# How to learn German verbs

## The one form that you need to learn for every "weak" verb (i.e. regular verb)

For every "weak" verb (i.e. regular verb), you only need to learn the present infintitive (INF). From this form, you can derive ...

| derived form | formula | abbreviated name for the preceding formula |
|---|---|---|
| ... the present stem | INF – en,<br>*or (!)* INF – n, *if the INF ends in –n instead of –en* | PRS |
| ... the preterite stem | PRS + t<br>*or (!)* PRS + et, *if PRS ends in d, t, or in more than one consonant*<br>(= INF – (e)n + (e)t) | PTT |
| ... the past participle ++ its auxiliary verb in infinitive form | ge + PTT ++ haben<br>(= ge + INF – (e)n + (e)t ++ haben) | PPC ++ AUX |

## Some examples of "weak" verbs (i.e. regular verbs)

| INF | | PRS | PTT | PPC ++ AUX | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| fragen | "to ask" | frag | fragt | gefragt haben | "to have asked" |
| lieben | "to love" | lieb | liebt | geliebt haben | "to have loved" |
| ordnen | "to bring in order" | ordn | ordnet (instead of ‡ordnt !) | geordnet haben | "to have brought in order" |
| arbeiten | "to work" | arbeit | arbeitet (instead of ‡arbeitt !) | gearbeitet haben | "to have worked" |
| handeln | "to trade, to act" | handel (!) | handelt | gehandelt  haben | "to have traded, to have acted" |

Using these derived forms, you can form all other forms of a "weak" verb (i.e. regular verb).

# The non-synthetic tenses and moods of the "weak" verb, i.e. the tenses and moods being formed by merely altering the form of the verb itself

| tense and *mood* | number ⇨ | singular | | | | plural | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | person ⇨ | 1st | 2nd | 2nd **polite** | 3rd | 1st | 2nd | 3rd |
| | pronoun ⇨ | ich "I" | du "you" | Sie "you" | er, sie, es "he, she, it" | wir "we" | ihr "you" | sie "they" |
| | meaning ⇩ | | | | | | | |
| present *imperative*[1] | "Walk!" | ⬛ | PRS + (e)[2] | INF | ⬛ | ⬛ | PRS + (e)[1]t | ⬛ |
| present *indicative* | "I walk." "I am walking." | PRS + e | PRS + (e)[1]st | INF | PRS + (e)[1]t | INF | PRS + (e)[1]t | INF |
| present *subjunctive*[3] | TO BE DONE | PRS + e | PRS + est | INF | PRS + e | INF | PRS + et | INF |
| preterite[4] *indicative* | "I walked." | PTT + e | PTT + est | PTT + en | PTT + e | PTT + en | PTT + et | PTT + en |
| preterite *subjunctive*[5] | "I would walk." | PTT + e | PTT + est | PTT + en | PTT + e | PTT + en | PTT + et | PTT + en |

1 There is only a present imperative in German. Imperatives of other tenses don't exist.
2 **Add this e, if PRS ends in d, t, or in more than one consonant.**
3 The present subjunctive is usually called "the conditional I".
4 The preterite is sometimes called "the imperfect".
5 The preterite subjunctive is usually called "the conditional II".

General remarks on the use of these forms

1. Almost all forms must be preceded by the corresponding pronoun or noun. E. g. *ich frage*, etc.
2. **Exceptions** to this are:
2.1. The **present imperative 2nd person singular and plural** is used without a corresponding pronoun or noun: *Frag! Fragt!* Etc.
2.2. The **polite present imperative 2nd person singular** is followed by the corresponding pronoun: *Fragen Sie!*

Tricks for every day speech

1. The **present subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **present indicative**.
2. The **preterite indicative** can be freely replaced with the **present perfect indicative**. (See the *synthetic* tenses and moods further below.)
3. The **preterite subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **"conditional III"**. (See the *synthetic* tenses and moods further below.)

## The five forms that you need to learn for every "strong" verb (i.e. irregular verb)

| form or derived form (※) | formula | abbreviation | Does the form need to be learned? |
|---|---|---|---|
| the present infinitive | | INF | yes |
| ※ the present stem 1 | INF – en | PRS1 | |
| the present indicative 3rd person singular | | | yes |
| ※ the present stem 2 | present indicative 3rd person singular – t | PRS2 | |
| the present imperative 2nd person singular | | IMP | yes |
| the preterite indicative stem = the preterite indicative 3rd person singular | | PTT | yes |
| ※ the preterite subjunctive stem | PTT + ¨ on the vowel, *if the vowel is a, o, or u otherwise just* PTT | PTS | |
| the past participle ++ its auxiliary verb in infinitive form | | PPC ++ AUX | yes |

