

THE Past Simple TENSE

What Is The Past Simple?

We use the past simple to talk about actions that started and finished in the past. These actions are complete—they are not happening now. It's great for talking about your day, telling stories, and sharing experiences.

Positive Sentence

Subject	+	past simple verb	(+ object).
I		flew	to Fiji.
They		saw	him.
You		loved	swimming.

Subject	past simple verb "to be"	(object).
I/He/She/It/ Singular noun	was	tired.
You/We/They/ Plural noun	were	here.

To make a positive past simple sentence, you need a subject (the person or thing that does the verb), and a past simple verb. and an object. You might also like to add an object (the person or thing that receives the verb).

Sometimes, we use **did** in positive sentences to show strong feelings or surprise. For example, "I **did** fly to Fiji!", "They **did** see him!", "You **did** love swimming!".

When we do this, we say **did** a little louder and slower, and our pitch goes up slightly.

For a sentence with verb "to be", be sure to use the past simple forms. If you'd like to sound like a native speaker, use the weak forms of **was** /wəz/ and **were** /wə/.

Negative Sentence

Subject	did not	base form verb	(object).
I	didn't	fly	to Fiji.
They	didn't	see	him.
You	didn't	love	swimming.

Subject	past simple verb "to be" + not	(object).
I/He/She/It/ Singular noun	wasn't	tired.
You/We/They/ Plural noun	weren't	here.

To make a negative sentence, we use did not or didn't plus the base form of the verb (the base form is the present form). We use the base form because did already shows the past tense. We don't say didn't flew or didn't saw.

For a negative sentence with the verb "to be", we just add not or n't.

In normal speech, we usually say didn't, wasn't, and weren't. But we can use did not, was not, or were not when we want to add stress.

Questions

Did	subject	base form verb	(object)?
Did	I	fly	to Fiji?
Did	they	see	him?
Did	you	love	swimming?

past simple verb "to be"	subject	(object)?
Was	I/he/she/it/ singular noun	tired?
Were	you/we/they/ plural noun	here?

To make questions, we need *did* for most verbs. Then to answer, we use 'Yes + subject + did' (Yes, I did) or 'No + subject + didn't' (No, I didn't).

For questions with the verb to be, we don't need any extra words. We just swap the order.

And if you want more information, use a question word like why, where, or when.

"Why did I fly to Fiji?" Because I live there.

"Where did they see him?" At the park.

"When did you love swimming?" When I was a child.

"When was I upset?" Last night!

"Why were they here?" Because they wanted to see the house.

The -ed Ending: Pronunciation

Most past simple verbs are regular. This means you just add **-ed** to the verb:

- walk → **walked**
- play → **played**
- want → **wanted**

But the **-ed** ending doesn't always sound the same. Walked (/t/), loved (/d/), wanted (/ld/). Let's look at the rules.

/t/ for unvoiced sounds

walked stoped danced finished

Walk, stop, dance, and finish all end with an unvoiced sound. This means you don't use your voice to make the sound, only your breath. So, we add /t/.

/d/ for voiced sounds

played used loved cleaned

Play, use, love, and clean all end with a voiced sound. This means you do use your voice to make the sound. So, we add /d/.

/ɪd/ for **/t/** and **/d/**

want decide need hate

Want, decide, need, and hate all end in /t/ or /d/. So, we add /ɪd/.

The -ed Ending: Spelling

When we're writing verbs with -ed endings, there are five spelling rules we need to remember.

Usually + **-ed**

walked played

Ends in consonant + y ~~y~~ + **-ied**

studied carried

Ends in e + **-d**

lived loved

Ends in c + **-ked**

panicked mimicked

Short and ends in vowel + consonant

Double last letter + -ed not w, x, or y

stopped travelled

If you're not sure, try adding -ed. If it looks or sounds wrong, check the rules. Practice with simple words, and soon it will feel natural.

Irregular Verbs

Most of the time, we use irregular verbs. They don't follow the -ed rule that we talked about above, so we have to learn them one by one. Here's a list of eleven of the most common ones.

base form	past simple
go	went
eat	ate
run	ran
say	said
make	made
take	took
come	came
see	saw
know	knew
get	got
give	gave

Test Your Knowledge

Now it's time for your quiz. Fill in the gaps using the words in brackets. Some words might need to be changed. Others don't.

We'll do the first question together.

1. Last night, I _____ a great movie. (watch)
2. They _____ the house before the guests arrived. (not clean)
3. _____ she _____ for the test yesterday? (study)

4. They _____ a cake for the birthday party. (make)
5. We _____ to go home early. (decide)
6. I _____ breakfast this morning. (not eat)
7. _____ you _____ about the new restaurant? (hear)
8. They _____ to the park early in the morning. (go)

Time Expressions

The past simple is often used with time expressions to show when something happened. These expressions help give more detail and make your sentences clearer.

For example,

- *I ate dinner at 6pm.*
- *They went to Paris two years ago.*
- *He stayed at the hotel for a week.*

Time expressions can show specific times or durations, but students often mix them up. So, let's go through them one by one.

At **Specific times** at 6pm, at 8:30, at midnight

On **Specific days and dates** on Monday, on 5th July, on Christmas Eve

In **Longer time periods** in 1994, in July, in the summer

Ago **How long before now something happened** two years ago, six days ago

For **How long a past event lasted** for a week, for an hour, for the whole afternoon

Until **When something stopped** until midnight, until 2018, until 10am

From... to... **When something started and finished** from Tuesday to Thursday

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Answers:

1. Last night, I watched a great movie.
2. They didn't clean the house before the guests arrived.
3. Did she study for the test yesterday?
4. They found the answer after thinking for a while.
5. We decided to go home early.
6. I didn't eat breakfast this morning.
7. Did you hear about the new restaurant?
8. They went to the park early in the morning.