**Simple Past**

The simple past (also called past simple, past indefinite or preterite) is a [verb tense](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/verbtenseintro.html) 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. Read on for detailed descriptions, examples, and simple past exercises.

**Simple Past Forms**

The simple past is formed using the **verb + ed**. In addition, there are many [verbs with irregular past forms](https://www.englishpage.com/irregularverbs/irregularverbs.html). 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.

[Complete List of Simple Past Forms](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/simplepastforms.htm)

**Simple Past Uses**

**USE 1 Completed Action in the Past**

simple past completed action

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 **travelled** 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**

simple past series

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.
* 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**

simple past duration

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**

simple past habit

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*](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/usedto.html). 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**

simple past fact

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*](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/usedto.html).

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*

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