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GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

Simple past

USES

EXPLANATION

- The **SIMPLE PAST** is a very important tense in English.
- IELTS candidates make many errors when using it in the Speaking and Writing Tests.
- It is almost impossible to do well in the IELTS Reading and Listening Tests without a good understanding of the SIMPLE PAST tense.
- We usually use the SIMPLE PAST tense to describe something which happened (and probably finished) at a specific/particular time in the past.

WHEN TO USE SIMPLE PAST

To describe long-term situations in the past:

- Until very recently, most humans **had** incredibly difficult lives. They constantly **struggled** for heat, food and shelter and **faced** the threat of death on a daily basis.
- During the nineteenth century, most educators **believed** in the use of corporal punishment. Teachers **thought** it was perfectly acceptable to hit badly-behaved pupils.
- People probably **worked** harder in the past than they do today. Working hours **were** longer and conditions **were** extremely tough.

WHEN TO USE **SIMPLE PAST**

To describe actions in the past which were repeated often:

- During the 1930s, thousands of Europeans **emigrated** to The United States.
- When I was in secondary school, I often **played** truant or **misbehaved** in class.
- In the past, the police **arrested** anyone who they suspected of committing a crime. These days, officers are more circumspect.
- Up until a few decades ago, most adults **worked** / **had to work** on Saturdays. Thankfully, the situation has now changed.

WHEN TO USE SIMPLE PAST

To describe completed past actions:

- Fleming **discovered** penicillin in 1928.
- Thieves **broke into** the museum last night and **stole** several of the most valuable paintings.
- The number of people living in the area **reached** a peak in 1998 before falling back the following year.
- When I **was** young, I **found** it difficult to understand what my teachers **told** me.
- In the past, more people **died** as a result of hunger and poverty than is the case today.

WHEN TO USE SIMPLE PAST

To describe past actions which definitely happened/finished in a time period which finished:

- **In 1776**, the government **declared** independence.
- I **woke up** at **eight o'clock yesterday morning**.
- I **moved** here **last January**.
- Temperatures **rose last July** but **fell** again **in September**.
- I **saw** her **the day before yesterday**.
- The burglary **took place during the night of June 6th**.
- **When I was a child**, I **didn't know** much about science and, to be honest, I **didn't care** much about it either.

WHEN TO USE SIMPLE PAST

To describe a series of past events in the order they happened:

- As soon as the war **started**, thousands **fled** the country. They generally **spent** time in refugee camps on the border and then **tried** to begin new lives in other countries.
- Students **handed** in their homework. It **was marked** by a tutor and **returned** the following day, with comments.
- The rain **fell** heavily all night. The following morning, water levels in the city **rose** and the police and emergency services **met**. They **decided** to evacuate the area. Officers **sent** texts and emails to advise resident to leave and the town slowly **emptied**. Those living in the region only **returned** two days later.



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GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

Simple past

ADVERBIAL PHRASES

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EXPLANATION

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- **IELTS** candidates make many errors when using it in the **Speaking** and **Writing** Tests.
- It is almost impossible to do well in the **IELTS Reading** and **Listening** Tests without understanding it well.
- We usually use the **SIMPLE PAST** to describe something which happened (and probably finished) at a specific/particular time in the past.
- It is good to know **adverbial phrases** which can be used with the **SIMPLE PAST**.

USEFUL ADVERBIAL PHRASES FOR SIMPLE PAST

The simple past can be used with adverbial phrases which refer to a specific past time:

- **In the past**, many people **trusted** politicians but **did not trust** journalists.
- **Yesterday**, a spokesperson **announced** that the company was going to be divided into two smaller parts.
- **A hundred years ago**, most workers **received** low wages and **had to deal with** terrible working conditions.
- **Ten weeks ago**, **there was** a terrible explosion in a large factory.
- **In the 1960s**, the standard of living **rose** and pensions **were introduced**. (This is a passive form)

USEFUL ADVERBIAL PHRASES FOR SIMPLE PAST

The simple past can be used with adverbial phrases which refer to a specific past time:

- **In the fifteenth century**, disease **affected** nearly everybody.
- **Last year**, the authorities **froze** tuition fees but **increased** the price of energy.
- **Last Saturday**, newspapers and websites **reported** another political scandal.
- **Earlier this year**, the boss of one of Japan's leading companies **resigned**.
- **Earlier this month**, temperatures **reached** their highest ever level.

USEFUL ADVERBIAL PHRASES FOR SIMPLE PAST

The simple past can be used with adverbial phrases which refer to a specific past time:

- **In the dim and distant past**, it **was** generally **believed** that the world **was** flat and at the centre of the universe. Mercifully, thanks to scientific endeavour, we now have a far more accurate understanding of this subject. **(This is a passive form)**
- There have been huge advances in our standard of living. For instance, **when I was young**, our house **lacked** running water, gas and electricity. These days, most youngsters would struggle to live in such conditions.

