IRREGULAR ENGLISH VERBS

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH



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Irregular English Verbs

A systematic approach

by

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Please note that the Table of Contents below corresponds to the full book, not to this sample.

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Foreword

There are around 400 English verbs that have an irregular simple past tense or past participle and even more that manifest some form of irregularity in the present tense. Most books on irregular verbs simply list all irregular verbs in alphabetical order, with all their forms and a few examples of use.

This book takes a different approach, which is more suitable for people who want to read a book from cover to cover. Verbs are grouped together according to common patterns, such as a -d that becomes a -t in the past tense (e.g. bend, send), the pattern "-ink, -ank, -unk" (e.g. drink, sink), verbs that do not change at all (e.g. cut, put), etc.

Archaic verbs that are not used at all in modern English were not included in this book, but all irregular verbs that are for some reason still relevant were included, even if they are uncommon (such as "cleave" or "gainsay"), which, I hope, will allow you

not only to master English verbs but also to expand your vocabulary in the course of reading this book.

Irregularity in the present tense

There are a few English verbs that form the present tense in an irregular way. We will quickly discuss them before moving on to the past tense, which is the main source of difficulties.

The standard conjugation pattern (or, as linguists call it, "paradigm") followed by the vast majority of English verbs is as follows:

Infinitive: **to make**

I **make**	we **make**
you **make**	you (pl.) **make**
he/she/it **make<u>s</u>**	they **make**

Negative:
I/you/we/they **do not make** (**don't make**) he/she/it **does not make** (**doesn't make**)

Present participle: **making**

If a verb ends with one of the following sounds, the third person singular ending becomes **-es** (pronounced /ɪz/):

> /s/, e.g. **kiss**: he kisses, **miss**: he misses
> /ks/, e.g. **fix**: he fixes, **tax**: he taxes
> /z/, e.g. **buzz**: it buzzes, **quiz**: he quizzes
> /ʃ/, e.g. **fish**: he fishes, **splash**: it splashes
> /tʃ/, e.g. **catch**: he catches, **watch**: he watches

Notice that the third person singular of "quiz" is "quizzes", not "quizes". It is an instance of consonant doubling, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

If the verb ends in **-y** that is pronounced as /aɪ/, the ending is spelled "ies" instead of "ys", e.g.

> **fly**: he flies /flaɪz/
> **supply**: he supplies /səˈplaɪz/
> **fry**: he fries /fraɪz/

If it ends in **-y** pronounced as /i/, the ending also becomes "ies", but the pronunciation is /iz/, e.g.

> **envy**: he envies /ˈɛnviz/
> **vary**: it varies /ˈvɛəriz/ (BrE), /ˈvɛriz/ (AmE),
> **embody**: he embodies /ɪmˈbɒdiz/ (BrE),
> /ɪmˈbɑːdiz/ (AmE)

This spelling change does not apply when the final "y" is preceded by a vowel (and hence pronounced as /j/), e.g. **buy** (he buys), **lay** (he lays). All such verbs are regular in the present tense, except "say", which has an irregular pronunciation:

> **say**: he says /sɛz/ (not /seɪz/)

There are a few verbs ending in **-o** that becomes -oes in the third person singular (pronounced /əʊz/ in British English and /oʊz/ in American English):

> **go**: he goes
> *(the same applies to "go" with a prefix, e.g. "undergo", "forgo")*
> **echo**: it echoes
> **veto**: he vetoes
> **solo** *(play a solo)*: he soloes
> **radio** *(send a message by radio)*: he radioes
> **demo** *(create a demo)*: he demoes
> **lasso** *(catch using a lasso)*: he lassoes

The verb "do" follows the same pattern in writing but has an irregular pronunciation:

> **do**: he does /dʌz/
> *(the same pronunciation pattern applies to "redo", "undo", and other similar verbs)*

This is the end of the sample of this chapter. To find out more about verbs irregular in the present tense (including modal verbs), go to

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Final consonant doubling

As you surely know, the final consonant of some verbs gets doubled when the suffix -ing or -ed is added, e.g.

