense which expresses a future action or an assumption in the future which has been completed at a determined point in the future.

We use this tense when...

1. ... we formulate assumptions about an past action
2. ... we describe an action that has already been completed by a specific point in the future

Example sentences:

1. Max ist müde. Er wird wohl wenig geschlafen haben.
2. Emma ist zu spät. Sie wird wohl ihren Bus verpasst haben.
3. Daniel verliert ständig Sachen. Vermutlich wird er morgen das Handy (= smartphone) verloren haben.

Explanation to 1)

Max ist müde. This sentence describes a current event, as Max is tired right now. The second sentence is the assumption based on the fact that Max is tired. *Er wird wohl wenig geschlafen haben.* We assume that he hadn't slept much. Thus, Futur II is needed.

Explanation to 2)

Emma ist zu spät. This clause describes a current event, as Emma is late right now. If we assume why she is late, we will use the Futur II to do so. *Sie wird wohl ihren Bus verpasst haben.* We assume that she failed to catch her bus.

Explanation to 3)

Based on our experiences with our imaginary friend Daniel, we can assume that he will lose his smartphone tomorrow. In that case, we do not refer to a current event with our assumption as we did in sentence 1) and 2). This time we use our experiences and assume a special action in the future. As our friend Daniel is quite unorganised, we can assume that he will be like that tomorrow. Thus, Futur II needed.

⑦ Write following sentences in the Futur II

- Ich gehe morgen in die Schule
- Das Essen ist lecker
- Wir haben viel Spaß
- Das Lied ist schön