USEFUL ADVERBIAL PHRASES FOR SIMPLE PAST

The simple past can be used with adverbial phrases which refer to a specific past time:

- **In previous generations**, neighbours and relatives **looked after** each other and genuinely **cared** for one another.
- **Prior to the invention of the internet**, the vast majority of interaction **was** face-to-face.
- **Before the process of globalisation began**, companies often **found** it genuinely difficult to export goods and services.
- You are talking about things which **happened before I was born**.



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GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

Simple past FORM

EXPLANATION

- The **SIMPLE PAST** is a very important tense in English.
- IELTS candidates make many errors when using it in the Speaking and Writing Tests. It is an essential part of the IELTS Reading and Listening Tests.
- It is important to know how to form the **SIMPLE PAST**.
- We need to know how it works with **regular verbs, irregular verbs, to be, there is/are** and **modal verbs**.

HOW TO FORM SIMPLE PAST: REGULAR VERBS

Regular verbs add **-ed** to form the simple past:

- In the past, children **played** outside far more than they do now.
- I **stayed** in your hotel between 16th and 18th July.
- The table indicates that sales **plummeted** at the beginning of the period.
- When I was younger, I **wanted** a bike.
- The war **started** more than a decade ago.
- The party **turned out** to be a complete disaster!
- We **ordered** a portable radio but it never **arrived**.

HOW TO FORM SIMPLE PAST: NEGATIVES

Regular verbs use **did not / didn't + infinitive** to form negatives:

- Just a few decades ago, smokers **didn't / did not accept** scientific advice about the risks associated with putting a cigarette in their mouths.
- I **didn't / did not want** to go to the party but I **didn't / did not** really **like** the idea of staying at home either.
- I **didn't / did not enjoy** school much and I **didn't / did not finish** my education with good grades.
- I'm sorry I **didn't / did not chat** to you at the party. Actually, I **didn't / did not realise** you were there!

HOW TO FORM SIMPLE PAST: IRREGULAR VERBS

There are many irregular verbs:

- Previous generations **understood** and **knew** about the importance of several virtues which no longer seem as important in the modern world. These include patience, courtesy and consideration.

Irregular verbs use **did not / didn't + infinitive** to form negatives in the same way as regular verbs:

- Until very recently, most of us **did not understand** the dangers connected to computer games and **did not know** about the risks: some youngsters have become completely addicted to them, and have experienced psychological distress as a result.

HOW TO FORM SIMPLE PAST: TO BE

We use **was/were** to form the simple past for the verb **to be**:

- I'm sorry I didn't come to the party. I **was** really ill.
- It **was** obviously far more difficult in the past to keep in touch with friends and family members on the other side of the world.
- I believe that we **were** not as tolerant in the past as we are now. Although there are individuals these days with racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes, such views are not tolerated or accepted.
- I know you **were** worried about your exams, so it must be a great relief to have passed.
- I **was not / wasn't** there, and I know you **were not / weren't** there either.

HOW TO FORM SIMPLE PAST: THERE IS

We use **there was/were** as the past form of **there is/are**:

- The statistics indicate that **there was** a sharp rise in non-violent crime between 1990 and the end of the millennium. However, it seems that **there was not / there wasn't** a corresponding increase in violent offences.
- **There were** many reasons why people emigrated to The United States in the nineteenth century; most of these reasons were connected with poverty and a lack of opportunity at home. **There were not / There weren't** many adults who were prepared to stay in countries like Ireland, where they would almost certainly starve to death.

HOW TO FORM PAST MODALS

We often put modals in the past by adding **have + past participle**:

- It **must have been** difficult for migrants in the past. They **might/may/could have had** to deal with racism and intolerance. They certainly **cannot have had** an easy life.
- Governments of countries which invited migrants to come and do the hard work which natives were unwilling to do **ought to have helped** the new arrivals to assimilate themselves into society and **should have ensured** their safety and wellbeing.

HOW TO FORM PAST MODALS

Some modals/semi-modals have simple past forms like regular verbs:

- Those who arrived from Third World countries often **had to work** excessively long hours and **needed to live** in poor-quality housing.
- Fortunately, after a great deal of effort, many of these foreign nationals **managed to learn** the local language and get well-paid jobs which enabled them to have a better standard of living.
- When I was young I **could swim** but I **couldn't dance**.

Some modals are made with **to be + adjective** form. Their simple past form is the same as that of **to be**:

- In the past, poorer people **were unable to afford** decent accommodation. They **were obliged/forced to live** in poor-quality housing.

