



PAST TENSE - A2

I. About this Lesson

Activity title: Using the past tense in everyday life ('Cat's Cafe' webcomic by Matt Tarpley)

Level: A2

Recommended Age: 10-14

Subject: English as a foreign language

Timing: 50 minutes

Resources: Computer with internet access, worksheet.

Learning objectives:

- Understand how to use the past tense
- Learn the grammar of the past tense
- Improve the usage of past tense in oral communication

Materials needed: pen, paper, whiteboard, markers, computer with internet access to Cat's café website (<https://www.catscafecomics.com/>) or printed version of comic strips from the Cat's Cafe.



II. Lesson scenario

1. Instructions for the teacher

Preparation to do before the lesson

Go to <https://www.catscafecomics.com/> and discover yourself the online Cat's Café comic strips. Cat's Café is a webcomics created by Matt Tarpley and refers to the life of Cat and the animal customers who come to its café. It is a series of short comic strips with cute drawings but which at the same time can tackle deep topics such as mental health, fitting in society, etc. The language used is informal American English and many times it includes idioms and slang.

It would be particularly interesting to ask your students beforehand to visit the website and discover the webcomics series. They do not need to read everything or to understand all the comics' meaning or vocabulary; they can just go through a few and discuss if they have any questions in the classroom.

For the present lesson on the past tense, you need to already have a list of selected webcomics for your students. Here is a selection with a few currently available webcomics which use verbs in past tense, that you can use:

- <https://www.catscafecomics.com/post/190894729824/belonging>
- <https://www.catscafecomics.com/post/634319322895024128/over-the-past-couple-of-months-i-took-some-time>
- <https://www.catscafecomics.com/post/638124385816952832/simpler-times>
- <https://www.catscafecomics.com/post/637218439622180865/weathering-the-storm-part-5>
- <https://www.catscafecomics.com/post/643922597292261376/my-destination-rats-tale-part-13>



Introduction (5 min)

Start the lesson with a short “Check IN” by telling students:

- a. Today, we will check together a few comic strips which will help us study the past tense.
- b. We will remember the grammar rules and see how we can build our confidence in expressing ourselves in the past tense.
- c. Apart from oral discussion, we will create written dialogues in the form of comic strips as in the examples we will see at the beginning of the class.
- d. These will be the kind of exercises we will do in pairs.
- e. Then, we will have time at the end to see each other’s work and debrief.

Step 1: Present and analyse the comic strips to the students (15 min)

- a. Introduce to your students a few comic strips from the Cat’s Café series. You can use the worksheet with 3 examples (EXERCISE 1), or you can print others from the website.
- b. Give some time (5 minutes) to the students to read the strips (TASK 1).
- c. Then, discuss each comic strip with them: What is the story about? Who did what? Are there any unknown words? Then complete together TASK 2 on the worksheet.
- d. Ask students to read again each comic strip and to note or highlight the verbs that are in the past tense (TASK 3).
- e. All together in the classroom, check the verbs found and move on to the next step that refers to grammar rules for the usage of the past tense.



Step 2: Focus on the grammar rules and explanation of the past tense (15 minutes)

- a. Introduce the grammar rules for the past tense. You can use the information on the students' practice sheet (EXERCISE 2) and add further information if need be.
- b. Ask your students questions and make sure they have understood the grammar. Then you can move on to TASKS 1 and 2.

Answers task 1: 1) finished; 2) didn't have, took; 3) Did you dance; 4) found, sat; 5) didn't want, ordered.

Answers task 2: 1) came; 2) Did; 3) went; 4) met; 5) tried; 6) fell; 7) did

- c. You can always go back to the Cat's Café comic strips and explain the theory based on these examples!

Step 3: Practice the grammar in oral and written exercises (20 minutes)

- a. Start with TASK 1 in EXERCISE 3. Students can work on this task individually or in pairs.
- b. Once students have created their stories, ask them to present them in pairs or in the classroom (TASK 2).
- c. If you have time, check together in the classroom the previous parts of comic strip 2 that are linked together ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) and [Part 4](#)). If you don't have time, you can ask them to do so at home and come back to those in the next class in case there are questions.



