

# *Proofreading Skills Tutorial*

## **Tutorial 6: Past Tense**

### **Using the Simple Past Tense of Regular Verbs Using the Simple Past Tense of Irregular Verbs**

This Tutorial includes two files:

- **Lesson (6a\_Past\_Tense\_Lesson)**

In order to learn the material presented in this tutorial more effectively, as you read you should take notes in a place that you can reference later. If it is convenient, you could print the tutorial and annotate it so you can keep it for future reference.

- **Exercises (6b\_Past\_Tense\_Exercises** – located in the same area as the lesson)

- It has highlighted areas for you to answer the exercises using an application such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- Download and save this file as your own; you will share it with an instructor after you complete the lesson and exercises.

Please contact the Writing Center with any questions or difficulties:

[csmtwc@smccd.edu](mailto:csmtwc@smccd.edu) or 650-574-6436.

## **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**

**Please open your 6b exercises file and complete Exercises 1.**

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.

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- First, in your notes, 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, in your notes, 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? Write the answer in your notes.

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.”

**Please open your 6b exercises file and complete Exercises 2, 3 and 4.**

## 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>		
<i>Subject</i>	<i>Present-Tense Verb</i>	<i>Past-Tense Verb</i>
<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

Please open your 6b exercises file and complete **Exercise 5**.

## **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 **supposedu to** know? (CORRECT)

Nico was **supposedu 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 **usedu to** rise from my bed early in the morning. (CORRECT)

**Principle IV. When using “supposedu to” and “usedu 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.

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- Whenever a verb follows “supposeded to” and “useded to,” don’t forget to add the silent “d.”

**Please open your 6b exercises file and complete Exercise 6.**

## **Final Activity**

### **Instructions:**

1. Review a classroom essay that you are working on and 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. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor working in the Writing Center. To make this appointment, sign up using the same method you use to make essay conference appointments. Be sure to include a comment or note that you are meeting about a tutorial.
3. During this appointment, the instructor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to the exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.