

3

past time

past simple basic use

Use past simple

- for finished events in the past which have a definite time.
*In 1969 the first men **landed** on the Moon.*
- in narrative.
*The door **opened** and two boys **came** into the room.*
- for past habits and routines, usually with a time expression.
*Few people in Victorian times **took** a bath **every day**.*

Many common verbs have irregular past forms which have to be learnt. Always check in a dictionary if you are not sure of the past form.

other uses of past simple

- Past simple can also be used for very recent events, without a time expression.
*What **happened** to you? Someone **hit** me!*
- Past simple is also used in conditional sentences and with *it's time* (see **Units 12, 13, 14**).
*It's time **we left**.*

past continuous basic use

Use past continuous

- to describe a continuing unfinished action in the past.
*I looked out of the window and saw that **it was raining**.
Whenever I visited him, **he was working** in his garden.*
- for a continuing unfinished action interrupted by a sudden past action.
*While we **were getting** ready to go out, the rain suddenly **stopped**.
While I **was getting** ready for bed, the doorbell **rang**.*
- for activities as background description.
*Helen looked down into the busy street. Crowds of people **were pushing** along the pavements, and cars **were hooting**.*
- for two continuing events happening at the same time.
*While Jim **was painting** the outside of the house, Sarah **was decorating** the bedrooms.*

other uses of past continuous

Past continuous can also be used

- to emphasize that an action was still continuing.
*They started producing the car in 1946 and **were still producing** it thirty years later.*
- to describe a changing situation (see **Unit 2**).
***It was becoming** more and more difficult to find work.
Her performances **were getting** better and better.*
- with *forever, continually, always* etc (see **Unit 2**) to criticize actions we feel are annoying, or which we wish to exaggerate.
*At school, **he was always getting** into trouble.
She was forever falling in love with the wrong kind of man.*

We do not generally use past continuous to describe habitual actions in the past.

*That summer **we were going** swimming nearly every day.
That summer **we went** swimming nearly every day.*

past perfect simple and continuous

- are used to refer to events in the past which happened before other events in the past, usually when there is no time expression to make this clear. Past perfect simple refers to finished events and past perfect continuous to unfinished, recently completed or continuing events.

*By the time we got to the cinema, the film **had started**.*

***He'd been working** hard all morning, and he felt really tired.*

In both examples, the past perfect happens before the past simple.

- are common after verbs such as *realize, remember, know, understand* etc.
*When I got on the bus, **I realized I had left** my wallet at home.*
- are common in reported speech (see **Unit 17**).
- are **not** used to emphasize that an event happened a long time ago.

Compare the use of past simple and past continuous with past perfect tenses.

*While we **were watching** a film, the fire alarm **went off**.* (past events)

*I remembered the events of the day before. At 11.00 while we **had been watching** a film, the fire alarm **had gone off**.* (past seen from the past)

Only use past perfect tenses when absolutely necessary to show that one event in the past happened before another event in the past. Often the meaning is clear without using past perfect. When we describe a series of short actions, we usually use past simple.

used to do

- Use *used to* to describe habits and states in the past, especially when we make contrasts with the present. Any time reference tends to be general. The pronunciation is /ju:st tu:/.
***I used to play** chess quite often, but I haven't played for ages.*
*In those days people **used to wash** all their clothes by hand.*
***I used to like** tennis, but I don't play much now.*
- Used to* refers only to the past. There are no other tense forms in modern English, though they can be found in older literary texts.
- The question is normally *Did you use to?*
***Did you use to** play hide-and-seek when you were a child?*
- The negative is normally *didn't use to*.
*In those days, people **didn't use to** travel abroad so much.*
- Past simple is also used to describe past habits, with other details added to make a contrast between past and present.
***When I was younger I played** chess quite often, but I haven't played for ages.*
- Be used to something* has no connection with *be used to*, and means *be accustomed to* something.
To in this case is a preposition, so it is followed by a noun or *-ing*.
*I can't eat any more. **I'm not used to** such big meals.*
*She can't climb all those steps! **She's not used to taking** so much exercise!*

would

- can be used to describe a person's habitual activity. It cannot be used with state verbs.
*Every summer **we would stay** in a small village in the mountains.*
It is not possible to say *I would like tennis, but I don't play much now.*
- Would* is more common in more literary texts, reminiscences etc

past tenses used as polite forms

- Past simple and past continuous are often used when the speaker is being more polite or less direct. The time reference is to present time.
***Did you want** to see me about anything?*
***I was wondering** what you wanted.*



