

44 Past simple of *be*

Deborah Kerr and Ingrid Bergman were film stars in the 1950s, but they weren't American. Deborah Kerr was British and Ingrid Bergman was Swedish.



1 Form

We make the past tense of the verb *be* with *was* and *were*:

POSITIVE

I/He/She/It	<i>was</i>	
We/You/They	<i>were</i>	French.

There are no short forms of *was* and *were* in positive sentences.

NEGATIVE

I/He/She/It	<i>was not</i>	<i>(wasn't)</i>	
We/You/They	<i>were not</i>	<i>(weren't)</i>	<i>there.</i>



NATURAL ENGLISH We use the short forms *wasn't* and *weren't* when we are speaking to someone and in informal writing.

QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWERS

Was I/he/she/it there? Yes, *I/he/she/it was.* No, *I/he/she/it wasn't (was not).*

Were we/you/they there? Yes, *we/you/they were.* No, *we/you/they weren't (were not).*

Where were you?

How much was it?

What was the name of the film?

2 Use

We use the past simple tense of *be* to talk about people and situations in the past.

We often use dates and times with *was* and *were*:

Deborah Kerr and Ingrid Bergman were film stars in the 1950s.

Was he in the beginners' class last year?

It wasn't very cold in December.

Compare *was/were* with *is/are*:

The weather was hot yesterday but it's cooler today.

1920s films were in black and white but now most films are in colour.

Practice

1 GRAMMAR IN USE Choose the correct words in *italics* in the text.

Leslie Howard

Leslie Howard (0) *is / was* a famous film star in the 1930s in Hollywood. But he (1) *wasn't / didn't* American – he (2) *were / was* British. In those days there (3) *not be / weren't* a lot of British actors in Hollywood, most of the film stars (4) *was / were* American. Leslie Howard (5) *be / was* a very good actor and his films (6) *was / were* very successful, but he (7) *wasn't / weren't* happy in Hollywood and he went back to England. His most famous film (8) *did / was* 'Gone With The Wind' in 1939.



2 Write questions and short answers.

0 Thomas Edison / a famous inventor? (✓)

Was Thomas Edison a famous inventor? Yes, he was.

1 Christopher Columbus / Spanish? (✗)

2 Grace Kelly / a famous scientist? (✗)

3 Gustave Eiffel / French engineer? (✓)

4 Michelangelo and Raphael / film directors? (✗)

5 the Wright brothers / American? (✓)

6 John F Kennedy and Winston Churchill / actors (✗)

3 GRAMMAR IN USE Complete the conversations with *was*, *were*, *wasn't* or *weren't* and the word(s) in brackets () .

1 A Where (0) *were you* last night? (you)

B (1) at that new Chinese restaurant in Dover Street. (I)

A (2) good? (it)

B No, (3) terrible. (the food)

2 A (4) a doctor? (your grandfather)

B No, (5) He was a dentist. (he)

A (6) successful? (he)

B Yes, (7) very rich. (he)

3 A (8) at home yesterday morning? (you)

B No, (9) at home – we were at the supermarket. (we)

A (10) with you? (the children)

B No, (11) with our neighbours. (they)