

# The Past Tense Sheet

The **preterite tense** is used to describe *events* in the past. In a story, an event is something that *happened* in the story—when you describe it, the beginning of it is clear to the listener, and you've informed the listener about the whole event, beginning-to-end, using one word.

## Regular Preterite (Event Past)

### -ar Verbs

yo -é                      nosotros -amos  
tú -aste                  vosotros -asteis

él                      ellos  
ella                    ellas                    -aron  
Ud.                    Uds.

### -er/-ir Verbs

yo -í                      nosotros -imos  
tú -iste                  vosotros -isteis

él                      ellos  
ella                    ellas                    -ieron  
Ud.                    Uds.

### Preterite Forms (Regular) Lyrics

-ar preterite is *é aste ó amos aron*  
-er/ir forms are *í iste ío imos ieron*

Many verbs that end in *-uir* (not *guir*) change the "i" of the endings third singular and plural to "y"  
The same is true of many stems with a vowel on the end, like *leer, oír, creer, caer, poseer*

The only verbs that have a change in the stem  
Are *-ir* verbs, you must remember them  
Third person stems will have the vowel replaced  
By *u* or *i*, just one letter in its space

Because i's and e's soften g's and c's  
Sometimes a spelling change is what you need  
Don't let an ending change the way you say  
The last letter of the stem—make a consonant change (*c>qu, g>gu, z>c*)

### Por ejemplo: ("y" preterites)

*influí, influiste, influyó, influimos, influyeron*  
*leí, leíste, leyó, leímos, leyeron*

**pero...**

*seguí, seguiste, siguió, seguiste, siguieron*

### Por ejemplo: (stem-changers)

*dormí, dormiste, durmió, dormimos, durmieron*  
*mentí, mentiste, mintió, mentimos, mintieron*

### Por ejemplo: *buscar, llegar, empezar*

*c > qu: busqué, buscaste, buscó, etc.*

*g > gu: llegué, llegaste, llegó, etc.*

*z > c: empecé, empezaste, empezó, etc.*

These verbs are often called *-car/-gar/-zar* verbs.

### Irregular Preterites Lyrics

*e, iste, o, imos, isteis, ieron*

Irregular preterites  
have got their own set of stems  
And their own set of endings  
that don't have accent marks on them

*cup, sup, hub*  
are *caber, saber, haber*  
*quis, vin, hic,*  
are *querer, venir, hacer*

*anduv, tuv, estuv,*  
*andar, tener, estar*  
*traj, dij, traduj,*

*caber to fit*  
*andar to walk, to go*  
*traducir to translate*  
*poner to put*  
For *haber*, use *hubo* only,  
"there was/were" w/event.

the *-ieron* ending loses its *i* after the *j*

*traer, decir, traducir*  
Finally now remember  
for *poder* the stem is *pod*  
They both have a "d",  
The stem rhymes with food

*Conducir* (to drive) and *producir*  
(to produce) are conjugated like  
*traducir: conduj- and produj-*

The toughest stem of all, although it's no excuse,  
The stem for *poner*  
Isn't *pon*, it's *pus*

### Some -ir stem-changers and "y" preterites

<b>competir (i)</b>	to compete	<b>destruir</b>	to destroy
<b>mentir (ie)</b>	to lie	<b>construir</b>	to build
<b>pedir (i)</b>	to request	<b>caer</b>	to fall
<b>morir (ue)</b>	to die	<b>poseer</b>	to possess
<b>sentir (ie)</b>	to feel	<b>oír</b>	to hear
<b>divertir (ie)</b>	to divert	<b>influir</b>	to influence
<b>seguir (i)</b>	to follow		

Notice that in both sets of verbs, the weird stuff happens in the third person singular and plural; the *él/ella/Ud./ellos/ellas/Uds.* forms

### Otros Irregulares

There are four very common irregulars that don't follow the pattern for irregular preterites:

*ir/ser: fui, fuiste, fue, fuimos, fueron*

*hacer: hice, hiciste, hizo, hicimos, hicieron*

*ver: vi, viste, vio, vimos, vieron*

*dar: di, diste, dio, dimos, dieron*

Notice that the forms that normally need accent marks are only one-syllable, so no accent marks are needed.

The **imperfect tense** is used to talk about actions or states in the past that were **ongoing** or **repeated**. When you tell a story, you use imperfect to give background information (what was “going on” at a certain part of your story), or to talk about things that happened repeatedly (what “used to” happen) in the past. All regular *-ar* forms have *aba* in them, and all *-er/-ir* forms have *ía*. Regular or irregular, the *yo* form is always the same as the *él/ella/Ud.* form.

### **-ar Verbs**

yo	<b>-aba</b>	nosotros	<b>-ábamos</b>
tú	<b>-abas</b>	vosotros	<b>-abais</b>
él	} <b>-aba</b>	ellos	} <b>-aban</b>
ella		ellas	
Ud.		Uds.	

### **-er/-ir Verbs**

yo	<b>-ía</b>	nosotros	<b>-íamos</b>
tú	<b>-ías</b>	vosotros	<b>-íais</b>
él	} <b>-ía</b>	ellos	} <b>-ían</b>
ella		ellas	
Ud.		Uds.	

### **Irregulars**

You’re not going to believe this, but only three verbs are irregular in the imperfect:

<b>Ir</b>		<b>Ser</b>		<b>Ver</b>	
iba	íbamos	era	éramos	veía	veíamos
ibas	ibais	eras	erais	veías	veíais
iba	iban	era	eran	veía	veían

### **How to choose between preterite and imperfect**

The most important thing to do in trying to decide whether to use preterite tense (events) or imperfect (ongoing/repeated) tense is to *picture the action*:

**Preterite:** If you’re summing up an action **beginning-to-end** with one word (or focusing on the **beginning** or the **end**), you’re going to use the **preterite** tense. For example:

*We ate in a fancy restaurant last night. Comimos* anoche en un restaurante elegante.

You’re summing up that entire evening in one word: **comimos**. Your listener instantly pictures that event beginning-to-end, from being seated to leaving the restaurant.

**Imperfect:** If you’re talking about an **ongoing** or **repeated** action (or state), use the **imperfect**.

*A violin player played while we ate. Un violinista tocaba* mientras **comíamos**. (**Ongoing** actions/states)

In this case, you’re not focusing the listener on the beginning or end of either action—you’re plopping the listener down in the middle of two ongoing actions, *playing*, and *eating*. You’re describing two things that were “going on” while you were at the restaurant.

*We bought pizza after my ball games. Comprábamos* pizza después de mis partidos. (**Repeated** actions/states)

### **Watch out!**

You may be tempted to use English as a short-cut when working with preterite and imperfect. It is true that a phrase like “we were eating” makes it clear that an action is ongoing, that “used to” makes it clear that something was repeated, and that an *-ed* ending makes something sound like an event, but notice in the above example that we’re not always consistent in English in the way we speak about ongoing or repeated actions. Those short-cuts may get you through a homework assignment, but *they will not make you good at preterite vs. imperfect in the long run*.