

Speak Easy #002 – Three tips for pronouncing the past tense

Episode description

In this episode, Andrew and Suzanne teach you three tips that will help you master how to pronounce regular past tense verbs in English.

Fun fact

The overwhelming majority of verbs in English are regular. There are only about 200 irregular verbs that are commonly used.

What's included in the study guide

- Transcript
- Pronunciation exercises
- Bonus listening downloads



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hello, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew, how's it going?

Andrew: I'm doing really, really well. How about you? How are you?

Suzanne: I'm good, doing pretty good. Working hard these days.

Andrew: Suzanne, today we are happy to present to everyone the second episode of our brand-new Speak Easy series. And in this series, we give you tips on pronunciation so that you can make your spoken English sound more natural.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: You know, Suzanne, I think a lot of people get discouraged when it comes to pronunciation. Like they think, ah, I can never sound like a native speaker because I'm learning English as an adult and you can only sound perfect if you learn English as a child.

Suzanne: I know, yeah, it can be overwhelming.

Andrew: So you just give up, you're like, whatever, I don't care about pronunciation, and there is a little bit of truth to that. Of course, I think everyone can agree that children who learn foreign languages at a young age can get the accent down pat. But what we want to do in this Speak Easy series, everyone, is give you some tips that you can easily learn and incorporate into your spoken English to make your English sound more natural. So just one tip at a time, one step at a time, one adjustment at a time. You can make a slight tweak to sound better, and this is really the goal of this series.

Suzanne: Yeah, and also as you listen to these episodes, you don't have to make these adjustments right away, just be aware of them and perceive them in your speech and maybe in other people's speech. And that's the first step, just understanding and being aware of these little tricks, these little tips. And sooner or later you'll start doing them in your own pronunciation and hopefully feel more confident.

Andrew: Absolutely, I couldn't agree more. And today we have a very, very, very important pronunciation tip, one that unfortunately is not taught in too many English classes. And why that is, I'm not 100% sure but, when it comes to English pronunciation, there are some things that you don't need to pronounce correctly. For example, the "TH" sound in English, if you don't nail that 100% correctly, it doesn't bother native speakers.

But I think with today's topic, today's tip, if you don't pronounce it correctly, it's very noticeable to native speakers. It will really make your English sound unnatural if you're not at least attempting to make the pronunciation that we're going to teach you today.

Let's get into it, Sue. What is this pronunciation tip that you're going to tell us about today?

Suzanne: So today has a lot to do with a grammar feature. Most of us know the simple past, past tense, right? But the simple past, not like buy and bought, but when you add an "-ed" ending to a word, right?

Andrew: To a regular verb?

Suzanne: A regular verb, exactly.

Andrew: It's easy, just add "-ed."

Suzanne: Yeah, so on paper when you're writing in English, you just add an "-ed" or when you're reading English, you just read it as a simple past word, "-ed." But when you're speaking it, there are three different ways of perceiving and saying the "-ed" ending of a word. There's /t/ as in a "T" sound, /t/. There's /d/ a "D" sound, or /ɪd/, like an "-ed" sound /ɪd/.

Andrew: Suzanne, so what you're telling us, if I understand correctly, is that "-ed" the ending that we attach to regular verbs to change them to past tense verbs, is pronounced three different ways, it could be a /t/, /d/, or /ɪd/, is that right?

Suzanne: Yes, now somebody say "-ed," some people say /ɪd/, it just depends on how fast you're talking. But, yes, exactly, there are three different ways of saying it.

