

# Uses of the past tenses Part I

The simple past tense

Form: Subject + past tense of the verb

I worked.

She sang.

He played.

Mother cooked.

The simple past tense is used to talk about an action completed in the past. It is often used with adverbs or adverb phrases of past time.

I met him yesterday.

His father died last year.

I received the letter a week ago.

The simple past tense is sometimes used without an adverb of time. In such cases, the time of the action may be either implied or indicated by the context.

The simple past tense is also used to talk about habitual actions in the past.

When I was in college, I studied eight hours a day. (= When I was in college, I used to study eight hours a day.)

Edison sold newspapers before he became a famous scientist. (= Edison used to sell newspapers before he became a famous scientist.)

Past continuous tense

Form: Subject + was/were + ing form of the verb

I was working

She was singing.

They were playing.

It was raining.

John was sleeping.

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Note that we use *was* when the subject is *I* or a singular noun. We use *were* when the subject is a plural noun. The personal pronoun *you* is also followed by *were*.

The past continuous tense represents an action as going on or being done continuously at some time in the past. The time of action may or may not be mentioned.

It was raining when we went out.

The children were playing in the garden.

Mother was cooking dinner.

Alice was learning her lessons.