

Past Simple Tense

The Past Simple Tense is used to refer to actions that were completed in a time period before the present time. In the Simple Past the process of performing the action is not important. **What matters is that the action was completed in the past. The action may have been in the recent past or a long time ago.**

So let's start learning the Simple Past Tense – one of the most common tenses in spoken English – and the points to pay attention to.

Using the Simple Past Tense

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- The Simple Past is used for actions that started and finished at a specific time in the past. It's also possible to use the simple past in a sentence without specifying a time, but it must have previously been made clear that the speaker is referring to a finished period.

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I saw a movie last week.

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- The Simple Past is used to describe several actions that were completed in the past.

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I finished work, walked to the beach and met my friends.

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- The Simple Past is used to describe a process that started and finished in the past. In this case, the process of the action is long and is used by specifying time periods such as 'the whole year' or 'all day'.

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I lived in Italy for five years.

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- The Simple Past can also be used in sentences that describe past habits. These sentences have the same purpose as the expression 'used to'. It should be clear in this kind of sentence that the action referred to is a habit. Time expressions like *always, often, usually* and *never* can be used to underline this.

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I often played football when I was a young man.

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Forming the Simple Past

Subject	Verb To be	Verb To have	Verb To do
I	was	had	did
You	were	had	did
He/she/it	was	had	did
We	were	had	did
You	were	had	did
They	were	had	did

Affirmative sentences in the Simple Past

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In affirmative sentences the word order is subject + verb and the form of the verb in the simple past is the same for all subjects (with the exception of 'to be' – *was/were*).

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Subject + past simple + object

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For example:

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I played football yesterday.

He saw his family last week.

I was in France in June.

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Negative sentences in the Simple Past

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To make negative sentences in the simple past we use the auxiliary 'did not' / 'didn't' and the base form of the verb.

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Subject + did not + **base form of verb** + object

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For example:

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I didn't play football yesterday.

They didn't go to the theater last month.

She didn't arrive on time this morning.

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Questions in the Simple Past

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To make questions in the simple past we use 'did' in front of the subject and base form of the verb.

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Did + subject + **base form of verb** + object?

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For example:

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Did you play football yesterday?

Did they lose the match?

Did he clean his home last weekend?

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Regular and Irregular Verbs

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In order to convert regular verbs from their base form to the simple past form, we add -ed. For irregular verbs, however, the simple past form doesn't follow this rule and can vary significantly and you simply need to learn them by heart. There are many [irregular verbs](#) but below you can find the most common ones that you need to know for daily use.

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Regular verb examples

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- place – placed
- dance – danced
- plan – planned
- stop – stopped
- fix – fixed
- snow – snowed
- rain – rained
- need – needed
- help – helped
- add – added
- worry – worried

- play – played

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As you can see from these examples, with most regular verbs we add -ed. When a verb ends in -e we simply add -d. And when a verb ends in a consonant and -y, we change the -y to -i and add -ed.

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Irregular verb examples

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- be – was/were
- buy – bought
- come – came
- do – did
- eat – ate
- find – found
- go – went
- have – had
- leave – left
- make – made
- pay – paid
- see – saw
- take – took
- tell – told
- write – wrote

• How To Use The PAST SIMPLE Tense In English With ALL Its Meanings

- 1. We use the Past Simple when we talk about completed actions in the Finished Past.

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Examples:

I walked a long way last weekend.

How far did you walk?

- What did he tell you?

He told me a secret.

- When was this book written?

It was written 50 years ago.

How long did you live in Australia?

I lived there for 2 years.

Did you enjoy it?

Yes, I did.

- He swam a lot while he was on holiday.

Did he read much as well?

No, he didn't read at all.

- 2. We use the Past Simple to talk about the time or date of completed actions in the past.

- So, we use the Past Simple in questions using **When? What date? What time?**

- We also use the Simple Past in sentences with **Ago**.

Examples:

When did they leave?

They left after dinner.

- How long ago did you move to this house?

I moved here 4 years ago.

When did he start his new job?

He started his new job this year.

- The train was late today.
Oh! When did it arrive?
It arrived at 14.10. It was 20 minutes late

Take a look at this example:

Hurry up, the film has already started.
When did it start?
It started a few seconds ago.

- 3. We use the Past Simple to express chronological order.
- This means that we use the Past Simple to say what happened first, second, third and so on.
- **Example 1:**
He got in his car, switched on the engine and drove to work. (*note: it would not be correct to say "He got in his car, drove to work and switched on the engine", because this would not be logical. He needs to switch on the engine before he starts driving.*)
- **Example 2:**
I woke up, had a shower and prepared breakfast. (*note: here we know that I did these things in this order: First, I woke up, second, I had a shower, and third, I prepared breakfast.*)
- It's important to remember that the Past Simple expresses chronological order because sometimes we use other past tenses, the Past Continuous, the Past Perfect Simple and the Past Perfect Continuous when we want to **break** the chronological order.
- 4. We use the Past Simple in Reported Speech to report what someone originally said in the Present Simple.
- **Examples:**
He said he was too cold. (*note: his actual words here in direct speech were "I am too cold."*)
She told me she had a new job. (*note: her actual words here in direct speech were "I have a new job."*)
He asked me how I was. (*note: his actual words here in direct speech were "How are you?"*)

- 5. We use the Past Simple after IT'S TIME and IT'S HIGH TIME if we want to express urgency.

