

German Imperfect Tense

Use: Like English, German has more than one past tense. The imperfect can be used to describe any event/action in the past (eg **made**, **did make**, **has made**, **was making**, **used to make**), and has pretty much the same meaning as the perfect tense. It's used more in written German (so you find it a lot in newspapers and short stories, for example), but sometimes occurs in spoken German also.

Form: The imperfect has one verb part (the perfect has **two** parts: eg Ich **habe** ihn **gesehen** = **I have seen him**).

Weak verbs: add these endings (highlighted **red**) to the stem of the verb.

Verb endings for weak German verbs

Ich mach**te** meine Hausaufgaben. [I did my homework.]

Du mach**test** deine Hausaufgaben. [You did your homework.]

Er/Sie/Es mach**te** seine/ihre/seine Hausaufgaben. [He/She/It did his/her/its homework.]

Wir mach**ten** unsere Hausaufgaben. [We did our homework.]

Ihr (you, plural, informal) mach**tet** eure Hausaufgaben. [You did your homework.]

Sie (they) mach**ten** ihre Hausaufgaben. [They did their homework.]

Sie (you, formal) mach**ten** Ihre Hausaufgaben. [You did your homework.]

How do you know if it's a **weak** verb or a **strong** verb? Look for the verb in any list/table of strong/irregular verbs (e.g. in the back of a dictionary, or online, maybe even a verb wheel!). If it's not there, it's most likely a **weak** verb, and you use the endings given above.

Strong verbs: They're in any list/table of strong/irregular verbs. The stem vowel of many strong verbs changes in the imperfect (in English also) and you have to learn them. The column headed **Imperfect Tense** in the table gives the verb form you use with **ich** and with **er/sie/es**. For the **du** form, add **-st** to that. For the **wir** form, and **sie** (they), and **Sie** (formal you), add **-en**. For **ihr**, add **-t**.

For example: Ich schwamm, du schwamm**st**, wir schwamm**en**

Tips:

Remember that the **ich** form and the **er/sie/es** form are the same as each other, and that the **wir** and **sie** (they), and **Sie** (formal you) forms are the same as each other.

Some verbs whose stem ends in **-d** or **-t** have an extra **e** before the imperfect endings are added, eg ich arbeit**ete**.