

A2 EINHEIT 3 GRAMMAR

In this entire unit there is only one point of grammar that will be taught – the present perfect tense (*das Perfekt*). Fortunately for us, the present perfect in German is formed in basically the same way as it is in English – a helping verb plus the past participle. As is the case in English, there are quite a few irregular past participles. However, many of the common verbs that have irregular past participles in German are the same ones that are irregular in English. It must be noted that the present perfect tense is much more important in German than it is in English. In English, when referring to a completed event in the past, we use the past tense. When speaking German, the use of the present perfect tense is not limited to those occasions when one would use the present perfect in English, but is also used where we would use the simple past tense. In fact, the German present perfect tense is often referred to as the *„conversational past“* because this is the tense form chosen by Germans to refer to past events when speaking. Subsequently, one must remember that a sentence in the present perfect tense in German often translates into the past tense in English. *Ich habe gespielt* can mean *„I have played“* but just as likely means *„I played“*.

FORMING THE PRESENT PERFECT (*DAS PERFEKT*) IN ENGLISH – In English, the present perfect is formed by combining the past participle with a helping verb – a form of *to have*. The past participle is formed by adding a *d* or *ed* to the infinitive – *I have played* or *He has distributed*. However, many examples which immediately come to mind have irregular past participles – *I have eaten*, *I have seen*, *She has gone*, etc.

These must be memorized. In this regard German is no different.

FORMING *DAS PERFEKT* IN GERMAN - Just like English, German forms the present perfect tense by combining the past participle with a helping verb. In a simple sentence the conjugated form of the helping verb is in the second element position and the past participle goes to the end of the sentence. A regular past participle in German is formed by combining *ge* + stem (infinitive minus the *en*) + *t*. Let's take for example the verb *tanzen*. To form the past participle one combines *ge* + *tanz* + *t* = *getanzt*. The helping verb in German is a conjugated form of *haben* or *sein*. If the verb shows motion from one place to another (change of location) or a change of condition (to die, to wake up, to fall asleep) and it is intransitive (cannot have a direct object) a form of *sein* is the helping verb. If not, choose a form of *haben*. Most verbs – like *tanzen* – require a form of *haben*. We danced the entire evening is *Wir haben den ganzen Abend getanzt*. Although *tanzen* clearly shows motion, the helping verb is a form of *haben* and not *sein* because the motion does not result in a change of location – one remains on the dance floor. The most common verbs that are not exceptions to the rule that require a form of *sein* as the helping verb are *gehen*, *kommen*, and *fahren*. The thinking behind what constitutes a change of location isn't always obvious. For example, *aufstehen* (to stand up) takes a form of *sein* as the helping verb. (You are no longer in the chair or bed or whatever.)

All verbs that are irregular in the present tense have irregular past participles. Unfortunately, many verbs that are regular in the present tense have irregular participles. An irregular past participle can look just like or completely different from the infinitive. However, all irregular past participles end in *n*. All but one end in *en*. They also have the *ge*. (There are several regular and irregular past participles that do not take the *ge*. They will be discussed later.) Three common verbs with irregular past participles are *gehen* – *gegangen*, *fahren* – *gefahren*, *essen* – *gegessen*. *Wir sind nach Chicago gefahren*. *Ich habe Fisch gegessen*. Irregular past participles must be memorized.

When a verb has a separable prefix the *ge* goes between the prefix and the stem. *Ich rufe dich morgen an*. *Ich habe dich gestern angerufen*. – *Ich hole sie am Montag ab*. *Ich habe sie am Montag abgeholt*. *Dorothea kommt mit*. – *Dorothea ist mitgekommen*.

Verbs with the inseparable prefixes *be, emp, ent, er, ge, miss, voll, ver,* and *zer* and verbs whose infinitives end in *ieren* form their past participles without adding *ge*. Note the following examples.

Ich habe eine Kamera zu Weihnachten bekommen. Hast du seinen Namen vergessen? Er hat den Kindern eine Geschichte erzählt. Ich habe das Fahrrad repariert. (bekommen, vergessen, erzählen, reparieren).

There are several verbs that are exceptions to the rule governing *haben* and *sein* as helping verbs. In all cases they are verbs that don't meet the criteria for using *sein* as the helping verb but nonetheless do. All the exceptions are intransitive, however. You need to be concerned with only two – *sein* and *bleiben*. Neither *sein* (to be) nor *bleiben* (to stay) show motion or change of condition. Yet both use a form of *sein* as the helping verb. The past participle of *sein* is *gewesen*. The past participle of *bleiben* is *geblieben*. *Ich bin krank gewesen* is I was sick and *Wir sind zu Hause geblieben* is We stayed home. You have learned that the past tense of *sein* is a form of *war*. This is the simple past tense form as opposed to the present perfect. In most situations there is no difference in meaning between the two. There are a few verbs – modals, *sein*, and, to a lesser extent *haben* (*hatte*) for which the simple past and not the present perfect is used in conversation. You are more likely to hear *Ich war krank* than *Ich bin krank gewesen*.

Below are some sample sentences in the present and present perfect tenses using verbs from this unit.

Ich dusche jeden morgen.

Um wie viel Uhr frühstückst du?

Ich nehme meinen Bruder mit.

Reserviert ihr einen Tisch?

Wir gehen ins Kino.

Wir verpassen den Zug.

Ich habe jeden morgen geduscht.

Um wie viel Uhr hast du gefrühstückt?

Ich habe meinen Bruder mitgenommen.

Habt ihr einen Tisch reserviert?

Wir sind ins Kino gegangen.

Wir haben den Zug verpasst.

There is one other group of verbs of which you need to be aware. In English we refer to them as mixed verbs. They are called mixed verbs because, like many irregular verbs, the stem vowel for the past participle is different from that of the infinitive but, like regular verbs, the past participle ends in *t*. Some examples are: *bringen – gebracht, denken – gedacht, kennen – gekannt, wissen – gewußt*. Unlike other verbs whose participles end in *t*, these can't be described as regular.

You will be given a list of verbs with their past participles and helping verbs. You should learn the past participles of the verbs that are familiar to you and each new verb you learn.

As part of the unit test you will have to identify past participles and helping verbs in a paragraph and indicate whether they are regular or irregular. Remember, any past participle that ends in *t* regardless of where the *ge* is or even if it has no *ge* is regular. You will also be given cues – both words and pictures – and you will have to use the cues to create sentences in the present perfect – either by describing what took place in the picture (sketch) you see or use the words you are given to create a sentence.