

sein • haben • werden

— SEIN, HABEN, WERDEN

sein, haben and werden are the three most-used German verbs, and they double as auxiliary verbs: ich bin, ich habe, ich werde.

Ich bin 25 Jahre is left hanging: either add **alt** (Ich bin 25 Jahre alt) or stop at **Ich bin 25**, just like English “I’m 25”. And age takes **sein**, never **haben**.

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01 00:10

Why we start with these

⚡ SHORTCUT The wir and sie/Sie rows are the infinitive in all three verbs: **sind • haben • werden**. The rest is what you have to memorise.

The first sentence you meet in German is almost always built with one of these three. The reason is simple: they work not only with **their own meaning** but also as **auxiliary verbs** for other tenses — just like “be”, “have” and “will” in English.

- ✓ **Ich bin** Lehrer.
I’m a teacher. — own meaning
- ✓ **Ich habe** Zeit.
I have time. — own meaning
- ✓ **Ich bin** gekommen.
I came / I have come. — auxiliary of the Perfekt
- ✓ **Ich werde** Arzt.
I’m going to be / I’m becoming a doctor.

① All three are **irregular**. You can’t build them the way you build **ich lerne • du lernst**; the tables have to be learnt one by one. The good news: there are only 18 cells in total and you will meet them ten times a day — they stick fast.

Three tables — the page to save

	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

Three cells to watch: **du bist** (there is a **-t** — it is not **bis**), **ihr seid** (ends in **-d**, not **seit** — that is a preposition), **du wirst** (there is no such thing as **werdst**).

- **wir** and **sie/Sie** are always the same, and they are the infinitive itself: **sind • haben • werden**.
- The **er/sie/es** row is always short: **ist • hat • wird**. All three have a **-t** sound.
- The **ihr** row always ends in **-t / -d**: **seid • habt • werdet**.

Working with **pairs of near-lookalikes** speeds up memorising these tables. The **du** and **ihr** forms in particular look very similar.

- ✓ **Bist du bereit?**
Are you ready? (one person)
- ✓ **Seid ihr bereit?**
Are you ready? (several people)

Which one, when — a three-second decision

In English “be”, “have” and “become/get” feel like different verbs, so this should be easy — the trouble comes from “to be” being used for so much. The split is sharp: **a state, a possession or a change?**

QUESTION	VERB	EXAMPLE
What state? Who / how?	sein	Ich bin müde . • Sie ist Ärztin . • Das ist teuer .
What do you own or have?	haben	Ich habe Hunger . • Er hat ein Auto . • Wir haben Zeit .
What is it turning into? Where does it end up?	werden	Es wird kalt . • Sie wird Lehrerin . • Ich werde 30 .

sein is a **photograph** — the state right now. **werden** is an **arrow** — a move from one state to another. **Es ist kalt** is “it’s cold”, **Es wird kalt** is “it’s getting cold”.

✓ Ich **bin** Student.

I'm a student. → right now

✓ Ich **werde** Student.

I'm going to be a student — not yet.

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04 03:40

No article with jobs and nationalities

An English reflex: "I'm a teacher", so you reach for **ein**. With **sein** and **werden**, German uses **no article for jobs, nationalities and beliefs**.

✗ Ich bin **ein** Lehrer.

article not needed

✓ Ich bin Lehrer.

I'm a teacher.

✓ Sie wird Ärztin.

She's going to be a doctor.

✓ Er ist Türke. • Sie ist Türkin.

He is Turkish. • She is Turkish. — again no article

① The moment an adjective is added, the article comes back: **Er ist ein guter Lehrer**. The rule works like this: no article while the job title stands bare.

Traps



TRAP 01

Age — sein, not haben

English says “I am 25”, and so does German: **Ich bin 25 Jahre alt.** is correct, but the pattern people use more often is **Ich bin 25.** If you also speak French or Spanish, watch out: **Ich habe 25 Jahre** — the “I have 25 years” pattern — **does not exist** in German.

✗ **Ich habe 25 Jahre.**

wrong structure

✓ **Ich bin 25 (Jahre alt).**

I’m 25.



TRAP 02

Hunger, thirst, fear: these take haben

In English “I’m hungry” is built like a *state*. In German it is **something you have**. This group takes **haben** and the noun stays without an article.

Ich bin hungrig.

grammatically right but rare — everyday German doesn’t use it

✓ **Ich habe Hunger • Durst • Angst • Zeit • Recht.**

I’m hungry • thirsty • afraid • I have time • I’m right.

Being cold and being in pain take a third route — neither **sein** nor **haben**: that pattern is here.



TRAP 03

seid or seit

Two different words that sound the same. **seid** = the **ihr** form of **sein**. **seit** = a preposition meaning “since / for” that takes the Dativ. Germans mix these two up as well; you don’t have to.

✓ **Seid** ihr bereit?

Are you ready?

✓ **Ich wohne seit** zwei Jahren hier.

I have lived here for two years.



TRAP 04

Translating werden as “become” and using it instead of sein

The dictionary gives “become” for it, and that is tempting wherever English says “be”. But **werden** describes a **process**; it can’t describe a state that already exists.

✗ **Ich werde** Lehrer und arbeite in Berlin.

wrong if you mean “I am a teacher” — it says “I’m becoming a teacher”

✓ **Ich bin** Lehrer und arbeite in Berlin.

I’m a teacher and I work in Berlin.

06 06:00

Where you will meet them again

The real payoff of settling these three tables now comes later: **all of them come back as auxiliary verbs**.

STRUCTURE	AUXILIARY	EXAMPLE
Perfekt — past tense	haben / sein	Ich habe gegessen . • Ich bin gefahren .
Futur I — future	werden	Ich werde morgen kommen .
Passiv — passive	werden	Das Haus wird gebaut .

So if you don’t learn **du wirst** today, you will trip over the same cell again in the passive at B1. The [Perfekt page](#) explains the choice between haben and sein in detail.

For today it is enough to know the **own meanings** of these verbs and their basic forms. Once they act as auxiliaries, they lose their own meaning.

✓ Ich **bin** in Berlin.

I'm in Berlin. (own meaning)

✓ Ich **bin** nach Berlin geflogen.

I flew to Berlin. (auxiliary of the Perfekt)

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

TIPS

Know this before the test

The core of the topic in three lines, then the mistakes people make most often.

01

Three basic verbs, all irregular

sein (to be) • haben (to have) • werden (to become). The skeleton of German; the Perfekt and the passive are built with them too.

ich bin • ich habe • ich werde

02

sein: bin bist ist sind
seid sind

It looks like no rule at all, so learn it like a song. The polite Sie is always sind.

Du bist nett. • Seid ihr müde?

03

Patterns with haben where English uses “be”

Hunger haben • Durst haben • Zeit haben — English says “I’m hungry”, German says “I have hunger”.

Wir haben Hunger.

04

werden = change

Es wird kalt (it's getting cold) · Du wirst Vater (you're becoming a father) — a move from one state to another.

Es wird kalt.

✗ ~~Ich habe 25 Jahre alt.~~

✓ Ich bin 25 Jahre alt.

Age is said with sein.

✗ ~~Ich bin Hunger.~~

✓ Ich habe Hunger.

Hunger is possession: haben.

✗ ~~Seid Sie Herr Müller?~~

✓ Sind Sie Herr Müller?

Polite Sie → sind; seid is only for ihr.

✗ ~~Es ist kalt. (when you mean "it's getting cold")~~

✓ Es wird kalt.

Change takes werden; ist states the current state.

07 07:10

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Finish the topic: take the full test

13 questions · timed · exam style · 60% finishes the topic



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