

Participles as adjectives

— PARTIZIP I UND II ALS ADJEKTIV

In German a verb can be used like an adjective to describe a noun: Partizip I for an action still going on (kochend), Partizip II for a finished one (gekocht).

In German you can use verbs like adjectives, just as English does with “boiling water” and “boiled egg”. Partizip I (Infinitiv + d) is for actions that are going on right now, Partizip II for finished actions.

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01 00:15

Right now: turning a verb into an adjective

SHORTCUT ⚡ **Partizip I (-d)**: the action is going on at the same time as the main verb. **Partizip II (ge-)**: the action is finished or was done by someone else (inseparable prefixes and verbs ending in -ieren take no “ge-”; with separable verbs “ge-” slips into the middle).

- ✓ **das kochende Wasser**
boiling water (it is boiling right now, P I)
- ✓ **das gekochte Ei**
boiled egg (the cooking is done, P II)

When these words come in front of a noun, they follow the adjective-ending rules (Adjektivdeklinaton) exactly like an ordinary colour or size adjective.

02 01:30

You already do this in English

In English we add “-ing” or “-ed/-en” to verbs and put them in front of nouns (a crying child, a used car). The logic in German is the same.

ENGLISH	GERMAN	PATTERN
the crying child	das weinende Kind	Partizip I (infinitive + d)
the used car	das gebrauchte Auto	Partizip II (third form)
the flowing water	das fließende Wasser	Partizip I (infinitive + d)
the stolen bag	die gestohlene Tasche	Partizip II (third form)

Partizip I is always an active, ongoing action. Partizip II is a finished action (with transitive verbs it also expresses the passive).

03 02:45

Table: Partizip II is not only passive

Partizip II is usually used for passive actions (done by someone else). But intransitive verbs that form their perfect with **sein** and express a change of state or place (einschlafen, kaputtgehen) can also give a Partizip II. These are not passive: they express “active but finished”.

VERB TYPE	EXAMPLE	MEANING
Transitive (takes haben)	das gekaufte Auto	the car that has been bought (passive)
Intransitive (takes sein)	das eingeschlafene Baby	the baby that has fallen asleep (active , event finished)
Intransitive (takes sein)	das kaputtgegangene Radio	the radio that has broken (active , event finished)

Verbs that take haben and are also intransitive (e.g. weinen, lachen) can NOT be used as a Partizip II adjective.

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04 04:00

Trap: intransitive verbs that take haben



TRAP

Trying to make a Partizip II adjective from every verb

If a verb cannot take an object (intransitive) and forms its Perfekt with “haben” (e.g. weinen, lachen, schlafen), you cannot make a Partizip II adjective from it. English is more relaxed here — “a laughed man” sounds odd, but “a slept-in bed” exists — so do not trust your English ear.

✗ **das ~~geweinte~~ Kind**

Wrong. weinen takes “haben” and is intransitive.

✓ **das ~~weinende~~ Kind**

the crying child

✗ **der ~~gelachte~~ Mann**

Wrong. lachen takes “haben”.

✓ **der ~~lachende~~ Mann**

the laughing man

05 05:00

The part nobody tells you: a shortcut instead of a Relativsatz

In newspapers and books you meet very long adjective phrases: **Der vor dem Haus parkende Wagen...** This is German’s trick for shortening sentences. The structure “Der Wagen, der vor dem Haus parkt...”, which is really a relative clause (Relativsatz), is made more compact with a participle. In everyday speech the Relativsatz is preferred, in writing the Partizip.

06 05 : 00

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Take the full test

10 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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