

PAST TENSES OF VERBS OVERVIEW

Note that there are 3 tenses for expressing *past* time: the **SIMPLE PAST**, the **PRESENT PERFECT**, and the **PAST PERFECT** tenses:

<u>IMPERFECT</u> or <u>SIMPLE PAST</u> (IMPERFEKT)* * sometimes called "Preterite" (Präteritum)	sie lernte	<i>she learned</i> <i>[she was learning]</i> <i>[she did learn]</i>
	sie ging	<i>she went</i> <i>[she was going]</i> <i>[she did go]</i>
<u>PRESENT PERFECT</u> (PERFEKT)	sie hat gelernt	<i>she has learned</i>
	sie ist gegangen	<i>she has gone</i>
<u>PAST PERFECT</u> (PLUSQUAMPERFEKT)	sie hatte gelernt	<i>she had learned</i>
	sie war gegangen	<i>she had gone</i>

I. USAGE: SIMPLE PAST AND PRESENT PERFECT TENSES

In German, the **SIMPLE PAST** and **PRESENT PERFECT** tenses can be used fairly interchangeably, although the **PRESENT PERFECT** tense is the more common form in **everyday spoken language**.

Except for the more frequently used verbs like "haben", "sein", "werden", and the modal verbs, the **SIMPLE PAST** is used more for **narration**, especially in written form.

For example, a German speaker who wants to express that he went to the movies last night would use the **PRESENT PERFECT** tense and say:

"Ich bin gestern abend ins Kino gegangen."

(instead of "Ich ging gestern abend ins Kino.", although this would not be incorrect.)

Note that in English these two tenses are not interchangeable.

For example, an English speaker, wanting to express the same thing, must use the **SIMPLE PAST** tense and say:

"I went to the movies last night."

(It would be incorrect to say "I have gone to the movies last night.")

This is why it is often better to translate German sentences in the PRESENT PERFECT tense into English sentences in the SIMPLE PAST:

"Sie **haben** gestern schwer **gearbeitet**." = "*They **worked** hard yesterday.*"

II. USAGE: PAST PERFECT TENSE

In German and in English, the PAST PERFECT tense is used identically, to express events that happened in the past of the past time being expressed.

"Er **hatte** gerade zu arbeiten **angefangen**, als die Gäste ankamen."
*"He **had** just **begun** to work, when the guests arrived."*

"Wir **hatten** ihn jahrelang **gekannt**, bevor er berühmt wurde."
*"We **had** **known** him for years before he became famous."*