> **stop**: stopping, stopped
> **cram**: cramming, crammed

In other cases, it is not doubled:

> **visit**: visiting, visited
> **shift**: shifting, shifted

The rule governing the doubling of the final consonant is actually quite simple. If a verb has just one syllable and ends with exactly **one vowel followed by one consonant (except "w", "x", and "y")**, the consonant is doubled:

> **rob**: robbing, robbed
> **sit**: sitting, (past tense: sat)
> **beg**: begging, begged
> **hum**: humming, hummed

If there are two vowels or two consonants at the end, no doubling occurs:

> **read**: reading, (past tense: read)
> **coat**: coating, coated
> **bark**: barking, barked
> **fill**: filling, filled

This applies also to "oo" and "ee":

> **cook**: cooking, cooked
> **seed**: seeding, seeded

Similarly, if a verb ends with a silent "e", do not double the preceding consonant:

> **take**: taking, (past tense: took)
> **come**: coming, (past tense: came)
> **hope**: hoping, hoped
> **game**: gaming, gamed

The letters "w" and "y" are never doubled (they act as vowels in this context):

> **snow**: snowing, snowed
> **stay**: staying, stayed

Similarly, the letter "x" is never doubled, because it represents two consonants "ks":

> **box**: boxing, boxed
> **vex**: vexing, vexed

Words beginning with "qu" may seem like an exception to the rule, but "qu" is actually pronounced as "kw", i.e. as two consonants, which does not prevent the following vowel from doubling:

> **quiz**: quizzing, quizzed (think of "kwiz")
> **quit**: quitting, quitted (usually just "quit")

The rule can be summarized as:

> **One vowel + one consonant = doubling**
> *(in monosyllabic words; except -w, -x, -y)*

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This is the end of the sample of this chapter. To learn about consonant doubling in polysyllabic words (and about exceptions), go to

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Irregularity in the past tense

We have already mentioned one type of "irregularity" in the past tense—consonant doubling—which, ironically, only applies to so-called *regular verbs*, that is, verbs that form the past tense with the suffix -ed (or -d if the infinitive ends with an "e").

In this chapter, we will deal with verbs that do not form the past tense using the suffix -ed (or -d). They fall into many small groups of words that share some similarities.

How to read this chapter

One important attribute shared by virtually all irregular verbs is that **prefixes do not influence ir-**

regularity. For example, the past tense of "pay" is "paid", and this form is always used in the past tense of "pay" with a prefix, e.g. "repaid", "prepaid", "overpaid". We will usually not mention verbs with prefixes in this book, unless they are irregular in a way different from the root verb, or it is hard to recognize the prefix.

To save space, verb forms will always be given in the following format (except the verbs "be" and "have" in the next section, which have more forms):

> **infinitive – past simple – past participle**

For example, the verb "go" will be presented as

> **go – went – gone**

Each section ends with a box captioned "Sentences to review". It provides simple sentences containing the verbs presented in the given section, and I recommend reading the sentences once or several times just to see the verbs used in context.

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The verb 'get'

The verb "get" has two forms of the past participle:

> **get** – **got** – **got** or **gotten**

Only "**got**" is used as the past participle of "get" in **British English**; if you learn British English, avoid the form "gotten" altogether.

However, the situation is more complex in **American English**. In the sense of "**receive**" or "**become**", the past participle is usually "gotten", e.g.

> I have never gotten a gift.
> *(= I have never received a gift.)*

> I've gotten interested in chess.
> *(= I've become interested in chess.)*

In the sense of "**have**" (possess) or "**must**", the past participle is always "got":

> She's got five children.
> *(= She has five children)*
>
> I've got to go.
> *(= I must go.)*

Sometimes both forms are possible but express different ideas:

> I've got a lot of questions.
> *(= I have a lot of questions.)*
>
> I've gotten a lot of questions.
> (= *I've received a lot of questions.)*

The verb "get" has around 30 different meanings, and covering the usage of each of them would be beyond the scope of this book. As a rule of thumb, if the meaning is unrelated to possession or necessity, the preferred form is "gotten" (but both forms are possible in many cases).

Even though the verb "**forget**" was derived from "get" by adding the archaic prefix for-, it does not follow the distinction above and is always used as follows:

> **forget – forgot – forgotten**

Some native speakers use "forgot" as the past participle, but such usage is usually considered obsolete (it was common in the 18th and 19th century).

"**Beget**", another verb derived from "get" meaning "to become a father of" or "to be the source of", has two possible past simple forms:

> **beget – begat** or **begot – begotten**

It is rarely used in modern English, but it is quite common in historical and religious context and in certain phrases, such as "violence begets violence".

