

Proofreading Skills Tutorial:

**Tutorial #6:
Past Tense**

Using the Simple Past Tense of Regular Verbs

Using the Simple Past Tense of Irregular Verbs

Writing Center

English 800 Center

All notes and exercises can be done on separate sheets of paper, which you should bring to your conference with an instructor in the center.

As you work through the tutorial, make sure to see an instructional aide at the front desk in the Writing Center or English 800 Center if you have any questions or difficulties.

Past Tense Verbs

Before you begin this tutorial, we recommend that you complete *the Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*. This tutorial will demonstrate strategies for:

1. using the simple past tense of regular verbs
2. using the simple past tense of irregular verbs.

All the verbs in the following sentences are underlined. Some are regular verbs, and others are irregular verbs. But all the verbs are written in simple past tense:

Yesterday I smiled at my boyfriend for the first time since our fight.

The cat licked its paws.

Tatiana had a good time at the party on Tuesday.

Liam was at work.

Susannah took her banjo to Louisiana in 1926.

You ran very quickly down the street.

Notice that some of the previous sentences specify when the verb (the action *or* the state of being or having) occurred. That is, the smiling at my boyfriend started and stopped yesterday. The having a good time at the party began and ended on Tuesday. And the taking of the banjo to Louisiana started and stopped in the year 1926.

But some of the sentences do not specify when the verb (the action or state of being or having) occurred. That is, these sentences don't tell us when the cat licked its paws, when Liam was at work, or when you ran down the street.

Principle I: Even if the sentence does not say *when*, the simple past tense of both regular and irregular verbs shows that an action (or a state of being or having) *began and ended* at a single, specific time in the past.

Part One: Using the Simple Past Tense of Regular Verbs

Exercise 1

Instructions: Read through the passage below and underline the verbs. Then, go back and put [brackets] around the subjects. The example below shows the steps of identifying verbs and subjects that are covered in the *Introductory Tutorial: Identifying Verbs and Subjects*. If you have completed the tutorial, you will remember that the way to find the verb is to change the time of the sentence by temporarily adding *today*, *yesterday* and *tomorrow*, and the word that changes tense in response to these time shifts is the verb. Since it is already written in one of these tenses, the verb will only change one of three times.

Example: On her way to school, [Yi] traveled 90 mph in her little red sports car through residential neighborhoods.

Step One: To find the verb, temporarily change the time of the sentence:
(Tomorrow) Yi will travel 90 mph in her little red sports car through residential neighborhoods.

(Today) Yi travels 90 mph in her little red sports car through residential neighborhoods. The word that changes is the verb, “traveled,” so underline traveled.

Step Two: To find the subject, ask “who or what” does the action of the verb and put brackets around the subject. That is, who or what travels in her little red sports car? The answer to this question is the subject, “Yi,” so put brackets around Yi.

When she arrived at school late for the fifth time in January, Yi cringed as her Political Science professor, Dr. Murillo, asked her to stay after class. As she approached Dr. Murillo’s desk at the end of the hour, Yi smiled and attempted to look innocent without much success. Worse, when Murillo asked her why she showed up late so often, Yi decided to lie, thinking that the truth, that she just liked to stay in bed until noon, would not be a very good excuse. She explained that her sick parents needed special care because they both suffered from chronic illness. At the end of the story, Dr. Murillo excused all of Yi’s tardies. In reality, Yi’s “chronically ill” parents worked in the local bank and never missed a day of work.

All of the verbs you have underlined in the previous paragraph are *regular verbs*, meaning that they share a common feature when they are written in the past tense. Let’s examine what this common feature is.

- First, list two subject-verb units from Exercise 1 that contain a *singular* subject (*she, he, or it*, or any noun that *she, he, or it* can substitute for). For example, “Yi (*she*) lied.”

- Now list two subject-verb units from Exercise 1 that contain *plural* subjects (*they* or any noun that *they* can substitute for). For example, “parents (*they*) worked.”

Looking at the regular verbs that you identified above, what similarities between the simple past-tense verbs for singular subjects and the simple past-tense verbs for plural subjects do you notice?