- Andrew: OK, I think this is gonna come as a shock to many people, because it's one spelling but three different pronunciations. And the good news is, there are some rules that you can follow to determine what pronunciation to use, and that is what we're going to tell you today. And just before we tell the tips to everybody, why don't we give some examples of some verbs that use the different endings?
- Suzanne: Right, so we can say, "I worked," right? That's a "T" ending. Worked /t/. I worked yesterday.
- Andrew: Not work-ed, not work-ed. Worked.
- Suzanne: Worked, yup. Or I could say, "yesterday I played frisbee in the park."
- Andrew: Played frisbee, so that's the /d/ ending right? Played.
- Suzanne: That's the /d/ ending, the "D."
- Andrew: OK.
- Suzanne: Or I could say, "Mike and I batted at the batting cages yesterday." Batted, and that is your example of the /ɪd/ batted.
- Andrew: The /ɪd/ batted. OK, very nice. So bat. "To bat," like when you play baseball, you have to hit a ball. We use this verb to bat and when we put it into the past tense, it's batted. OK, very good.
- Suzanne: So even though these words are spelled all the same with an "-ed" at the end, they're all pronounced differently.
- Andrew: So how do we know when to use the /t/, /d/ or /ɪd/ ending?
- Suzanne: Yeah, so they're actually three different easy rules to follow, very easy.
- Andrew: OK, I like it. I like easy.
- Suzanne: Yeah, that's why it's called Speak Easy. Well, the first one, if we look at the first ending, the /t/ or the "T" ending, right? Like worked, worked. So whenever the root word in the simple past form, or when we say root word it's kind of like the verb without the "-ed" ending, like work right? Before it becomes past tense.
- Andrew: OK.

- Suzanne: So if that word ends with a consonant that is voiceless like “S” /s/ or “P” /p/ or “K” like /k/ or an “F” sound like /f/ or /tʃ/ like church, so /tʃ/. Or the “TH” sound that is voiceless /θ/, or the “SH” sound like /ʃ/ as in fish, fished. Whenever you have the root word ending with one of those consonants’ sounds, not letters but sounds, then the “-ed” is gonna sound like a “T.”
- Andrew: So, Sue, you’re saying whenever the verb that we want to change to the past tense, if it ends with a voiceless consonant like, again, an “S” sound /s/ “P” sound /p/, “K” sound /k/, “F” sound /f/, “CH” sound /tʃ/, voiceless “TH” like /θ/, or “SH” sound /ʃ/, whenever the verb ends with that sound as its final sound, then the “-ed” is pronounced like a “T.” Correct?
- Suzanne: Correct and, just to clarify, you can figure out if a sound is voiced or voiceless by putting your hand just on your throat, like where your vocal cords are, your vocal folds, you know, your voice box is. And you make the sound, you feel /s/ like an “S” sound /s/ and if you feel vibration, then it’s not voiceless, it’s voiced. But if you don’t feel vibration, then it’s a voiceless consonant, and you know that it’s going to have a “T” at the end, when there’s a “-ed” ending.
- Andrew: Exactly, this is kind of fancy linguistics speech, voiced and voiceless. But really it just means vibrating or non-vibrating. So voiceless means non-vibrating. If you take, for example, the “S” sound, you put your hands on your throat and you go /s/, you feel no vibration. If you change that to a /z/ sound /z/, well, then that is a voiced consonant and you can feel lots of vibration on your throat. And so this is how you can determine voiced or voiceless. Voiceless are the consonants that change the “-ed” sound to a /t/ sound.
- Suzanne: Exactly. You know what, Andrew? Let’s take a listen to an example dialogue and see if we can pick out the “-ed” endings that sound like /t/.
- Andrew: Let’s do it, sounds good to me.

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Friend 1: | I can’t believe it’s not even lunch yet. I’m so tired. |
| Friend 2: | You have a late night? |
| Friend 1: | I worked until midnight and then I went to this new club down the street. We danced until 3 a.m. |
| Friend 2: | Oh man, you must have been wiped out this morning. |
| Friend 1: | Yeah, I had hoped this coffee would have helped, but nah. |
| Friend 2: | Too bad. |

Suzanne: All right, so in that dialogue, Andrew, what words did you notice that ended with a /t/ sound in this simple past?

Andrew: Well, there were several of them. Let's see. I heard the verb worked in the past tense, worked.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Also danced, wiped, and hoped.

Suzanne: Yeah, and all of those had root words, so the original word or verb before adding the "-ed" ending, that ended with a voiceless consonant, right? The /k/, the worked ended with a "K" a /k/ sound.

Andrew: A /k/, yup.

Suzanne: Danced ended with a /s/ sound right? A "S" sound, and wiped and hoped ended with a /p/ a "P" sound. And so they all get a "T" ending.

Andrew: Exactly. So, guys, once again, just listen: worked, danced, wiped, hoped. OK? Work-ed? No. Danc-ed? No. Wip-ed? No. Hop-ed? No. OK? Worked, danced, wiped, hoped.

