

Past Simple: Was/Were

Grammar Lesson, Examples & 30 Practice Questions

Past Simple: Was/Were

In English, we use **was** and **were** to talk about the past. They tell us how things *were* at an earlier time — yesterday, last week, when you were a child, or any finished moment in the past.

Was and **were** are the past forms of the verb **be** (am / is / are). You already know the present forms:

- I **am** happy. → I **was** happy yesterday.
- She **is** tired. → She **was** tired last night.
- They **are** at school. → They **were** at school this morning.

Let's learn exactly when to use **was** and when to use **were**.

Rule Breakdown

What Is a Subject?

Before we start, let's understand one word: **subject**. The subject is the person or thing that the sentence is about. For example:

- I was hungry.
- The dog was small.
- We were late.

The underlined word is always the subject. We choose **was** or **were** depending on the subject.

When to Use: Was

Use **was** with these subjects:

I → I **was**

He → He **was**

She → She **was**

It → It **was**

These are all **singular** subjects. *Singular* means one person or one thing.

Here are some simple examples:

- I **was** at home yesterday.
- He **was** a student.
- She **was** very kind.

- It **was** a sunny day.
- The cat **was** small.
- My father **was** a teacher.

When to Use: Were

Use **were** with these subjects:

- You** → You **were**
- We** → We **were**
- They** → They **were**

These are **plural** subjects. *Plural* means more than one person or thing. **You** is also plural when you talk to more than one person — and we always use **were** with **you**, even when talking to just one person.

Here are some simple examples:

- You **were** very helpful.
- We **were** at the park.
- They **were** happy.
- The children **were** noisy.
- My friends **were** late.
- The books **were** on the table.

Was / Were: Full Pattern Table

Subject	Was or Were?	Example Sentence
I	was	I was tired last night.
He	was	He was a good student.
She	was	She was at the shop.
It	was	It was cold yesterday.
You (one person)	were	You were very kind.
We	were	We were at school.
They	were	They were best friends.
Two or more people/things	were	The dogs were hungry.

Negative Sentences: Was Not / Were Not

To make a **negative** sentence (to say something did NOT happen or was NOT true), we add **not** after **was** or **were**.

was not → short form: **wasn't**

were not → short form: **weren't**

A short form is called a **contraction**. We join two words together with an apostrophe (') to make a shorter word.

Examples:

- I **was not** at school. / I **wasn't** at school.
- He **was not** happy. / He **wasn't** happy.
- She **was not** tired. / She **wasn't** tired.
- It **was not** cold. / It **wasn't** cold.
- You **were not** late. / You **weren't** late.
- We **were not** hungry. / We **weren't** hungry.
- They **were not** at home. / They **weren't** at home.

Negative Sentences: Table

Subject	Full Form	Contraction	Example
I	was not	wasn't	I wasn't ready.
He / She / It	was not	wasn't	She wasn't at home.
You / We / They	were not	weren't	They weren't tired.

Questions with Was / Were

To ask a question in the past with **was** or **were**, we put **was** or **were** at the **beginning** of the sentence.

Positive sentence: She was at school.

Question: **Was** she at school?

Positive sentence: They were happy.

Question: **Were** they happy?

More examples:

- **Was** I late? — Yes, you were. / No, you weren't.
- **Was** he a doctor? — Yes, he was. / No, he wasn't.
- **Was** it expensive? — Yes, it was. / No, it wasn't.
- **Were** you at the party? — Yes, I was. / No, I wasn't.
- **Were** they friendly? — Yes, they were. / No, they weren't.
- **Were** we in the same class? — Yes, we were. / No, we weren't.

Questions with Was / Were: Table

Question	Short Answer (Yes)	Short Answer (No)
Was I right?	Yes, you were.	No, you weren't.
Was he late?	Yes, he was.	No, he wasn't.
Was she happy?	Yes, she was.	No, she wasn't.
Was it cold?	Yes, it was.	No, it wasn't.
Were you tired?	Yes, I was.	No, I wasn't.
Were we at school?	Yes, we were.	No, we weren't.
Were they hungry?	Yes, they were.	No, they weren't.

