Taaldus

DUTCH VERBS · CHEAT SHEET

Present & Past Perfect *(perfectum & plusquamperfectum)*

Hebben or *zijn* + past participle, how to build the participle, and the explicit rule for choosing *hebben* or *zijn*.

How to form it

Formula: auxiliary + past participle, with the participle at the end of the sentence. Building it is one recipe for both tenses; only the auxiliary's own tense changes. Take *werken* and *groeien* as examples:

1. Start with the infinitive → **werken**
2. Take the stem (drop -en) → **werk**
3. Add ge- in front → **gewerk**
4. SoFTKeTCHuP: does the stem end in *S, F, T, K, CH, P*? Add *-t* (*werk*), otherwise *-d* (*groei*) → **gewerkt**

	PRESENT PERFECT		PAST PERFECT	
Pronoun	**werken** *hebben*	**groeien** *zijn*	**werken** *hebben*	**groeien** *zijn*
ik	**heb** gewerkt	**ben** gegroeid	**had** gewerkt	**was** gegroeid
jij, u	**hebt** gewerkt	**bent** gegroeid	**had** gewerkt	**was** gegroeid
hij, zij, het	**heeft** gewerkt	**is** gegroeid	**had** gewerkt	**was** gegroeid
wij, jullie, zij	**hebben** gewerkt	**zijn** gegroeid	**hadden** gewerkt	**waren** gegroeid

Choosing *hebben* or *zijn*

The default is *hebben*. The large majority of verbs use it: *Ik heb gewerkt.*

Use *zijn* with verbs of movement toward a place and verbs of change: *gaan, komen, vertrekken, beginnen, worden, blijven, gebeuren, groeien*... and with *zijn* itself: *Ik ben in Parijs geweest.*

Which tense, when

Present perfect: Spoken Dutch often prefers it where English uses the simple past: *Gisteren heb ik gewerkt.* (Yesterday I worked.)

Past perfect: For an event completed before another past event: *Ik had gewerkt en daarna liep ik naar huis.* (I had worked, and afterwards I walked home.)

Spelling the participle: two pitfalls

Judge the consonant from the infinitive, not the present-tense stem (the same pitfall as the simple past). *Reizen* has a *z*, so *gereisd*, not *gereist*. Same for *leven* → *geleefd*.

Verbs that already start with *be-*, *ge-*, *ver-*, *ont-* or *her-* don't get an extra *ge-*: *betalen* → *betaald*, *gebeuren* → *gebeurd*, *vertellen* → *verteld*.

Irregular participles: vowel change instead of -t/-d

Many of the most common Dutch verbs ignore the spelling rule above and change their vowel instead, usually ending in *-en*: *lezen* → *gelezen*, *zitten* → *gezeten*, *gaan* → *gegaan*. *Zijn* is its own case: *geweest*. There is no formula: these are the same forms you memorized for the simple past.

Common mistakes

A common mistake: not moving the participle all the way to the end. English puts the time expression last ('I worked yesterday'), which tempts a word-for-word *Ik heb gewerkt gisteren*. Dutch keeps the participle at the very end of the clause: *Ik heb gisteren gewerkt*.

Practice the present & past perfect in the Verb Quiz
taaldus.com/verb-conjugation-quiz

Full explanation
taaldus.com/verb-grammar/perfect-tenses