Suzanne: That's right.

Andrew: Very, very good. OK, Suzanne so that is the first sound of the "-ed," the /t/ ending. Why don't we take a look now at the second possible sound? The /d/ ending?

Suzanne: OK, so when we use the /d/ ending for "-ed," it's going to be when the root word, which is the original verb before "-ed" ending, ends with a voiced or vibrating consonant sound.

For example, /z/ like a "Z" sound, /g/, /b/, the voiced "TH" like /ð/, "M" like /m/ or "N" like /n/, "L" like /l/, "R" like /r/, "NG" /ŋ/ OK?

So when you have those sounds, also /v/ the "V" sound /v/, and also the /dʒ/ sound like judge, judged. So when you have the sounds like /z/, /g/, /b/, /ð/ as in "TH," "M" /m/, "N" /n/, "L" /l/, /r/ as in "R," "NG" /ŋ/, or /v/ as in "V" the "V" sound or /dʒ/, those will require the "-ed" ending to sound like a "D" /d/. So let's look at some example words, actually, before we go further.

Andrew: Sounds good. So, Suzanne, I can think of several verbs here that end with one of these voiced consonant sounds. For example, the verb graze. Graze like graze on grass. This is what animals do when they eat grass. They graze on it. So if we change graze to the past tense, what does it sound like?

Suzanne: It would sound like grazed, grazed.

Andrew: Grazed. OK, very good. Another example is, you know, a bad guy will rob a house, steal things from a house, he will rob a house. And if we change the verb rob into the past tense, it sounds like?

Suzanne: Robbed, robbed.

Andrew: Robbed, with the “D,” robbed. OK, this is something I hate, is when my internet connection lags, OK? There’s delay, it’s lagging. And so to switch lag into the past tense, what does it sound like?

Suzanne: It would sound like lagged. Lagged, your internet lagged yesterday.

Andrew: I’m sorry about that. And we also have other examples like, clone, changing to cloned, bathe changes to bathed, spoil to spoiled, and care to cared, OK? So these are just some of the examples using this second tip, when you switch a verb that ends a voiced consonant to “-ed,” add the “D” pronunciation, instead of the other ones.

Suzanne: And, again, you can put your hand right on your throat and your vocal cords and you can feel the vibration whenever you say these sounds, like /z/, /g/, /b/, /m/, /n/, /l/, /r/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/, you’ll feel a vibration and you’ll know that is a voiced consonant and requires a /d/, the “-ed” ending sound.

Andrew: All right, everyone so let’s listen to another conversation example and, again, in this example we want you to listen for past tense verbs and especially past tense verbs using this /d/ ending. So keep your ears open for them and see how many you can pick out. OK, let’s listen to the example now.

Steve: Hey, Alice, how’s the new pad?

Alice: Yeah, it’s great. We moved in yesterday and already entertained some guests.

Steve: Wow, that’s fast. I assume you used some movers?

Alice: Nah, we just bagged everything up and moved. It only took a few hours, but we haven’t arranged everything the way we want it to be yet.

Andrew: All right. Sue, it’s your turn, I’m gonna put you on the spot.

Suzanne: OK.

Andrew: So, what verbs did you hear in that conversation that ended with the /d/ “-ed” sound?

Suzanne: So, I heard moved, right? We moved in yesterday. And I heard entertained, we entertained some guests. Used, used some movers. And bagged, we just bagged everything up. And arranged, we haven't arranged everything. Those words ended with a voiced consonant, so we add a "D" sound.

Andrew: Exactly, again. So, the temptation is there for people to use their eyes when they're speaking English, right? You see "-ed" you wanna pronounce it /ed/ moved. But this is wrong, English is wacky and weird and wonderful, but definitely wacky and weird. And so we can't say mov-ed, we have to say moved. Entertain-ed? No, entertained. Assum-ed? No, assumed. OK? So again, when the end of the verb has a voiced consonant, then we must use that "D" ending to pronounce the past tense verb.

Suzanne: Awesome. Now, let's move on to our third and last ending sound. The /ɪd/ sound. When do we use /ɪd/?

Andrew: That is a very good question Sue, when do we use /ɪd/?

