

THE PRETERITE TENSE: REGULAR, STEM-CHANGING, SPELLING-CHANGING & IRREGULAR

Regular Preterite Tense in Spanish

When do we use the preterite tense? The preterite handles completed actions. In other words, you can say what happened or what occurred.

Basically, the preterite answers the question *¿Qué pasó?* (What happened?)

<i>¡Pasaste la señal de alto sin parar!</i>	You passed the stop sign without stopping!
<i>¡El ladrón entró por la ventana!</i>	The robber entered through the window!
<i>¡Me robaron el carro y todo mi dinero!</i>	They stole (robbed me of) my car and all my money!

NOTE: The preterite is **NOT** used to describe people (He was tall...) **NOR** to describe or set scenes (It was a dark and stormy night and I was watching television...). Another tense (the Imperfect) takes care of that.

The preterite tense represents an action that is located in a specific point on a time line and is considered a completed action (done). It is always used when listing a series of consecutive actions:

<i>Él llamó a su novia, salió de la casa y manejó al cine.</i>	He called his girlfriend, left the house and drove to the movies.
---	---

It also is used for when you begin, finish or become something:

<i>Empezó a llorar.</i>	He began to cry.
<i>Terminó el examen.</i>	He finished the test.
<i>Me puse enojada [or] Me enojé.</i>	I became angry.

NOTE: The preterite is **NOT** used to describe an existing emotional state, like "He was angry". For emotional states we use a different past tense which is called the **Imperfect** past tense.

Conjugating

Let's take a look at what endings we need to use when we conjugate regular verbs into the preterite. Just as in the present tense, we remove the last two letters to get to the stem or root of the verb and then add endings.

In the present tense there were three (3) sets of conjugations because the *nosotros* form was different for -ar, -er, and -ir verbs. However, in the preterite (and, in fact, all other tenses and moods) the endings for -er and -ir verbs are the same. So there are only two (2) sets of endings we need to remember: those for the -ar verbs and those for the -er /-ir verbs.

	-ar	-er/-ir		-ar	-er/-ir
<i>Yo</i>	-é*	-í*	<i>Nosotros, -as</i>	-amos	-imos
<i>Tú</i>	-aste	-iste	<i>Vosotros, -as</i>	-asteis	-isteis
<i>Ud., él, ella</i>	-ó*	-ió*	<i>Uds., Ellos, ellas</i>	-aron	-ieron

Notice that **only** *yo* and *Ud., él, ella* carry accent marks

Examples

	yo	tú	usted, él, ella	nosotros, - as	vosotros, - as	ellos, ellas, ustedes
hablar	<i>hablé</i>	<i>hablaste</i>	<i>habló</i>	<i>hablamos*</i>	<i>hablasteis</i>	<i>hablaron</i>
comer	<i>comí</i>	<i>comiste</i>	<i>comió</i>	<i>comimos**</i>	<i>comisteis</i>	<i>comieron</i>
vivir	<i>viví</i>	<i>viviste</i>	<i>vivió</i>	<i>vivimos*</i>	<i>vivisteis</i>	<i>vivieron</i>

*same as the present form **same ending as -ir verbs

Stem-Changing in the Preterite

The three most important things to remember about stem-changing verbs in the preterite are:

-ar / -er Verbs	-ir Verbs
<p>I. -ar and -er verbs that stem-change in the <u>present</u> tense do NOT stem-change in <u>any</u> other tenses including the <u>preterite</u>. (e.g., <i>mostrar</i>, <i>almorzar</i>, <i>perder</i>, <i>tener</i>, <i>entender</i>).</p>	<p>II. -ir verbs that stem-change in the <u>present</u> tense WILL continue to have stem-changes, but ONLY in the 3rd person singular (<i>usted, él, ella</i>) and plural (<i>ustedes, ellos, ellas</i>). → (e.g. <i>dormir, servir, preferir, etc.</i>)</p> <p>III. They follow the same stem-changing pattern they have in the present progressive tense ("-iendo"):</p> <p>The "o → ue" stem-changers change to "u" as they did with the <i>"-iendo"</i> form: <i>Dormir: él está <u>du</u>miendo, él <u>du</u>rmio</i></p> <p>And the "e → ie" and the "e → i" change to "i" as they did with the <i>"-iendo"</i> form: <i>Servir: Ellos están <u>si</u>rviendo la cena, ellos <u>si</u>rvieron la cena.</i></p>

