

## Past Simple

### Regular Verbs

Most verbs are regular verbs and are formed by adding **–ed** to the stem [VERB+ed].

| Positive  | Negative  | Interrogative   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I <b>waited</b>.</li><li>• You <b>waited</b>.</li><li>• He <b>waited</b>.</li><li>• She <b>waited</b>.</li><li>• It <b>waited</b>.</li><li>• We <b>waited</b>.</li><li>• You <b>waited</b>.</li><li>• They <b>waited</b>.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I <b>did not wait</b>.</li><li>• You <b>did not wait</b>.</li><li>• He <b>did not wait</b>.</li><li>• She <b>did not wait</b>.</li><li>• It <b>did not wait</b>.</li><li>• We <b>did not wait</b>.</li><li>• You <b>did not wait</b>.</li><li>• They <b>did not wait</b>.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Did I wait?</b></li><li>• <b>Did you wait?</b></li><li>• <b>Did he wait?</b></li><li>• <b>Did she wait?</b></li><li>• <b>Did it wait?</b></li><li>• <b>Did we wait?</b></li><li>• <b>Did you wait?</b></li><li>• <b>Did they wait?</b></li></ul> |

Note: when speaking we use the contractions:

**did not = didn't**

We also use contractions for informal writing like emails to friends and colleagues.

When you write a formal text, like a job application letter, you **MUST** use full forms.

## Irregular Verbs

Other verbs such as 'go' take irregular forms in the Past Simple in positive sentences. Negatives and interrogatives are formed the same way as with regular verbs.

Many irregular verbs are extremely common, so it is not so difficult to learn them because you will use them all the time.

| Positive  | Negative  | Interrogative   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I <b>went</b>.</li><li>• You <b>went</b>.</li><li>• He <b>went</b>.</li><li>• She <b>went</b>.</li><li>• It <b>went</b>.</li><li>• We <b>went</b>.</li><li>• You <b>went</b>.</li><li>• They <b>went</b>.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I <b>did not go</b>.</li><li>• You <b>did not go</b>.</li><li>• He <b>did not go</b>.</li><li>• She <b>did not go</b>.</li><li>• It <b>did not go</b>.</li><li>• We <b>did not go</b>.</li><li>• You <b>did not go</b>.</li><li>• They <b>did not go</b>.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Did I go?</b></li><li>• <b>Did you go?</b></li><li>• <b>Did he go?</b></li><li>• <b>Did she go?</b></li><li>• <b>Did it go?</b></li><li>• <b>Did we go?</b></li><li>• <b>Did you go?</b></li><li>• <b>Did they go?</b></li></ul> |

Note: when speaking we use the contractions:

**did not = didn't**

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When you write a formal text, like a job application letter, you **MUST** use full forms.

Click on the link below for a list of the top 100 most common verbs in English:

<http://robertdesenior.com/2014/02/12/top-100-english-verbs/>

## ‘To Be’

This verb is also irregular in the Past Simple. Unlike other irregular verbs, there are two Past Simple forms: "was" and "were." It also has different negative and interrogative forms.

Note: you DO NOT use ‘did’ with the verb ‘to be’ in the Past Simple.

‘To be’ is the most important verb in the English language and the one you will learn first and use most.

| Positive  | Negative  | Interrogative   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I <b>was</b>.</li><li>• You <b>were</b>.</li><li>• He <b>was</b>.</li><li>• She <b>was</b>.</li><li>• It <b>was</b>.</li><li>• We <b>were</b>.</li><li>• You <b>were</b>.</li><li>• They <b>were</b>.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I <b>was not</b>.</li><li>• You <b>were not</b>.</li><li>• He <b>was not</b>.</li><li>• She <b>was not</b>.</li><li>• It <b>was not</b>.</li><li>• We <b>were not</b>.</li><li>• You <b>were not</b>.</li><li>• They <b>were not</b>.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Was</b> I?</li><li>• <b>Were</b> you?</li><li>• <b>Was</b> he?</li><li>• <b>Was</b> she?</li><li>• <b>Was</b> it?</li><li>• <b>Were</b> we?</li><li>• <b>Were</b> you?</li><li>• <b>Were</b> they?</li></ul> |

Note: when speaking we use the contractions:

I was not = I **wasn't** // you were not = you **weren't**

he was not = he **wasn't** // she was not = she **wasn't**

it was not = it **wasn't** // we were not = we **weren't**

you were not = you **weren't** // they were not = they **weren't**

We also use contractions for informal writing like emails to friends and colleagues.  
When you write a formal text, like a job application letter, you **MUST** use full forms.

### USE 1 Finished Event in the Past

(with no connection to the present)



We use the Past Simple to talk about events which took place in the past.

- Leonardo de Vinci painted the Mona Lisa.
- The Vikings invaded Britain.

### USE 2 With Time Expressions That Refer to the Past



We use the Past Simple to express the idea that an action started and finished **at a specific time** in the past.

Some examples of words/phrases that specifically refer to past time and typically go with the Past Simple are: yesterday, last week, last weekend, last Monday (etc), last month, last year, two days ago (every phrase with 'ago'), the last time.

- The last time I saw my cousin was two years ago.
- I didn't see a play yesterday, I saw a movie.
- Last year, I travelled to Japan.
- I went clubbing at the weekend.
- Did you have dinner last night?

### USE 3 A Series of Completed Actions



We use the Past Simple to list a series of completed actions in the past.

- I finished work, walked to the beach, and found a nice place to swim.
- He arrived at the airport at 8:00, checked into the hotel at 9:00, and met the others at 10:00.
- He went to a café, sat down and lit a cigarette.
- Yesterday I went to the library, met a friend for lunch, and played tennis.

### USE 4 Duration in Past



We use the Past Simple to talk about actions which started in the past, continued for some time and then finished. This period of time is indicated by expressions such as: for two years, for five minutes, all day, all year, etc.

- I lived in Brazil for two years.
- Shaun studied Japanese for five years.
- They sat at the beach all day.
- They didn't stay at the party for long.
- We talked on the phone for thirty minutes.
- A: How long did you wait for them?  
B: We waited for an hour.

### USE 5 Habits in the Past



We use the Past Simple to describe something which we regularly did in the past but which we later STOPPED doing. It can have the same meaning as '[used to](#)'. To make it clear that we are talking about something which we did regularly, we often add expressions such as: always, often, usually, never, when I was a child, when I was younger, etc.

- I studied French when I was a child.
- He played the violin when he was younger.
- He didn't play the piano.
- Did you play a musical instrument when you were a child?
- She worked at the movie theatre after school.

### USE 6 Past Facts or Generalisations



We use the Past Simple to describe past facts or generalisations which are no longer true. As in USE 4 above, this use of the Past Simple can have the same meaning as '[used to](#)'.

- 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.

## **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.

- When I gave her a dollar, she answered my question.
- She answered my question when I gave her a dollar.

When-clauses are important because they always happen first when both clauses are in the Past Simple. Both of the examples above mean the same thing: **first**, I gave her a dollar, and **then**, she answered my question. It is not important whether 'when I gave her a dollar' is at the beginning of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. Notice as well that here 'when' has the same meaning as 'after'.

## **Adverb Position**

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

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

## **Active/Passive**

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

Go to <http://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/simplepast.html> and <http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/english-language-pdf.html> to find exercises to practice the Past Simple.