

28 Compound verbs

Compound verbs consist of a verb with a prefix attached to it, e.g. **missverstehen** (to *misunderstand*) or **wiedersehen** (to *see again*). German has many more compound verbs than English.

There are three categories of prefixes: separable, inseparable and variable (i.e. those which are sometimes separable and sometimes inseparable). It is helpful to concentrate first on the two latter categories, in which there are only a limited number of prefixes to be learnt.

28.1 Inseparable prefixes

The following seven prefixes are inseparable: **be-**, **emp-**, **ent-**, **er-**, **ge-**, **ver-**, **zer-**. In speech, verbs with these prefixes ('inseparable verbs') always have the main stress on the verb and not on the prefix. Examples:

bekommen	Ich bekomme	<i>I'll have a cup of tea.</i>
	einen Tee.	
entschuldigen	Sie entschuldigt sich.	<i>She gives her apologies.</i>
gefallen	Das Bild gefällt mir.	<i>I like the picture.</i>
verstehen	Das verstehe ich.	<i>I understand that.</i>

Verbs with inseparable or double inseparable prefixes (e.g. **anvertrauen** – to *entrust*) form the past participle without **ge-**:

Sie hat den Wein **empfohlen**. *She recommended the wine.*
 Sie haben uns das **anvertraut**. *They entrusted us with it.*

28.2 Variable prefixes

The following prefixes may be separable or inseparable: **durch-**, **hinter-**, **miss-**, **über-**, **um-**, **unter-**, **voll-**, **wider-**, **wieder-**:

<u>untergehen</u> (<i>sep.</i>)	<u>unternehmen</u> (<i>insep.</i>)
Das Schiff geht unter .	Er unternimmt eine Reise.
<i>The ship is sinking.</i>	<i>He is going on a journey.</i>

The same prefix may be used with the same verb both as a separable and as an inseparable prefix. The meaning of the two resulting verbs is different; the separable verb is often used in a literal sense, whereas the inseparable verb is used in a figurative sense:

<u>wiederholen</u> (<i>separable, stress on wieder</i>)	<u>wiederholen</u> (<i>inseparable, stress on holen</i>)
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Ich hole dir den Ball wieder . <i>I'll bring you the ball back.</i>	Ich wiederhole die Frage. <i>I'll repeat the question.</i>
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For the formation of the tenses of separable verbs see 28.3.

28.3 Separable prefixes

All prefixes other than those mentioned in 28.1 and 28.2 are separable. In speech the main stress is on the prefix. These prefixes are derived from other parts of speech, such as prepositions (**mitkommen** – to *come along*), adjectives (**freisprechen** – to *acquit*), adverbs (**fest halten** – to *hold on to*), nouns (**teilnehmen** – to *take part*) and verbs (**stehen bleiben** – to *stand still*).

■ **28.3.1** In the simple tenses and the imperative the prefix is normally separated from the verb and placed at the end of the clause:

Er ruf gerade einen Freund an .	<i>He is just phoning a friend.</i>
Sie rief gestern an .	<i>She called yesterday.</i>
Ruf mich bitte später an .	<i>Please call me later.</i>

But in subordinate clauses where the verb is placed at the end, the prefix remains attached to the verb:

Ich hoffe, dass er gut ankommt .	<i>I hope that he will arrive safely.</i>
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