Finish the lesson with a short “Check out” (5 min)

You can close the lesson by telling students:

- a. During the lesson we have learnt how we can use the simple past tense to express actions that happened in the past.
- b. We were able to recognize the past tense in written material, such as in the comic strips we read.
- c. We learned and practiced how to use the past form in discussions.
- d. As an assignment, you can explore more comic strips from Cat’s Café or another comic and note irregular verbs in the past tense.

2. Worksheet for student

INTRODUCTION: CAT'S CAFÉ Comic strips

Title: Cat's Cafe

Type of comic: online comic strips (webcomics)

Authors: Matt Tarpley

Summary: Cat's Cafe is a series of short online comic strips that discussing the life of Cat and its animal friends and café's customers.

Link to the webcomic: <https://www.catscafecomics.com/>

EXERCISE 1: ORDINAL NUMBERS

TASK 1: Read the following comic strips 1, 2 and 3



Comic strip 1



Comic strip 2



Comic strip 3



TASK 2: For each comic strip, try to fill the boxes below, answering the questions about each story:

COMIC STRIP 1

- Who?

- When?

- Where?

- What happened?



COMIC STRIP 2

- Who?

- When?

- Where?

- What happened?



COMIC STRIP 1

- Who?

- When?

- Where?

- What happened?

TASK 3: Read again the three comic strips above and use your marker to highlight the verbs that are in the past tense in each comic.



EXERCISES 2: GRAMMAR

REMEMBER THE PAST SIMPLE

- We use the simple past tense to talk about a **finished** action that happened in the past.
- The action can have happened **at any time in the past**.
- We change the **verb** to express past tense.

The regular verbs using the **affirmative form**:

Base of the main verb + -ed

Examples: To pack → **packed** To cook → **cooked**

Irregular verbs need to be learnt by heart. The past simple use their second form.

Examples: make → **made** find → **found** do → **did**

For all verbs (regular and irregular), the **negative form** is as follows:

Did not (didn't) + Base form of the main verb

Examples: To pack → **didn't** pack To cook → **didn't** cook

For all verbs (regular and irregular), the **interrogative form** is as follows:

Did + subject + Base form of the main verb

Example: To pack → **Did** you pack?

