

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

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.