

# Simple Past Tense

## What is the simple past tense?

The simple past tense talks about events that started and finished in the past. For example:

I *ate* too much ice cream at Mike's birthday party yesterday.

They *didn't study* for the test last week.

## What is the sentence structure?

The sentence structure for positive past tense sentences looks like this:

subject | main verb (past tense) | object | complement (time expression)

He | watched | a movie | last Saturday.

Walter | played | basketball | two weeks ago.

The sentence structure for negative past tense sentences looks like this:

subject | auxiliary verb (did) + not | main verb | object | complement (time expression)

Bill | did not | eat | breakfast | this morning.

Beth | did not | go | to the beach | last weekend.

And lastly, here is the sentence structure for questions:

**yes/no questions:** auxiliary verb (did) | subject | main verb | object | complement

Did | you | finish | the report | last night?

**wh-questions:** wh-question | auxiliary verb (did) | subject | main verb  
| object | complement

What | did | you | eat | for dinner | last night?

When did you eat dinner last night?

Where...?

Why...?

Who did you eat dinner with last night?

## How is the simple past tense used?

The past tense describes an action that started and finished in the past. A time expression may be used, but isn't necessary if everyone understands when the action happened. For example:

**Kate:** You look hungry. Did you eat breakfast?

**Josh:** No, I didn't eat breakfast. I woke up late. I didn't have time.

It's clear that Kate means breakfast *this morning*. Here are a few more time expressions:

yesterday  
last week  
last month  
two days ago  
two months ago  
two years ago  
last night  
last year  
the day before yesterday

## Is there additional information on the simple past tense?

Most verbs can be changed to the past tense by adding -ed. These are called regular verbs. However, some verbs are irregular. Their form changes. Here are a few examples:

**regular verbs:** move - moved / play - played / use – used

**irregular verbs:** buy - bought / eat - ate / see – saw

The simple past tense can be used to talk about both short and long events. For example:

**short:** I woke up at 5:30 this morning.

**long:** I lived in Germany for 10 years.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).