

Past Tense

Talking about the past

Past events and situations

We use the **past simple** to talk about:

- something that happened **once in the past**:

*The film **started** at seven thirty.*

*We **arrived** home before dark.*

- something that **was true for some time in the past**:

*Everybody **worked** hard through the winter.*

*We **stayed** with our friends in London.*

When we talk about something that happened **several times in the past**, we use the **past simple**:

*Most evenings, we **stayed** at home and watched DVDs.*

*Sometimes they **went** out for a meal.*

or **used to**:

*Most evenings, we **used to stay** at home and watch DVDs.*

*We **used to go for** a swim every morning.*

or **would**:

*Most evenings, he **would take** the dog for a walk.*

*They **would** often **visit** friends in Europe.*

We do not normally use *would* with **stative verbs**. We use the **past simple** or **used to** instead:

*He ~~would~~ **looked** much older than he does now. (NOT ~~would look~~)*

*We ~~would~~ **used to feel** very cold in winter. (NOT ~~would feel~~)*

Past tense

With most verbs, the past tense is formed by adding *-ed*:

<i>called</i>	<i>liked</i>	<i>wanted</i>	<i>worked</i>
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But there are a lot of irregular past tense forms in English. Here are the most common irregular verbs in English, with their past tense forms:

Base form	Past tense
<i>be</i>	<i>was/were</i>
<i>begin</i>	<i>began</i>
<i>break</i>	<i>broke</i>
<i>bring</i>	<i>brought</i>
<i>buy</i>	<i>bought</i>
<i>build</i>	<i>built</i>
<i>choose</i>	<i>chose</i>
<i>come</i>	<i>came</i>
<i>cost</i>	<i>cost</i>
<i>cut</i>	<i>cut</i>
<i>do</i>	<i>did</i>
<i>draw</i>	<i>drew</i>
<i>drive</i>	<i>drove</i>
<i>eat</i>	<i>ate</i>
<i>feel</i>	<i>felt</i>
<i>find</i>	<i>found</i>
<i>get</i>	<i>got</i>
<i>give</i>	<i>gave</i>
<i>go</i>	<i>went</i>
<i>have</i>	<i>had</i>
<i>hear</i>	<i>heard</i>
<i>hold</i>	<i>held</i>
<i>keep</i>	<i>kept</i>
<i>know</i>	<i>knew</i>
<i>leave</i>	<i>left</i>
<i>lead</i>	<i>led</i>
<i>let</i>	<i>let</i>
<i>lie</i>	<i>lay</i>

Base form Past tense

<i>lose</i>	<i>lost</i>
<i>make</i>	<i>made</i>
<i>mean</i>	<i>meant</i>
<i>meet</i>	<i>met</i>
<i>pay</i>	<i>paid</i>
<i>put</i>	<i>put</i>
<i>run</i>	<i>ran</i>
<i>say</i>	<i>said</i>
<i>sell</i>	<i>sold</i>
<i>send</i>	<i>sent</i>
<i>set</i>	<i>set</i>
<i>sit</i>	<i>sat</i>
<i>speak</i>	<i>spoke</i>
<i>spend</i>	<i>spent</i>
<i>stand</i>	<i>stood</i>
<i>take</i>	<i>took</i>
<i>teach</i>	<i>taught</i>
<i>tell</i>	<i>told</i>
<i>think</i>	<i>thought</i>
<i>understand</i>	<i>understood</i>
<i>wear</i>	<i>wore</i>
<i>win</i>	<i>won</i>
<i>write</i>	<i>wrote</i>

We use the past tense to talk about:

- something that happened **once in the past**:

*I **met** my wife in 1983.*

*We **went** to Spain for our holidays.*

*They **got** home very late last night.*

- something that happened **several times in the past**:

*When I was a boy, I **walked** a mile to school every day.*

*We **swam** a lot while we were on holiday.*

*They always **enjoyed** visiting their friends.*

- something that was **true for some time in the past**:

*I **lived** abroad for ten years.
He **enjoyed** being a student.
She **played** a lot of tennis when she was younger.*

- we often use **expressions with ago** with the past simple:

*I **met** my wife **a long time ago**.*

Past simple questions and negatives

We use **did** to make **questions** with the past simple:

***Did** she **play** tennis when she was younger?*

***Did** you **live** abroad?*

*When **did** you **meet** your wife?*

*Where **did** you **go** for your holidays?*

But questions with *who* often don't use *did*:

***Who discovered** penicillin?*

***Who wrote** Don Quixote?*

We use **didn't (did not)** to make **negatives** with the past simple:

*They **didn't go** to Spain this year.*

*We **didn't get** home until very late last night.*

*I **didn't see** you yesterday.*

Exercise

Complete the sentences with the past simple of the verbs in brackets ().

1. The young man _____ (take) out his wallet and _____ (pay) the bill.
2. When Lucy _____ (go) to the interview, she _____ (wear) her best suit.
3. We _____ (leave) the motorway and _____ (drive) for an hour on quiet country roads.
4. I _____ (think) I _____ (know) my irregular verbs, but now I'm not so sure!
5. As soon as I _____ (meet) Ali, I _____ (know) she _____ (be) someone special.

