



Activity 1 - The Simple Past Tense

Now that you are familiar with the plot of *Rotkäppchen*, watch this video on YouTube, it was made in a primary school, the children painted pictures and read the story out loud:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw5X-kxMass>

In both the written version and the read-out version on YouTube, the language used is formal and appropriate for written German. The tense preferred when writing down a story in German is the **Simple Past** tense (A note on terminology: other names for this tense are: *preterite, Imperfekt, Präteritum*). Rules in German for the use of tenses are informed by the situation, the context, rather than by grammatical indicators. When TELLING a story in spoken German, the Perfect Tense is used, but for written German, the **Simple Past** is employed. The two tenses refer to the same time – the past: the only difference is whether they are being used in speech or in writing. There are a few verbs however which are used in the Simple Past Tense even in spoken German, these are:

The auxiliaries:

haben – hatte
sein – war
werden – wurde

Modal verbs:

dürfen - durfte
können – konnte
möchten - mochte
müssen – musste
sollen –sollte
wollen – wollte

and a few common ones:

wissen – wusste
kommen – kam
stehen – stand
gehen - ging

Have a look at this excerpt:

Wie nun Rotkäppchen in den Wald **kam**, **begegnete** ihm der Wolf. Rotkäppchen aber **wusste** nicht, was das für ein böses Tier **war**, und **fürchtete** sich nicht vor ihm. "Guten Tag, Rotkäppchen!" **sprach** er.

The Simple Past forms are highlighted. There are two types of verb: those which are regular, and those which are not. In the passage above, there are only two regular verbs: *begegnen* with its past form *begegnete* and *fürchten* – *fürchtete*. All the others are not regular verbs – and this is no coincidence. Statistically, the most frequently used verbs are not the regular ones. Here we find: *kommen* – *kam*; *wissen* – *wusste*; *sein*- *war*; *sprechen* – *sprach*.

If you'd like to brush up on irregular forms of German verbs, have a look here:

http://coerll.utexas.edu/gg/gr/vsp_02.html

If you want to have a look at regular verbs, go here:

http://coerll.utexas.edu/gg/gr/vsp_01.html