

A **VERB CONJUGATION** is a list of the six possible forms of a verb for a particular tense (Tense, p. 59). For each tense, there is one verb form for each of the six persons used as the subject of the verb (Subject pronouns, p. 46).

Different tenses have different verb forms, but the principle of conjugation remains the same. In this chapter our examples are in the present tense (Present, p. 61).

### Singular

1 <sup>st</sup> person	I am
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	you are
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	he, she, it is

### Plural

1 <sup>st</sup> person	we are
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	you are
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	they are

## 14.1 IN ENGLISH

The verb *to be* conjugated above is the English verb that changes the most; it has three forms: *am*, *are*, and *is*. In conversation the initial vowel is often replaced by an apostrophe: *I'm*, *you're*, *he's*. Other English verbs only have two forms. Let us look at the verb *to sing*.

### Singular

1 <sup>st</sup> person	I sing
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	you sing
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	he sings
	she sings
	it sings

### Plural

1 <sup>st</sup> person	we sing
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	you sing
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	they sing

Because English verbs change so little, it isn't necessary to learn "to conjugate a verb;" that is, to list all its possible forms. For most verbs, it is much simpler to say that the verb adds an "(e)-s" in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular.

## 14.2 IN GERMAN

Unlike English, German verb forms change from one person to another so that when you learn a new verb you must also learn how to conjugate it. The conjugation of most verbs follows a predictable pattern so that once you learn the pattern for one German verb you will be able to apply that pattern to other German verbs.

## CATEGORIES OF GERMAN VERBS

A German verb is composed of two parts, a stem and an ending.

- **THE STEM** – the part of the verb left after dropping the final **-en** from the infinitive (or with a few verbs like **tun** *to do* and **ändern** *to change* by dropping the final **-n**).
- **THE ENDING** – the part of the verb that is added at the end of the stem and that corresponds to the grammatical person.

Infinitive	Stem	Ending present tense
singen	sing-	ich singe (1 <sup>st</sup> pers. sing.)
machen	mach-	du machst (2 <sup>nd</sup> pers. sing.)
kommen	komm-	sie kommt (3 <sup>rd</sup> pers. sing.)

Listed below is the terminology used to categorize German verbs according to the changes in the stem. You will notice that some verbs belong to more than one category.

**WEAK VERBS** (sometimes called **REGULAR VERBS**) — verbs that keep the same stem throughout the different tenses. For example, **wohnen**, **wohnte**, **gewohnt** (*live, lived, lived*).

**STRONG VERBS** (sometimes called **IRREGULAR VERBS**) — verbs whose stem vowel changes to indicate different tenses. For example, **singen**, **sang**, **gesungen** (*sing, sang, sung*). Note that strong verbs are not exactly irregular—they belong to a limited number of verb groups with similar patterns of vowel changes.

**STEM-CHANGING VERBS** – verbs whose stem vowel changes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the present tense. For example, **lesen** (*to read*), **du liest**, **er liest** (*you read, he reads*). The stem change can also be the addition of an umlaut over the vowel. For examples, **fahren** (*to travel*), **du fährst**, **er fährt** (*you travel, he travels*).

Some verbs belong to the two above categories: for instance, **geben** (*to give*) is a stem-changing verb since the stem vowel changes from **-e-** to **-i-** in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular in the present tense; it is also a strong verb since the stem vowel changes from **-e-** to **a-** depending on the tense.

**MIXED VERBS** — verbs that have elements of both weak and strong verbs. Many common verbs are mixed verbs: **bringen** (*to bring*), **kennen** (*to know*), **denken** (*to think*).

When you learn a new verb, memorize in which category it belongs so that you can conjugate it correctly.

Note: The English verb system also includes weak, strong, and mixed verbs which can be recognized by the similar conjugation patterns (weak: *play-played*, strong: *sing-sang*, mixed: *bring, brought*). While not every pair of verbs in both languages will always share the same pattern, they usually do and it helps to recognize the similarities.

## HOW TO CONJUGATE A VERB

Here are the steps to conjugate the regular verb **machen** (*to make*) in the present tense.

1. Find the verb stem by removing the infinitive ending.

INFINITIVE: **machen** → STEM: **mach-**

2. Add the ending that agrees with the subject. Weak and strong verbs add the same endings in the present tense.

### Singular

1 <sup>st</sup> person	ich mache	<i>I make</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person familiar	du mach <b>st</b>	<i>you make</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	er mach <b>t</b>	<i>he, it makes</i>
	sie mach <b>t</b>	<i>she, it makes</i>
	es mach <b>t</b>	<i>it makes</i>

### Plural

1 <sup>st</sup> person	wir mach <b>en</b>	<i>we make</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person familiar	ihr mach <b>t</b>	<i>you make</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	sie mach <b>en</b>	<i>they make</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person formal (sing. & pl.)	Sie mach <b>en</b>	<i>you make</i>

As strong verbs are introduced in your textbook, either their entire conjugation or their principal parts will be given so that you will know how to conjugate them (Principal parts, p. 82). Be sure to memorize these forms, because many common verbs are irregular (**sein**, *to be*; **gehen**, *to go*; **werden**, *to become*, for example).