Past Simple Was/Were in a Mini Story

Read this short story. Notice how **was** and **were** are used:

Yesterday was a special day. It was my birthday. I was at home with my family. My mum was in the kitchen. She was very busy. My brother and sister were in the garden. They were excited. My dad was at the supermarket. The food was delicious. We were all very happy.

Can you see the pattern? Every verb in this story is **was** or **were** — they all talk about the past.

Important Differences and Special Cases

You: Always Were — Even for One Person

In English, **you** always uses **were** in the past, even when you are talking to just one person:

- You **were** great today! (talking to one friend)
- You **were** all great today! (talking to a group)

Never say *you was* — this is incorrect in standard English.

Names and Nouns: Choose Was or Were by Number

When the subject is a name or a noun (a word for a person, place, or thing), decide if it is **one** (singular) or **more than one** (plural):

- **Tom** was at school. (one person → **was**)
- **Tom and Anna** were at school. (two people → **were**)
- The **book** was interesting. (one book → **was**)
- The **books** were interesting. (more than one → **were**)

There Was / There Were

We also use **was** and **were** with **there** to say that something existed in the past:

- **There was** a cat in the garden. (one cat)
- **There were** two cats in the garden. (more than one cat)
- **There was** a problem. (one problem)
- **There were** many people at the party. (many people)

The rule is the same: **was** for one thing, **were** for more than one thing.

Common Mistakes

✗ You was very kind to me.

✓ **You were very kind to me.**

✗ They was at the park.

✓ **They were at the park.**

✗ We was happy.

✓ **We were happy.**

✗ She were a teacher.

✓ **She was a teacher.**

✗ He were tired yesterday.

✓ **He was tired yesterday.**

✗ It were cold last night.

✓ **It was cold last night.**

✗ There were a dog in the garden.

✓ **There was a dog in the garden.**

✗ There was many children at school.

✓ **There were many children at school.**

✗ I not was ready.

✓ **I was not ready. / I wasn't ready.**

✗ Was they at home?

✓ **Were they at home?**

Contractions: Full Forms and Short Forms

In everyday English, we often use **contractions** — shorter forms of two words joined together. Here are the contractions for **was not** and **were not**:

Full Form	Contraction	Example
was not	wasn't	It wasn't cold yesterday.

Full Form	Contraction	Example
were not	weren't	We weren't at school.

Important: We do **not** make contractions with **was** and **were** in positive sentences. For example, we do **not** say *I'was* or *she'was*. Contractions only happen in the negative form (**wasn't** / **weren't**).

Past Simple Was/Were: Quick Summary

Here is everything you need to remember about **past simple was/were**:

- **Was** and **were** are the past forms of the verb **be**.
- Use **was** with: **I, he, she, it** (singular).
- Use **were** with: **you, we, they** (plural), and with plural nouns.
- For **negatives**, add **not**: was not / were not (or wasn't / weren't).
- For **questions**, put **was** or **were** at the start of the sentence.
- Use **there was** for one thing, and **there were** for more than one thing.
- Never say *you was* — always use **you were**.

Now practise **past simple was/were** in the exercises below.

Past Simple: Was/Were – Practice Test

A1 | 30 Questions: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap & Fill-in-the-Blank

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 Yesterday, I ____ very tired.

- ☐ A am
- ☐ B is
- ☐ C was
- ☐ D were

2 They ____ at school on Monday.

- ☐ A was
- ☐ B were
- ☐ C are
- ☐ D is

3 My mother ____ in the kitchen last night.

- ☐ A were
- ☐ B are
- ☐ C is
- ☐ D was

4 The boys ____ happy at the party.

- ☐ A was
- ☐ B is
- ☐ C were
- ☐ D am

5 He ____ not at home yesterday.

- ☐ A were
- ☐ B are
- ☐ C am
- ☐ D was

6 You ____ late for class this morning.

- A** was
- B** am
- C** were
- D** is

7 ____ she at the park yesterday?

- A** Were
- B** Was
- C** Is
- D** Are

8 The weather ____ cold last winter.

- A** are
- B** were
- C** is
- D** was

9 We ____ at the beach last Sunday.

- A** was
- B** is
- C** am
- D** were

10 ____ your friends at the party last night?

