

Verb Reconstruction, or: Where Do I Find This in the Dictionary? (Wilson chs. 2, 14-15)

1. Look for accompanying auxiliary verbs and the commonly occurring *ge*-prefix to determine whether you are dealing with a past participle. (Remember that some verbs, including all of those beginning *be-*, *emp-*, *ent-*, *er-*, *miss-*, *ver-*, *zer-*, do not take a *ge*-prefix in the past participle [e.g. *spazieren*], while other verbs have *ge*- throughout [e.g. *geschehen*].)
2. Past tenses ending in *-te(n)*, *-test*, or *-tet* and past participles ending in *-t* (the dental suffix) are markers of weak verbs. To find the infinitive, simply replace the suffix with *-en*, and (usually) remove any *ge*-prefix if dealing with a past participle.
3. In the absence of a dental suffix in past and past participle forms, you are dealing with a strong verb. To find the infinitive, you will have to change the stem vowel (see 5 and 6 below).
4. Much like infinitives, past participles of the strong conjugation mostly end in *-en*. In these cases, the infinitive is normally found by removing *ge-* (unless it is inseparable) and changing the stem vowel. If the stem vowel is *e* or *a*, you may not even have to change it.
5. The past tense of a strong verb always has a different vowel than the infinitive:
 - past *ie* often corresponds to infinitive *ei* or *a*;
 - past *a* often corresponds to infinitive *e* or *i*;
 - past *u* often corresponds to infinitive *a*. See Wilson appendix E for a fuller list.
6. The past participle of a strong verb may or may not have a different vowel than the infinitive:
 - participial *ie* often corresponds to infinitive *ei*;
 - participial *o* often corresponds to infinitive *e* or *ie*. See Wilson appendix E for a fuller list.
7. If, faced with a past tense with an inseparable prefix, you cannot figure out the infinitive, try removing the prefix and looking up the resulting form in your dictionary. It will probably redirect you to the infinitive for the shorter form; now find the entry for that form plus the prefix.
8. If, faced with a past participle with an inseparable prefix, you cannot figure out the infinitive, try replacing the prefix with *ge-* and looking up the resulting form in your dictionary. It will probably redirect you to the infinitive for the *ge*-form; now find the same word but with the original prefix.
9. Some verbs are both weak and strong, in that they take the dental suffix but also vary their stem vowel. The most important of these are best memorized:

bringen – brachte – gebracht	kennen – kannte – gekannt
denken – dachte – gedacht	wissen – wusste – gewusst