SENTENCES TO REVIEW

(To practice the forms "got" and "gotten", read the examples at the beginning of this section.)

I *forgot* your number. Have you already *forgotten* it?

Isaac *begat* Jacob. Violence has always *begotten* violence [note that the present perfect of "beget" is rarely used].

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The rest of this sample contains a selection of 4 (out of the total of 26) sections from this chapter. To get the full book (100 pages long), go to

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Verbs with invariant past tense

There is a huge class of verbs that are the same in the past tense as in the infinitive, e.g. set, cut, hit. This means is that you have to recognize from the context whether the past tense or the present tense is intended. You could say both:

> They cut vegetables every day. [present tense]

and

> They cut vegetables yesterday. [past tense]

If the verb is in the third person singular, you can recognize the past tense by the absence of the third-person ending -s:

> He cut vegetables. [past tense]
> He cuts vegetables. [present tense]

Since the list of such verbs is very extensive and all three past forms of each verb are the same, we will change the usual format and show every verb to-

gether with an example sentence in the third person singular (the subject will be either "he", "she", or "it"), and there will be no sentences to review at the end of this section.

This should make remembering the verbs easier. We will also list common verbs with prefixes that are harder to recognize. Here is the list:

- **bet** – He bet on a good horse.
- **bid** (offer amount) – He bid a lot of money.

  Note: In other senses of "bid" (e.g. "bid farewell"), the pattern "bid – bade – bidden" is more common.
- **broadcast** – He broadcast the good news.

  Note: Most dictionaries list also "broadcasted" as a possible form, but this form is not commonly used in practice.
- **burst** – She burst out laughing.
- **cut** – He cut some vegetables.
- **cost** – It cost a lot.
- **cast** – Frodo cast [threw] the ring into the fire, didn't he?

- **fit** – It fit(ted) into the box.

  In the US, the past tense and past participle are usually "fit", whereas in the UK they are usually "fitted". However, when used as adjectives, "fit" means healthy or appropriate, and "fitted" means designed to fit, both in the US and in the UK.

- **forecast** He forecast good weather.

  Even though the form "forecasted" exists, "forecast" is much more common.

- **fraught** (only used in the past participle in the sense of "filled", "loaded") – The situation was fraught with danger.

  "To fraught" means "to load". However, it is only used as an adjective in modern English

- **hit** – The ball hit me.
- **hurt** – It really hurt.
- **input** – He input the figures into a spreadsheet.

  Some dictionaries allow the alternative "inputted", but this alternative is uncommon in published literature. Probably the most sensible recommendation is to avoid using "input" as a verb altogether

and use a suitable synonym, such as "enter", "insert", or "type".

- **knit** – My grandma knit(ted) a scarf.

  Both "knit" and "knitted" are acceptable, but the regular form is more common.

- **let** – Who let the dogs out?
- **offset** [compensate] – It offset the costs.
- **put** – She put a coin into the tip jar.
- **quit** – He quit his job.
- **reset** – She reset the settings.
- **retrofit** – He retrofit(ted) the car with an improved engine.

  Note: "to retrofit" means "to equip something with a part it didn't originally have". The same note as for "fit" applies here.

- **rid** [remove something causing a problem] – The hero rid our streets of crime.
- **set** – She set a new world record.
- **shed** – It shed some light on the issue.
- **shit** (vulgar) – The dog shit/shat on the floor.

The form "shat" is less common.

- **shut** – He shut down the computer.
- **slit** [make a cut] – The knife slit his vein.
- **sublet** ["sub-rent"] – He sublet his room to another person.
- **spread** – It spread from one region to another.
- **thrust** [push quickly] – She thrust her hands into her pockets.
- **typeset** – Who typeset this book?
- **upset** – It upset me.
- **wed** ["to marry", old-fashioned] – A rock star wed(ded) a top model.

  The form "wedded" has traditionally been more common, but the irregular form "wed" is more common in modern English.

- **wet** – The baby wet the bed.

  Both "wet" and "wetted" are in use, but the regular form is considered unnatural by many speakers.

The verb "read" follows the same pattern in writing but not in pronunciation:

- **read** /riːd/ – He read /rɛd/ the article. I haven't read /rɛd/ it yet.

Finally, the past tense of "beat" is also "beat", but the past participle is "beaten":

- **beat** /biːt/ – She beat /biːt/ me in the game. I have never beaten /biːtn/ her.

