

Simple Past (Preterit)

The simple past (also called past simple, past indefinite or **preterit**) 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. 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. 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.
- 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.

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.