

Simple Past Tense

The simple past is a verb tense that is used to talk about things that happened or existed before now.

Example

Ali entered a tennis contest.

He won the silver medal.

The simple past tense shows that you are talking about something that has already happened. Unlike the past continuous tense, which is used to talk about past events that happened over a period of time, the simple past tense emphasizes that the action is finished.

You can also use the simple past to talk about a past state of being, such as the way someone felt about something. This is often expressed with the simple past tense of the verb to be and an adjective, noun, or prepositional phrase.

Example

Ali was proud of his victory.

The contest was the highlight of his week.

How to Formulate the Simple Past

For regular verbs, add -ed to the root form of the verb (or just -d if the root form already ends in an e):

Play→Played	Type→Typed	Listen→Listened	Push→Pushed
Love→Loved			

For irregular verbs, things get more complicated. The simple past tense of some irregular verbs looks exactly like the root form:

Put→Put	Cut→Cut	Set→Set	Cost→Cost	Hit→Hit
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For other irregular verbs, including the verb to be, the simple past forms are more erratic:

See→Saw Build→Built Go→Went Do→Did Rise→Rose
Am/Is/Are→Was/Were

The good news is that verbs in the simple past tense (except for the verb to be) don't need to agree in number with their subjects.

Ali polished his medal. The other winners polished their medals too.

How to Make the Simple Past Negative

Fortunately, there is a formula for making simple past verbs negative, and it's the same for both regular and irregular verbs (except for the verb to be). The formula is did not + [root form of verb]. You can also use the contraction didn't instead of did not.

Ali did not brag too much about his skills. Ali's friend didn't see the contest.

For the verb to be, you don't need the auxiliary did. When the subject of the sentence is singular, use **was not** or **wasn't**. When the subject is plural, use **were not** or **weren't**.

The third-place winner was not as happy as Ali. The fourth-place winner wasn't happy at all. The onlookers were not ready to leave after the contest ended. The contestants weren't ready to leave either.

How to Ask a Question

The formula for asking a question in the simple past tense is did + [subject] + [root form of verb].

Did Ali win the gold medal or the silver medal? Where did Ali go to celebrate? Did the judges decide fairly, in your opinion?

When asking a question with the verb to be, you don't need the auxiliary did. The formula is was/were + [subject].

Was Ali in a good mood after the contest? Were people taking lots of pictures?