HOW TO USE PAST MODALS IN IELTS WRITING TASK 2

Examiners are usually impressed to see modals used in past forms in IELTS Writing Task 2:

- Before the age of social media, people **could not get / were not able to get** in touch with each other so easily. (ability)
- Although businesses sometimes **managed to make / succeeded in making** a profit during the last economic recession, it certainly was not easy. (ability)
- Before computers became so widespread, administrative staff **must have struggled** to do their jobs. They **cannot have found** work easy. (certainty/deduction)

HOW TO USE PAST MODALS IN IELTS WRITING TASK 2

Examiners are usually impressed to see modals used in past forms in IELTS Writing Task 2:

- In the past, children **might/may/could have been** happier and healthier because they had the opportunity to play outside with their friends. These days, parents are often too afraid to allow their sons and daughters to venture out unsupervised. **(possibility)**
- In the past, school-children **had/needed to spend** more time in the classroom but **did not have/need to do** as much homework as the current generation. **(necessity/obligation)**
- We as a civilisation **should have heeded / ought to have heeded** the warnings about climate change when scientists first alerted us to the dangers. **(advice/suggestion)**



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GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

Simple past

CONFUSING VERBS

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EXPLANATION

- The **SIMPLE PAST** is a very important tense in English.
- **IELTS** candidates make many errors when using it in the Speaking and Writing Tests. It is an essential part of the IELTS Reading and Listening Tests.
- It is good to know how to use **to do** and **to have**.

HOW TO FORM SIMPLE PAST TENSES

CONFUSING VERBS

The verb **to do** causes confusion.

The simple past form **did** can act as a regular verb:

- When I was at school, I **did** homework every evening.
- My parents **did** a lot to help me when I was younger.
- I **didn't** / **did not** **do** everything I was told to by my parents.

The form **didn't** / **did not** / **did** can act as an auxiliary verb:

- I **didn't** / **did not** **do** everything I was told to by my parents.
- I **didn't** / **did not** always **finish** History homework because I generally **didn't** / **did not** **understand** it.
- What time **did** you **get** home last night?
- I said I would finish it and I **did**.

HOW TO FORM SIMPLE PAST TENSES

CONFUSING VERBS

The difference between **have** and **have got** does not matter in the past:

- When I was much younger, I **had** a serious accident and, as a result, I find it difficult to run. (**have** = action)
- When I was a child I **didn't have / did not have** a shower or even a wash until I was told to. (**have** = action)
- When I was younger I **had** a teddy-bear which I loved dearly. (**have got / have** = possession)
- When I was a child, I **didn't have / did not have** a great deal of free time. (**have got / have** = possession)



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GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

Simple past

IRREGULAR VERBS

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- **IELTS** candidates make many errors when using it in the **Speaking** and **Writing Tests**.
- It is almost impossible to do well in the **IELTS Reading** and **Listening Tests** without understanding it well.
- We usually use the **SIMPLE PAST** to describe something which happened (and probably finished) at a specific/particular time in the past.
- It is good to know about the most common **irregular verbs** in the **SIMPLE PAST**.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO BE** In the late 1970s, the number of householders who owned their own property **was** much higher than the number of people who rented.
- **TO BE** In the past, when children **were** naughty or badly-behaved, their parents punished them in some way. In many cultures, this approach now seems outdated and even barbaric.
- **TO BECOME** As a result of discoveries of oil and gas around its coast, Norway **became** one of the world's richest countries in the period leading up to the year 2000.
- **TO BEGIN** It **began** raining so we decided to cancel the picnic.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO BREAK** My brother was hoping to become a professional footballer but, unfortunately, he **broke** his leg last year.
- **TO BRING** Although tourism **brought** huge economic advantages to the countries of southern Europe in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, it should also be mentioned that it caused a great deal of environmental damage and negatively affected the lives of many locals.
- **TO BUILD** In the past, we generally **built** houses from stone. This is becoming increasingly uncommon.
- **TO BUY** I recently **bought** a pair of shoes from your shop and would like to return them.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO CATCH** I'm really sorry I won't be able to come to the meal. I **caught** a cold last week and I can't get rid of it.
- **TO CHOOSE** When football's governing body **chose** to hold the 2018 World Cup in Russia and the 2022 competition in Qatar, the decision was heavily criticised in some quarters.
- **TO COME** Figures suggest that more tourists **came** to Europe last year than in any previous twelve-month period.
- **TO CUT** I **cut** my hair yesterday and I really don't like how I look any more.
- **TO DO** Although I **did** most of my homework, I didn't manage to complete all of it.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO DREAM** When I was little, I **dreamt** of becoming a famous celebrity.
- **TO DRINK** He **drank** a great deal and fell asleep in the corner.
- **TO DRIVE** I **drove** all the way to the airport but the flight had been delayed so I had to drive all the way back again.
- **TO EAT** I **ate** more than I should have eaten yesterday.
- **TO FALL** After remaining stable throughout the previous decade, the figure **fell** slightly in 2001.
- **TO FEEL** I **felt** absolutely exhausted after the flight.
- **TO FIGHT** He was an amazing political campaigner who **fought** for the rights of the under-privileged.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO FIND** I **found** the whole application process incredibly difficult.
- **TO FLY** Because of concerns over global warming, many people **flew** less last year than in previous years.
- **TO FORGET** Unfortunately, I **forgot** to take my passport.
- **TO FORGIVE** Although I **forgave** her for treating me so badly, I could never completely forget about it.
- **TO GET** I need to return the computer I **got** last week.
- **TO GIVE** Can you pay me back the money I **gave** you?
- **TO GO** Many young adults from privileged backgrounds who **went** to top private schools find it much easier to get work than job-seekers who did not enjoy these benefits and privileges.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO GROW** The number of people living in poverty **grew** significantly last year, according to recently-published figures.
- **TO HAVE** I **had** quite a lot of difficulty actually finding your office.
- **TO HEAR** I **heard** a rumour that you were moving to Austria. Is it true?
- **TO HIT** Confidence in the economy **hit** rock bottom last year.
- **TO HURT** I **hurt** my back quite badly on a skiing trip last winter.
- **TO KEEP** The child sitting in the row behind me **kept** kicking my seat, so I couldn't sleep.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO KNOW** I **knew** you wouldn't be able to finish your work on time.
- **TO LEARN** In the past, children **learnt** useful skills such as how to deal with money and how to survive in the wild.
- **TO LEAVE** I'm afraid you missed him. He **left** around half an hour ago.
- **TO LEND** The bank **lent** us a great deal of money.
- **TO LET** A woman on the train **let** me borrow her phone because mine had run out of power.
- **TO LOSE** I **lost** half a kilo in weight in just over a week. I'm absolutely delighted!

