

Spanish | The Preterit Tense

The Preterit Tense is the 'simple past tense' in Spanish, it describes a **completed** action or event - e.g. *He **bought** a book.* The formation of regular verbs in the Preterit Tense is also very easy, with only two sets of regular endings to remember.

Regular Verbs

To form the Preterit Tense, simply take the stem off the infinitive and add the following endings - the stem is the verb minus its ending.

- For -AR verbs, take the AR off the end. **Then add the AR endings.**
- For -ER verbs, take the ER off the end. **Then add the ER endings.**
- For -IR verbs, take the IR off the end. **Then add the IR endings.**

(Note; the ER and IR verb endings are the *same*)

Form	AR Verbs	ER Verbs	IR Verbs
Yo (I)	é	í	í
Tú (You S.)	aste	iste	iste
El / Ella (He/She)	ó	ió	ió
Nosotros/as (We)	amos	imos	imos
Vosotros/as (You P.)	asteis	isteis	isteis
Ellos/as (They)	aron	ieron	ieron

Note:

The we forms for **-ar** and **-ir** regular verbs (not **-er**) are identical in the present and preterit. **Hablamos** can be *we speak* or *we spoke*, depending on the context, and the same thing occurs with **vivimos**.

Irregular Verbs

1. Spelling Changes
2. Completely Irregular Verbs
3. Strong Stem Preterits

Spelling Changes

In the preterit, some verbs have a spelling change - these are called orthographic changes. Spelling changes occur in order to maintain pronunciation.

Verbs whose infinitive ends in -car, -gar and -zar have a spelling change in the I form of the preterit:

Form	Buscar - To Look For	Pagar - To Pay	Empezar - To Begin
Yo (I)	bus <u>qu</u> é	pag <u>u</u> é	empe <u>c</u> é
Tú (You S.)	buscaste	pagaste	empezaste
El / Ella (He/She)	busc <u>ó</u>	pag <u>ó</u>	empez <u>ó</u>
Nosotros/as (We)	buscamos	pagamos	empezamos
Vosotros/as (You P.)	buscasteis	pagasteis	empezasteis
Ellos/as (They)	buscaron	pagaron	empezaron

Completely Irregular Verbs

Some verbs are completely irregular in the preterit, their conjugations must be learnt.

Note; IR and SER are the same in the preterit, context should be used to determine the correct meaning.

Form	Dar - To Give	Ser - To Be	Ir - To Go
Yo (I)	Di	Fui	Fui
Tú (You S.)	Diste	Fuiste	Fuiste
El / Ella (He/She)	Dio	Fue	Fue
Nosotros/as (We)	Dimos	Fuimos	Fuimos
Vosotros/as (You P.)	Disteis	Fuisteis	Fuisteis
Ellos/as (They)	Dieron	Fueron	Fueron

Strong Stem Preterits

A special class of verbs are referred to as strong stem preterits since they have a special stem. Verbs which are strong stem preterits are listed below.

- These verbs have a special stem and a special set of endings, none of which carries an accent
- To form these, simply add the endings below to the special stems, which are provided at the bottom of the page.

Form	Ending
Yo (I)	-e
Tú (You S.)	-iste
El / Ella (He/She)	-o
Nosotros/as (We)	-imos
Vosotros/as (You P.)	-isteis
Ellos/as (They)	-(i)eron

The following verbs are strong stem preterits, their stems and meanings are provided:

Verb	Preterit Stem	Meaning
Andar	Anduv-	To walk
Conducir 1*	Conduj-	To drive
Decir 1*	Dij-	To say, tell
Estar	Estuv-	To be (P,P)
Hacer 2*	Hic-	To make, do
Poder	Pod-	To be able
Poner	Pus-	To put, place
Querer	Quis-	To want
Saber	Sup-	To know
Tener	Tuv-	To have
Traducir 1*	Traduj-	To translate
Venir	Vin-	To come

*1 = If the preterit stem ends in a -j-, the -i- of the third person plural form is dropped: dijeron, trajeron

2* = The third person singular form of hacer has a spelling change: hice, hiciste, hizo, hicimos, hicisteis, hicieron