



The Perfect Tense(1)

When German speakers talk about things that happened in the past, they most often use the perfect tense. The perfect tense consists of two parts: a conjugated form of either ***haben*** or ***sein*** and the **past participle** of the verb, for example:

subject	auxiliary		past participle
Luca	ist	zu seiner Oma	gefahren.
Nico	hat	einen Schokoladenkuchen	gebacken.

Weak (or regular) verbs in German form their past participle by adding **ge-** in front of the verb stem and **-t** at the end of the verb stem, for example:

*Luca und Sebi haben Tennis **gespielt**.*

*Luca hat für die Uni **gelernt**.*

*Sebi hat Rühreier mit Speck **gekocht**.*

*Alle Freunde haben zusammen Inas Geburtstag **gefeiert**.*

Strong (or irregular) verbs form their past participle in a variety of ways. It is best to learn the past participle right away together with the verb when you learn a new verb. Here are some ways that strong verbs form the past participle (but there are many more ways):

add **ge**- in front:

- *kommen* – **ge**kommen (*Luca ist spät nach Hause gekommen.*)
- *fahren* – **ge**fahren (*Wir sind zu Oma gefahren.*)
- *backen* – **ge**backen (*Ich habe einen Kuchen gebacken.*)

add **ge-** in front plus a vowel change:

- *schwimmen* – **ge**schw**o**mmen (*Maren ist schnell geschwommen.*)
- *trinken* – **ge**tr**u**nken (*Ina hat einen Cocktail getrunken.*)

add **ge-** in front plus a vowel change plus a consonant change:

- *gehen* – **ge**g**an**gen (*Ich bin gestern in die Uni gegangen.*)

Separable prefix verbs insert **ge-** between the prefix and the verb stem (which can take on various forms), for example:

ausschlafen (to sleep in) – *aus**ge**schlafen* (*Luca hat am Samstag ausgeschlafen.*)

aufstehen (to get up) – *auf**ge**standen* (*Bist du am Sonntag spät aufgestanden?*)

mitbringen (to bring along) – *mit**ge**bracht* (*Habt ihr einen Kuchen mitgebracht?*)

Sein or haben?

And if this is not confusing enough, now you need to figure out which verbs take *haben* and which verbs take *sein* as auxiliary when forming the perfect tense. Most verbs form the perfect tense with *haben*, but there are some very common verbs that use *sein* instead of *haben*.

The verbs using *sein* denote a **change of location** (e.g., *fahren, gehen, kommen, wandern, reiten, ...*), a **change of condition** (*aufwachen* - to wake up, *aufstehen* – to get up, *sterben* - to die, *ankommen* – to arrive, ...) and the verbs ***sein* and *bleiben***.

ACHTUNG When you learn a new verb, always learn its past participle form with it.