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO MAKE** I **made** quite a few mistakes during my first few years as an accountant.
- **TO MEET** I first **met** my current boyfriend on a bus journey from Buenos Aires to Cordoba.
- **TO PAY** She only **paid** me half of the money she owed me.
- **TO PUT** We **put** a great deal of effort into that project.
- **TO READ** I **read** an interesting article about human behaviour.
- **TO RIDE** I **rode** a horse for the first time when I was six.
- **TO RISE** The figure went down in 2002 but **rose** sharply the following year.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO RUN** I **ran** in my first marathon at the age of sixty-two.
- **TO SAY** I **said** that I wouldn't get involved again.
- **TO SEE** Everyone who **saw** the devastation caused by the hurricane last week was horrified.
- **TO SELL** Your firm **sold** me an insurance policy at the beginning of this year. I am writing to cancel it.
- **TO SEND** I **sent** the email last week. You should have received it.
- **TO SING** You **sang** very well when you were little.
- **TO SIT** I **sat** down for the first time at half past seven in the evening. I was absolutely exhausted.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO SLEEP** I **slept** badly last night.
- **TO SPEAK** I **spoke** to him about the problems and possible solutions.
- **TO SPEND** In the past, many children **spent** hours playing games. It was believed that this would help to develop their imagination and creativity. Nowadays, parents are often keen for their children to be engaged in formal learning from a very early age and the opportunities for free play have become limited.
- **TO TAKE** Last year, several governments **took** the important decision to close down most of their coal-fired power stations in an attempt to reduce carbon emissions.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO TEACH** My grandfather **taught** me all about the natural world. It was far more valuable than anything I ever learnt at school.
- **TO TELL** In the past, language teachers often **told** their students to learn useful phrases by repeating them again and again. This approach has gone out of fashion now.
- **TO THINK** In the past, people genuinely **thought** that smoking was good for their health. It has taken years to convince smokers that this habit is harmful and often deadly.
- **TO UNDERSTAND** Thousands of years ago, early humans **understood** the need to co-operate and to live in large social groups.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

- **TO WAKE UP** I **woke up** in a bad mood.
- **TO WEAR** I **wore** my best jacket and tie for the interview. However, I noticed that most of the other applicants had turned up in much more informal clothes.
- **TO WIN** Although he **won** more championships than any other player, he may not have been the greatest of all time.
- **TO WRITE** I **wrote** to you last week, inquiring about vacancies on the course.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

Verbs formed using other irregular verbs follow that irregular pattern:

- Those who **overcame** tremendous difficulties in the past deserve our respect and admiration.
- I have to confess that I **became** increasingly bored during the lecture and eventually fell asleep.
- The government **undertook** to solve the housing crisis within a decade.
- The town clearly **underwent** significant changes during the thirty-year period.
- Eventually, I **forgave** her for the fact that she had lied to me.
- I'm so sorry I **forgot** to text you on your birthday.

IRREGULAR SIMPLE PAST VERBS

Verbs formed using other irregular verbs follow that irregular pattern:

- Instead of appealing against his IELTS grade, my friend **re-took** / **re-sat** the exam.
- Although some experts **foresaw** the difficulties, they were not generally heeded.
- He was a great lecturer. As soon as he explained something, we all **understood** it.
- I really **overdid** it at the party. I **overate**, **overdrank** and, as a result, this morning I **overslept**.



