

University of Tikrit

College of Education for Humanities

Department of Quranic sciences &
Islamic education



Past Simple and Past Continuous Tenses

Head way

Second year

Assistant Lecturer: Mediha Khalid

2025-2026

Past Simple and Past Continuous Tenses

1) Introduction

Tenses are one of the most important elements of English grammar. They help us to show time:

When an action happens / how long it lasts/ and whether it is completed or still in progress. In academic writing, correct use of

Tenses are essential because it gives clarity, accuracy, and logical sequence to ideas. Incorrect tense usage may confuse the reader and weaken the meaning of the text. In English, tenses are generally divided

Into three main time categories (past / present / future) each category has four main forms: (simple / continuous / perfect / perfect continuous) so we have 12 main tenses in English.

The Past Simple Tense: is used to refer to actions that were completed in a time period before the present time. In the Simple Past the process of performing the action is not important. What matters is that the action was completed in the past. The action may have been in the recent past or a long time ago.

2) Using the Simple Past Tense

The Simple Past is used for actions that started and finished at a specific time in the past. It's also possible to use the simple past in a sentence without specifying a time, but it must have previously been made clear that the speaker is referring to a finished period.

I saw a movie last week.

- The Simple Past is used to describe several actions that were completed in the past.

I finished work, walked to the beach and met my friends.

- The Simple Past is used to describe a process that started and finished in the past. In this case, the process of the action is long and is used by specifying time periods such as ‘the whole year’ or ‘all day’.

I lived in Italy for five years.

- The Simple Past can also be used in sentences that describe past habits. These sentences have the same purpose as the expression ‘used to’. It should be clear in this kind of sentence that the action referred to is a habit. Time expressions like *always*, *often*, *usually* and *never* can be used to underline this.

I often played football when I was a young man.

a) Affirmative sentences in the Simple Past

In affirmative sentences the word order is subject + verb and the form of the verb in the simple past is the same for all subjects (with the exception of ‘to be’ – *was/were*).

Subject + past simple + object

For example:

I played football yesterday.

He saw his family last week.

I was in France in June.

b) Negative sentences in the Simple Past

To make negative negative sentences in the simple past we use the auxiliary ‘did not’ / ‘didn’t’ and the base form of the verb.

Subject + did not + base form of verb + object

For example:

I didn't play football yesterday.

They didn't go to the theater last month.

She didn't arrive on time this morning.

c) Questions in the Simple Past

To make questions in the simple past we use 'did' in front of the subject and base form of the verb.

Did + subject + base form of verb + object?

For example:

Did you play football yesterday?

Did they lose the match?

Did he clean his home last weekend?

In order to convert regular verbs from their base form to the simple past form, we add -ed. For irregular verbs, however, the simple past form doesn't follow this rule and can vary significantly and you simply need to learn them by heart. There are many irregular verbs but below you can find the most common ones that you need to know for daily use.

3)Regular verb examples

- place – placed
- dance – danced
- plan – planned
- stop – stopped
- fix – fixed

- snow – snowed
- rain – rained
- need – needed

As you can see from these examples, with most regular verbs we add -ed. When a verb ends in -e we simply add -d. And when a verb ends in a consonant and -y, we change the -y to -i and add -ed.

4) Irregular verb examples

- be – was/were
- buy – bought
- come – came
- do – did
- eat – ate
- find – found

5) What is the past continuous tense?

The past continuous tense is a verb tense that shows an ongoing action that began and ended in the past.

Ex / I was watching a movie when the power went out.

- The past continuous verb tense, also known as the past progressive, describes ongoing actions in the past: I was writing my research paper all night.
- The past continuous is formed almost identically to the present continuous tense; the only difference is that the verb *to be* appears in the simple past, rather than in the simple present, before the present participle of the main verb.

- The past continuous is useful for expressing that an action was ongoing at a specified time, for emphasizing the duration of something that occurred in the past, or for establishing context for something else in the past.

6)Types of Sentences in Past Continuous Tense

Past continuous sentences describe ongoing past actions and come in four main types: Affirmative (Subject + was/were + V-ing), Negative (Subject + was/were + not + V-ing), Interrogative (Was/Were + Subject + V-ing)?

a. Affirmative (Positive)

- Structure: Subject + was/were + Verb(-ing).
- Example: *She was reading a book when I called.*

b. Negative

- Structure: Subject + was/were + not + Verb(-ing).
- Example: *They were not listening to the teacher.*

c. Interrogative (Yes/No Questions)

- Structure: Was/Were + Subject + Verb(-ing)?.
- Example: *Were you studying for the test?*

Short answer : Yes, you were/ or No, you were

7)Differences between past Simple and Past Continuous

Past Simple describes completed actions at a specific past time, while Past Continuous describes actions that were ongoing or in progress at a specific past moment, often setting the scene or being interrupted by a shorter, completed action (Past Simple). Use Past Simple for finished events (e.g., "I *ate* dinner"), and Past Continuous for background actions or ongoing situations ("I *was eating* when the phone *rang*").

Past Simple

- Focus: Completed actions, states, or habits in the past.
- Structure: Subject + Past Simple Verb (e.g., *worked, went, played*).
- Usage:
 - Finished actions at a definite time: "She *arrived* yesterday."
 - A series of completed actions: "I *woke up, had* breakfast, and *left*."
 - Habits: "He *played* basketball in college."

Past Continuous

- Focus: Actions in progress at a specific moment in the past.
- Structure: Subject + was/were + Verb-ing (e.g., *was working, were playing*).
- Usage:
 - Ongoing action at a specific time: "At 8 PM, I *was studying*."
 - Background action for a shorter event: "She *was driving* when the phone *rang*."
 - Two simultaneous ongoing actions: "I *was reading* while he *was watching* TV."

Key Comparison Summarized

- Completed vs. Ongoing: Past Simple is for *finished* actions, Past Continuous for *ongoing* ones.
- Interruption: Past Continuous sets the scene, and Past Simple often describes what *interrupted* it: "They *were walking* (continuous) when they *saw* (simple) a deer."

English tenses are the backbone of correct and meaningful communication. Mastering them enables students to express ideas clearly, write academically, and understand texts accurately. Continuous Practice and correct application of rules will lead to strong language competence.