As you probably have noticed, there is no difference in the way that we form a past-tense verb for singular and plural subjects. In fact, no matter what the subject is (*I, you, we, they, he, she, it*, or any noun at all), the simple past tense of a regular verb always ends in “ed.”

Principle II. To form the simple past tense of a regular verb that does not end with “e,” add “ed.” If the verb ends with “e,” add “d.” No matter what the subject is, the simple past tense for regular verbs always ends in “ed.”

Exercise 2

Instructions: Using Principle II, write the correct simple past tense form of the regular verb provided. The first one has been done for you.

1. Lindsay ignored the construction workers. (IGNORE)
2. Texaco _____ rights to drill for oil in my yard. (OBTAIN)
3. Jaime _____ the best table at Macaroni Grill for his date. (RESERVE)
4. Ann _____ to break the tie by making the free throw. (ATTEMPT)
5. You _____ your options for not paying this parking ticket. (EXHAUST)
6. My dog _____ the sound of leaves blowing in the wind. (FEAR)

7. Antoine's story _____ affected his mother deeply. (AFFECT)

Now that you have practiced forming the simple past tense of regular verbs, let's practice how to use this tense correctly.

Exercise 3

Instructions: Some of the regular verbs in the following exercise are correct, but others are written in an incorrect verb tense. First, by changing the time of the sentence, identify each verb and underline it. Then, using Principles I and II, decide which verbs should be written in the simple past tense, and if the verb is incorrect, write the correct form of the verb (one with a "d" or "ed" ending). The first one has been done for you.

believed

1. In the 19th century many people believe in the lost island of Atlantis.
2. The last time that you arrived at the shop, the electrician repairs your car's wiring.
3. Last year, on his twenty-sixth birthday, Leopold explores the Grand Canyon.
4. Juan Carlo's tricks work whenever he uses them.
5. Caitlin and Tommy like to go on road trips.
6. Many young Americans idolize Elvis Presley in the 1950s.
7. Last Halloween, the Great Pumpkin appear on Halloween, and Hassan photograph it.

Exercise 4

Instructions: Write an original sentence of your own using the simple past tense for each of the regular verbs listed below. The first one has been done for you.

1. WASTE *Takumi, Tanisha and Karen wasted a lot of time before they worked on their math project.*
2. REMEMBER

3. PERSUADE
4. ORDER
5. APPLAUD
6. CHEAT

Part Two: Using the Simple Past Tense of Irregular Verbs

Irregular verbs are trickier than regular verbs since they do not always take the same form, as you can see in the examples below:

- To weep:
Present Tense: She weeps at least once a month.
Simple Past Tense: She wept last night.
- To drive:
Present Tense: Jamil drives home to Vallejo every weekend.
Simple Past Tense: Jamil drove to Las Vegas last year.
- To be:
Present Tense: Nigella Lawson is a terrific chef.
Simple Past Tense: On last season's cooking show, Nigella was a terrific cook.
- To have:
Present Tense: Michele Obama has an organic vegetable garden at the White House.
Simple Past Tense: When her family lived in Chicago, Michele Obama had an organic vegetable garden.

Principle III. There is no single rule that explains forming the simple past tense of irregular verbs since they are formed in a variety of ways. To find the past tense of an irregular verb, look up the present-tense form of the verb in a dictionary. The dictionary will provide the simple past tense.

Irregular verbs are similar to regular verbs because, almost always, no matter what the subject is (*I, you, we, they, he, she, it*, or any noun at all), the simple past tense does not change. The only exception is the verb “be.” The following chart lists the different forms of the simple present tense and the simple past tense of the verb “be.”

The Simple Present and Simple Past of the Verb <i>Be</i>		
Subject	Present-Tense Verb	Past-Tense Verb
<i>I</i>	am	was
<i>you</i>	are	were
<i>we</i>	are	were
<i>they</i> or any noun for which <i>they</i> could substitute (<i>They</i> can refer to either people or things.)	are	were
<i>he</i> or any noun for which <i>he</i> could substitute	is	was
<i>she</i> or any noun for which <i>she</i> could substitute	is	was
<i>it</i> or any noun for which <i>it</i> could substitute	is	was

Exercise 5

Instructions: Using Principle III and the previous chart, write the simple past tense of the irregular verb provided. If you are uncertain about the past tense form of the irregular verb, look it up in a dictionary. The first one has been done for you.

