

Past Simple - Structure

How do we make the past simple tense in English?

How to form the past simple of "be"

Positive form

I was
you were
he was
she was
it was
we were
they were

For example:

- I **was** a teacher.
- It **was** a sunny day.
- They **were** at home last night.

Negative form

Put **“not”** after the verb.

Full form	Short form
I was not	I wasn't
you were not	you weren't
he was not	he wasn't
she was not	she wasn't
it was not	it wasn't
we were not	we weren't
they were not	they weren't

For example:

- I **wasn't** a good student.
- He **was not** at school today.
- Shakespeare **wasn't** American.
- We **weren't** hungry.

Question forms

Invert the subject and the verb, and put a question word ("what", "who", etc.) at the beginning for wh- questions.

Yes/No questions	
	Was I?
	Were you?
	Was he?
	Was she?
	Was it?
	Were we?
	Were they?

Wh- questions	
	was I?
What	were you?
Who	was he?
Where	was she?
When	was it?
Why	were we?
How	were they?
etc.	

For example:

- **Was** I right?
- **Were** you tired after work?
- **Was** it helpful?
- Where **were** you on Saturday?
- Who **was** she?
- Why **were** we in the park?
- How **were** they?

How to form the past simple of other verbs

Positive form

For all other verbs, the verb is the same for all subjects.

For **regular verbs**, add **-ed** to the base form (the infinitive without "to"), or just **-d** if the verb ends in **-e**. If the verb ends in a **consonant + y**, remove the **"y"** and add **-ied**.

Here are some examples:

play	live	study
I played	I lived	I studied
you played	you lived	you studied
he played	he lived	he studied
she played	she lived	she studied
it played	it lived	it studied
we played	we lived	we studied
they played	they lived	they studied

For example:

- I **played** Monopoly last night.
- We **lived** in a big city.
- She **studied** electrical engineering.

For **irregular verbs**, there is no rule for forming the past simple.

Here are some examples:

have	go	do
I had	I went	I did
you had	you went	you did
he had	he went	he did
she had	she went	she did
it had	it went	it did
we had	we went	we did
they had	they went	they did

For example:

- I **had** lunch at 1 pm.
- He **had** curly hair as a child.
- Mary **went** to the gym two days ago. (she **went**)
- They **went** to Disneyland last year.
- You **did** a good job.
- Ethel and I **did** the dishes. (we **did**)

Negative form

Put "**did not**" between the subject and the main verb.
The contraction of "**did not**" is "**didn't**".

Here we will use "**play**" as the main verb.

Full form	Short form
I did not play	I didn't play
you did not play	you didn't play
he did not play	he didn't play
she did not play	she didn't play
it did not play	it didn't play
we did not play	we didn't play
they did not play	they didn't play

For example:

- I **didn't play** basketball yesterday.
- You **didn't make** a mistake.
- They **did not like** the play.

Question forms

Put **“did”** before the subject and put a question word (what, who, etc.) at the beginning for wh- questions.

Yes/No questions	
	Did I play?
	Did you play?
	Did he play?
	Did she play?
	Did it play?
	Did we play?
	Did they play?

Wh- questions	
What	did I play?
Who	did you play?
Where	did he play?
When	did she play?
Why	did it play?
How	did we play?
etc.	did they play?

For example:

- **Did** you **play** chess at school?
- **Did** she **work** here?
- How **did** you **fix** the computer?
- What **did** we **do** last Monday?
- When **did** it **rain**?

Advanced grammar point

In old-fashioned English, and even in some formal contexts today, **"have"** is often treated similarly to **"be"** in past simple negative sentences and questions (we do not use "did"). You might see these structures in older books.

In other words, for **negative sentences**, we use "hadn't" instead of "didn't have".

Modern English:

- **You didn't have time.**
- **She didn't have a house.**

Old-fashioned English:

- **You hadn't time.**
- **She hadn't a house.**

Note: "You had not time" and "She had not a house" are also correct, but they are very rare.

For **questions**, we simply invert the subject and the verb.

Modern English:

- **Did you have time?**
- **Did she have a house?**

Old-fashioned English:

- **Had you time?**
- **Had she a house?**