Simple Past

FORM

[VERB+ed] or irregular verbs

Examples:

- You called Debbie.
- Did you call Debbie?
- You did not call Debbie.

Complete List of Simple Past Forms

USE 1 Completed Action in the Past

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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

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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 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.
• A: How long **did you wait** for them?
  B: We **waited** for one hour.

### 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.

IMPORTANT When-Clauses Happen First

Clauses are groups of words which have meaning but are often not complete sentences. Some clauses begin with the word "when" such as "when I dropped my pen..." or "when class began..." These clauses are called when-clauses, and they are very important. The examples below contain when-clauses.

Examples:
- When I paid her one dollar, she answered my question.
- She answered my question when I paid her one dollar.

When-clauses are important because they always happen first when both clauses are in the Simple Past. Both of the examples above mean the same thing: first, I paid her one dollar, and then, she answered my question. It is not important whether "when I paid her one dollar" is at the beginning of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. However, the example below has a different meaning. First, she answered my question, and then, I paid her one dollar.

Example:
- I paid her one dollar when she answered my question.

ADVERB PLACEMENT

The examples below show the placement for grammar adverbs such as: always, only, never, ever, still, just, etc.
Examples:

- You *just* called Debbie.
- Did you *just* call Debbie?

**ACTIVE / PASSIVE**

Examples:

- Tom *repaired* the car. *ACTIVE*
- The car *was repaired* by Tom. *PASSIVE*

[More About Active / Passive Forms](#)