4

The Past Simple and Talking About the Future

4.1 The past simple

4.1.1 Form

Regular verbs add *-ed*: *work* → *worked*, *play* → *played*. Spelling: *stop* → *stopped* (double the consonant), *study* → *studied* (*-y* → *-ied*), *live* → *lived* (just *-d*). Irregular verbs must be learned individually — see Appendix A: *go* → *went*, *see* → *saw*, *buy* → *bought*, *take* → *took*.

Negatives and questions use *did* + base verb, for *all* persons:

Statement	Negative	Question
She arrived late.	*She didn't arrive late.*	*Did she arrive late?*
They went home.	*They didn't go home.*	*Did they go home?*

Common Error

After *did/didn't*, use the *base* verb, never the past form: ✗ *Did you went to the party?* → ✓ *Did you go to the party?* ✗ *She didn't bought anything.* → ✓ *She didn't buy anything.*

4.1.2 Pronunciation of *-ed*

- /t/ after voiceless sounds: *worked, stopped, washed*
- /d/ after voiced sounds: *played, lived, cleaned*
- /ɪd/ (extra syllable) only after /t/ or /d/: *wanted, needed, decided*

4.1.3 Uses

1. **Completed actions at a finished time:** *I **saw** her yesterday. They **moved** here in 2015.*
2. **Sequences in stories:** *She **opened** the door, **switched** on the light, and **screamed**.*
3. **Past habits and states:** *We **walked** to school every day. He **lived** alone.*

Typical time markers: *yesterday, last week, in 2010, two years ago, when I was a child.*

4.2 *Used to* and *would* for past habits

- *used to* + base verb: past habits and states that are no longer true — *I **used to smoke**. There **used to be** a cinema here.*
- Negative and question: *didn't use to, Did you use to. . . ?*

- *would* + base verb: repeated past *actions* in nostalgic narrative (not states) — *Every summer we **would swim** in the river.* ✗ *We would live in a small village.* → ✓ *We used to live in a small village.*

Common Error

Do not confuse *used to do* (past habit) with *be/get used to doing* (= be/become accustomed to): *I **used to drive** on the left* (past habit) vs. *I **am used to driving** on the left* (it is normal for me now).

4.3 The past progressive

Form: *was/were* + *-ing*. It sets the scene and describes actions in progress at a past moment:

- *At eight o'clock we **were having** dinner.*
- Interrupted action: *I **was taking** a shower when the phone **rang**.* (long background action in progressive; short interrupting action in past simple)
- Parallel actions: *While I **was cooking**, he **was setting** the table.*

Key Point

Past simple = completed events that move the story forward. Past progressive = the background scenery around those events. *The sun **was shining** and the birds **were singing** when suddenly a stranger **knocked** at the door.*

4.4 Talking about the future

English has no single future tense; it chooses among several forms according to meaning.

4.4.1 *will* + base verb

1. Predictions and beliefs: *It **will rain** tomorrow. I think they'**ll win**.*
2. Instant decisions made at the moment of speaking: *The phone's ringing — I'**ll get** it.*
3. Promises, offers, threats: *I'**ll help** you. We **won't forget** this.*
4. Facts about the future: *She **will be** forty in May.*

4.4.2 *be going to* + base verb

1. Prior intentions and plans: *We'**re going to redecorate** the kitchen this spring.*
2. Predictions based on present evidence: *Look at those clouds — it'**s going to rain**.*

4.4.3 Present progressive and present simple for the future

- Present progressive: fixed arrangements, typically with a time and other people involved — *I'**m seeing** the dentist at four.*
- Present simple: timetables and schedules — *The flight **departs** at 6:55.*

Key Point

Decision made *now* → *will*. Decision made *before now* → *going to* or present progressive. *"We've run out of milk." "Really? I'**ll buy** some."* vs. *"Why are you putting on your coat?" "I'**m going to buy** some milk."*

Usage Note

Shall survives mainly in offers and suggestions with *I/we* in British English: ***Shall** I open a window?* ***Shall** we start?* As a plain future (*I shall return*) it now sounds formal or old-fashioned.

Exercises

Exercise 4.1 Past simple forms

Give the past simple of: *buy, catch, come, drink, fall, feel, fly, forget, hold, leave, lose, pay, run, teach, think, throw, wear, win, write, begin.*

Exercise 4.2 Past simple or past progressive?

Choose the correct form.

1. When the fire alarm (rang / was ringing), everyone (left / was leaving) the building calmly.
2. I (found / was finding) this wallet while I (walked / was walking) the dog.
3. She (didn't hear / wasn't hearing) the doorbell because she (listened / was listening) to music.
4. What (did you do / were you doing) at 10 p.m. last night?

Exercise 4.3 Future forms

Choose the most natural form: *will*, *going to*, present progressive, or present simple.

1. "There's no sugar left." "Oh, I _____ (get) some from the shop."
2. Watch out! You _____ (drop) that tray!
3. We _____ (fly) to Osaka on the 14th — the tickets are booked.
4. The conference _____ (begin) at 9 a.m. sharp, according to the programme.
5. I'm sure you _____ (pass) the exam.

Exercise 4.4 used to

Rewrite using *used to* or *be used to* as appropriate.

1. In the past, I drank coffee every morning; now I don't.
2. Night shifts are normal for her; they don't bother her.
3. There was a bakery on this corner years ago.