Section 4  past tenses

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language notes
Pronunciation: the unstressed forms of auxiliary was and were can be difficult for some students to hear. The CD-ROM exercises will help with this.

possible further activities
The pictures and captions are simply intended for introductory reading, to illustrate the use of the simple past. However, they could be used as a basis for activities with more advanced students:

History pictures  Get students to bring in pictures of historical events and to say briefly what they illustrate, or to write captions, using the simple past.

Quiz  Students work in groups to write quiz questions for the class, beginning ‘Who wrote / painted / built / discovered / invented / directed / etc …?’ (Note that did is not used to form questions when the subject is who or what – see pages 108–109.)
OR: Students say what famous people did, without naming them; the others have to say who they were. (‘He went from Italy to China in the tenth century. Who was he?’ ‘Marco Polo.’)

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language notes
The pronunciation of -ed depends on what comes before it:
– /t/ after an unvoiced sound like /p/, /k/ or /ʃ/
– /d/ after a vowel or a voiced consonant like /b/, /g/, /m/, /l/ etc
– /ɪd/ after /t/ and /d/.

The distinction between /t/ and /d/ is unimportant except for learners who want a very high level of accuracy in pronunciation, but students should be clear about when to pronounce the ending /ɪd/. The CD-ROM exercises will help with this.

Final -d may be difficult to pronounce after a consonant, or difficult to pronounce at all, for students whose languages have different phonetic structures from English (e.g. Spanish, Italian, Chinese or Japanese).

British English illogically doubles /l before -ed in unstressed syllables. American English doesn’t normally do this:
BrE: travelled  AmE: traveled

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language notes
Students’ difficulties with the simple past are parallel to those with the simple present (see notes on Section 2):

*Where you went yesterday?
*What did she wanted?
*I no understood.

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use.

⇒ Section 4 continues
possible further activities

*Memory test*  Do twenty or thirty different actions (stand on a chair; close your eyes; pick up a book; open a window; …). Students work in groups and try to write down everything you did (time limit: five minutes).

*OR:* Get a student to do the actions.

*Quiz*  Students work in groups to prepare questions beginning ‘When did …?’ (‘When did the Second World War end?’ ‘When did Spain win the World Cup?’) They ask the class their questions. Answers must use ‘ago’. This can be done as a contest, with one group asking questions, the rest of the class writing their answers, and the winner perhaps getting a small prize.

*Hundred-word stories*  Students (perhaps for homework) write the story of a film, book, play or musical in 100 words (using past tenses).

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possible further activities

*Negatives*  Think of a historical figure. Students write five things that he/she didn’t do (time limit: three minutes).

*OR:* as above, but students write about their parents or grandparents.

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possible further activities

*Questions*  Students prepare 20 or more questions about somebody’s early childhood (‘Where did you live?’ ‘Did you travel a lot?’ ‘Did you like school?’ …). When they are ready they interview each other and write reports.

*Invented pasts*  Students invent imaginary pasts for themselves, and then interview each other. (‘Where did you live?’ ‘In a palace in Egypt.’)

*Class interview*  Prepare questions as above, but a longer list. Bring somebody into the classroom (for example a colleague, a friend, a student from another class); students ask their questions and write reports on what they found out.

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possible further activities

*Split sentences*  Write out some past sentences beginning with question words on cards; then cut them into three parts, shuffle them, and give one to each student. Students have to walk round saying (not showing) what is on their cards, and trying to form groups of three to make possible sentences. There may be many possible right answers; it doesn’t matter if a combination is silly. Some suggestions:

Why | did Alice | climb out of the window?
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When | did the President | open the new hospital?
Why | did your dog | bite the postman?
What time | did Grandma | arrive at the airport?
How | did that horse | get into the garden?
Why | did everybody | start dancing?
When | did Shakespeare | get married?
How | did the cat | get onto the roof?
When | did Christopher Columbus | reach America?
language notes

Students’ difficulties with the past progressive are parallel to those with the present progressive (see notes on Section 2):

*When I looked out of the window it snowed.
*What was studying your brother?
*What your brother was studying?

possible further activities

Mime  Students mime what they were doing at 10.00 last night (true or not). The class have to guess what is being mimed. (‘You were dancing.’)

Memory test  Give students cards with the names of continuous actions on. For example:
  read, write, dance, sit on the floor, walk, scratch your head, clap your hands, sing etc.
Shout ‘Start!’ Students do their actions and continue for about two minutes until you shout ‘Stop!’, observing each other’s actions at the same time. They then have to try to write down what everybody was doing when you shouted ‘Stop!’. (‘When you shouted ‘Stop!’, Makoto was sitting on the floor, Daniel was reading …’).