

Present tense

Strong verbs

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02/10/2017

Strong verbs in German are only partially irregular.

In the following we will summarize important aspects of strong verbs.

1. Which persons are affected?

Strong verbs have irregularities in the 2nd and 3rd person singular. The other persons will have the normal regular form.

2. What is the irregularity?

The verbs will undergo a stem change, while the conjugation endings will stay the same as regular verbs. The stem change will always include vocal change.

This is also common in other languages such as Spanish.

Example. Poder (o -> ue)

The verb „poder“ undergoes a stem change from o to ue for 1st, 2nd, 3rd person singular and 3rd person plural.

yo puedo, tú puedes, él puede, nosotros podemos, vosotros podéis, ellos pueden.

In the following, we discuss an example in German.

Example. empfehlen (e -> ie)

The verb „empfehlen“ (recomendar) in German has a stem change. The vocal e turns to ie for the 2nd and 3rd person singular.

ich empfehle, du empfiehst, er empfiehlt, wir empfehlen, ihr empfeht, sie/Sie empfehlen.

In order to learn the strong verbs and their conjugation it is enough to remember what group of stem changes they belong to. Once this is known, the stem change will most of the time only affect the first vocal.

Thus, in the following there is a table with three columns displayed. Each column displays one vocal stem change group and it is important to memorize the verbs which belong to each category.

The 3rd person singular conjugation is displayed in parenthesis in order to provide an example for the reader.

e -> i	e -> ie	a -> ä
nehmen (nimmst)	befehlen (befiehlt)	blasen (bläst)
brechen (bricht)	empfehlen (empfiehlt)	fahren (fährt)
essen (isst)	lesen (liest)	halten (hält)
geben (gibt)	sehen (sieht)	laden (lädt)
gelten (gilt)	stehlen (stiehlt)	lassen (lässt)
helfen (hilft)	geschehen (geschieht)	schlafen (schläft)
messen (misst)		schlagen (schlägt)
schmelzen (schmilzt)		tragen (trägt)
sprechen (spricht)		wachsen (wächst)
stechen (sticht)		waschen (wäscht)
sterben (stirbt)		braten (brät)
treffen (trifft)		fallen (fällt)
treten (tritt)		raten (rät)
verderben (verdirbt)		laufen (läuft)
vergessen (vergisst)		saufen (säuft)
werfen (wirft)		graben (gräbt)
werben (wirbt)		

Important note 1:

By adding a prefix to the verbs (an, ver, er, auf, ab, etc.) the verbs will still be part of their proper group and therefore these words are omitted in the above list.

Example:

geben (**gibt**), **er**geben (er **gibt**), **auf**geben (**gibt** auf), **ver**geben (ver**gibt**), **an**geben (**gibt** an), **ab**geben (**gibt** ab)