1. Martin builds his house every weekend.

Martin built his house last year.

2. Mold grows on cream cheese.

When you left it out last night, mold _____ on the cream cheese.

3. My physics professor finds my excuses for failing pretty weak.

Yesterday, my physics professor _____ my excuses for failing pretty weak.

4. Yuri is a little tired today.

Yesterday he _____ a little tired. We always eat all the cheesecake that Mom makes.

5. Lakisha and Habib are in their first year of college at CSM.

Rachel and Ruth _____ students at CSM last year.

6. You sometimes lose your temper with authority figures.

Last week, you _____ your temper with the dean.

8. My Aunt Maria sends me a Christmas card every July.

Last year, she _____ me a Hanukkah card in August.

Some Pointers about Two “Ed” Endings and a Review of the Past-Tense Rules

Supposed to and Used to

Inexperienced writers may forget to use the “ed” ending in two particular cases because when we *say* the words, we don’t hear the “d” at the end of the verb.

How am I **suppose to** know? (INCORRECT)

Nico was **suppose to** go to the dentist. (INCORRECT)

In these incorrect sentences, “supposed to” has been spelled the way it sounds when you speak, but if you are writing, the sentences should be rewritten as follows:

How am I **supposed to** know? (CORRECT)

Nico was **supposed to** go to the dentist. (CORRECT)

The same is true for the verb in the next sentence:

I **use to** rise from my bed early in the morning. (INCORRECT)

Just as “supposed to” has a silent “d,” “used to” may sound as if it should be spelled “use to.” But it should be rewritten as follows:

I **used to** rise from my bed early in the morning. (CORRECT)

Principle IV. When using “supposed to” and “used to” in a sentence, don’t forget to add the silent “d.”

A Review of the Past-Tense Rules

- The simple past tense is used to show that an action began and ended at specific times in the past.
- You can use “d” and “ed” endings to form the simple past tense of all regular verbs—no matter what the subject is (*I, you, we, they, he, she, it*, or any noun at all).
- Unlike the past tense for regular verbs, there is no single rule that explains how to form the simple past tense of irregular verbs since they are formed in a variety of ways. Remember if you are uncertain about the correct past tense form of an irregular verb, you can find it by looking up the root (or present tense) form of the verb in a dictionary.
- Irregular verbs are similar to regular verbs because, almost always, no matter what the subject is (*I, you, we, they, he, she, it*, or any noun at all), the simple past tense does not change. The only exception is the verb *be*. See “The Simple Present and Simple Past of the Verb *Be*” chart, which appears after Principle III.
- Whenever a verb follows “supposed to” and “used to,” don’t forget to add the silent “d.”

Exercise 6

Instructions: Using Principles I, II, III and IV, change every regular and irregular verb that is not written in the correct tense.

Carlos never use to worry about fixing his car until yesterday when he find that the mechanic at the garage cheated him. He was suppose to take his car into the garage because his girlfriend, who drive it the day before, say that the brake pedal go all the way to the floor. Yesterday morning when he take it to the clinic, the scruffy owner tell him that it need entirely new brakes and brake wiring, and the cost of the repair is two thousand dollars. Carlos gasp and stare at the ground for a minute. But he mistakenly trust the owner of the clinic and leave his car there overnight. When he drive it the next day, Carlos notice that the car still make the same sounds. After he attempt to stop at a stop sign, he slam into the SUV in front of him because the brakes were still bad. Looking back, he now realize what a terrible mistake he make that day by trusting the mechanic.

Exercise 7

Instructions:

1. Review an essay where your teacher has marked your past tense errors. Be prepared to describe, in your own words, how to identify your verb tense errors in your own writing and how to revise them
2. Look back at the principles and exercises in this tutorial and make notes on a separate sheet of paper. You will bring these notes and the essay to your conference.
3. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor in the Writing Center (18-104) or English 800 Center (18-102). To make this appointment, stop by the Centers or call (650) 574-6436. During this appointment, the professor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to these exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.

Reminder:

For this appointment, bring

- any notes about the tutorial that you have taken
- your completed tutorial exercises
- and the essay