Using "beat" as the past participle is somewhat common in speech, but it is usually considered colloquial.

Past tense with -t instead of -ed

There is a large class of verbs that get the suffix -t instead of -ed in the past tense, sometimes with another minor change (mostly the substitution /iː/ → /ɛ/ in the root of the verb):

creep – **crept** – **crept**
deal – **dealt** /dɛlt/ – **dealt** /dɛlt/
dwell [live somewhere] – **dwelt*** – **dwelt***
feel – **felt** – **felt**
keep – **kept** – **kept**
kneel – **knelt*** – **knelt***
lose – **lost** – **lost**
mean – **meant** – **meant**
sweep – **swept** – **swept**

Note that while the forms "dwelled" and "kneeled" exist, the forms with -t are much more common, and I recommend sticking to them.

When forming the past tense and the past participle of the verbs listed below, we can choose freely between the irregular form (with -t) and the regular form (with -ed). I recommend using the regular (-ed) form in writing. The -t form may be perceived as "too British" by Americans, whereas the -ed form is perfectly acceptable in the UK:

burn – **burned** or **burnt**
dream – **dreamed** /driːmd/ or **dreamt** /drɛmt/
lean – **leaned** /liːnd/ or **leant** /lɛnt/
leap – **leaped** /liːpt/ or **leapt** /lɛpt/
learn – **learned** or **learnt**

smell – **smelled** or **smelt**
spell – **spelled** or **spelt**
spill – **spilled** or **spilt**
spoil – **spoiled** or **spoilt**

SENTENCES TO REVIEW

The finals *crept* closer every day. Many non-standard forms have *crept* into the English language. She *dealt* with the problem quite well. Have you *dealt* with it? They *dwelt* ["lived", formal] in a small castle near the sea. They have *dwelt* there since the 15th century. I *felt* bad about it. I have always felt this way.

She *kept* it a secret. The climate has *kept* tourists away. The knight knelt before the king. Has he *knelt* yet? He *lost* his keys. I am completely *lost*. It *meant* a lot to us. It has never *meant* a lot to me. She *swept* the crumbs off the table. They were *swept* away by the waves.

Patterns -ing -ang -ung and -ink -ank -unk

There is a class of irregular English verbs that follow the pronunciation pattern /ɪŋ/ → /æŋ/ → /ʌŋ/ in the past tense, two of which end with "-ing" in the present tense:

> **ring** /rɪŋ/ – **rang** /ræŋ/ – **rung** /rʌŋ/
> **sing** /sɪŋ/ – **sang** /sæŋ/ – **sung** /sʌŋ/

Notice that the "g" at the end is not pronounced. The /ŋ/ sound found at the end of these words is produced simply by making the back of your tongue touch the back of your throat.

There are four other verbs that follow the same pattern but end with a "k", which *is* pronounced:

> **drink** /-ɪŋk/ – **drank** /-æŋk/ – **drunk** /-ʌŋk/
> **shrink** /-ɪŋk/ – **shrank** /-æŋk/ – **shrunk** /-ʌŋk/
> **sink** /sɪŋk/ – **sank** /sæŋk/ – **sunk** /sʌŋk/
> **stink** /stɪŋk/ – **stank** /stæŋk/ – **stunk** /stʌŋk/

The simple past of "**stink**" can, alternatively, be "**stunk**", but this is somewhat less common.

SENTENCES TO REVIEW

The name *rang* a bell. Your phone has *rung*. She *sang* a beautiful song. The song was *sung* by a professional singer.

I *drank* three beers yesterday. Almost all water was *drunk*. The T-shirt *shrank* during the first wash. Titanic *sank* in the morning of 15 April 1912, but it wasn't *sunk* by a submarine; it collided with an iceberg. The cheese *stank* (or *stunk*) like a dirty sock, and the kitchen has *stunk* for hours after dinner.

Verbs 'lie' and 'lay'

The verbs "lie" and "lay" are perhaps the two most confusing irregular English verbs. "Lie" has two

fundamentally different meanings: "not to tell the truth" and "to be in a horizontal position" (or "to be located somewhere"). "Lay" means "to put something in a particular position"—that is, after you lay something somewhere, it lies there.

