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TENSES L7 – Präteritum vs. Perfekt

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Video Lesson:

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DIFFERENCE IN MEANING

THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE AT ALL!!!

- „Ich **bin** im Kino **gewesen**." = „Ich **war** im Kino."

Typical German mistake in English:

- „I wasn't in England yet." vs. „I haven't been to England yet."
wrong vs. correct

Same sentences in German:

- „Ich **war** noch nicht in England." = „Ich **bin** noch nicht in England **gewesen**."

No difference – both are correct!!!

DIFFERENCE IN USE

Präteritum (Simple Past)	Perfekt (Present Perfect)
• On the news • In newspapers, books, reports, and stories • In spoken language for the verbs: "sein", "haben", "werden" and modal verbs	• in conversation • In personal letters and emails, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter,

VERBS USING PRÄTERITUM (SIMPLE PAST) IN SPOKEN LANGUAGE

- sein, haben, werden
- können, sollen, wollen, dürfen, müssen

These verbs almost exclusively use Präteritum, even in spoken language. Why? Because they usually come with a second verb, and forming their Perfekt version can get long, complicated, and sometimes irregular. So, using Präteritum instead makes it easier for you!

- "Mixed Verbs" like brennen, kennen, denken, bringen, scheinen, ...

The Präteritum versions of these verbs are known because their Partizip 2 (past participle) is formed with the Präteritum stem of the verb. In northern parts of Germany, you will hear them in Präteritum, but if you go further south, you will also hear them in Perfekt.

Interesting fact: Swiss-German doesn't use the Präteritum. Swiss-German-speaking people always use the Perfekt.

EXCESSIVE USE OF PRÄTERITUM

AT BEST – You are immediately busted as a non-native speaker, even if you don't have an accent!

AT WORST – You sound like a snob or robot, and the people from southern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland may even have problems understanding what you are trying to say!

SUMMARY

- Don't use modal verbs in Perfekt; nobody does so! (outside Switzerland) The word order in subordinate clauses is irregular in Perfekt!
- Use the Präteritum (Simple Past) when writing official letters to the government, at work, and for complaints
- For everything else: USE THE PERFEKT!
- **When in doubt: USE PERFEKT!** (Even in the written language, the Perfekt is getting more and more accepted.)

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