These are some -ir stem-changing verbs (Check textbook pp. 506-507 for more verbs).

	yo	tú	usted, él, ella	nosotros, -as	vosotros, -as	ellos, ellas, ustedes
dormir (o → ue, u)	<i>dormí</i>	<i>dormiste</i>	<i><u>du</u>rmio</i>	<i>dormimos</i>	<i>dormisteis</i>	<i><u>du</u>rmieron</i>
morir (o → ue, u)	<i>morí</i>	<i>moriste</i>	<i><u>mu</u>rio</i>	<i>morimos</i>	<i>moristeis</i>	<i><u>mu</u>rieron</i>
preferir (e → ie, i)	<i>preferí</i>	<i>preferiste</i>	<i><u>prefi</u>rio</i>	<i>preferimos</i>	<i>preferisteis</i>	<i><u>prefi</u>rieron</i>
divertir(se) (e → ie, i)	<i>divertí</i>	<i>divertiste</i>	<i><u>divi</u>rtio</i>	<i>divertimos</i>	<i>divertisteis</i>	<i><u>divi</u>rtieron</i>
mentir (e → ie, i)	<i>mentí</i>	<i>mentiste</i>	<i><u>mi</u>ntio</i>	<i>mentimos</i>	<i>mentisteis</i>	<i><u>mi</u>ntieron</i>
repetir (e → i, i)	<i>repetí</i>	<i>repetiste</i>	<i><u>repi</u>tio</i>	<i>repetimos</i>	<i>repetisteis</i>	<i><u>repi</u>tieron</i>
pedir (e → i, i)	<i>pedí</i>	<i>pediste</i>	<i><u>pi</u>dio</i>	<i>pedimos</i>	<i>pedisteis</i>	<i><u>pi</u>dieron</i>
servir (e → i, i)	<i>serví</i>	<i>serviste</i>	<i><u>si</u>rvio</i>	<i>servimos</i>	<i>servisteis</i>	<i><u>si</u>rvieron</i>
vestir(se) (e → i, i)	<i>vestí</i>	<i>vestiste</i>	<i><u>vi</u>stio</i>	<i>vestimos</i>	<i>vestisteis</i>	<i><u>vi</u>stieron</i>

Spelling-Changing in the Preterite

-car, -gar, and -zar verbs

Spelling changes in the preterite occur because the preterite vowel endings affect the way some consonants sound.

Remember that in Spanish the consonants **G** and **C** have **two** sounds:

G	C
G in front of the <u>soft vowels "i, e"</u> has a <u>soft</u> English "H" sound → <i>general</i> is pronounced "he-ne-rál".	C in front of " <u>i, e</u> " has a <u>soft "S"</u> sound → <i>cena, cien</i>
G in front of the <u>strong vowels "a, o, u"</u> has a <u>hard</u> "G" sound (as in "gone", "Gap" or "Gumby") → <i>gorra</i> is pronounced "go-rrah".	C in front of " <u>a, o, u</u> " has a <u>hard "K"</u> sound → <i>camisa, cortinas, cuentos</i> .

So how does that affect verbs in the preterite forms?

Take a look at *jugar* (to play). It is a **u → ue** stem-changing verb. In the present tense, *jugar* conjugates as

<i>juego</i>	<i>juegas</i>	<i>juega</i>	<i>jugamos</i>	<i>jugáis</i>	<i>juegan</i>
--------------	---------------	--------------	----------------	---------------	---------------

The **g** in *jugar* is hard, as in the English word 'game'.

Now, when we conjugate *jugar* in the preterite following the regular pattern, it should be:

<i>{jugé*}?</i>	<i>jugaste</i>	<i>jugó</i>	<i>jugamos</i>	<i>jugasteis</i>	<i>jugaron</i>
-----------------	----------------	-------------	----------------	------------------	----------------

But look at the **yo** form! Remember the Spanish "**g**" in front of the soft vowel "**e**" is pronounced like an English "**h**".

