

# Simple Past Tense

## Definition of the Simple Past Tense:

The simple past tense, sometimes called the preterite, is used to talk about a **completed action** in a time **before now**. The simple past is the basic form of past tense in English. The time of the action can be in the recent past or the distant past and action duration is not important.

### Examples

- John Cabot **sailed** to America in 1498.
- My father **died** last year.
- He **lived** in Fiji in 1976.
- We **crossed** the Channel yesterday.

You always use the simple past when you say **when** something happened, so it is associated with certain past time expressions

- **frequency:** *often, sometimes, always*  
I sometimes **walked** home at lunchtime.  
I often **brought** my lunch to school.
- **a definite point in time:** *last week, when I was a child, yesterday, six weeks ago*  
We **saw** a good film *last week*.  
*Yesterday*, I **arrived** in Geneva.  
She **finished** her work at *seven o'clock*  
I **went** to the theatre *last night*
- **an indefinite point in time:** *the other day, ages ago, a long time ago*  
People **lived** in caves a *long time ago*.  
She **played** the piano *when she was a child*.

**Note:** the word *ago* is a useful way of expressing the distance into the past. It is placed **after** the period of time: *a week ago, three years ago, a minute ago*.

**Be Careful:** The simple past in English may look like a tense in your own language, but the meaning may be different.

## Forming the simple past tense

## Patterns of simple past tense for regular verbs

Affirmative



Subjec t	+ verb + ed	
I	skipped.	
<b>Negative</b>		
Subjec t	+ did not	+ infinitive without <i>to</i>
They	didn't	go.
<b>Interrogative</b>		
Did	+ subject	+ infinitive without <i>to</i>
Did	she	arrive?
<b>Interrogative negative</b>		
Did	+ subject	+ infinitive



not		without <i>to</i>
Didn't	you	play?

## To Walk

Affirmative	Negative	Interrogative
I walked	I didn't walk	Did I walk?
You walked	You didn't walk	Did you walk?
He walked	He didn't walk	Did he walk?
We walked	We didn't walk	Did we walk?
They walked	They didn't walk	Did they walk?

## Simple past tense of to be, to have, to do

Subject	Verb
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Subject	Verb		
	Be	Hav e	Do
I	was	had	di d
You	wer e	had	di d
He/She/ It	was	had	di d
We	wer e	had	di d
You	wer e	had	di d
They	wer e	had	di d



# Notes on affirmative, negative, & interrogative forms

## Affirmative

The affirmative of the simple past tense is simple.

- I **was** in Japan last year
- She **had** a headache yesterday.
- We **did** our homework last night.

## Negative and interrogative

For the negative and interrogative simple past form of *"to do"* as an ordinary verb, use the auxiliary *"did"*, e.g. We **didn't do** our homework last night.

The negative of *"have"* in the simple past is usually formed using the auxiliary *"did"*, but sometimes by simply adding *not* or the contraction *"n't"*.

The interrogative form of *"have"* in the simple past normally uses the auxiliary *"did"*.

### Examples

- They **weren't** in Rio last summer.
- We **didn't have** any money.
- We **didn't have** time to visit the Eiffel Tower.
- We **didn't do** our exercises this morning.
- **Were** they in Iceland last January?
- **Did you have** a bicycle when you were young?
- **Did you do** much climbing in Switzerland?

**Note:** For the negative and interrogative form of **all** verbs in the simple past, always use the auxiliary *'did'*.

## Simple past, irregular verbs

Some verbs are irregular in the simple past. Here are the most common ones.

### to go

- He **went** to a club last night.
- **Did he go** to the cinema last night?
- He **didn't go** to bed early last night.

### to give



- We **gave** her a doll for her birthday.
- They **didn't give** John their new address.
- **Did Barry give** you my passport?

## to come

- My parents **came** to visit me last July.
  - We **didn't come** because it was raining.
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