So far, so good, but when we start using these verbs in the past tense, things get confusing. "Lie" in the sense of not telling the truth (and *in this sense only*) is regular:

> **lie** (not tell the truth) – **lied** – **lied**

In *all other senses*, "lie" follows the pattern

> **lie** (be located/horizontal) – **lay** – **lain**

As you can see, "lay" has two meanings. "I lay" can mean either "I was in a horizontal position" (the past tense of "lie") or "I put something somewhere" (the present tense of "lay").

Which meaning is intended should always be clear from the context because "lie" is never used with an object (you cannot "lie something") and "lay" is never used without one (you always "lay something"). There is a tendency among native speakers

to say “laying” instead of “lying”, e.g. “I was laying in bed”, but this is widely considered incorrect.

The distinction is also clear in the third person singular: “he lays” is the present tense of “lay”, while “he lay” is the past tense of “lie”.

There are two more verbs that are derived from “lie” in the latter sense and thus follow the same pattern: underlie – underlay – underlain; overlie – overlay – overlain.

The verb “lay” itself, which we have already mentioned in the previous section, is conjugated as

> **lay – laid – laid**

Pay special attention to words like “overlay” and “underlay”, which may be either past-tense forms derived from “lie” or present-tense forms derived from “lay”.

SENTENCES TO REVIEW

He *lied* in his résumé. Have you ever *lied* to someone?

The cabin *lay* [was located, from "lie"] in the woods. He has *lain* [was horizontal, from "lie"] on the meadow for hours.

Hens *lay* eggs [present tense of "lay"]. They *laid* lots of eggs [past tense of "lay"]. How many have they *laid*?

The principle of constant speed of light *underlay* [was the basis of; past tense of "underlie"] the foundation of the theory of relativity. They have to *underlay* [lay under; present tense] the cover with a water-resistant material; they *underlaid* it.

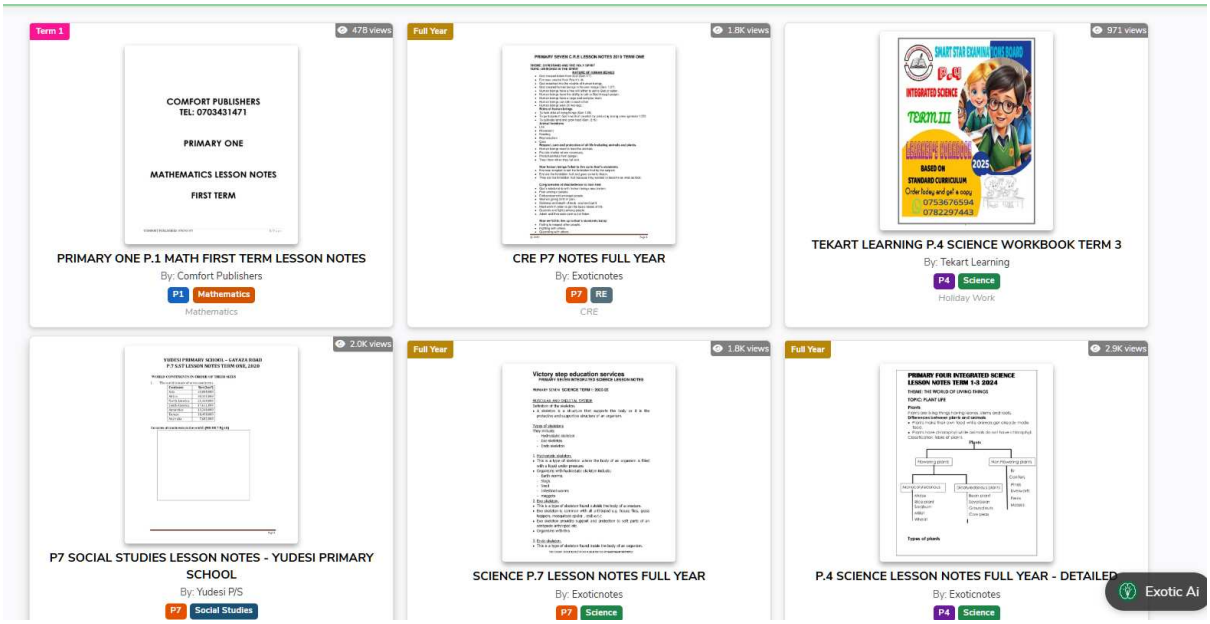
The layer of sediment *overlay* [was above; from "overlie"] a large area of bedrock. The workers *overlay* [cover, put on top; present tense] wood with gold; they *overlaid* it with gold.

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