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GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

Simple past

IN THE IELTS TEST

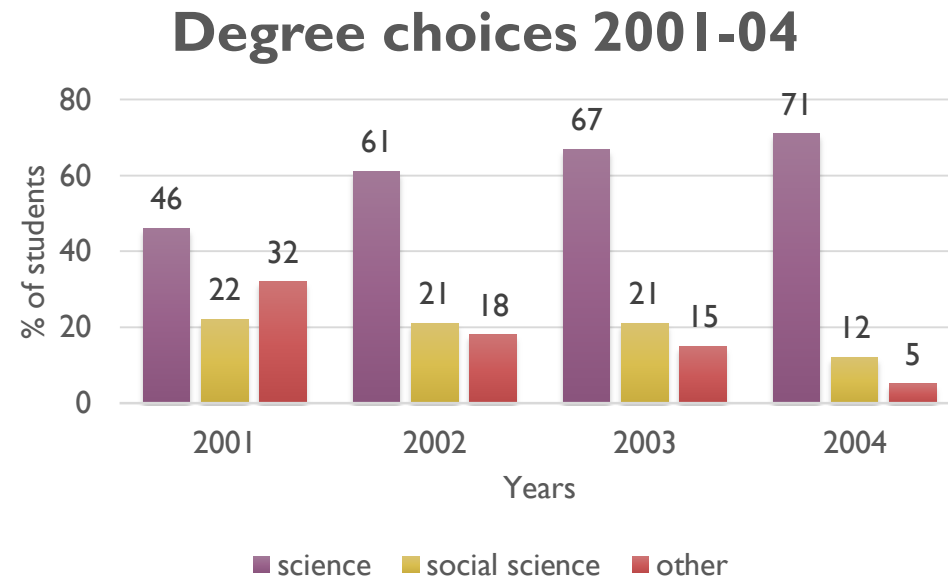
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EXPLANATION

- The **SIMPLE PAST** is a very important tense in English.
- **IELTS** candidates make many errors when using it.
- It is almost impossible to do well in the **IELTS Reading and Listening Tests** without understanding the **SIMPLE PAST** well.
- We usually use the **SIMPLE PAST** tense to describe something which happened (and probably finished) at a specific/particular time in the past.
- The **SIMPLE PAST** tense is useful in the **IELTS Writing and Speaking Tests**.

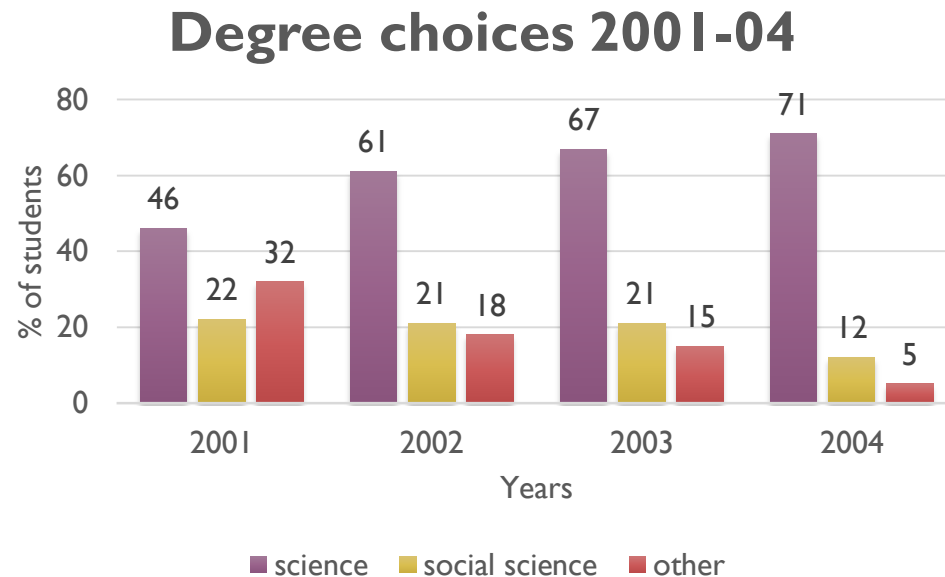
USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN IELTS TASK 1 WRITING (ACADEMIC)

THE TABLE SHOWS WHICH
TYPE OF DEGREE STUDENTS
CHOSE TO STUDY: 2001-04



USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN IELTS TASK 1 WRITING (ACADEMIC)

THE TABLE SHOWS WHICH
TYPE OF DEGREE STUDENTS
CHOSE TO STUDY: 2001-04



In 2002, science **became** a more popular choice.

In 2003, the popularity of science **increased** further.