So **jugé* would mean the **g** had lost the hard g (as in "game") sound, and the last syllable would be pronounced like the English word "hey". To preserve the hard "g" sound, we must **add a "u"** in front of the "**é**" to form the correct **yo** form:

→ *jugué*

The "**u**" makes the "**g**" hard without changing the "**é**" vowel sound. The spelling changes result from an effort to reflect the correct pronunciation.

Another example is *buscar*. When we conjugate *buscar* in the preterite following the regular pattern, it should be:

Now, when we conjugate *buscar* in the preterite following the regular pattern, it should be:

<i>{buscé*}?</i>	<i>buscaste</i>	<i>buscó</i>	<i>buscamos</i>	<i>buscasteis</i>	<i>buscaron</i>
------------------	-----------------	--------------	-----------------	-------------------	-----------------

But again, look at the **yo** form! Remember the Spanish "**c**" in front of "**e**" is pronounced like an English "**s**". So **buscé* would mean the "**c**" had lost the hard "k" sound, and the last syllable would be pronounced like the

English word "say". To preserve the hard "k" sound, we must change the "c" to "qu" in front of the "e" to form the correct *yo* form:

→ **busqué**

Remember that "qu" in Spanish always makes a "k" sound and never an English "kw" (as in "queen") sound.

Another example is **almorzar**. When we conjugate **almorzar** in the preterite following the regular pattern, it should be:

{almorzé*}?	almorzaste	almorzó	almorzamos	almorzasteis	almorzaron
--------------------	-------------------	----------------	-------------------	---------------------	-------------------

But again, look at the *yo* form! Remember the Spanish "z" occurs only in front of the strong vowels **a, o, u**.

Think of vocabulary words that end in Z, like the word for pencil, "**lápiz**". To make it plural we add "**es**". But the **z** isn't paired with the soft vowels **e** and **i**. So we must change the **z** to **c**: **lápices**.

So although ***almorzé** technically would have the same pronunciation, we have to honor the rule.

We must change the "z" to "c" in front of the "e" to form the correct *yo* form:

→ **almorcé**

So all verbs ending in **-car**, **-gar**, and **-zar** will make these changes in the *yo* form to maintain their original consonant sound and accurately reflect the correct pronunciation.

i → y

Another group of verbs with spelling changes are **-er** and **-ir** verbs that have double vowels in their endings like: **leer**, **oír**, **caer**.

An unaccented "i" between two strong vowels (***oio**, ***eie** or ***eio**, for example), will change into "y" to facilitate the pronunciation.

Therefore, in the third person singular (*Ud., él, ella*) and plural (*Uds., ellos, ellas*), the conjugations for **leer**, **oír**, and **caer** would be:

	yo	tú	usted, él, ella	nosotros, -as	vosotros, -as	ellos, ellas, ustedes
leer	<i>leí</i>	<i>leíste</i>	<i>leyó</i>	<i>leímos</i>	<i>leísteis</i>	<i>leyeron</i>
oír	<i>oí</i>	<i>oíste</i>	<i>oyó</i>	<i>oímos</i>	<i>oísteis</i>	<i>oyeron</i>
caer	<i>caí</i>	<i>caíste</i>	<i>cayó</i>	<i>caímos</i>	<i>caísteis</i>	<i>cayeron</i>

All **-er** and **-ir** verbs whose endings have double vowels will have the Spanish "y" instead of the "i":

creer, construir, destruir, freír, poseer, proveer, etc.

Irregular Preterite Forms in Spanish

- ☞ There are **QUITE A FEW** verbs with irregular conjugation forms in the preterite.
- ☞ These irregular forms have "radical" vowel and consonant changes in the stem of the verb.
- ☞ These changes occur in **ALL** of the conjugations (including the *nosotros* form.)

All verbs with grossly irregular changes in the preterite have the following endings:

Yo	-e	Nosotros, -as	-imos
Tú	-iste	Vosotros, -as	-isteis
Ud., él, ella	-o	Uds., Ellos, ellas	-ieron*

* Verbs with a "j" at the end of the stem drop the "i" and just use: *-eron*

Notice that **NONE** of these endings have accent marks!