## Some examples of "strong verbs" (i.e. irregular verbs)

| INF ※ PRS1 | | | ※ PRS2 | | IMP | | PTT ※ PTS | | | PPC ++ *AUX* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| sehen | "to see" | ※ seh | er sieht "he sees" | ※ sieh | Sieh! | "See!" | er sah | "he saw" | ※ säh | gesehen *haben* | "to have seen" |
| fahren | "to drive" | ※ fahr | er fährt "he drives" | ※ fähr | Fahr! | "Drive!" | er fuhr | "he drove" | ※ führ | gefahren *sein* | "to have driven" |
| geben | "to give" | ※ geb | er gibt "he gives" | ※ gib | Gib! | "Give!" | er gab | "he gave" | ※ gäb | gegeben *haben* | "to have given" |
| gehen | "to go" | ※ geh | er geht "he goes" | ※ geh | Geh! | "Go!" | er ging | "he went" | ※ ging (!) | gegangen *sein* | "to have gone" |
| stoßen | "to push" | ※ stoß | er stößt "he pushes" | ※ stöß | Stoß! | "Push!" | er stieß | "he pushed" | ※ stieß (!) | gestoßen *haben* | "to have pushed" |
| frieren | "to feel cold" | ※ frier | er friert "he feels cold" | ※ frier | Frier! | "Feel cold!" | er fror | "he felt cold" | ※ frör | gefroren *haben* | "to have felt cold" |

Using these forms, you can form all other forms of a "strong" verb (i.e. irregular verb).

# The non-synthetic tenses and moods of the "strong" verb, i.e. the tenses and moods being formed by merely altering the form of the verb itself

| tense and _mood_ | number ⇒ | singular | | | | plural | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | person ⇒ | 1st | 2nd | 2nd **polite** | 3rd | 1st | 2nd | 3rd |
| | pronoun ⇒ | ich "I" | du "you" | Sie "you" | er, sie, es "he, she, it" | wir "we" | ihr "you" | sie "they" |
| | meaning ⇓ | | | | | | | |
| present _imperative_ | "Walk!" | | IMP | INF | | | PRS1 + t | |
| present _indicative_ | "I walk." "I am walking." | PRS1 + e | PRS2 + st | INF | PRS2 + t | INF | PRS1 + t | INF |
| present _subjunctive_ | TO BE DONE | PRS1 + e | PRS1 + est | INF | PRS1 + e | INF | PRS1 + et | INF |
| preterite _indicative_ | "I walked." | PTT | PTT + st | PTT + en | PTT | PTT + en | PTT + t | PTT + en |
| preterite _subjunctive_ | "I would walk." | PTS + e | PTS + est | PTS + en | PTS + e | PTS + en | PTS + et | PTS + en |

General remarks on the use of these forms

1. Almost all forms must be preceded by the corresponding pronoun or noun. E. g. *ich sehe*, etc.
2. **Exceptions** to this are:
2.1. The **present imperative 2nd person singular and plural** is used without a corresponding pronoun or noun: *Sieh! Seht!* Etc.
2.2. The **polite present imperative 2nd person singular** is followed by the corresponding pronoun: *Sehen Sie!*

Tricks for every day speech

1. The **present subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **present indicative**.
2. The **preterite indicative** can be freely replaced with the **present perfect indicative**. (See the *synthetic* tenses and moods further below.)
3. The **preterite subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **"conditional III"**. (See the *synthetic* tenses and moods further below.)

The _synthetic_ tenses and moods of _all_ verbs **(excluding the passive forms!)**, i.e. the tenses and moods being formed by adding an auxiliary verb to the verb in question

| tense and _mood_ | meaning | formula<br>_auxiliary verb_[6] + verb form |
|---|---|---|
| "conditional III" | "I would walk." | _würde_ + INF |
| future _indicative_ | "I will walk." or "I'm going to walk." | _werde_ (1) + INF |
| future _subjunctive_ | "I would walk." (in the future) | _werde_ (2) + INF |
| present perfect[7] _indicative_ | "I have walked." | _habe_ (1) / _bin_ + PPC |
| present perfect _subjunctive_ | "I would have walked." | _habe_ (2) / _sei_ + PPC |
| preterite perfect[8] _indicative_ | "I had walked." | _hatte_ / _war_ + PPC |
| preterite perfect _subjunctive_ | "I would have walked." (in the past long ago) | _hätte_ / _wäre_ + PPC |
| †future perfect[9] _indicative_ | "I will have walked." | _werde_ (1) + PPC ++ AUX |
| †future perfect _subjunctive_ | "I would have walked." (in the future) | _werde_ (2) + PPC ++ AUX |

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6  **The table containing all forms of these auxiliary verbs can be found further below.**

7  The present perfect is usually just called "perfect".

8  Other names are "pluperfect" or "past perfect".

9  The future perfect is usually just called "future II".

General remarks on the use of these forms
1. The **future perfect indicative and subjunctive** are basically **not** used anymore in any way.

Tricks for every day speech
1. The **future indicative** can be freely replaced with the **present indicative**, if you also add an **adverb denoting a moment in time in the future**.
2. The **future subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **future indicative**.
3. The **present perfect subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **present perfect indicative**.

