

Chapter 11

The past tense: “weak” verbs

11.1 Weak and strong verbs

The verbs in all Germanic languages can be divided into two major classes according to whether:

- 1 the past tense is formed by the addition of a suffix to the stem = WEAK

to reside	resided	(has) resided
wonen	woonde(n)	(heeft) gewoond

or

- 2 the past tense is formed by a vowel change in the stem itself = STRONG

to sing	sang	(has) sung
zingen	zong	(heeft) gezongen

11.2 Simple past of weak verbs

The past tense of weak verbs is formed by adding **-t-** or **-d-** to the stem of the verb, and then the endings **-e** for the singular and **-en** for the plural:

Simple past = **stem + t/d + e(n)**

koken = to cook	horen = to hear
ik	ik
jij kookte	jij hoorde
u	u
hij/zij/het	hij/zij/het

wij		wij	
jullie	kookten	jullie	hoorden
zij		zij	

11.2.1 t or d?

The choice of **t** or **d** as the sign of the past is automatically determined by the consonant in the infinitive.

- 1 The endings **-te**, **-ten** are used after voiceless consonants (**t**, **k**, **f**, **s**, **ch**, **p**). A handy way to remember them is with the word 't kofschip, a name for an old type of sailing vessel:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Simple past singular</i>	<i>Simple past plural</i>
zetten	to set	zette	zetten
praten	to talk	praatte	praatten
roken	to smoke	rookte	rookten
straffen	to punish	strafte	strafden
fietsen	to cycle	fietste	fietsten
lachen	to laugh	lachte	lachten
hopen	to hope	hoopte	hoopten
kloppen	to knock	klopte	klopten

Notice that since **-tt-** is a spelling convention and pronounced like single **t**, and **-n** is dropped in ordinary speech, **praten** (infinitive), **praatte** (simple past, singular), **praatten** (simple past plural) are all pronounced alike.

- 2 Verbs that do not have any of the above consonants in their infinitive take a **-de/-den** ending:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Simple past singular</i>	<i>Simple past plural</i>
bestellen	to order	bestelde	bestelden
bouwen	to build	bouwde	bouwden
naaien	to sew	naaide	naaiden
studeren	to study	studeerde	studeerden
schudden	to shake	schudde	schudden
leggen	to lay	legde	legden
antwoorden	to answer	antwoordde	antwoordden

- 3 Verbs with **v** or **z** in the infinitive also add the endings **-de, -den**, but these endings are added to the *stem* of the verb:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Stem</i>	<i>Simple past singular</i>	<i>Simple past plural</i>
leven	to live	leef-	leefde	leefden
geloven	to believe	geloof-	geloofde	geloofden
reizen	to travel	reis-	reisde	reisden
glanzen	to shine	glans-	glansde	glansden

The explanation of this is the familiar rule that the letters **v** and **z** may not close a syllable. The pronunciation does not follow this, however, and the past tense forms on the right are pronounced as *leevede*, *geloovde*, *reizde*, *glanzde*.

11.2.2 By the way

Most Dutch speakers in the *Randstad* area pronounce the sound spelled **g** in the same way as that spelled **ch**, which would make it seem as though a verb like **leggen** ought to have the ending **-te**, as does **lachen**. The **-de** ending, however, reflects the fact that for many Dutch speakers, particularly in the southern provinces and in the whole of Dutch-speaking Belgium, the sounds **g** (voiced) and **ch** (voiceless) are as sharply distinguished from one another as are **v** and **f**, or **z** and **s**.

11.2.3 Let's try it

Supply the past tense.

- (werken) Hij _____ in de jaren 70 bij de Universiteit van Groningen.
(wonen) Wij _____ toen nog in de polder.
(praten) Jij _____ gisteren de hele tijd met haar.
(schudden) Sara en Karel _____ echt van het lachen.
(verhuizen) Wij _____ in dat jaar naar het oosten van het land.
(zetten) Met Sinterklaas _____ ik altijd mijn schoen.
(hopen, regen) Zij _____ op mooi weer, maar volgens mij _____ het de hele tijd.
(verven) Ik _____ mijn haar op Koninginnedag helemaal oranje.

11.3 The past participle

The past participle in Dutch consists of the stem of the verb plus either **d** or **t** and a prefix **ge-**:

past participle = **ge-** + stem + **d/t**

- 1 The **-t** ending is used when the final consonant of the stem is any of the consonants in **'t kofschip**, provided it is the same consonant in the infinitive.
- 2 The **-d** ending is used for all other weak verbs.

Note

- 1 In pronunciation there is no difference between **-t** and **-d** at the end of the word.
- 2 Since doubled letters may never stand at the end of a word in Dutch, no **-t** or **-d** is added to verbs whose stems already end in **-t** or **-d**:

praten
to talk

gepraat hebben
to have talked

antwoorden
to answer

geantwoord hebben
to have answered

II

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	PRESENT TENSE, INFINITIVE		PAST TENSE		PAST PARTICIPLE
VOICELESS	kloppen to knock		<input type="text" value="p"/>		<input type="text" value="p"/>
	hopen to hope		<input type="text" value="t"/>		<input type="text" value="t"/> -
	zetten to set		<input type="text" value="t"/>		<input type="text" value="t"/> -
	praten to talk		<input type="text" value="k"/>		<input type="text" value="k"/> -
	pakken to pack		<input type="text" value="k"/>		<input type="text" value="k"/> -
	roken to smoke		<input type="text" value="f"/>		<input type="text" value="f"/> -
	straffen to punish		<input type="text" value="f"/>		<input type="text" value="f"/> -
	missen to miss		<input type="text" value="s"/>		<input type="text" value="s"/>
VOICED	fietsen to cycle		<input type="text" value="s"/>		<input type="text" value="s"/>
	kuchen to cough		<input type="text" value="ch"/>		<input type="text" value="ch"/>
	krabben to scratch		<input type="text" value="b"/>		<input type="text" value="b"/>
	schudden to shake		<input type="text" value="d"/>		<input type="text" value="d"/> -
	baden to bathe		<input type="text" value="d"/>		<input type="text" value="d"/> -
	leggen to lay		<input type="text" value="g"/>		<input type="text" value="g"/> -
	volgen to follow		<input type="text" value="g"/>		<input type="text" value="g"/> -
	leven to live		<input type="text" value="f"/>		<input type="text" value="f"/> -
	reizen to travel		<input type="text" value="s"/>		<input type="text" value="s"/> -
	(all others)		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

Dutch has six unstressed verbal prefixes, **be-**, **er-**, **ge-**, **her-**, **ont-** and **ver-**. The participle prefix **ge-** is not added to verbs that already have one of these six prefixes:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Simple past</i>	<i>Past participle</i>
bedanken	to thank	bedankte(n)	bedankt
erkennen	to admit	erkende(n)	erkend
geloven	to believe	geloofde(n)	geloofd
herhalen	to repeat	herhaalde(n)	herhaald
ontmoeten	to meet	ontmoette(n)	ontmoet
verklaren	to explain	verklaarde(n)	verklaard