

The Preterit Tense

Regular Verbs

To form the preterit tense of regular verbs, use the following endings.

SUBJECT	AR	ER	IR
yo	hablé	comí	escribí
tú	hablaste	comiste	escribiste
él, ella, usted	habló	comió	escribió
vosotros	hablasteis	comisteis	escribisteis
nosotros	hablamos	comimos	escribimos
ustedes	hablaron	comieron	escribieron

Note: In the preterit tense, ER & IR verbs take the same endings in all forms.

Stem Changing Verbs

In the preterit tense, AR & ER verbs are regular; they do NOT have stem changes in any form. IR verbs, however, **DO** show stem changes in the third person singular and plural forms (ud., ella, él // uds, ellas, ellos). These stem changes take one of two forms:

Note: All stem-changing verbs take regular endings in the preterit.

E to I
pedir- pedí, pediste, pidió , pedisteis, pedimos, pidieron
O to U
dormir- dormí, dormiste, durmió , dormisteis, dormimos, durmieron

Stem changers you may know: **preferir, seguir, sentir, servir, morir**

Irregular Verbs

There are several types of irregular verbs in the preterit. They are divided into 4 groups below.

1. –GAR, –ZAR, & –CAR Verbs

Verbs that end in –gar, –zar, or –car are irregular in the “yo” form only, where they undergo a minor spelling change.

Note: all other forms take regular endings.

-GAR (GUÉ)
llegar – lleg <u>u</u> é, llegaste, llegó, llegasteis, llegamos, llegaron
-ZAR (CÉ)
comenzar – comenc <u>é</u> , comenzaste, comenzó, comenzasteis, comenzamos, comenzaron
-CAR (QUÉ)
tocar- to <u>q</u> ué, tocaste, tocó, tocasteis, tocamos, tocaron

2. Verbs Whose Stems End in Vowels

When a verb's stem ends in a vowel, it undergoes a spelling change in the third person singular and plural forms. Again, there are two types of changes:

'Y' Verbs
Several verbs take a 'y' in the third person singular and plural forms. (leer, creer, oír) leer- leí, leíste, leyó , leísteis, leímos, leyeron
'E' Verbs
The stem 'e' is dropped from verbs like reír & sonreír in the third person singular and plural forms. reír- reí, reíste, rió , reísteis, reímos, rieron

3. The Standard Irregulars

The standard irregulars take special endings in the preterit. **They also have special stems.**

yo	e
tú	iste
él, ella, usted	o
vosotros	isteis
nosotros	imos
ustedes	ieron / eron (after j)

Here is a list of some standard irregulars and their special stems. Memorize it!

andar		anduv-	conducir		conduj-
decir		dij-	estar		estuv-
poder	→	pud-	tener	→	tuv-
poner		pus-	venir		vin-
querer		quis-	traer		traj-

4. The Irregulars

Several verbs are completely irregular in the preterit. You will find a list of them below.

Hint: Commit it to memory.

IR	SER	DAR	VER	HACER
fui	fui	di	vi	hice
fuiste	fuiste	diste	viste	hiciste
fue	fue	dio	vio	hizo
fuisteis	fuisteis	disteis	visteis	hicisteis
fuimos	fuimos	dimos	vimos	hicimos
fueron	fueron	dieron	vieron	hicieron

The format for and example charts in this text are taken, with modifications, from:

Gill, Mary McVey, Brenda Wegmann, and Teresa Méndez-Faith. *EnContacto: Gramática en Acción*. 7th Edition. Ed. Helen Richardson. United States: Thomson Heinle, 2003.

Several verbs have distinct meanings in the preterit.

VERB	PRETERIT
conocer	to meet
saber	to find out
querer	to try
no querer	to refuse
poder	to succeed
no poder	to try & fail