

Tutor Tip

Pronunciation of Past Tense Regular Verbs

Did you know that English requires three different pronunciations for the past tense ending of regular verbs? Bet you didn't!

If native English speakers pause to think about this topic, most will identify only two different pronunciations: an 'id'-like sound in the word "painted", and a 't'-like sound in the word "stopped".

But there is a third! This third pronunciation is a 'd'-like sound in the word "robbed". For non-native speakers, this is all very confusing because English spelling is always "-ed"; this "-ed" is appended to the regular verb in its basic form ("to paint", "to stop", "to rob") but knowing this does not help the speaker to pronounce the word unless the speaker knows the rules!

What are the conditions that will dictate how the verb will be pronounced? Here are the rules and contrary to English spelling conventions where there are so many exceptions, there are no exceptions to these sound rules:

1. If the verb in its basic form ends in a 't' or a 'd' sound (e.g. 'paint' or 'decide'), when we want to change the verb to the past tense, we add "-ed" in spelling to this basic form. This "-ed" is pronounced as a separate syllable and sounds something like 'id' ('paintid' and 'decidid').
2. If the verb in its basic form ends with the following sounds (please see examples in brackets for clarity purposes) - p (stop), k (bake), f (laugh), s (bus), sh (wash), ch (lurch) – add "-ed" in spelling. This "-ed" is pronounced as 't'. So the examples just cited above sound like stopt, bakt, laft, bust, washt, lurcht.
3. If the verb in its basic form ends in any vowel sound or in any other consonant sound (except 'd' and those listed under 2 above), add "-ed" in spelling but pronounce the "-ed" as 'd'. A few examples of how some verbs in this category sound: rob → robd, buzz → buzzd, judge → judgd, halve → halvd, offer → offerd, mow → mowd.

Many non-native speakers are unaware that they never pronounce the past tense correctly when speaking English.

A couple of factors may influence this:

- the speaker's first language where the verb remains always in its basic form (paint, stop, rob), and the speaker will unconsciously transfer this characteristic to English
- the actual consonants and number of consonants that the speaker's first language allows at the end of a word. English is notorious in allowing up to four consonants to be pronounced (eg. *glimpsed* where 'MPST' are heard). Vietnamese and Cantonese speakers are severely restricted by their languages where very few consonants are pronounced in word-final position; this results in such speakers omitting most of these sounds from their spoken English. It also contributes to "machine-gun" rhythm. Spanish speakers also tend to simplify the number of consonants in word-final position, and this is particularly obvious if the following word starts with a vowel.

PRACTICE

Please indicate the correct **sound** that will indicate the past tense of the regular verbs in the following sentences. Please remember that the representations of the answers will be what you hear, not what you write. (Correct responses at the foot of the page).

Example: I don't think that Mary _____ with the police. (*co-operate*)

Answer: I don't think that Mary co-operatid with the police

1. The hunters _____ the fox through the fields. (*chase*)
2. The deaf older man _____ the words of the song. (*mouthe*)
3. John _____ a lot before the traffic accident. (*walk*)
4. I _____ my history notes with yours, and yours are better! (*compare*)
5. The boss _____ all the boring jobs to his assistant. (*delegate*)
6. Richard _____ on the door and _____ for his mother to open it for him. (*knock, wait*)
7. The thief _____ around before he _____ through the door. (*glance, bolt*)
8. Bob _____ the trunk of his car and _____ the heavy box. (*open, remove*)
9. Jim _____ the trip to Alaska, and he even _____ the suitcases! (*organize, pack*)
10. When we were young, our mother _____ and _____ everyday. (*cook, bake*)

Answers (please remember that this is how the word sounds):

1. Chast. 2. Mouthd. 3. Wakt. 4. Compard. 5. Delegatid. 6. Nokt/Waitid. 7. Glanst/Boltid. 8. Opend/Removd. 9. Organizd/Pakt. 10. Kookt/Bakt.