**Past Tenses**

**The Simple Past Tense**

We use the past tense to talk about:

1. **Completed Action in the Past (Something that happened once in the past)**

The simple past is used to express the idea that an action started and finished at a specific time in the past. Sometimes, the speaker may not actually mention the specific time, but they do have one specific time in mind.

* I **bought** this car in Montreal.
* I **went** to the grocery store.
* The train **was** ten minutes late*.*

1. **An activity connected with an expression of time (in the past)**

For a past action when the time is given.

* I **saw** a movie yesterday.
* I **graduated** in 2010.
* Last year, I **traveled** to Japan.

1. **To ask about past time in a question.**

* When **did** you meet him?

1. **A Series of Completed Actions or Something that happened several times in the past**

* I **finished** work, **walked** to the beach, and **found** a nice place to swim.
* When I **was** a kid, I **played** football every day.

1. **Duration in the Past**

The simple past can be used with a duration which starts and stops in the past. Duration is a longer action often indicated by expressions such as: for two years, for five minutes, all day, all year, etc.

* I **lived** in Brazil for two years.
* They **sat** at the beach all day.

1. **Habits in the Past**

The simple past can also be used to describe a habit which stopped in the past. It can have the same meaning as "[*used to*](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/usedto.html)". To make it clear that we are talking about a habit, we often add expressions such as: always, often, usually, never, when I was a child, when I was younger, etc.

* I **studied** French when I was a child.
* He **played** the piano.
* They never **went** to school, they always **skipped** class.

### Past Facts or Generalizations

The simple past can also be used to describe past facts or generalizations which are no longer true. This use of the simple past is quite similar to the expression "[*used to*](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/usedto.html)."

* She **was** shy as a child, but now she is very outgoing.
* People **paid** much more to make cell phone calls in the past.

You can also use simple past if you are describing how often you used to do something. In this type of sentence, you will see words like 'often' or 'sometimes,' and it is the context, as well as the verb itself, that will let you know the sentence is in simple past.

* **As a child**, I sometimes walked to school.

**Form:**

The simple past tense in regular verbs is formed by adding **ed** to the infinitive:

Infinitive: *to work*

Simple past: *worked*

But there are a lot of irregular past tense forms in English: ate (eat)

**AFFIRMATIVE:** SUBJECT + INFINITIVE (STEM) + ED + OBJECT

* **It happened** very quickly.

**NEGATIVE:** SUBJECT + DID + NOT + STEM+ OBJECT

* The car **did not stop**

**INTERROGATIVE:** DID + SUBJECT + STEM + OBJECT +?

* Did you work?

We also use **was** and **were** in negatives and questions.

NEGATIVE: *I/he/she/it* ***was not*** OR ***wasn't***

*You/we/they* ***were*** OR ***weren't***

QUESTION: ***was*** *I/he/she/it?*

***Were*** *you/we/they?*

* *I* ***wasn't*** *very well last week. The gates* ***weren't*** *open.*
* *Where* ***was*** *your friend last night?* ***Was*** *your steak nice?*

But questions with **“who”** often don't use **“did”:** Who stole my money?

**Spelling notes**

1. Verbs ending in **e** add **d** only:

Infinitive: *to love*

Simple past: *loved*

1. The rules about doubling the final consonant when adding **ing** apply also when adding **ed**:

*admit, admitted stop, stopped travel, travelled*

1. Verbs ending in **y** following a consonant change the **y** into **i** before adding **ed**:

*carry, carried try, tried*

1. But **y** following a vowel does not change: *obey, obeyed*.

**Irregular verbs: form**

These vary considerably in their simple past form:

Infinitive: *to eat, to leave, to see, to speak*

Simple past: *ate, left, saw, spoke*

The simple past form of each irregular verb must therefore be learnt, but once this is done there is no other difficulty, as irregular verbs (like regular verbs) have no inflexions in the past tense.

**Signal words:** Last week...,Ago ,In 1990..,Yesterday, Once upon a time, etc.