Past continuous

The past continuous is made from **the past tense of the verb *be*** and the ***-ing form*** of a verb:

<i>I was</i>	
<i>You were</i>	<i>working</i>
<i>He was</i>	<i>playing</i>
<i>She was</i>	<i>living</i>
<i>It was</i>	<i>talking</i>
<i>We were</i>	
<i>You were</i>	etc.
<i>They were</i>	

We use the past continuous to talk about the **past**:

- for something which **happened before and after another action**:

*The children **were doing** their homework when I got home.*

Compare: *The children **did** their homework when (= after) I **got** home.*

This use of the past continuous is very common at the beginning of a story:

*The other day **I was waiting** for a bus when ...*

*Last week, as **I was driving** to work, ...*

- for something that **happened before and after a specific time**:

*It was **eight o'clock**. I **was writing** a letter.*

Compare: *At eight o'clock I wrote (= started writing) **some letters**.*

- to show that something **continued for some time**:

*My head **was aching**.*

*Everyone **was shouting**.*

- for something that **happened again and again**:

*I **was practicing** every day, three times a day.*

*They **were meeting** secretly after school.*

*They **were always quarrelling**.*

- with verbs which show **change or growth**:

*The children **were growing up** quickly.*

*Her English **was improving**.*

My hair **was going** grey.
The town **was changing** quickly.

We do **not** normally use the past continuous with **stative verbs**. We use the **past simple** instead:

When I got home, I really **needed** (NOT ~~was needing~~) a shower.

Exercise

Choose the right combinations of words to complete the sentences. In some cases, there is more than one correct answer.

1. Ahmad _____ in and out of love when he was a young man.
 - **was always falling**
 - was falling always
 - always was falling
2. One of our teachers told us that we ____ hard enough.
 - not were working
 - weren't working
 - **were not working**
3. By the time we got to the party, ____ home.
 - **everyone was going**
 - was everyone going
 - was going everyone
4. Where ____ when they had their first child?
 - **were Rob and Rebecca living**
 - Rob and Rebecca were living
 - living Rob and Rebecca
5. When I got to work, I realized that I ____ my watch.
 - were not wearing
 - **was not wearing**
 - wasn't wearing

Past perfect

The past perfect is made from the verb **had** and the past participle of a verb:

*I **had finished** the work.*

*She **had gone**.*

The past perfect **continuous** is made from **had been** and the -ing form of a verb:

*I **had been working** there for a year.*

*They **had been painting** the bedroom.*

The past perfect is used in the same way as the present perfect, but it refers to a time in the past, not the present. We use the past perfect:

- for something that **started in the past** and **continued up to a given time in the past**:

*When George died, he and Anne **had been married** for nearly fifty years.*

*She didn't want to move. She **had lived** in Liverpool all her life.*

For this use, we often use the past perfect continuous:

*She didn't want to move. She **had been living** in Liverpool all her life.*

*Everything was wet. It **had been raining** for hours.*

- for something that **happened several times before a point in the past** and **continued after that point**:

*He was a wonderful guitarist. He **had been playing** ever since he was a teenager.*

*He **had written** three books and he was working on another one.*

- when we are **reporting our experience up to a point in the past**:

*My eighteenth birthday was the worst day I **had** ever **had**.*

*I was pleased to meet George. I **hadn't met** him before, even though I **had met** his wife several times.*

- for something that **happened in the past** and **is important at a later time in the past**:

*I couldn't get into the house. I **had lost** my keys.*

*Teresa wasn't at home. She **had gone** shopping.*

We often use **expressions with *for* and *since*** with the past perfect:

*I was sorry when the factory closed. I **had worked** there **for ten years**.*

*I **had been watching** that programmer every week **since it started**, but I missed the last episode.*

Perfect Continuous

We use **perfect continuous**:

- for something happening **before and after a specific time**:

*He's **getting** on the train. (Before and after the moment of speaking)*

*It was a quarter past ten. We **were watching** the news on television.*

- for something happening **before and after another action**:

*Mother **will be cooking** the dinner when we get home.*

*We **were waiting** for the bus when it started to rain.*

- for something **continuing for some time**:

*Everybody **will be waiting** for us.*

*They **had been working** hard all day.*

- for something **happening again and again**:

*They've **been doing** that every day this week.*

*The children **were always shouting**.*

*He **will be practicing** the piano every night.*

- for something **temporary**:

*We **are renting** an apartment until our house is ready.*

*He **was working** in a garage during the vacation.*

- for something **new**:

*We have moved from Birmingham. We're **living** in Manchester now.*

*He had left university and **was working** in his father's business.*

- to describe something **changing** or **developing**:

*Everything **has been getting** more difficult.*

*He **was growing** more bad-tempered every day.*

We can use **perfect continuous**:

- with **perfect tense**:

*How long **have** you **been sitting there**?*

*I don't know how long she **had been learning** Spanish.*

- with **modal verbs**:

*Your friends **will be looking for you**.*

*They **might be playing** tennis.*

- with both **modal verbs** and perfect:

*You **should have been driving** more carefully.*

*Soon we **will have been living** here for 25 years.*

Note: For translation consult Wren and Martin book.