## CHOOSING THE CORRECT “PERSON”

(Personal pronouns, p. 40)

In your textbook, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person formal forms will either be listed after the 2<sup>nd</sup> person familiar plural forms or after the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural form, as they are in the conjugation of the verb **singen** (*to sing*) below.

### Singular

1 <sup>st</sup> person	ich singe	<i>I sing</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person familiar	du sing <b>st</b>	<i>you sing</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	er sing <b>t</b>	<i>he, it sings</i>
	sie sing <b>t</b>	<i>she, it sings</i>
	es sing <b>t</b>	<i>it sings</i>

**Plural**

1 <sup>st</sup> person	wir singen	<i>we sing</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person familiar	ihr singt	<i>you sing</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	sie singen	<i>they sing</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person formal (sing. & pl.)	Sie singen	<i>you sing</i>

To choose the proper verb form, it is important to identify the person and the number of the subject.

**1<sup>ST</sup> PERSON SINGULAR** – The subject is always **ich** (*I*). Notice that **ich** is not capitalized unless it is the first word of a sentence.

**Ich** singe leise.

*I sing softly.*

Leise singe **ich**.

*Softly I sing.*

**2<sup>ND</sup> PERSON SINGULAR FAMILIAR** – The subject is always **du** (*you*).

Katrin, **du** singst gut.

*Katrin, you sing well.*

**3<sup>RD</sup> PERSON SINGULAR** – The subject can be expressed in one of three ways:

- the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular masculine pronoun **er** (*he* or *it*), the feminine pronoun **sie** (*she* or *it*), and the neuter pronoun **es** (*it*)

**Er** singt schön.

*He sings beautifully.*

**Sie** singt schön.

*She sings beautifully.*

**Es** singt schön.

*It sings beautifully.*

- a proper noun

**Anna** singt gut.

*Anna sings well.*

**Der Fischer Chor** singt gut.

*The Fischer choir sings well.*

Since the proper noun could be replaced by the pronoun *he, she* or *it* (**er, sie, or es**), you must use the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular form of the verb.

- a singular common noun

**Der Vogel** singt.

*The bird sings.*

**Die Geige** singt.

*The violin sings.*

**Das Kind** singt.

*The child sings.*

Since the common noun could be replaced by the pronoun *he, she* or *it* (**er, sie, or es**), you must use the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular form of the verb.

**1<sup>ST</sup> PERSON PLURAL** – The subject can be expressed in one of two ways:

- the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural pronoun **wir** (*we*)

**Wir** singen gut.

*We sing well.*

- a multiple subject in which the speaker is included

**Axel, Lukas, Ingrid und ich** singen gut.

*Axel, Lukas, Ingrid and I sing well.*

Since the subject could be replaced by the pronoun *we* (**wir**), you must use the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural form of the verb.

**2<sup>ND</sup> PERSON PLURAL FAMILIAR** – The subject is always **ihr** (*you*).

Ingrid und Lukas, singt **ihr** auch?

*Ingrid and Lukas, do you sing too?*

Since the subjects *Ingrid* and *Lukas* (whom you would address with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person familiar individually), could be replaced by the pronoun *you* (**ihr**), you must use the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural familiar form of the verb.

**2<sup>ND</sup> PERSON FORMAL (SINGULAR AND PLURAL)** – The subject is always **Sie** (*you*).

Notice that **Sie** is always capitalized regardless of its position in a sentence.

Frau Meier, wollen **Sie** heute nicht singen?

*Mrs. Meier, do you not want to sing today?*

Herr und Frau Meier, singen **Sie** gern zusammen?

*Mr. and Mrs. Meier, do you like to sing together?*

Since the subjects *Mr. and Mrs. Meier* (whom you would address with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person formal individually or together) could be replaced by the pronoun *you* (**Sie**), you must use the 2<sup>nd</sup> person formal form of the verb.

**3<sup>RD</sup> PERSON PLURAL** – The subject can be expressed in one of three ways:

- the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun **sie** (*they*)

**Sie** singen im Chor.

*They sing in the choir.*

- a plural noun

**Die Kinder** singen im Chor.

*The children sing in the choir.*

The plural noun could be replaced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun *they* (**sie**), you must use the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural form of the verb.

- two or more proper or common nouns

**Lukas und Ingrid** singen ein Duett.

*Lukas and Ingrid sing a duet.*

**Die Gläser und Teller** sind auf dem Tisch.

*The glasses and plates are on the table.*

The nouns could be replaced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun *they* (**sie**), you must use the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural form of the verb.

