

Past Forms of Verbs

Past Forms of Regular Verbs

Most of the thousands of English verbs are called “regular verbs.” These verbs form their ending by adding “ed” or simply “d” to the present tense.

Example: *call* becomes *called* and *dance* becomes *danced*

The ELL student rarely has trouble writing the past of regular verbs, although he or she may have quite a bit of trouble remembering one of three pronunciations associated.

Pronunciation of the Terminal ed

The ending *ed*, when added to any regular verb to form the simple past tense, is pronounced as follows:

1. It is pronounced as a separate syllable [*id*] if the verb ends in **t** or **d**. Example: *wait* becomes *waited*
2. It is pronounced [*t*] if the verb ends in any voiceless sound (**except t**). Example: *ask* becomes *asked* and *wash* becomes *washed* (both with **t** sounds at the end)
3. It is pronounced [*d*] if the verb ends in any voiced sound (**except d**)
Example: *play* becomes *played* and *turn* becomes *turned* [with the final sound a **d**]

Past Forms of Irregular Verbs

There are about 60 irregular verbs whose past forms do not follow the pattern above. We have to say “about” because English, as all languages, is constantly changing. In fact, many of the verbs we use to consider irregular are now considered regular. A good example is the verb “light” as in “The girl lights a candle every night.” When I was a child, this verb was considered irregular and the past form of the verb was “lit.” However, 30 years later, my children were learning this verb to be regular with a past form as “lighted.” Both are now accepted, but years from now “lit” might go the way of the do-do bird! If you look up “past tense of irregular verbs” on line, you will get hundreds of “irregular verbs”; however, be careful. Many of these verbs are outdated words and are rarely used in English. An example is the verb “hew” with a past tense of “hewed” or “hew.” “Hew” is to cut something like a tree down with an ax. It was also used metaphorically as in “Hew thy enemies!” Needless to say, there is neither a lot of hewing trees or enemies today by the average Canadian, so this verb is rarely used today! The following is a grouping and a way to remember many of the most common:

One group of irregular verbs has the same form for the past and the past participle:

Present	Past	Past Participle
get	got	got or gotten
swing	swung	swung
lead	led	led
bring	brought	bought
lend	lent	lent
fling	flung	flung
catch	caught	caught
shine	shone	shone
fight	fought	fought
lose	lost	lost
sit	sat	sat
sting	stung	stung

NB: The Past Tense Form is always used alone. The past participle form is used with forms of be or have. (Example: *I lost my mom's keys yesterday. I have lost my mom's keys*)

Another group of irregular verbs adds *n* or *en* to the past form to make the past participle:

Present	Past	Past Participle
bear	bore	borne
beat	beat	beaten
bite	bit	bitten
break	broke	broken
choose	chose	chosen
freeze	froze	frozen
speak	spoke	spoken
steal	stole	stolen
swear	swore	sworn
tear	tore	torn
wear	wore	worn

Seven irregular verbs are alike and follow the same pattern in changing the middle vowel.

Present	Past	Past Participle
begin	began	begun

drink	drank	drunk
ring	rang	rung
sing	sang	sung
sink	sank	sunk
spring	sprang(or sprung)	sprung
swim	swam	swum

Other irregular verbs are alike because they make the past participle from the present form not the past form:

Present	Past	Past Participle
blow	blew	blown
come	came	come
do	did	done
draw	drew	drawn
drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
give	gave	given
go	went	gone
grow	grew	grown
know	knew	known
ride	rode	ridden
rise	rose	risen
run	ran	run
see	saw	seen
shake	shook	shaken
slay	slew	slain
take	took	taken
throw	threw	thrown
write	wrote	written