

Mastering the Past

A Clear and Practical Guide to the Simple Past Tense



When to Use the Simple Past

We use the simple past tense to talk about actions and events that are completely finished.



We **watched** a movie last night.

They **visited** the museum.

She **baked** a cake for her friend's birthday party.

Two Paths to Form the Past

To create the past form of a verb, you'll follow one of two paths. The path depends on whether the verb is "regular" or "irregular".



The First Path: Regular Verbs

Rule 01: The Standard -ed Ending

Most regular verbs form the past tense by simply adding **-ed** to the base form.

walk → walked

watch → watched

repair → repaired

He **repaired** his car yesterday afternoon.

Regular Verbs: Spelling Rules

Rule 02: For verbs ending in **-e**, just add **-d**.

dance → danced

bake → baked

Rule 03: For verbs ending in a consonant + **y**, change the **-y** to **-ied**.

carry → carr

studied

The Second Path: Irregular Verbs

Irregular verbs do not follow the -ed rule. Their past forms are unique and must be learned.

eat → **ate**

⊖ ~~eated~~

drink → **drank**

⊘ ~~drinked~~

go → **went**

⊘ ~~goed~~

Common Irregular Verbs (Part 1)

These common verbs have unique past forms.

Base Form

eat
drink
speak
sleep
see
hear
feel
think
go
come

Past Form

ate
drank
spoke
slept
saw
heard
felt
thought
went
came

Common Irregular Verbs (Part 2)

Base Form

Past Form

do	did
say	said
tell	told
get	got
take	took
put	put
cut	cut
keep	kept
make	made
begin	began

Base Form

Past Form

leave	left
catch	caught
teach	taught
write	wrote
read	read
meet	met
run	ran
pay	paid
swim	swam
forget	forgot

A Special Case: Unchanging Verbs

Some irregular verbs have the same form for both the present (base) and the past. The context of the sentence tells you it's in the past.

cost, hit, set, let, cut, put, shut, hurt, spread, read*

Yesterday, he **cut** the cake into small slices.

*Notice: The verb 'read' is spelled the same, but the pronunciation changes from /ri:d/ (present) to /rɛd/ (past).

Application: Asking Questions

Did + Subject + Base Form of Verb ?



Notice the main verb returns to its original base form.
The word 'Did' shows the sentence is in the past.

Did you **watch** a movie last night?

Did she **bake** a cake?

Application: Making Negative Statements

Subject + **did not** + Base Form of Verb

The main verb returns to its **base form** here, too.

We **did not watch** a movie last night.

They **did not** visit the museum.

In conversation and informal writing, we usually use the contraction: `did not` → `didn't`

Putting It All Together

Affirmative

She baked a cake.

Negative

She **did not bake** a cake.

Question

Did she **bake** a cake?

They **went** to the museum.

They **did not go** to the museum.

Did they **go** to the museum?

The Simple Past: Your Complete Guide

USE

For completed actions in the past.



REGULAR VERBS

- Base + **ed** → walked**ed**
- Base ending in -e + **d** → danced**d**
- Base ending in consonant + y → **ied** → studied**ied**

IRREGULAR VERBS

Unique forms, must be learned.

eat → **ate**

go → **went**

see → **saw**

SENTENCE STRUCTURE



Did + Subject + **Base Verb**?



Subject + **didn't** + **Base Verb**.