**Spanish Preterite Tense Forms**

The preterit tense (*el pretérito*) is one of several past tenses in Spanish and it is used to describe actions completed at one point in the past or that lasted a specific amount of time in the past and are now completed. The preterit is not used to describe habitual or continuous actions in the past with no specific ending or beginning. The[imperfect tense](http://www.spanishdict.com/topics/show/show/59) is used for these instances. If the habitual action does have a specific beginning and end, the preterit can be used.

**Regular Preterit Forms**

There are only two sets of endings for regular preterit verbs, one for -ar verbs and one for both -er and -ir verbs. Simply remove the infinitive ending and add the correct preterit ending depending on who the subject of the action is.Preterit Verb Endings

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|   | **-ar verbs** | **-er and -ir verbs** |
| **yo** | *-é* | *-í* |
| **tú** | *-aste* | *-iste* |
| **usted, él, ella** | *-ó* | *-ió* |
| **nosotros** | *-amos* | *-imos* |
| **vosotros** | *-asteis* | *-isteis* |
| **ustedes, ellos, ellas** | *-aron* | *-ieron* |

Note that the 1st and 3rd person singular have tildes (written accents) to differentiate them from present tense conjugations.

* Mand**ó** una carta. *(He/She sent a letter.)*
* Mando una carta. *(I send a letter.)*
* Camin**é** con Miguel. *(I walked with Miguel.)*
* Camina con Miguel. *(He walks with Miguel.)*

Also, the 1st person plural (nosotros) endings for -AR and -IR verbs are the same for both preterit and present tenses. The tense must be deduced from the given context and [words that signify the preterit](http://www.spanishdict.com/topics/show/show/64).

* Siempre **cocinamos** paella los domingos. *(We always cook paella on Sundays.)*
* Ayer **cocinamos** paella para mi familia. *(Yesterday, we cooked paella for my family.)*

**Irregular Preterit**

There are really only three "really irregular" verbs in the preterit tense. These are irregular in both their stems and their endings.

**Irregular Conjugations**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **dar - to give** | **ser - to be** | **ir - to go** |
| **yo** | *di* | *fui* | *fui* |
| **tú** | *diste* | *fuiste* | *fuiste* |
| **usted, él, ella** | *dio* | *fue* | *fue* |
| **nosotros** | *dimos* | *fuimos* | *fuimos* |
| **vosotros** | *disteis* | *fuisteis* | *fuisteis* |
| **ustedes, ellos, ellas** | *dieron* | *fueron* | *fueron* |

Note that ser and ir share the exact same forms in the preterit.

**Uses of the Preterit**

In general, the preterit is used to describe completed actions in the past at specific points in time.

**1. To Indicate a Single Event that Took Place in the Past**

These actions began and ended in the past. They are usually verbs that communicate an instant change in the action.

* **Compré** un coche nuevo. *(I bought a new car.)*
* Ben y Cristina **se casaron**. *(Ben and Cristina got married.)*
* Roberto **nació**. *(Roberto was born.)*

**2. To Indicate an Action that Happened at or for a Specific Amount of Time**

These actions are completed at a definite moment in the past. They are easy to spot since they usually have a time frame in the sentence.

* **Regresé** anoche a la medianoche. *(I returned last night at midnight.)*
* **Vivió** en Perú por tres meses. *(He lived in Peru for three months.)*
* **Leíste** este libro cinco veces. *(You read this book 5 times.)*

**3. To Narrate Individual Events**

This is common in relating a story line where there are multiple actions presented.

* **Me levanté**, **me vestí**, y **salí** para la fiesta. *(I got up, got dressed, and left for the party.)*
* Tú **entraste**, **bebiste** un vaso de agua y **comiste** una hamburguesa. *(You came in, drank a glass of water, and ate a hamburger.)*

**4. To Indicate the Beginning or End of an Action in the Past**

* Empezó a nevar. (It began to snow.)
* La película terminó con una sorpresa. (The movie ended with a surprise.)