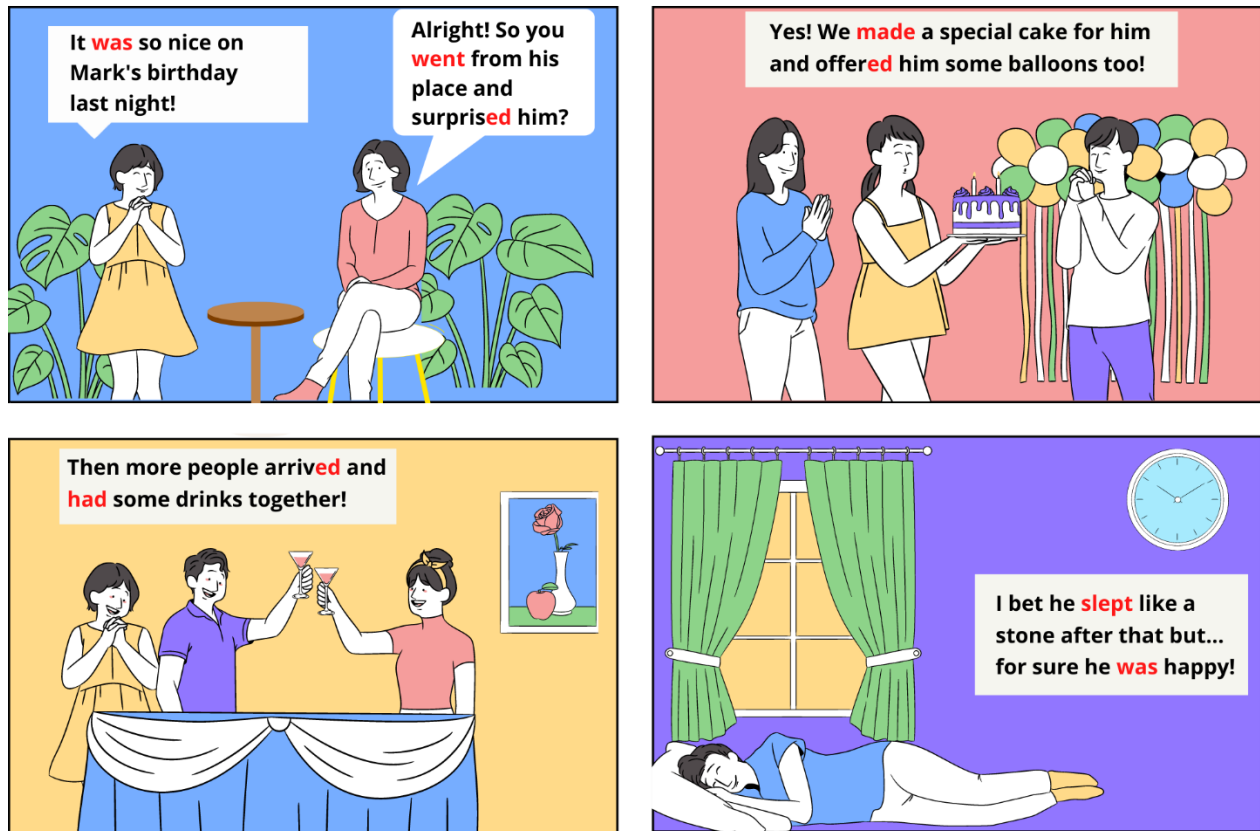
For all verbs (regular and irregular), the **negative interrogative form** is as follows:

Did + subject + Base form of the main verb

Example: To pack → **Didn't** you pack?

A COMIC EXAMPLE!

See the comic strip below and notice the various forms of the verbs used in past tense.



Comic strip 4

TASK 1: Rewrite the following sentences with the verb in brackets in the past simple.

1. She (finish) her work early yesterday.

_____.

2. I (not have) a car to take her to the airport so she (take) the train.

_____.



3. (You dance) at the party last night?

_____.

4. Last night after the cinema, we (find) a very nice restaurant and (sit) to eat.

_____.

5. I (not want) to cook so we (order) pizza.

_____.

TASK 2: Write the correct form of the verbs below in the past tense:

Come → _____

Do → _____

Go → _____

Meet → _____

Try → _____

Fall → _____

TASK 3: Now look at the comic strip below (comic strip 5) and try to fill the blanks, using the verbs above in the past tense.



Comic strip 5

EXERCISE 3: EXPLORING PAST TENSE IN WRITING AND SPEAKING

TASK 1: Use the Comic Strip 2 from EXERCISE 1 and try to write a short paragraph to explain how the mouse found the drawing and decided to look for Cat's Café!

You can write as if you were the mouse; tell its story **in the past tense!**



To help you start with your story, you can use for example the following sentences:

- Previous Saturday...
- Three days ago...
- One evening two weeks ago...
- It was a cold day, and I...

TASK 2: Share your story with your pair or with the classroom.

Do you want to know what really happened?

Check online the previous parts of the comic strip: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) and [Part 4](#)!



III. Modification and Differentiation ideas

- For the same lesson teacher has the flexibility to use any other comic strip from either Cat's Café or any other kind of comic. The condition is to use the past tense to describe simple actions happened in the past, in order to enhance student's confidence in expressing themselves easily in the past tense.
- You could also use this lesson in complement to a lesson or a reading about daily life and practice the simple past.
- As Cat's Café refers to short comic strips that are fun and easily accessible on the website, you could ask students to research and bring in the classroom their preferred ones and based on these stories, you can give tasks and short exercises where they can practice the simple past or other tenses. These exercises can be similar to Exercise 3: re-write the story, or presentation of the story.