

German Grammar: Verb Conjugation

German Grammar – Verb Conjugation

Quick reference guide for learners

1. The Basics

Element	Description
Verb stem	The part of the verb that stays constant across most forms (e.g., <i>geh?</i> from <i>gehen</i>).
Personal endings	Suffixes added to the stem to indicate person and number.
Tenses & moods	German uses six tenses (present, simple past, perfect, pluperfect, future?I, future?II) and three moods (indicative, subjunctive?I/II, imperative).
Auxiliary verbs	<i>sein</i> (to be) and <i>haben</i> (to have) are used to form the perfect, pluperfect and future?II.
Modal verbs	<i>können, dürfen, wollen, sollen, müssen, mögen</i> – they modify the meaning of a main verb and affect word order.

2. Present Tense (Präsens)

2.1 Regular (weak) verbs

Pattern: stem?+?personal endings

Person Ending Example: *machen* (to do)

ich	-e	ich mach e
du	-st	du mach st
er/sie/es	-t	er mach t
wir	-en	wir mach en
ihr	-t	ihr mach t
sie/Sie	-en	sie mach en / Sie mach en

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2.2 Strong (irregular) verbs

Changes affect the stem vowel (Ablaut) and sometimes add *-en* or *-t* in the 3rd person singular.

Verb	Present stem change	Example
<i>fahren</i>	<i>fährt</i> (a → ä)	ich fahre , du fährst , er fährt
<i>sehen</i>	<i>sieht</i> (e → i)	ich sehe , du siehst , er sieht
<i>lesen</i>	<i>liest</i> (e → i)	ich lese , du liest , er liest

2.3 Mixed verbs

Combine a weak ending pattern with a vowel change.

Verb	Present form	Note
<i>bringen</i>	ich bringe , du bringst , er bringt	Stem vowel unchanged, but past tense follows strong pattern.

3. Simple Past (Präteritum)

Used mainly in writing, storytelling, and formal speech.

Person	Weak ending	Strong pattern
ich	-te	stem + vowel change + -e
du	-test	stem + vowel change + -st
er/sie/es	-te	stem + vowel change
wir	-ten	stem + vowel change + -en
ihr	-tet	stem + vowel change + -t
sie/Sie	-ten	stem + vowel change + -en

Examples

- *machen* → **machte**, **machtest**, **machte**, **machten**, **machtet**, **machten**
 - *sehen* → **sah**, **sahst**, **sah**, **sahen**, **saht**, **sahen**
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4. Perfect Tense (Perfekt)