- 1 Complete the sentence using the verb in brackets and *would* or *used to*. If both are possible, write both.
- a Every day the young prince (go) *would go / used to go* hunting in the forest.
 - b Wild animals (sometimes come) into the garden at night.
 - c I (enjoy) computer games, but I've grown tired of them.
 - d Brian (speak) Italian quite well, but he's forgotten it all.
 - e Every day Anna (wake up) at 4.00 am and go to work at the bakery.
 - f My mother (often play) the piano and sing after dinner.
 - g I (own) a racing bike but I sold it and bought a scooter.
 - h Tony (believe) that one day he would be famous.
 - i When I was a student I (usually go) to bed about 1.00 am.
 - j Helen (live) in an old boat on the canal.

history

- 2 Complete the two texts about World War 1 with the correct form of the verb in brackets. Use past simple, past continuous, past perfect simple or past perfect continuous. Only use a past perfect form if it is necessary to make the meaning clear.

The condition of Britain in 1917

The government also **a** (need) *needed* to ensure that Britain was fed. Under the Defence of the Realm Act it was able to take over land and turn it over to food production. In February 1917 it

b (set up) the Women's Land Army to recruit women as farm workers. By then,

however, the food **supply** in Britain **c** (became) desperate. German **U-boats**

d (sink) one in every four British **merchant** ships and Britain had only six weeks' supply of wheat left. As food supplies **e** (run) short, so prices **f** (rise).

Wages **g** (hardly rise) during the war because people were mostly prepared to **sacrifice** better pay to support the war effort, but prices were now almost double what they **h** (be) in

1914. Poorer people could not even afford basic supplies such as bread. Shops **i** (close) early each afternoon as they **j** (run out) of goods to sell.



German reactions to the Treaty of Versailles 1919

The overall reaction of Germans was horror and **outrage**. They certainly **k** (not believe) they **l** (start) the war. They **m** (not even think) they **n** (lose) the war. In 1919 many Germans **o** (not really understand) how bad Germany's **military** situation **p** (be) at the end of the war in 1918. They believed that the German government **q** (simply agree) to a **ceasefire**, and that therefore Germany should have been at the Paris Peace Conference to **negotiate** peace. They were angry that their government was not represented at the talks and that the Allies **r** (force) them to accept a **harsh treaty** without any choice or even a comment. At first, the new government **s** (refuse) to sign the treaty and at one point it **t** (look) as though war might break out again. However, Ebert, the new German leader, was in an impossible position. Reluctantly, he agreed to accept the terms of the treaty and it was **signed** on 28 June 1919.

GLOSSARY



3 Underline the correct form. Only use the past perfect form when other forms are not possible.

- When Dora went / *had gone* to pay for the petrol she *was putting* / *had put* in her car, she *realized* / *was realizing* that she *lost* / *had lost* her credit card.
- While I *was waiting* / *had waited* for my meal to arrive, I *saw* / *was seeing* that the two men who had followed me into the restaurant *were staring* / *had been staring* at me from a nearby table.
- When I *heard* / *was hearing* the noise at the window, I *knew* / *had known* that someone *tried* / *was trying* to break into the house.
- Maria *didn't remember* / *wasn't remembering* anything about the accident, except that she *didn't drive* / *had not been driving* too fast and in fact *had almost stopped* / *was almost stopping* before she reached the crossroads.
- By the time the fire engines *arrived* / *was arriving* at the cottage, Tom and his neighbours *already put out* / *had already put out* the fire and *were carrying* / *had been carrying* furniture out of the blackened building.
- 'What *did you do* / *were you doing* in the High Street at that time of night, and why *did you run away* / *had you run away* when the officer *told* / *was telling* you to stop?' asked the lawyer.
- While Sally *Painted* / *was painting* the ceiling, she *fell off* / *was falling off* the ladder but luckily she *didn't break* / *wasn't breaking* any bones.
- Our taxi to the airport *didn't turn up* / *wasn't turning up* on time, and so by the time we *got* / *were getting* to the check-in desk, the flight *already closed* / *had already closed*.
- Marlowe walked slowly into the room. He *didn't forget* / *hadn't forgotten* his last visit to the house, when Miss LaPorte *had fired* / *was firing* two shots at him, so he *had taken* / *was taking* no chances this time.
- Alice could see that the tall boy *had* / *was having* difficulty making himself understood, but she *decided* / *was deciding* not to help him. After all, nobody *had helped* / *was helping* her during her first days in this country!

