

Introduction to Present Perfect Tense (basic introductory level - much more beyond this)

The term *tense* refers to a specific grammatical form of the verb. Often *tense* has nothing to do with actual *time*. A case in point is the *present perfect tense* which in actual *time* means *past*. (*present perfect tense = past time*)

The form of the *present perfect tense* requires two verbs. One verb is an *auxiliary*. The *auxiliary* verb is a helping verb that has no meaning of its own. This helping verb lets us know that we are in the *present perfect tense* and that the action is in *past time*. The other verb is the *lexical* verb. The *lexical* verb is the verb in the sentence that carries the true meaning. The *lexical* verb shows us what the action of the sentence truly is.

The *auxiliary* verb for present perfect *tense* is *haben*. When *haben* is used as an auxiliary to indicate present perfect *tense*, it carries no meaning. The verb *haben* simply

means “*this action is in past time*.” Do not try to translate *haben* into English, there is no equivalent.

The *lexical* verb in present perfect tense appears as a *participle*. The *participle* is an alternate form of the verb. Each verb in the language has a *participle*. Every verb has only one *participle*. The *participle* never changes. The *participle* never takes any conjugational endings. Regardless of what the subject of the sentence is, the *participle* for any given verb always remains unchanged.

The *participle* is related to the *infinitive* in the following manner: (The *infinitive* is the dictionary form of the verb.) The *participle* has the same stem as the infinitive, however, there are features that the *participle* has, which the infinitive is lacking. The participle begins with the prefix *ge-* and ends in a *-t* or *-et*.

• Examples of Participles and how they are related to the Infinitive

<i>infinitive</i>	<i>stem</i>	add <i>ge ... t</i>	<i>participle</i>	English
wohnen	wohn	<i>ge</i> + wohn + <i>t</i>	gewohnt	<i>haben</i> + <i>gewohnt</i> = lived, resided
kaufen	kauf	<i>ge</i> + kauf + <i>t</i>	gekauft	<i>haben</i> + <i>gekauft</i> = bought, purchased
arbeiten	arbeit	<i>ge</i> + arbeit + <i>et</i>	gearbeitet	<i>haben</i> + <i>gearbeitet</i> = worked
lieben	lieb	<i>ge</i> + lieb + <i>t</i>	geliebt	<i>haben</i> + <i>geliebt</i> = loved

• Sentence Structure in Present Perfect Tense

The sentence structure of the German present perfect tense is as follows. The auxiliary verb *haben* is conjugated to the subject of the sentence. This auxiliary occupies the second position in the sentence. The participle of the lexical verb is placed at the very end of the sentence. In

polar questions, the auxiliary is placed first and the rest of the sentence follows with the participle being the final element. In information questions, a question word is placed in the fore-field and the rest of the sentence follows with the participle being the final element.

Here are some example sentences with their English equivalents. Notice that only the auxiliary changes form, not the participle.

*Er hat zwei Jahre in Berlin gewohnt.
Ich habe ein Jahr in Bremen gewohnt.
Sie hat gestern lange gearbeitet.
Wir haben gestern lange gearbeitet.*

He lived in Berlin for two years.
I lived in Bremen for a year.
She worked for a long time yesterday.
We worked for a long time yesterday.

To create a polar (yes-no) question in the present perfect tense, place the conjugated auxiliary first.

*Hast du deinen Professor gefragt?
Hat er den Bürgersteig gefegt?
Habt ihr gestern gearbeitet?*

Did you ask your professor?
Did he sweep the sidewalk?
Did you guys work yesterday?

To create an information question in the present perfect tense, place a question word in the fore-field.

*Wieviel hat das Auto gekostet?
Wann hast du in Berlin gewohnt?
Warum haben sie den Professor nicht gefragt?*

How much did the car cost?
When did you live in Berlin?
Why didn't they ask the professor?