

**Deutsch 101 Handout: 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 second-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:

play - <u>played</u>	spielen - <u>gespielt</u>	speak - <u>spoken</u>	sprechen - <u>gesprochen</u>
learn - <u>learned</u>	lernen - <u>gelernt</u>	give - <u>given</u>	geben - <u>gegeben</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 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.

<u>spielen</u> - <u>gespielt</u>	<u>machen</u> - <u>gemacht</u>	<u>fragen</u> - <u>gefragt</u>
<u>wohnen</u> - <u>gewohnt</u>	<u>arbeiten</u> - <u>gearbeitet</u>	<u>reden</u> - <u>geredet</u>

There are two exceptions to this nice regularity. The first is that verbs that end in -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 in -ieren, so it's a pretty easy group to remember.)

<u>studieren</u> - <u>studiert</u>	<u>manipulieren</u> - <u>manipuliert</u>	<u>reparieren</u> - <u>repariert</u>
------------------------------------	--	--------------------------------------

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.

<u>besuchen</u> - <u>besucht</u>	<u>erleben</u> - <u>erlebt</u>	<u>verkaufen</u> - <u>verkauft</u>
----------------------------------	--------------------------------	------------------------------------

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 <u>zugemacht</u> .	<i>We closed the door.</i>
Hast du dein Zimmer <u>aufgeräumt</u> ?	<i>Did you clean up your room?</i>

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 <u>habe</u> Fußball <u>gespielt</u> .	<i>I played football.</i>
Maria <u>hat</u> zwei Semester Deutsch <u>gelernt</u> .	<i>Maria learned German for two semesters.</i>
<u>Hast</u> du deine Hausaufgaben <u>gemacht</u> ?	<i>Did you do your homework?</i>

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 for 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 (Verb Classes) for details on stem vowel changes.

sing - sung

fly - flown

give - given

singen - gesungen

fliegen - geflogen

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

mitbringen - mitgebbracht

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 - gekannt

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 last night?* \_\_\_\_\_

4. *to see* = \_\_\_\_\_ *participle:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Whom (accusative) did you see?* \_\_\_\_\_

5. *to know a fact* = \_\_\_\_\_ *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*, 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 yesterday.* \_\_\_\_\_

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 take 'haben'. Try to determine which helping verb to use.

- Wir \_\_\_\_\_ nach Hause gegangen.
- Paul \_\_\_\_\_ uns gesehen.
- Wir \_\_\_\_\_ Pizza gegessen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ ihr um zehn Uhr eingeschlafen?
- \_\_\_\_\_ du gestern Fußball gespielt?
- Tante Uschi \_\_\_\_\_ Pharmazie studiert.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sie zur Uni gelaufen?
- Meine Großmutter \_\_\_\_\_ im Jahre 1978 gestorben.
- Ich \_\_\_\_\_ nach Madison gefahren.
- 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 bit of practice.

- arbeiten / lernen*: Wir \_\_\_\_\_ den ganzen Tag \_\_\_\_\_, aber wir \_\_\_\_\_ nichts \_\_\_\_\_.
- aufstehen / essen*: Ich \_\_\_\_\_ heute um 6 Uhr \_\_\_\_\_, und dann \_\_\_\_\_ ich Frühstück \_\_\_\_\_.
- fragen / sagen*: Du \_\_\_\_\_ mich \_\_\_\_\_, und ich \_\_\_\_\_ "nein" \_\_\_\_\_.
- 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 verstanden.

[BACK TO GRAMMAR WORKSHEETS](#)