

Simple Past

The simple past (also called past simple, past indefinite or preterite) is a verb tense which is used to show that a completed action took place at a specific time in the past. The simple past is also frequently used to talk about past habits and generalizations.

Simple Past Forms

The simple past is formed using the **verb + ed**. In addition, there are many verbs with irregular past forms. Questions are made with *did* and negative forms are made with *did not*.

- Statement: You **called** Debbie.
- Question: **Did** you **call** Debbie?
- Negative: You **did not call** Debbie.

Simple Past Uses

USE 1 Completed Action in the Past



Use the simple past 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.

Examples:

- I **saw** a movie yesterday.
- I **didn't see** a play yesterday.
- Last year, I **traveled** to Japan.
- Last year, I **didn't travel** to Korea.
- **Did** you **have** dinner last night?
- She **washed** her car.
- He **didn't wash** his car.

USE 2 A Series of Completed Actions



We use the simple past to list a series of completed actions in the past. These actions happen 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and so on.

Examples:

- I **finished** work, **walked** to the beach, and **found** a nice place to swim.

Tense n4° :Simple Past

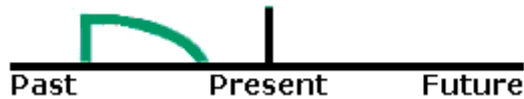
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- He **arrived** from the airport at 8:00, **checked** into the hotel at 9:00, and **met** the others at 10:00.
- **Did** you **add** flour, **pour** in the milk, and then **add** the eggs?

USE 3 Duration in the Past

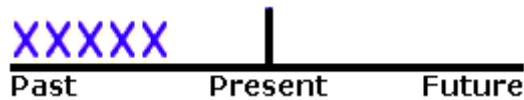


The simple past can be used with a duration which starts and stops in the past. A duration is a longer action often indicated by expressions such as: for two years, for five minutes, all day, all year, etc.

Examples:

- I **lived** in Brazil for two years.
- Shauna **studied** Japanese for five years.
- They **sat** at the beach all day.
- They **did not stay** at the party the entire time.
- We **talked** on the phone for thirty minutes.
- A: How long **did** you **wait** for them?
B: We **waited** for one hour.

USE 4 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." 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.

Examples:

- I **studied** French when I was a child.
- He **played** the violin.
- He **didn't play** the piano.
- **Did** you **play** a musical instrument when you were a kid?
- She **worked** at the movie theater after school.
- They never **went** to school, they always **skipped** class.

USE 5 Past Facts or Generalizations



The simple past can also be used to describe past facts or generalizations which are no longer true. As in USE 4 above, this use of the simple past is quite similar to the expression "used to."

Examples:

- She **was** shy as a child, but now she is very outgoing.
- He **didn't like** tomatoes before.
- **Did** you **live** in Texas when you **were** a kid?
- People **paid** much more to make cell phone calls in the past.

Simple Past Tips

IMPORTANT When-Clauses Happen First

Clauses are groups of words which have meaning but are often not complete sentences. Some clauses begin with the word "when" such as "when I dropped my pen..." or "when class began..." These clauses are called when-clauses, and they are very important. The examples below contain when-clauses.

Examples:

- **When I paid her one dollar**, she answered my question.
- She answered my question **when I paid her one dollar**.

When-clauses are important because they always happen first when both clauses are in the simple past. Both of the examples above mean the same thing: first, I paid her one dollar, and then, she answered my question. It is not important whether "when I paid her one dollar" is at the beginning of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. However, the example below has a different meaning. First, she answered my question, and then, I paid her one dollar.

Example:

- I paid her one dollar **when she answered my question**.

ADVERB PLACEMENT

The examples below show the placement for grammar adverbs such as: always, only, never, ever, still, just, etc.

Examples:

- You **just** called Debbie.
- Did you **just** call Debbie?

ACTIVE / PASSIVE

Examples:

- Tom **repaired** the car. *Active*
- The car **was repaired** by Tom. *Passive*

Practice

Using the words in parentheses, complete the text below with the appropriate tenses, then

- Since computers were first introduced to the public in the early 1980's, technology (change) a great deal. The first computers (be) simple machines designed for basic tasks. They (have, not) much memory and they (be, not) very powerful. Early computers were often quite expensive and customers often (pay) thousands of dollars for machines which actually (do) very little. Most computers (be) separate, individual machines used mostly as expensive typewriters or for playing games.

Times (change) . Computers (become) powerful machines with very practical applications. Programmers (create) a large selection of useful programs which do everything from teaching foreign languages to bookkeeping. We are still playing video games, but today's games (become) faster, more exciting interactive adventures. Many computer users (get, also) on the Internet and (begin) communicating with other computer users around the world. We (start) to create international communities online. In short, the simple, individual machines of the past (evolve) into an international World Wide Web of knowledge.