**Past Tense**

In order to put verbs in the past tense in BCS, we have to go back to the verb *biti* (to be). Let’s review, quickly, how to conjugate this verb in the present tense:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Biti* (to be) | Singular | Plural |
| 1st person | *(Ja) sam* | *(Mi) smo* |
| 2nd person | *(Ti) si* | *(Vi) ste* |
| 3rd person | *(On/Ona/Ono) je* | *(Oni/One/Ona) su* |

The first thing we have to do when putting a verb in the past tense is to find the subject (of course), and then **conjugate *biti* in the present tense according to the subject**. So if the subject is *Ja*, we’re going to say *Ja sam.*

Now, let’s go back to the infinitive of the verb. (Remember, this is the basic form of the verb that usually ends in *-ti*.) We’re going to **drop the *-ti* ending**, and add a specific ending according to the **grammatical gender and number** of the subject. Let’s look at these endings in a chart:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Singular | Plural |
| Masculine | *-o* | *-li* |
| Feminine | *-la* | *-le* |
| Neuter | *-lo* | *-la* |

So, let’s say the verb is *čitati*, and we want to say “I was reading a book.” We would say: *Ja sam čitala knjigu*. If our subject was masculine and plural, like *ovi studenti*, we change the verb accordingly: *Ovi studenti su čitali knjige.*

As we all know by now, you don’t always have to include a visible subject in sentences, sometimes the subjects are inferred. (Present tense example: *Čitam knjigu.*) You can do the same with past tense sentences, but the **syntax/word order** changes. Let’s say we’re using the same example as above, but we want to leave out the visible subject *ja*. We’d have to put the infinitive first, then the conjugated form of *biti*, then everything else. As follows: *Čitala sam knjigu.* While syntax is malleable in BCS, the word order in this specific instance **isn’t optional**.

Now, can you come up with your own examples of sentences in the past tense?

**Verbal Aspect in Past Tense**

If you’ll recall from last semester, verbs in BCS can be either perfective or imperfective. The verb that I’ve been using in examples, *čitati*, is imperfective, meaning that you’d use it for an ongoing action, or a repeated action. So the sentence “*Ja sam čitala knjigu*” can be translated as “I read a book,” implying that the act of reading lasted for some time, and that the book may or may not be finished. It can also be translated as “I was reading a book,” implying that you were reading for a while, and then decided to stop.

You can, of course, put perfective verbs in past tense. For example: *Ja sam pročitala knjigu.* The use of perfective here indicates that I read **and finished** the book.

Can you use the following verbal aspect pairs in past tense sentences, and explain why imperfective or perfective verbs are needed in each instance?

*Kupovati/Kupiti*

*Čitati/Pročitati*

*Pisati/Napisati*

*Spremati/Spremiti*