- **Examples:**

It's time we left. (*note: this means "We need to leave right now". If I say "It is time to leave" this does not express urgency.*)

It's high time, I cleaned those windows. They are filthy! (*note: the expression "It's high time" expresses even more urgency. So we know that the windows must be very dirty, even before I say in the second sentence that they are filthy.*)

It's time he got a job. He has been unemployed for too long

- 6. We use the Past Simple after WOULD RATHER and WOULD SOONER if we want to express a preference about other people, or about ourselves and other people.

- **Example 1:**

I'd rather we ate in this restaurant than in that one. The food is better in this one. (*note: Here, we are expressing a preference about ourselves and other people. It is incorrect to say "I'd rather ate...". You need to include the subject of the Past Simple verb, which in this sentence is WE. So it is correct to say "I'd rather we ate..."*)

- **Example 2:**

I would sooner we took an earlier train in case the later one is cancelled. (*note: "would sooner" means the same as "would rather", but "would rather" is more commonly used.*)

- **Example 3:**

Would you rather they didn't visit us this weekend, as you are so busy?

- 7. We use the Simple Past in Second Conditional Clauses when we are referring to UNREAL PRESENT OR FUTURE.

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- **Examples:**

He is very poor, but if he had a lot of money he would be rich. (*note: the reality here is that he does not have a lot of money, but the conditional clause "If he had a lot of money" refers to a hypothetical, unreal situation in the present*)

I am going to Rome next month. If I had more time there, I would visit you but I will only be there for 2 days. (*note: the reality is that I will not have enough time to visit you. In the conditional clause "If I had more time there", the Past Simple verb, Had, refers to a time in the future - in other words, the time next month when I will be in Rome.*)

If I were you, I would apologise to her. (*note: here, we use the subjunctive form "If I were..." instead of the Past Simple "If I was...". We always use this form of the verb BE for the unreal present after I. It is also correct to use it after He, She or It, but in practice we often just use the Past Simple.*)

- Imagine if you had the power to travel in time. Which time period would you travel to? (*note: here, the second conditional idea is split across 2 sentences. We could express this as one sentence with a conditional clause. In this case, we would say: "If you had the power to travel in time, which time would you travel to?"*)

- 8. We use the Past Simple tense with I WISH and IF ONLY when we are referring to the UNREAL PRESENT .

- **Examples:**

I wish I had a car so I **could** drive you to the airport. (*note: the real present situation here is that I do not have a car.*)

If only I had an umbrella with me! I hate walking home in the rain. (*note: the real present situation is that I do not have an umbrella with me*)

- 9. We use the Past Simple when we want to sound less certain or make something sound less likely, or to be more polite and more tentative. Here it can have a present or future meaning.

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We often use the Past Simple tense in this way with expressions such as **Suppose, Supposing and What if.**

- **Example 1:**

Suppose we stayed on holiday another week? Would we lose our jobs when

we got home? (*note: we could also say "Suppose we stay another week..." but by choosing the Past Simple here, the speaker makes the idea of staying another week more hypothetical, less likely and therefore as a suggestion, this becomes more tentative.*)

- **Example 2:**

What if we just didn't tell him? He doesn't need to know about it and it would only upset him if he knew. (*note: in the first sentence here, we could say "What if we don't tell him..." but when we say "What if we didn't tell him...", the suggestion sounds more tentative.*)

- **Example 3:**

I thought perhaps we could try a new approach to the problem. (*note: here, the speaker says "I thought we could..." in order to make this suggestion sound more tentative and therefore perhaps more diplomatic*)

- **Example 4:**

I wanted to ask if you could help me with this project. (*note: here, the speaker could also say "I want to ask.." but saying "I wanted to ask..." sounds less direct and therefore more polite.*)

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10. Sometimes use the Past Simple tense in polite offers with **WANT** and **NEED** with a present meaning.

- **Examples:**

Did you want another cup of tea, madam? (*note: we could also say "Do you want another cup of tea?" but this is a more direct and less tentative offer. We might use the question "Did you want another cup of tea" if we want to sound more polite and less direct.*)

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When answering this question, it is **incorrect** to use the Past Simple, so you can not say:

Yes please, **I wanted** some more tea.

Some possible correct answers to this question would be:

- Yes please, I'd like some more tea.
- Yes please, I do.
- No thank you, I don't want any more.

