

Plusquamperfekt

— DAS PLUSQUAMPERFEKT

The Plusquamperfekt is the German past perfect: it describes an action that was already finished before another past event, built with *hatte* or *war* + Partizip II.

“Nachdem ich gegessen hatte, ging ich” — first eating, then leaving. English has the same tense (“I had eaten”), so the idea is nothing new; what is new is that German makes you use it after **nachdem**.

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01 00:10

Right now: one word changes in a sentence you already know



SHORTCUT

Take your Perfekt sentence and change **habe** → **hatte** · **bin** → **war**. **Do not touch** the Partizip II. That is the Plusquamperfekt.

TENSE	SENTENCE	MEANING
Perfekt	Ich habe gegessen .	I have eaten . / I ate .
Plusquamperfekt	Ich hatte gegessen .	I had eaten .
Perfekt	Ich bin gegangen .	I have gone . / I went .
Plusquamperfekt	Ich war gegangen .	I had gone .

The answer to **haben** or **sein**? is **exactly the same as in the Perfekt**. You are not memorising a new list: verbs that take **sein** still take **war**.

You already do this in English — with the same logic

English separates this tense **exactly** the way German does, and you use it all the time: *I had come · I had eaten · she had left · I had forgotten*. The German version maps one to one — on this topic you have an **advantage** over learners whose own language has no such tense.

ENGLISH	GERMAN	ORDER
I had eaten	Ich hatte gegessen .	happened first
then I left	Dann ging ich los .	happened second
The train had left	Der Zug war abgefahren .	happened first
when I got to the station	als ich am Bahnhof ankam .	happened second

Whatever job **had + past participle** does in English, **hatte/war + Partizip II** does in German. Building the sentence in English and translating it **works** here — a rare thing.

One difference: in English you can often get away with “After I ate, I left” and nobody blinks. In German, after **nachdem** this tense is **required** — leave it out and the sentence is wrong.

Where it really lives: the nachdem clause

The Plusquamperfekt rarely stands alone. Almost every time it shows up in **a sentence that puts two events in order**, and the conjunction of that sentence is **nachdem**.

NACHDEM CLAUSE	MAIN CLAUSE	EXAMPLE
Plusquamperfekt	Präteritum	Nachdem ich gegessen hatte , ging ich los .
Perfekt	Präsens	Nachdem ich gegessen habe , gehe ich los .

The rule in one line: **the nachdem clause sits one step behind the main clause**. If the main clause is in the past, the subordinate clause drops to “the past of the past”; if the main clause is in the present, the subordinate clause drops to the past.

✗ **Nachdem ich gegessen ~~habe~~, ~~ging~~ ich los.**

The two tenses do not match.

✓ **Nachdem ich gegessen **hatte**, **ging** ich los.**

After I had eaten, I left.

① With a separable verb the Partizip II still splits in the middle: **abfahren** → **abgefahren** · **ankommen** → **angekommen** · **einkaufen** → **eingekauft**. That part lives on [the Perfekt page](#).

04 03:10

Two places where people go wrong



TRAP 1

Using the Plusquamperfekt in a bevor clause

nachdem demands the tense shift, **bevor** does **not**. Once learners know the rule they start applying it to every time conjunction — but in a **bevor** clause both sides stay in the same tense.

✗ **Bevor** ich gegessen ~~hatte~~, ging ich los.

bevor does not shift the tense.

✓ **Bevor** ich **ging**, **aß** ich etwas.

Before I left, I ate something.

The logic is simple: **bevor** already says “before”, so the conjunction shows the order. **nachdem** says “after” and has to show **which event came first through the tense**.



TRAP 2

Picking the wrong auxiliary

Verbs that take **sein** in the Perfekt take **war** here. Learners memorise **hatte** and write it everywhere.

✗ Der Zug ~~hatte~~ abgefahren.

abfahren is a motion verb — it takes sein.

✓ Der Zug **war** abgefahren.

The train had left.

A reminder: verbs of **movement from A to B** (gehen • kommen • fahren • fliegen • abfahren • ankommen) and verbs of **change of state** (aufstehen • einschlafen • sterben • werden) take **sein**. Plus three exceptions: **sein • bleiben • passieren**.

05 04:30

The part nobody tells you: this tense is almost absent in speech

Textbooks present the Plusquamperfekt as one of six tenses, as if people used it constantly in daily life. **They do not**. In spoken German you will hear it almost only in **nachdem** sentences; otherwise Germans put two events in order by

saying **zuerst ... dann**.

✗ **Ich hatte gegessen und dann war ich gegangen.**

Grammatically fine, but nobody talks like that.

✓ **Ich habe zuerst gegessen und bin dann gegangen.**

This is everyday German.

The practical consequence: **you are learning this topic for writing and reading, not for speaking**. You will meet it in the B1 written exam and in newspaper and novel texts; you do not need to chase it in the oral exam.

The second thing nobody mentions: in southern Germany and Austria, everyday speech has a “**double Perfekt**” — **Ich hab gegessen gehabt**. Do not be surprised when you hear it; **do not write it** — in an exam it counts as a mistake.

06 05:15

What to do this week

This topic sticks when you **put two events in order**. Five minutes a day, one exercise:

- Pick two events from yesterday and write them in order: “I ate.” → “I left.”
- Turn the earlier one into the Plusquamperfekt: **Ich hatte gegessen**.
- Join the two with **nachdem**: **Nachdem ich gegessen hatte, ging ich los**.
- Flip the same pair with **bevor** — and **drop the Plusquamperfekt**: **Bevor ich losging, aß ich etwas**.
- Once a week, drill the **sein** verbs: **war angekommen** • **war eingeschlafen** • **war abgefahren**.

① Next up is the Passiv: a sentence that loses its subject — the structure formal German uses most.

07 BUILD

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

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13 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end

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