

Past Tense of Be: Was, Were and Been

Be is the most irregular verb in English. It has two past forms: was for I, he, she and it, and were for you, we and they. The past participle is been.

Base	be
Past	was / were
Past participle	been
3rd person / -ing	is / being

Examples

I want to be on time today. — After want to, the verb stays as be.

Be quiet in the library, please. — Be is the base form in a polite order.

I was at home last night. — Use was with I, he, she and it.

We were late for the bus. — Use were with you, we and they.

She has been ill this week. — Has been links the past to now.

They have been in London for two days. — Have been is the present perfect of be.

Notes

Was or were? Use was with I, he, she, it and a single thing or person: The film was long. Use were with you, we, they and plural nouns: The shops were closed.

Been or gone? He has been to Paris means he visited and came back. He has gone to Paris means he is still there or on the way.

Common mistakes

I were at school yesterday. → I was at school yesterday. — Use was, not were, after I.

She has was here since noon. → She has been here since noon. — After has or have, use the past participle been.

He be a teacher. → He is a teacher. — In the present, be changes to am, is or are; the base form be is not used after he.

Exercises

Choose the right form

1. We ___ in the garden yesterday. (was / were / been)
2. I have ___ to this shop before. (was / were / been)
3. She ___ very tired last night. (was / were / been)
4. Please ___ careful on the stairs. (is / be / are)

Write the missing form

1. They have ___ married for ten years.
2. It ___ cold on Monday.
3. You ___ right yesterday.

Correct the mistake

1. She has was here since noon.

Answer key

Choose the right form

1. were — Yesterday is past and we takes were.
2. been — After have, use the past participle been.
3. was — Last night is past and she takes was.
4. be — A polite order uses the base form be.

Write the missing form

1. been — Have plus the past participle is have been.
2. was — It takes was in the past.
3. were — You takes were in the past.

Correct the mistake

1. been — After has, use been, not was.