Simple Past Tense

The **simple past tense** is sometimes called the preterite tense. We can use several tenses to talk about the past, but the simple past tense is the one we use most often.

How do we make the Simple Past Tense?

To make the simple past tense, we use:

- **past form** only

  or

- auxiliary **did + base form**

Here you can see examples of the **past form** and **base form** for irregular verbs and regular verbs:

	V1 **base**	**V2** **past**	**V3** **past participle**	
regular verb	**work** **explode** **like**	**worked** **exploded** **liked**	worked exploded liked	The past form for all regular verbs ends in -ed.
irregular verb	**go** **see** **sing**	**went** **saw** **sang**	gone seen sung	The past form for irregular verbs is variable. You need to learn it by heart.
			You do not need the past participle form to make the simple past tense. It is shown here for completeness only.	

The structure for **positive** sentences in the simple past tense is:

subject + main verb

past

The structure for **negative** sentences in the simple past tense is:

subject + auxiliary verb + not + main verb

did base

The structure for **question** sentences in the simple past tense is:

auxiliary verb + subject + main verb

did base

The auxiliary verb **did** is not conjugated. It is the same for all persons (I did, you did, he did etc). And the base form and past form do not change. Look at these examples with the main verbs **go** and **work**:

	subject	**auxiliary verb**		**main verb**	
+	I			went	to school.
	You			worked	very hard.
-	She	did	not	go	with me.
	We	did	not	work	yesterday.
?	Did	you		go	to London?
	Did	they		work	at home?

Exception! The verb **to be** is different. We conjugate the verb to be (I was, you were, he/she/it was, we were, they were); and we do **not** use an auxiliary for negative and question sentences. To make a question, we exchange the subject and verb. Look at these examples:

	subject	**main verb**		
+	I, he/she/it	was		here.
	You, we, they	were		in London.

-	I, he/she/it	was	not	there.
	You, we, they	were	not	happy.
?	Was	I, he/she/it		right?
	Were	you, we, they		late?

How do we use the Simple Past Tense?

We use the simple past tense to talk about an action or a situation - an event - in the past.

The event can be **short** or **long**.

Here are some **short** events with the simple past tense:

The car exploded at 9.30am yesterday. She went to the door. We did not hear the telephone. Did you see that car?		
past	**present**	**future**
The action is in the past.		

Here are some **long** events with the simple past tense:

I lived in Bangkok for 10 years. The Jurassic period lasted about 62 million years. We did not sing at the concert. Did you watch TV last night?		
past	**present**	**future**
		

The action is in the past.		

Notice that it does not matter how long ago the event is: it can be a few minutes or seconds in the past, or millions of years in the past. Also it does not matter how long the event is. It can be a few milliseconds (car explosion) or millions of years (Jurassic period). We use the simple past tense when:

- the event is **in the past**
- the event is **completely finished**
- we say (or understand) the **time** and/or **place** of the event

Here are some more examples:

- I **lived** in that house when I was young.
- He **did**n't **like** the movie.
- What **did** you **eat** for dinner?
- John **drove** to London on Monday.
- Mary **did** not **go** to work yesterday.
- **Did** you **play** tennis last week?
- I **was** at work yesterday.
- We **were** not late (for the train).
- **Were** you angry?

Note that when we tell a story, we usually use the simple past tense. We may use the past continuous tense to "set the scene", but we almost always use the simple past tense for the action. Look at this example of the beginning of a story:

"The wind was howling around the hotel and the rain was pouring down. It **was** cold. The door **opened** and James Bond **entered**. He **took off** his coat, which **was** very wet, and **ordered** a drink at the bar. He **sat down** in the corner of the lounge and quietly **drank** his..."

Exercise

1. Jane Auten (write) _____ about 6 novels.
2. How did you know the answer? My friend (tell) _____ me.
3. Ann (spend) _____ a lot of money yesterday.
4. Don (fall) _____ down stairs this morning and (hurt) _____ his leg.
5. Jim (throw) _____ ball to Ann, who (catch) _____ it.
6. We (see) _____ Ria in a town few days ago.
7. _____ (go) out last night?
8. _____ (be) the food good?
9. Patrick and Ria (play) _____ tennis this morning.
10. I _____ (tired) when I _____ (get) home.
11. She _____ (study) Math when they _____ (call).
12. I was very thirsty. I _____ (drink) the water very quickly.
13. She was not hungry, so she _____ (eat) anything.
14. We _____ (go) to her house yesterday, but she _____ (be) not at home.
15. The hotel was not very expensive. It _____ (cost) very much.

References

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