

Español 3AC: Preterite Tense

The preterite tense is one of two past tenses in Spanish. It is used to talk about actions that were completed in the past.

a. Regular Preterite Tense

To conjugate regular verbs in the preterite tense:

1. Drop the -ar, -er, or -ir ending.
2. To the verb stem add the new ending.

-ar		-er/-ir	
- é	- amos	- í	- imos
- aste	- asteis	- iste	- isteis
- ó	- aron	- ió	- ieron

Watch the accents!

B. Spell-changing Preterites

Verbs ending in -car, -gar, -zar: make the following changes in the first person singular- "yo" form of the preterite in order to maintain the original sound of the stem.

-car: **c** → **qu**; buscar, comunicar, explicar, publicar, practicar, sacar, tocar

-gar: **g** → **gu**; apagar, castigar, colgar, conjugar, jugar, llegar, negar, pagar, pegar

-zar: **z** → **c**; abrazar, alcanzar, almorzar, comenzar, empezar, rezar

buscar (*car*: **c** → **qu** in "yo" form)

busqué	buscamos
buscaste	buscasteis
buscó	buscaron

llegar (gar: g → gu in "yo" form)

<i>llegué</i>	llegamos
llegaste	llegasteis
llegó	llegaron

empezar (zar: z → c in "yo" form)

<i>empecé</i>	empezamos
empezaste	empezasteis
empezó	empezaron

NOTICE: All spell-changers use the regular -ar preterite verb endings.

C. Stem-changing Preterites

Stem-changers: Only certain -IR verbs stem-change in the preterite tense.

There are three types of stem-changers:

1. those that change *e* to *ie* in the *present* to *i* in the preterite - *preferir*
2. those that change *o* to *ue* in the *present* to *u* in the preterite - *dormir*
3. those that change *e* to *i* in the *present* to *i* in the preterite - *servir*

preferir (e → ie → i)

preferí	preferimos
preferiste	preferisteis
<i>prefirió</i>	<i>prefirieron</i>

dormir (o → ue → u)

dormí	dormimos
dormiste	dormisteis
durmió	durmieron

servir (e → i → i)

serví	servimos
serviste	servisteis
sirvió	sirvieron

NOTICE: All stem-changers use the regular -ir preterite verb endings.

Other stem-changing verbs:

e → ie → i: advertir, convertir, divertirse,
hervir, mentir, sentir(se)

o → ue → u: dormir(se), morir

e → i → i: conseguir, corregir, despedirse,
elegir, pedir, reír^{*}, repetir, seguir, servir,
sonreír^{*}, vestir(se)

reír (e → i → i)

reí	reímos
reíste	reísteis
rió	rieron

sonreír (e → i → i)

sonreí	sonreímos
sonreíste	sonreísteis
sonrió	sonrieron

NOTICE: Reír and sonreír have accents on **all forms except the Uds./ellos/ellas form!**