Here are some common irregular verbs in the preterite:

	yo	tú	Ud., él, ella	Nosotros, - as	vosotros, - as	ellos, ellas, ustedes
andar	<i>anduve</i>	<i>anduviste</i>	<i>anduvo</i>	<i>anduvimos</i>	<i>anduvisteis</i>	<i>anduvieron</i>
conducir*	<i>conduje</i>	<i>condujiste</i>	<i>condujo</i>	<i>condujimos</i>	<i>condujisteis</i>	<i>condujeron</i>
decir*	<i>dije</i>	<i>dijiste</i>	<i>dijo</i>	<i>dijimos</i>	<i>dijisteis</i>	<i>dijeron</i>
estar	<i>estuve</i>	<i>estuviste</i>	<i>estuvo</i>	<i>estuvimos</i>	<i>estuvisteis</i>	<i>estuvieron</i>
hacer**	<i>hice</i>	<i>hiciste</i>	<i>hizo</i>	<i>hicimos</i>	<i>hicisteis</i>	<i>hicieron</i>
poner	<i>puse</i>	<i>pusiste</i>	<i>puso</i>	<i>pusimos</i>	<i>pusisteis</i>	<i>pusieron</i>
poder	<i>pude</i>	<i>podiste</i>	<i>pudo</i>	<i>podimos</i>	<i>podisteis</i>	<i>podieron</i>
querer	<i>quise</i>	<i>quisiste</i>	<i>quiso</i>	<i>quisimos</i>	<i>quisisteis</i>	<i>quisieron</i>
saber	<i>supe</i>	<i>supiste</i>	<i>supo</i>	<i>supimos</i>	<i>supisteis</i>	<i>supieron</i>
tener	<i>tuve</i>	<i>tuviste</i>	<i>tuvo</i>	<i>tuvimos</i>	<i>tuvisteis</i>	<i>tuvieron</i>
traer*	<i>traje</i>	<i>trajiste</i>	<i>trajo</i>	<i>trajimos</i>	<i>trajisteis</i>	<i>trajeron</i>
venir	<i>vine</i>	<i>viniste</i>	<i>vino</i>	<i>vinimos</i>	<i>vinisteis</i>	<i>vinieron</i>

Irregulars which use a "j" in the preterite only add "-eron*" (NOT "*-ieron*") to the third-person plural

****Hacer** in the third person singular changes out the "c" for a "z" to reflect the correct pronunciation.

Other verbs which are irregular in the preterite

Again, **NONE** of these endings have accent marks

Dar	<i>di</i>	<i>diste</i>	<i>dio</i>	<i>dimos</i>	<i>disteis</i>	<i>dieron</i>
In the preterite dar takes on the -er/-ir preterite verb endings rather than -ar endings... ~ <i>Wierd</i>						
Ver	<i>vi</i>	<i>viste</i>	<i>vio</i>	<i>vimos</i>	<i>visteis</i>	<i>vieron</i>
Verbs with only 2 or 3 letters, such as Dar, Ser, Ir and Ver , also DO NOT wear accent marks in the Preterite . Remember that Spanish only uses accent marks when required for pronunciation or differentiation.						
Ir & Ser	<i>fui</i>	<i>fuiste</i>	<i>fue</i>	<i>fuiimos</i>	<i>fuisteis</i>	<i>fueron</i>
Notice that Ir and Ser share the <u>same forms</u> in the preterite. These preterite forms will <u>nearly always</u> be Ir (an <u>action</u> verb) rather than Ser (a <u>descriptive</u> verb) which is usually conjugated in the Imperfect Past tense .						
Also the <u>context</u> of a sentence or a conversation will let you know <u>which</u> is being used. For example:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fui <u>a</u> supermercado clearly means "I went <u>to</u> the supermarket," not *"I was <u>to</u> the supermarket."• Fuimos <u>miembros de</u> la banda clearly means "We were members <u>of</u> the band," not *"We went <u>of</u> the band.						
In certain situations, you need to play CLOSE attention to the <u>prepositions</u> after the verb to see the difference in meaning. For example:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fuimos <u>los miembros de</u> la banda vs. Fuimos <u>a</u> los miembros de la banda. The first means "We were the members of the band." In contrast to the latter which means: "We went <u>to</u> the members of the band."						