

## Pretérito

The preterit tense expresses an action or actions **completed** in the past. It is generally described as the “simple past” tense (for example, “I saw.”). The preterit is used to express:

- Some action completed in the past
- A series of completed actions in the past
- Conditions no longer in effect

Some words and phrases indicate specific time frames, and therefore signal the use of the preterite.

- ayer (yesterday)
- anteayer (the day before yesterday)
- anoche (last night)
- desde el primer momento (from the first moment)
- durante dos siglos (for two centuries)
- el otro día (the other day)
- en ese momento (at that moment)
- entonces (then)
- esta mañana (this morning)
- esta tarde (this afternoon)
- la semana pasada (last week)
- el mes pasado (last month)
- el año pasado (last year)
- hace dos días, años (two days, years ago)
- ayer por la mañana (yesterday morning)
- ayer por la tarde (yesterday afternoon)

Verbs which appear to “change meaning” in the preterit. Since the preterit focuses on the action as being over and done with, the preterit sometimes connotes a different meaning when compared to other tenses. This happens most frequently with the following verbs:

**poder:** to be able > managed (to do something)

Pudimos llegar a tiempo. We managed to arrive on time (we were able to do it and actually did it).

**haber:** there to be > occurred

Hubo un accidente aquí. An accident occurred here. (OR: There was an accident here.)

**querer:** to want, love > tried, attempted

Quise encontrar el perro. I tried to find the dog (wanted to find him and put that desire into action).

**no querer:** not to want > refused

Jorge no quiso venir. Jorge refused to come (didn't want to and thus didn't come).