

19 The future tense

19.1 Uses

To refer to a future action German often uses the present tense (18.1). However, the future tense is used

- to emphasize future meaning, especially where this meaning would not be clear from the context:
Meine Tochter **wird** nicht zur Universität **gehen**. *My daughter is not going to university.*
- to stress determination to do something:
Mach dir keine Sorgen, ich **werde** das **machen**. *Don't worry, I will do it.*
- to express probability:
Er **wird** jetzt (wohl) in New York **sein**. *He will (probably) be in New York by now.*

19.2 Formation

The future tense is formed from the present tense of **werden** and the infinitive of the verb. The infinitive is placed at the end of a simple sentence or main clause.

Singular

1. ich **werde**
2. du **wirst**
3. er/sie/es **wird**

Plural

1. wir **werden**
2. ihr **werdet**
3. sie/Sie **werden**

Deutsch **lernen**

I
you
he/she/it

will learn
German

we
you
they/you
(formal)

20 The past tenses: the perfect

Both the perfect tense and the simple past tense (21) refer to actions in the past. Which tense is chosen is largely a matter of personal and stylistic preference rather than of meaning. However, formal written German tends to use the simple past, while the perfect tense is more common in spoken and informal written German. Note that the perfect is not an exact equivalent of the English present perfect tense, but is often translated by the English simple past.

20.1 Uses

The perfect tense is preferred in both written and spoken German for

- a past action with continuing relevance to the present:
Ich kann nicht arbeiten, weil ich mir das Bein **gebrochen habe**. *I can't work because I have broken my leg.*
Ich **habe** immer viel **gelesen**. *I've always read a lot.*
- an action to be completed in the future:
Wenn sie die Examen **bestanden hat**, wird sie eine Fete geben. *When she has passed her exams she will have a party.*
- a series of repeated actions lasting up to the present:
Wir **sind** oft in Spanien **gewesen**. *We've often been to Spain.*

The perfect is also used in speech and informal writing for past actions with no direct link to the present, where the simple past would normally be used in more formal writing.

Sie **hat** ihre Mutter jeden Sonntag **besucht**. *She used to visit her mother every Sunday.*