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

- Choose a novel or story, and select one or two pages. Make a list of the past tenses used on these pages. Are these the only tenses possible, or are others also acceptable?
- Translate some of the sentences in Exercise 2 into your language. Does your language have a similar set of tenses, or is it different?

Answer key

Unit 1

Ex 1

a contain b are slowly beginning to understand
c do you think d don't realize e are imagining
f are having g I'm taking h appears i is considering
j Does this wallet belong

Ex 2

a I'm having b- c I imagine d- e- f don't mean
g I'm settling h- i I seem j- k I'm also thinking
l is knocking m is having n I expect o I'm considering

Ex 3

a is going down b are still trying c is improving
d believe e show f agree g means h is increasing
i looks j interprets k remains l is becoming m cost
n is pursuing o are currently facing p are having
q have r suggest s behave t say u seems
v cause w are introducing x are concentrating

Unit 2

Ex 1

a ✓ b smells c ✓ d do you do e It's costing f ✓
g ✓ h I'm thinking i we're beginning j ✓

Ex 2

a is knocking b cook c is forever losing d comes
e is reading f kicks g don't understand h is leaving
i is getting j hear

Ex 3

a are you doing b contains c visits d is beginning
e is seeing f don't know g is taking h measures
i is happening j suppose

Ex 4

a go b is rapidly becoming c causes d seems
e are taking f simply weigh g carry h actually gives
(g and h could be: *are carrying / is actually giving*, to
emphasise that this is a current trend)
i simply don't realize j is happening k are still examining
l do not believe m involves n expect o are working
p hope (n and p could be: *are expecting, are hoping,*
to emphasize current activity) q realize
r depend s understand t are checking

Ex 5

a Does this car belong to you, sir?
b This perfume smells nice.
c There seems to be a mistake.
d I don't see what you mean.
e What do you think?
f At birth a baby elephant weighs about 90 kg.
g Does the price matter?
h How much does this model cost?
i This book looks interesting
j What does the box contain?

Ex 6

a They say Harry is a very good card player.
b I don't understand this maths problem.
c I agree with you.
d She's working in the garden.

e Stop shouting, the teacher's coming.
f Somebody is knocking at the door.
g Some people believe [that] UFOs have landed on Earth.
h It's getting hotter in here.
i I love skiing.
j Peter is always losing his homework.

Ex 7

a tries b is walking c hears d is watching e turns
f doesn't see g creeps h hears i sees j is sitting
k asks l answers m says n laughs o replies
p is standing

Ex 8

a are spending b pay c means d is taking e works
f does g am finding h admits i am trying
j am managing k understand l know m am going
n are helping / help o am learning p am experiencing
q points out r are taking s do not really know t want
u are developing v are appearing w are spending
x think y are going

Unit 3

Ex 1

a would go / used to go
b would sometimes come / used to come
c used to enjoy d used to speak
e would wake up / used to wake up
f would often play / used to play
g used to own
h used to believe i would usually go / usually used to go
j used to live

Ex 2

A
a needed b set up c had become d were sinking
e had run / ran f had risen / rose g had hardly risen
h had been i closed / were closing j had run out
B
k did not believe l had started m did not even think
n had lost o did not really understand p had been
q had simply agreed r had forced s refused t looked

Ex 3

a went, had put, realized, had lost
b was waiting, saw, were staring
c heard, knew, was trying
d didn't remember, had not been driving,
had almost stopped
e arrived, had already put out, were carrying
f were you doing, did you run away, told
g was painting, fell off, didn't break
h didn't turn up, got, had already closed
i hadn't forgotten, had fired, was taking
j was having, decided, had helped

Unit 4

Ex 1

a has written b spent c studied d has written e won
f have been g received h also won i has always been
j have accused k (has) pointed out l wrote

Ex 2

a have been trying b have been c came up
d gave e found f performed g used h called
i has found j have learned