## STUDY TIPS

### VERB CONJUGATIONS

#### Pattern

- 1 Start by looking for a pattern within the conjugation of the verb itself. For example, let's find a pattern in the conjugation of **wohnen**.

ich wohne	wir wohnen
du wohnst	ihr wohnt
er/sie/es wohnt	sie wohnen/Sie Wohnen

What pattern do you see?

- all the forms start with the same stem: **wohn-** and **mach-**
- **ich** forms have an **-e** ending
- **du** forms have an **-st** ending
- **er/sie/es** and **ihr** have a **-t** ending
- **wir, sie** (pl.) and **Sie** have an **-en** ending

If you learn best with mnemonics, think of the regular conjugation pattern as the verb stem + **-e, -st, 10, 10** throughout the list; that is, **-e, -st, -t, -en, -t, -en** for **ich, du, er/sie/es, wir, ihr,** and **Sie/sie**. Your teacher may also share this mnemonic in the form of “icky dust 10 10” (**ich -e, du -st, -t, -en, -t, -en**).

- 2 Whenever you learn a new verb, look for similarities with another verb. The pattern can be related to the consonant ending the stem. For example, let's look at **finden** (*to find*), **arbeiten** (*to work*) and **öffnen** (*to open*).

ich finde	wir finden	ich arbeite	wir arbeiten	ich öffne	wir öffnen
du findest	ihr findet	du arbeitest	ihr arbeitet	du öffnest	ihr öffnet
er findet	sie/Sie finden	er arbeitet	sie/Sie arbeiten	er öffnet	sie/Sie öffnen

What similarities and differences with regular verbs (see under 1 above) do you see?

- the endings of the verb forms are the same, except for **du, er/sie/es** and **ihr** that insert an **-e** before the ending

The pattern can be related to the vowel of the stem. For example, let's look at three stem-changing verbs **sehen** (to see), **schlafen** (to sleep) and **geben** (to give).

ich sehe	wir sehen	ich schlafe	wir schlafen	ich gebe	wir geben
du siehst	ihr seht	du schläfst	ihr schlaft	du gibst	ihr gebt
er sieht	sie/Sie sehen	er schläft	sie/Sie schlafen	er gibt	sie/Sie geben

What similarities and differences with regular verbs (see under 1 above) do you see?

- the endings of all the verb forms are the same
  - the stem vowel changes only in the **du** and **er/sie/es** forms
  - vowels change in the same way in the **du** and **er/sie/es** forms
- ③ In the conjugation of most regular and irregular German verbs, there are four forms that look like the infinitive of the verb and end in **-en** or **-n**: the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> persons plural and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person formal, singular and plural (Verbs, p. 29).
- ④ As new verb conjugations are introduced, more and more similarities and patterns will become evident. Take the time to look for them.

### Flashcards

Create a card for each verb to memorize its meaning and conjugation pattern. On the German side, write the infinitive form and the following information as appropriate:

- ① If it is a stem-changing verb, indicate its type (**a → ä**; **e → i**; **e → ie**) in parentheses.

fahren (a → ä)	to drive
geben (e → i)	to give
lesen (e → ie)	to read

- ② If the verb requires a spelling change in the **du** or **er/sie/es** endings owing to particular consonant combinations, write the form in parentheses and underline the spelling change.

reden (er red <u>e</u> t)	to talk
arbeiten (er arbeit <u>e</u> t)	to work
tanzen (du tanz <u>t</u> )	to dance

**Practice**

- ① Learn the different forms of a verb by writing them down (always using the subject pronoun). Repeat until you can write the correct forms without referring to your textbook.
- ② Practice using the various forms out of order, so that if you are asked a question you can respond without going through the entire pattern.
- ③ Be sure to do the exercises that follow the introduction of a new conjugation. When you've finished, refer to your textbook or answer key to make corrections. Mark the mistakes and corrections with a colored pen so that they stand out and you can concentrate on them when you review.
- ④ Write your own sentences using the different forms of the verb.

See also Study Tips, p. 84.



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**REVIEW ACTIVITY**

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**I. Draw a box around the stem of the German verbs in the infinitive form.**

- a. denken
- b. rennen
- c. arbeiten
- d. wandern
- e. reisen
- f. tun
- g. vertreten
- h. mitnehmen

**II. Write the stem and conjugate the verbs.**

a. gehen (to go). Stem: \_\_\_\_\_  
ich \_\_\_\_\_  
du \_\_\_\_\_  
er, sie, es \_\_\_\_\_  
wir \_\_\_\_\_  
ihr \_\_\_\_\_  
sie \_\_\_\_\_

b. laufen (to run). Stem: \_\_\_\_\_  
ich \_\_\_\_\_  
du \_\_\_\_\_  
er, sie, es \_\_\_\_\_  
wir \_\_\_\_\_  
ihr \_\_\_\_\_  
sie \_\_\_\_\_

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