

verbs which can take haben or sein

In grammatical terms, verbs that take **sein** are intransitive, i.e. they don't take a direct object. Transitive verbs, which do take a direct object, take **haben**.

However, some verbs can be used transitively or intransitively, and so can take **sein** or **haben**, e.g:

Er ist nach Berlin gefahren. *He's gone to Berlin.*

Er hat sein neues Auto gefahren. *He drove his new car.*

Ich bin alleine in den Urlaub geflogen. *I flew off alone on holiday.*

Der Pilot hat uns nach Berlin geflogen. *The pilot flew us to Berlin.*

A few verbs of movement form their perfect tense with **sein** if they involve moving to a destination, but not if they merely describe doing the activity. The commonest such verbs are **schwimmen** to swim, **reiten** to ride, **segeln** to sail:

Sie ist von England nach Frankreich geschwommen. *She swam from England to France.*

Wir haben den ganzen Morgen im Mittelmeer geschwommen. *We spent the whole morning swimming in the Mediterranean Sea.*

Wir sind ans andere Ufer gesegelt. *We sailed to the other bank.*

Letztes Jahr habe ich auf dem Chiemsee gesegelt. *Last year I sailed on the Chiemsee.*



Verbs relating to movement are easy enough to recognise, but what about verbs relating to a change of state? These refer to a fundamental transformation of the bodily state (e.g. **einschlafen** to fall asleep, **aufwachen** to wake up) or of the essence of a thing (e.g. **verwelken** to wilt), and take **sein**: **Ich bin eingeschlafen/aufgewacht**; **Die Blumen sind schon verwelkt** *The flowers have already wilted*. Changing a legal or official state or status doesn't count! **Unsere Freunde haben geheiratet/haben sich scheiden lassen** *Our friends have got married/divorced*.

when to use the perfect tense

- The perfect tense in German is used to convey the English *have* + past participle: *I have worked, I have eaten*. In informal German, such as conversation, letters and emails, the perfect tense is also used in preference to the simple past/imperfect to refer to a completed action in the past: *I worked, I went, I ate* etc.

Ich habe zwei Karten gekauft. *I (have) bought two tickets.*

Sie ist nach Dresden gefahren. *She has gone to Dresden./She went to Dresden.*

Wir haben uns dort amüsiert. *We had a good time there.*

Er ist um halb acht aufgestanden. *He got up at 7:30.*

- It is also used when the auxiliary verbs *did* or *didn't*, *have* or *haven't* are used in English questions and negatives:

Was haben Sie gestern gemacht? *What did you do yesterday?*

Er ist noch nicht gekommen. *He hasn't arrived yet.*

Wann hast du ihn kennengelernt? *When did you meet (i.e. get to know) him?*

- As in English, the perfect tense is used in subordinate time clauses which refer to future time:

Wenn ich das Buch gelesen habe, werde ich es dir leihen.

When I have read the book, I'll lend it to you.

Er darf mit euch gehen, sobald er die Hausaufgaben gemacht hat.

He is allowed to go with you, as soon as he has finished his homework.

- It is used in negative sentences containing **seit** for/since, to mean *have/has done* or *have/has been doing*, whereas the present tense is used in positive sentences (page 135):

Ich habe ihn seit vielen Jahren nicht gesehen.

I haven't seen him for many years.

Er hat seit fünf Monaten nicht gearbeitet.

He hasn't worked for five months.

Beware of translating sentences such as *I've lived in this house for ten years* and *They've known each other a long time* into German using the perfect tense. In English, the perfect tense implies *I still live in this house* and *They still know each other*, whereas in German it means the action is in the past, possibly even a long time in the past: **Ich habe zehn Jahre in diesem Haus gewohnt** *I lived in this house for ten years*; **Sie haben einander gekannt** *They knew/used to know each other*.

