

Verb conjugation · Präsens

— KONJUGATION IM PRÄSENS

Conjugation means the verb changes its ending to match the subject: Ich gehe, du gehst, er geht.

Ich fahre but du fährst — the stem quietly changes in two of the six rows. English barely conjugates at all (only the -s in “he goes”), so six endings feel like a lot. Here: the endings, how to find the stem, and the two rows where the vowel shifts.

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Why you get stuck

⚡ **SHORTCUT** There are four endings: -e · -st · -t · -en. The stem stays put; only the end changes.

You already do this in English, just in miniature: *I go, you go, he goes*. One ending, one person. German simply does it for **every person** — there are only six endings, and they all attach to the end of the verb.

The problem is not memorising. The problem is that in speech, after saying **er**, your English reflex leaves the verb *bare* — because English mostly does that. German does not forgive it; **er gehen** is not a sentence. The whole point of this page is to build the opposite reflex.

✓ **Er geht** nach Hause.

He's going home.

✗ **Er gehen** nach Hause.

no ending — not a sentence

- ① German has **no separate “I am learning” and “I learn”**. **Ich lerne Deutsch** means both. So the one conjugation you are about to learn covers almost all everyday speech.

How to find the stem

The dictionary form is called the **Infinitiv**, and almost all of them end in **-en**. Drop that ending and you are left with the **stem**; every conjugated form is built on it.

DICTIONARY FORM	STEM	MEANING
lernen	lern-	to learn
wohnen	wohn-	to live (somewhere)
spielen	spiel-	to play
arbeiten	arbeit-	to work
sammeln	sammel-	to collect — only the -n drops

With verbs ending in **-eln** and **-ern** (**sammeln** • **ändern**), only the final **-n** is removed.

Six endings — the table to save

This table is the whole page. Look at why it is easier than it seems: **two endings are identical** (**wir** and **sie/Sie** → **-en**), and two more are too (**ihr** and **er** → **-t**). So there are really only four endings to learn.

PERSON	ENDING	LERNEN	WOHNEN
ich - I	-e	ich lerne	ich wohne
du - you (informal)	-st	du lernst	du wohnst
er - sie - es - he / she / it	-t	er lernt	sie wohnt
wir - we	-en	wir lernen	wir wohnen
ihr - you all (informal)	-t	ihr lernt	ihr wohnt
sie - they / Sie - you (formal)	-en	sie lernen	Sie wohnen

The **wir** and **sie/Sie** forms look exactly like the Infinitiv (**lernen**). That is no accident, and it is a gift: for those two persons you change nothing at all.

- The ending always attaches to the **stem**, not to the Infinitiv: **lern + st**, not **lernen + st**.
- You cannot drop the pronoun. In Spanish or Italian “I go” is one word; in German, as in English, you must write **ich**.
- The verb stays in **second position**: **Heute lerne ich Deutsch**. — when a time word takes the first slot, the subject moves behind the verb.

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Three cases where the language adds a letter

These are not exceptions, they are **ease of pronunciation**. Where German would be hard to say, it slips in an **e** or swallows a repeated sound. Understand the three once and you never have to memorise them again.

HOW THE STEM ENDS	WHAT HAPPENS	EXAMPLE
-t · -d	an e slips in for du and er/ihr	arbeiten → du arbeit e st · er arbeit e t
-m · -n (after a consonant)	the same e slips in	atmen → du atm e st · öffnen → er öff e net
-s · -ß · -z · -x	the s of the du ending is swallowed → just -t	heißen → du heiß t · sitzen → du sitz t

The third row is where most mistakes happen: there is no such thing as **du heißst**. The **ß** already contains that sound.

✓ Wie **heißt** du?

What's your name? — a single t

✓ Du **arbeitest** heute.

You're working today. — an e slipped in

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Three irregulars: sein · haben · werden

Only three conjugations in German truly have to be memorised. All three are the backbone of everyday speech: **to be** · **to have** · **to become**. Every other verb works with the endings in the table.

PERSON	SEIN · TO BE	HABEN · TO HAVE	WERDEN · TO BECOME
ich	bin	habe	werde
du	bist	hast	wirst
er · sie · es	ist	hat	wird
wir	sind	haben	werden
ihr	seid	habt	werdet
sie · Sie	sind	haben	werden

ihr seid is spelled with a **d** — **seit** means “since”. This is the pair people confuse most often in exams.

There is one more group: verbs whose **stem vowel changes**. Only in the **du** and **er/sie/es** rows does the vowel in the stem shift; the endings stay the same. The full list has its own page — for now, get to know the six most common.

VERB	DU	ER · SIE · ES	CHANGE
fahren	fährst	fährt	a → ä
schlafen	schläfst	schläft	a → ä
sprechen	sprichst	spricht	e → i
essen	isst	isst	e → i
lesen	liest	liest	e → ie
nehmen	nimmst	nimmt	e → i + double m

The change happens **only in these two rows**. **wir fahren · ihr fahrt · sie fahren** — everything else goes back to normal.

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Three traps



TRAP 01

Forgetting the ending on er/sie/es

English trains you to leave the verb bare in most persons, so your brain does it here too. In German the **-t** is compulsory: **er kommt · sie macht · es funktioniert**.



TRAP 02

“ihr” and “er” take the same ending

Both take **-t**, but they do not get mixed up, because the pronoun is different: **ihr lernt** (you all) · **er lernt** (he). It is a trap when **listening**, not writing — do not miss the pronoun at the start of the sentence.



TRAP 03

The sie · sie · Sie trio

All three are spelled the same; the ending tells them apart: **sie lernt** = she · **sie lerne**n = they · **Sie lerne**n = you (formal, capitalised even mid-sentence).

- ① If you have got past these three traps, you have got past all of A1 conjugation. The rest is vocabulary — the endings are always the same.

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

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13 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end

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