## The passive (always formed synthetically)

**The passive can in general be completely avoided by formulating your sentence differently.**

| **passive** form<br>(tense and *mood*) | meaning | formula<br>*auxiliary verb* + verb form *(+ auxiliary verb(s))* |
|---|---|---|
| present *imperative*<br>(this form doesn't exist for the 2nd singular polite) | "Be kissed!" | *Werde* + PPC ! (2nd singular)<br>*Werdet* + PPC ! (2nd plural)[10] |
| present *indicative* | "I am (being) kissed." | *werde* (1) + PPC |
| present *subjunctive* | TO BE DONE | *werde* (2) + PPC |
| preterite *indicative* | "I was kissed." | *wurde* + PPC |
| preterite *subjunctive* | "I would be kissed." | *würde* + PPC |
| "conditional III" doesn't exist in the passive | | |
| future *indicative* | "I will be kissed." or "I'm going to be kissed." | *werde* (1) + PPC + *werden*[11] |
| future *subjunctive* | "I would be kissed." (in the future) | *werde* (2) + PPC + *werden* |
| present perfect *indicative* | "I have been kissed." | *bin* + PPC + *worden*[12] |
| present perfect *subjunctive* | "I would have been kissed." | *sei* + PPC + *worden* |
| preterite perfect *indicative* | "I had been kissed." | *war* + PPC + *worden* |
| preterite perfect *subjunctive* | "I would have been kissed." (in the past long ago) | *wäre* + PPC + *worden* |
| †future perfect *indicative* | "I will have been kissed." | *werde* (1) + PPC + *worden* + *sein*[13] |
| †future perfect *subjunctive* | "I would have been kissed." (in the future) | *werde* (2) + PPC + *worden* + *sein* |

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10 *Werde!* = 2nd person singular present imperative, and *Werdet!* = 2nd person plural present imperative of *werden* "to become".

11 *Werden* "to become" is an infinitive.

12 *Worden* is an irregular PPC of *werden* "to become".

13 *Sein* "to be" is an infinitive.

<u>General remarks on the use of these forms</u>

1. Almost all forms must be preceded by the corresponding pronoun or noun. E. g. *ich werde geküsst*, etc.
2. **Exception** to this is only:
2.1. The **present imperative 2nd person singular and plural** is used without a corresponding pronoun or noun: *Werde geküsst! Werdet geküsst!* Etc.
3. The **future perfect indicative and subjunctive** are basically **not** used anymore in any way.

<u>Tricks for every day speech</u>

1. The **present subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **present indicative**.
2. The **preterite indicative** can be freely replaced with the **present perfect indicative**.
3. The **future indicative** can be freely replaced with the **present indicative**, if you also add an **adverb denoting a moment in time in the future**.
4. The **future subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **future indicative**.
5. The **present perfect subjunctive** can be freely replaced with the **present perfect indicative**.

# The highly irregular forms of the **mentioned auxiliary verbs**

| | the infinitives of the **mentioned auxiliary verbs** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | werden | | | | haben | | | | sein | | | |
| | present indicative | present subjunctive | preterite indicative | preterite subjunctive | present indicative | present subjunctive | preterite indicative | preterite subjunctive | present indicative | present subjunctive | preterite indicative | preterite subjunctive |
| | **werde (1)** | **werde (2)** | **wurde** | **würde** | **habe (1)** | **habe (2)** | **hatte** | **hätte** | **bin** | **sei** | **war** | **wäre** |
| ich "I" | werde | werde | wurde | würde | habe | habe | hatte | hätte | bin | sei | war | wäre |
| du "you" | wirst | werdest | wurdest | würdest | hast | habest | hattest | hättest | bist | seist | warst | wärest |
| Sie "you (polite)" | werden | werden | wurden | würden | haben | haben | hatten | hätten | sind | seien | waren | wären |
| er, sie, es "he, she, it" | wird | werde | wurde | würde | hat | habe | hatte | hätte | ist | sei | war | wäre |
| wir "we" | werden | werden | wurden | würden | haben | haben | hatten | hätten | sind | seien | waren | wären |
| ihr "you (plural)" | werdet | werdet | wurdet | würdet | habt | habet | hattet | hättet | seid | seiet | wart | wäret |
| sie "they" | werden | werden | wurden | würden | haben | haben | hatten | hätten | sind | seien | waren | wären |

## The six infinitives

| form | meaning | formula |
|---|---|---|
| present infinitive active | "to walk" | INF |
| present infinitive passive | "to be kissed" | PPC + *werden* |
| future infinitive active | "to walk" (in the future) | INF + *werden* |
| future infinitive passive | "to be kissed" (in the future) | PPC + *werden* + *werden* (!) |
| past infinitive active | "to have walked" | PPC ++ AUX |
| past infinitive passive | "to have been kissed" | PPC + *worden* + *sein* |

## The other participle

| form | meaning | formula |
|---|---|---|
| †present participle | "walking" | INF + d |

## General remarks

The **present participle** is basically not used anymore in any way.