
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

Past simple



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hello. Welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Finn.

Sophie

And me, Sophie. Hello.

Finn

In today's programme we're talking about the past simple tense...

Sophie

... when we use it, how we form it for regular verbs...

Finn

... we'll take a look at some irregular verbs, negative sentences and questions.

Sophie

... and we'll finish as usual with a quiz.

Finn

Ok - so let's get started! The past simple is a tense in English that we use to talk about an event that happened and finished in the past. Here's Neil with our first example:

Neil

Jack Dorsey **invented** Twitter in 2006.

Sophie

Thanks Neil. Now, we often find the past simple in stories like this:

Neil

The boy **started** running. Suddenly, he **stopped** and **listened**...

Finn

Wow - sounds like an exciting story! And it had three past simple verbs: **started**, **stopped**, and **listened**.

Sophie

... and they are all regular verbs. We make the past simple of regular verbs by adding an 'e' and a 'd' to the infinitive.

Finn

... so the past simple of **start** is **started**,

Sophie

... the past simple of **stop** is **stopped**,

Finn

... and the past simple of **listen** is **listened**...

Sophie

... did you spot the difference in the pronunciation there?

Finn

Yes, sometimes the 'e' and 'd' at the end sounds like a 't'. Listen: **Stopped. Stopped.**

Sophie

Sometimes it sounds more like 'id'. 'id'. **Started. Started.**

Finn

... or like a 'd': **Listened. Listened.**

Sophie

Let's hear all three again:

Neil

Stopped, started, listened. Stopped, started, listened.

Finn

So, listen out for those 3 different pronunciations of the past simple e-d ending. It's simple, isn't it...

Sophie

Yes, well we are talking about the past simple, ... but ... irregular verbs are not quite so simple.

Finn

That's true: can you give us some examples of irregular verbs, please, Neil?

Neil

I **went** to the interview yesterday and **got** the job!

Finn

And another one please?

Neil

Kurosawa **made** some wonderful films.

Finn

So the past simple of **go** is **went**.

Sophie

...**get** is **got**.

Finn

...and **make** is **made**.

Sophie

And I'm afraid you just have to learn irregular verbs. There is no one simple rule for them.

Finn

But the good news is that the past simple is the same for all people.

Sophie

Yes – it's **I got** the job, **you got** the job, **he got** the job...

Finn

We got the job... **they got** the job...

Sophie

Everybody got the job!

Both

Hooray!

IDENT

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

Finn

Now, for negatives in the past simp... [sfx: loud sound of unwrapping of biscuit and someone taking a bite] ...Sophie, are you hungry?

Sophie

[munching] Yes, sorry, **I didn't have** breakfast this morning.

Finn

You didn't have breakfast! Aha! ... past simple negatives ... this is simple... you just put didn't in front of the main verb.

Sophie

That's right. Didn't plus the infinitive makes a past simple negative: **I didn't have** breakfast this morning.

Finn

So remember: it's not I didn't had, it's **I didn't have** breakfast.

Sophie

I didn't have breakfast. **I didn't have** time!

Finn

Now, let's move on to past simple questions. Here's an example:

Neil

Did you make that cake? It's delicious!

Sophie

Did you say 'cake'? Where?

Finn

Sorry Sophie, it was just the example! So in past simple questions it's did plus subject plus an infinitive: **Did you make?** Let's hear that again - with an answer this time:

Neil

Did you make that cake? It's delicious!

Finn

Yes, I did.

Sophie

Or we could say: **No, I didn't.** For short answers, just drop the verb and use the subject with did or didn't, so it's **Yes, I did.**

Finn

Or: **No, I didn't.** Good! Now for a quiz. I'll say a sentence in the present simple and you change it to the past simple. Here goes: We start work at 10 in the morning. We start work at 10 in the morning.

Sophie

Ok, in the past simple it's: **We started** work at 10 in the morning.

Finn

We started work at 10 in the morning. Great! Number 2. Here's a sentence in the past simple: you have to make it negative. Ready? Scientists found a cure for the disease. Scientists found a cure for the disease.

Sophie

And the answer is: Scientists **didn't find** a cure for the disease. We change 'found' to 'find' and put 'didn't' in front of the verb: Scientists **didn't find** a cure for the disease.

Finn

And finally, I'll ask a past simple question. Can you give me a short answer, Sophie: Did you have breakfast this morning? Did you have breakfast this morning?

Sophie

No, I didn't. Or I could say: **Yes, I did.** Finn, what did you have for breakfast?

Finn

Oh, I had cereal, eggs, toast, orange juice ... coffee, croissants

Sophie

Stop, stop! I'm so hungry... [munching a biscuit]... There's more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

Both

Bye.