- A** Was
- B** Is
- C** Were
- D** Are

Part 2: Fill in the Gap (Questions 11–20)

11 I ____ very tired yesterday.

- A** was
- B** were
- C** am

12 They ____ at school last Monday.

- A** were
- B** was
- C** are

13 She ____ not happy with her grade.

- A** was
- B** were
- C** is

14 We ____ at the park on Saturday.

- A** were
- B** was
- C** be

15 The movie ____ very long last night.

- A** was
- B** were
- C** had

16 ____ you at home yesterday?

- A** Were
- B** Was
- C** Did

17 My brother ____ sick last week.

- A** was
- B** were
- C** has

18 The children ____ very loud at the party.

- A** were
- B** was
- C** be

19 It ____ cold and rainy last Sunday.

- A** was
- B** were
- C** is

20 You and Tom ____ late for class this morning.

- A** were
- B** was
- C** are

Part 3: Fill in the Blank (Questions 21–30)

21 Yesterday, I _____ at school.

22 She _____ very happy last night.

23 They _____ at the park on Sunday.

24 The weather _____ cold last winter.

25 We _____ hungry after the long walk.

26 My parents _____ at home all day yesterday.

27 He _____ late for class this morning.

28 You _____ very kind to me last week.

29 The children _____ tired after school.

30 It _____ a sunny day last Saturday.

Answer Key & Explanations

Past Simple: Was/Were | A1

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **C** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was with I in the past. I was tired.
2. **B** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were with they in the past. They were at school.
3. **D** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was with she (my mother) in the past. My mother was in the kitchen.
4. **C** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were with plural nouns like the boys in the past. The boys were happy.
5. **D** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was with he in the past. For negative, we say was not or wasn't.
6. **C** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were with you in the past. You were late.
7. **B** Correct Answer: Was ✓ Explanation: We use Was with she to ask a question in the past. Was she at the park?
8. **D** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: The weather is singular, so we use was in the past. The weather was cold.
9. **D** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were with we in the past. We were at the beach.
10. **C** Correct Answer: Were ✓ Explanation: Your friends is plural, so we use Were to ask a question in the past. Were your friends at the party?

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: With I, we use was in the past simple. I was very tired yesterday.
12. **A** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: With they (plural), we use were in the past simple. They were at school last Monday.
13. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: With she (singular), we use was in the past simple. She was not happy with her grade.
14. **A** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: With we (plural), we use were in the past simple. We were at the park on Saturday.

15. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: The movie is singular (it/he/she), so we use was in the past simple. The movie was very long last night.
16. **A** Correct Answer: Were ✓ Explanation: With you, we use were to make a past simple question. Were you at home yesterday?
17. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: My brother is singular (he), so we use was in the past simple. My brother was sick last week.
18. **A** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: The children is plural (they), so we use were in the past simple. The children were very loud at the party.
19. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: With it (singular), we use was in the past simple. It was cold and rainy last Sunday.
20. **A** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: You and Tom means two people (plural), so we use were in the past simple. You and Tom were late for class this morning.

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **was** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was with I in the past simple. I was at school yesterday.
22. **was** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was with he / she / it in the past simple. She was happy.
23. **were** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were with they / we / you in the past simple. They were at the park.
24. **was** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: The weather is singular, so we use was in the past simple. The weather was cold.
25. **were** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were with we in the past simple. We were hungry.
26. **were** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: My parents is plural, so we use were in the past simple. My parents were at home.
27. **was** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was with he / she / it in the past simple. He was late.
28. **were** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: We use were with you in the past simple. You were very kind.
29. **were** Correct Answer: were ✓ Explanation: The children is plural, so we use were in the past simple. The children were tired.
30. **was** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: We use was with it in the past simple. It was a sunny day.

Score Guide

27–30 Correct	Excellent! You have mastered this topic.
23–26 Correct	Very good! Review the rules you missed.
18–22 Correct	Good start. Re-read the lesson and examples.
0–17 Correct	Study the lesson again before retaking the test.