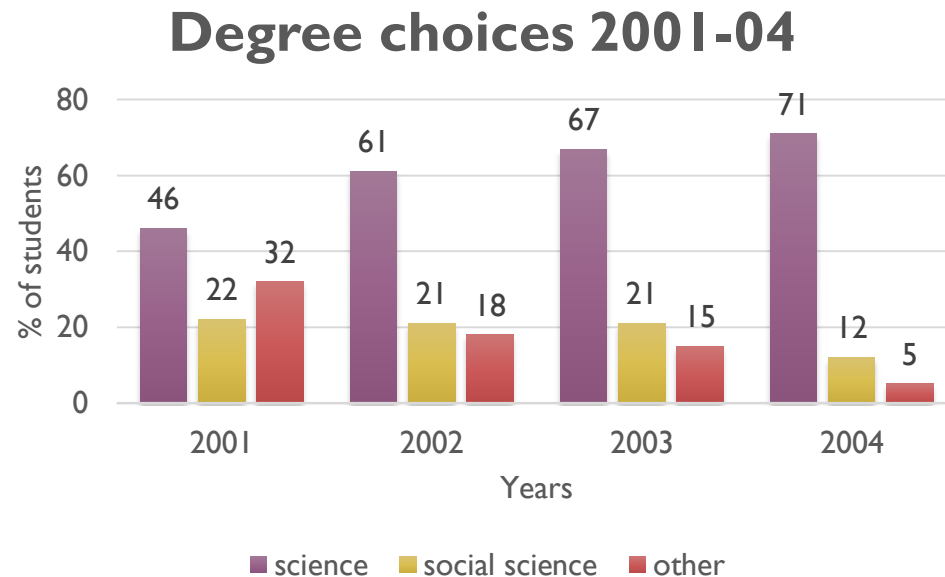
In 2002, the number of school-leavers opting for social science courses **was** slightly higher than the corresponding level for 'other' courses.

In 2004, **there were** far more teenagers interested in science than in any other area of study.

Over the whole period, studying social science **became** less popular.

USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN IELTS TASK 1 WRITING (ACADEMIC)

THE TABLE SHOWS WHICH
TYPE OF DEGREE STUDENTS
CHOSE TO STUDY: 2001-04



During the period in question, studying science became more popular.

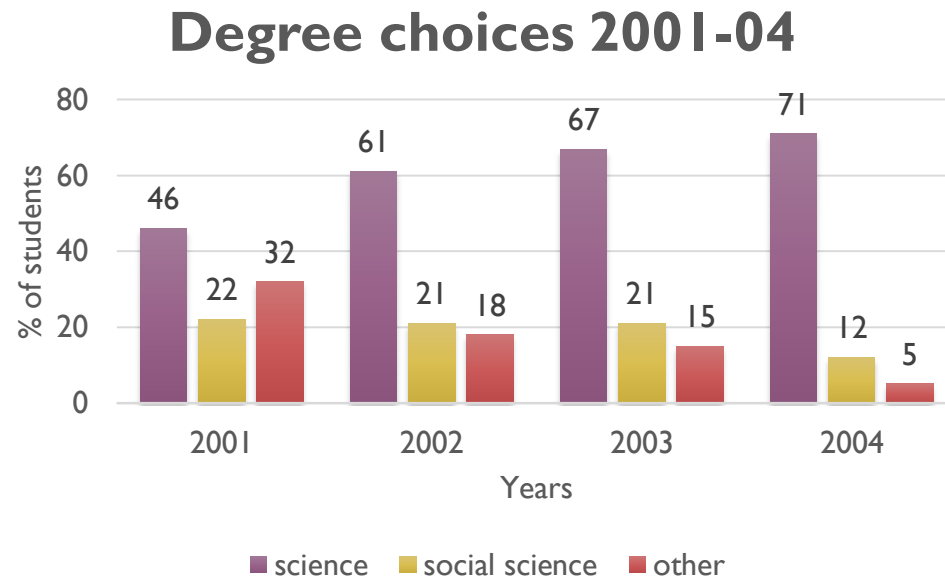
Throughout the entire period, with the exception of 2001, the category of 'other' was the least popular.

There was a noticeable rise in the popularity of science during the four-year period referred to in the chart.

Generally, there was not much difference between the categories of 'social science' and 'other' during the period.

USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN IELTS TASK 1 WRITING (ACADEMIC)

THE TABLE SHOWS WHICH
TYPE OF DEGREE STUDENTS
CHOSE TO STUDY: 2001-04



At the beginning of the period, there was not a considerable difference between the popularity of science and social science.

During the period, this gap widened.

At the end of the period, studying social science was distinctly less popular than taking a course in physics, chemistry or biology.

By the end of the period in question, a huge discrepancy between the levels for science and social science had emerged.

USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN IELTS TASK 1 WRITING (GENERAL)

We use the simple past when we specifically refer to a past time:

- It **was** wonderful to see you again at the conference last month.
- We **had** a great time when we **visited** you in April.
- We **loved** the meal. Thank you so much for inviting us!
- We **spent** the entire journey home reminiscing.
- I **bought** a computer from your company two months ago.
- Although one of your colleagues **promised** to return my call, I **did not hear** anything from your company for more than a week.
- The receptionist **did not give** us any information about the problem.
- The manager **was** impolite and **did not seem** to care.

USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN IELTS SPEAKING TEST

We use the simple past when we specifically refer to a past time:

- When I **was** young, I **spent** most of my free time flying a kite.
- Just before I **got** here today, I **bumped into** an old friend on the street.
- I must admit that I **didn't sleep** very well last night.
- I **took** the IELTS exam a couple of months ago. I **was** really well prepared but the essay question **was** incredibly difficult and I **didn't do** very well. I **was** incredibly disappointed.
- I **was** nearly late for my exam today. I **walked** down this street three times but **there wasn't** a sign outside the building and I **couldn't work out** what to do. Luckily, somebody **helped** me.

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GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

Past tenses

USED TO AND WOULD

EXPLANATION

We can use USED TO + INFINITIVE to describe something which:

- **happened in the past / was true in the past**
- **happened regularly or repeatedly / was true for a long period**
- **does not happen now / is not true now**

OTHER PAST TENSES USED TO

- Before the invention of television, most families **used to spend** evenings together. They **used to have** meaningful conversations and **used to discuss** matters of importance such as politics and current affairs. Nowadays, this is no longer the case.
- It is my belief that workers **used to work** harder, neighbours **used to be** friendlier and life **used to be** simpler and more enjoyable. It **used to be** far less stressful than it is nowadays.
- **There used to be** a far smaller gap between the salaries of the rich and those of the poor.
- Begging in the streets **used to be tolerated**. It **used to be seen** as part of everyday life. **(This is a passive form)**

OTHER PAST TENSES

USED TO

The negative form of **used to** is **didn't use to / did not use to**:

- People **didn't use to be** as worried and stressed as they are these days. They obviously **didn't use to spend** time on social media and certainly **didn't use to have to deal with** the pressures which that brings. They **didn't use to care** as much about their physical appearance, and probably **didn't use to concern themselves** about what other people thought about them.
- **There didn't use to be** as much litter on the streets as there is now.
- Children **didn't use to be given** as much freedom or as much money as they are given today. (This is a passive form)

EXPLANATION

- We can use **WOULD** in a similar way to **USED TO**. It describes things which happened regularly or repeatedly in the past, and which do not happen now.
- It can only describe actions, so you cannot usually use it with verbs like **to know**.
- We usually use **WOULD** to describe repeated past actions which we have positive feelings about. We never write **I would get up really early. I absolutely hated it** but we might write **I would get up early every Saturday and go straight outside to help my uncle milk the cows. It was my favourite part of the week.**

OTHER PAST TENSES

WOULD

- When I was little, we went to Italy every year and, as soon as we got there, we **would head for** this fabulous café where they made the most delicious ice-creams I've ever had.
- When my little brother was younger, he **would climb** the tree in our neighbours' garden and pick the apples. I don't know why, because he didn't even like them.
- When I was at university, I **would get up** early every single day and go rowing on the river. It was a fantastic way to start the morning.
- In the first job I ever had, there was a colleague who never shared anything. When she went to meetings, we **would steal** her biscuits. She never realised.

OTHER PAST TENSES

WOULD

There are some situations where we should not use **would**:

- **INCORRECT:** When I was younger, we **would live** in a tiny house (**To live** is a state. You can only use **would** as a past tense to describe actions)
- **INCORRECT:** Once, when we went to Italy for a week, I **would eat** ice-cream every afternoon. (**We can only use would** for actions which happened regularly, over a long period of time. Although the person in this sentence might have eaten ice-cream seven times, the action happened within a one-week period)

OTHER PAST TENSES

WOULD

There are some situations where we should not use **would**:

- **INCORRECT:** When I was at school, I **would have** History and Geography lessons on a Tuesday afternoon. (There is no positive feeling or emotional content in this sentence. It is a statement of fact. We usually use **would** as a past tense to describe things which we have positive feelings about)
- **INCORRECT:** When I was little, I **would** really **struggle** to understand the teachers. (There is no positive feeling or emotional content in this sentence. It is a statement of fact. We usually use **would** as a past tense to describe things which we have positive feelings about)



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Prepare for {IELTS}

PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Try to put the following sentences into the simple past:

1. I play a lot of tennis
When I was younger, I _____ a lot of tennis
2. I usually do my homework as soon as I get home.
Yesterday, I _____ my homework as soon as I _____ home.
3. I regularly lose my keys
Last week, I _____ my keys.
4. I come to town at eight o'clock in the morning and go home at around four o'clock in the afternoon nearly every single day.
Last Friday, I _____ to town at eight o'clock in the morning and _____ home at around four o'clock in the afternoon.
5. I have plenty of enthusiasm but I don't have a lot of money.
I _____ plenty of enthusiasm but I _____ a lot of money.
6. I often buy new clothes but I don't sell my old ones.
Last month, I _____ some new clothes but I _____ my old ones.
7. Many students don't understand but prefer not to put up their hand and ask the teacher for help.
Many students _____ but _____ not to _____ up their hand and _____ the teacher for help.
8. The children who love school usually do better than those who detest it.
In the past, the children who _____ school usually _____ better than those who _____ it.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. When I was younger, I **played** a lot of tennis.
2. Yesterday, I **did** my homework as soon as I **got** home.
3. Last week, I **lost** my keys.
4. Last Friday, I **came** to town at eight o'clock in the morning and **went** home at around four o'clock in the afternoon.
5. I **had** plenty of enthusiasm but I **didn't have** a lot of money.
6. Last month, I **bought** some new clothes but I **didn't sell** my old ones.
7. Many students **didn't understand** but **preferred** not to **put** up their hand and **ask** the teacher for help.
8. In the past, the children who **loved** school usually **did** better than those who **detested** it.

PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

The following paragraphs come from an IELTS Task 1 (Academic) Writing Test. They contain errors connected to the simple past tense. Try to find and correct the errors:

1. The statistics demonstrate that between 1990 and 2010, there has been a significant change in food consumption patterns. The most striking movement takes place in Asia where the amount of meat which had been eaten has risen sharply. There is a simultaneous rise in sales of fish and a slight fall in the quantities of fruit and vegetables. The trend in Europe is rather different. Meat sales plummeting at the beginning of the period but stabilising and eventually start rising. With regard to fish, the amount which consumers buy fluctuates wildly during the period but has gone up after the year 2000 and reach a peak in 2008.
2. The questionnaire shows that in the year 1979, the majority of people prefer to spend their free time with friends. Most people enjoying socialising and the percentage of the population which goes out for a drink or a meal is relatively high. The survey also finds that in the late 1970s, watching television and going to the cinema are being less popular than before. In addition, there is a fall in the popularity of home-based activities such as knitting and carpentry. One area of free-time activity which many people take part in is photography. It seems that a large percentage of respondents regularly taking photos.

ANSWERS

1. The statistics demonstrate that between 1990 and 2010, **there was** a significant change in food consumption patterns. The most striking movement **took place** in Asia where the amount of meat which **was eaten** **rose** sharply. **There was** a simultaneous rise in sales of fish and a slight fall in the quantities of fruit and vegetables. The trend in Europe **was** rather different. Meat sales **plummeted** at the beginning of the period but **stabilised** and eventually **started rising**. With regard to fish, the amount which consumers **bought** **fluctuated** wildly during the period but **went up** after the year 2000 and **reached** a peak in 2008.
2. The questionnaire shows that in the year 1979, the majority of people **preferred** to spend their free time with friends. Most people **enjoyed** **socialising** and the percentage of the population which **went out** for a drink or a meal **was** relatively high. The survey also **found** that in the late 1970s, watching television and going to the cinema **were** less popular than before. In addition, **there was** a fall in the popularity of home-based activities such as knitting and carpentry. One area of free-time activity which many people **took part** in **was** photography. It seems that a large percentage of respondents regularly **took** photos.

PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

The following paragraphs come from an IELTS Task 2 Writing Test. They contain errors connected to the simple past tense. Try to find and correct the errors:

1. There is little doubt that nuclear weapons could destroy the whole world. It would only require one small miscalculation for our entire planet and species to be annihilated. This very nearly was happened in the early nineteen-sixties. The American government has decided to station nuclear weapons in Turkey. The Soviet Union finds this quite unacceptable and starts to send missiles to Cuba. The US President threatens war. Fortunately, negotiations are taking place and the Soviet Union agrees to withdraw its weapons. Although the situation calms down, it illustrates how close to total destruction we are.
2. Many developing countries are angered when western governments lecture them about the environment. Ministers from nations like India, China and Nigeria sometimes point out that in the past, states like Britain and America had done things which damage the planet terribly and profoundly. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so-called developed countries pump huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, make the air dirty with pollution from factories, poison soil and water with dangerous chemicals and waste essential natural resources.

ANSWERS

1. There is little doubt that nuclear weapons could destroy the whole world. It would only require one small miscalculation for our entire planet and species to be annihilated. This very nearly **happened** in the early nineteen-sixties. The American government **decided** to station nuclear weapons in Turkey. The Soviet Union **found** this quite unacceptable and **started** to send missiles to Cuba. The US President **threatened** war. Fortunately, negotiations **took place** and the Soviet Union **agreed** to withdraw its weapons. Although the situation **calmed down**, it illustrates how close to total destruction we are.
2. Many developing countries are angered when western governments lecture them about the environment. Ministers from nations like India, China and Nigeria sometimes point out that in the past, states like Britain and America **did** things which **damaged** the planet terribly and profoundly. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so-called developed countries **pumped** huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, **made** the air dirty with pollution from factories, **poisoned** soil and water with dangerous chemicals and **wasted** essential natural resources.