Suzanne: The only time you use /ɪd/ is whenever you have a simple past that ends with a /t/ a "T" or a "D" sound. So if you think about it, we just used the endings /t/ and /d/ for "-ed."

Now say we have the word shout, OK? Like he shouted at me.

Andrew: OK.

Suzanne: /t/ is a voiceless consonant right? /t/, /t/, /t/, there's no vibration, so technically you would think, OK, so I add a "T" but then you would go shout /t/, doesn't make sense.

Andrew: Oh, yeah, I see. It doesn't really work. You can't add a voiceless "T," "-ed" ending to a verb that already ends with "T."

Suzanne: Exactly.

Andrew: Shout, /t/, nah, it doesn't work.

Suzanne: The same thing with hand, like, say, hand me that book? He handed me that book. You wouldn't say hand /t/.

Andrew: Oh yeah, hand /t/, no.

Suzanne: Right?

Andrew: It's impossible to pronounce.

Suzanne: Exactly. So English does this cool thing where we add a vowel in order to break up all of those weird sounds at the end to make it past. So instead of having lots of /t/ or /d/ sounds at the end, we add an /ɪ/ and a /d/ or an /e/ and a /d/. So it's shouted, or handed.

Andrew: Shouted or handed. Yeah, I hear it. There's a very small vowel sound that we insert to break that up, right?

Suzanne: Yeah. So why don't we listen to an example conversation using the /ɪd/ ending like shouted, or handed.

Andrew: Very good and, once again guys, how many examples of this sound that we used to pronounce the past tense can you hear in the following conversation? Keep your ears open for past tense verbs. OK, let's listen now.

Friend 1: Oh my gosh, I love your new jacket.

Friend 2: Oh thanks, I hated the old one, so I pleaded with my mom and she caved and bought me this.

Friend 1: Ah, I love it. But I thought the old one suited you well, too.

Friend 2: Yeah, but I was fitted for this one, so it's almost custom made.

Friend 1: Wow, they fitted you? What an unexpected treat.

Friend 2: Yeah, and they gave my mom a discounted price because she's frequented that store for over 10 years and befriended the owner.

Friend 1: Wow, sounds like your shopping experience exceeded expectations.

Andrew: OK, so, Sue, I'm gonna put you in the hot seat again and tell me, how many past tense verbs did you notice in that conversation that featured the /ɪd/ ending?

Suzanne: OK, I heard hated, right? Hate, hated. Plead, pleaded. Suited. Fitted. Unexpected.

Andrew: Yes.

Suzanne: Discounted.

Andrew: I heard that one too.

Suzanne: And frequented.

- Andrew: Yes, “frequented the shop.” Very good.
- Suzanne: Right? Befriended, right? Befriended the owner.
- Andrew: Yeah, so befriend becomes befriended.
- Suzanne: And then exceeded, exceeded expectations.
- Andrew: Exceeded expectations. Wow, Suzanne, you’ve got a really good ear for picking out these past tense verbs.
- Suzanne: Thanks, Andrew.
- Andrew: Well, Sue, that about takes us to the end of this episode. But I think before we go, we should recap what we talked about today.
- Suzanne: So, just to recap, whenever you’re speaking or reading aloud and you get to a verb in the simple past form, remember if the root word or the original verb ends with a voiceless or a non-vibrating consonant, you’re going to pronounce the ‘ED” like a /t/, liked worked. If you get to a word that the root word ends in a voiced consonant, then you will pronounce the “-ed” ending like /d/, a /d/, like robbed, robbed. And finally, if you have a word in the simple past, with a root verb that ends with a /t/ or a /d/ sound, you’re going to add an /ɪd/ as the “-ed” ending, like hated or exceeded.
- Andrew: Everyone, I would also like to add that the first step to incorporating these three different pronunciation patterns into your English is just to be aware that they exist. So, now that you know that “-ed,” past tense “-ed” in English, is pronounced three different ways depending on the ending of the verb, you can keep your ears open for it when you’re listening to English. When you are listening to Culips, how do we pronounce past tense verbs? This is the first step in making your pronunciation sound natural, is just being aware that they exist and then slowly, over time, you can start pronouncing the verbs the correct way in your own speech as well. But don’t stress out and feel like you have to make the change suddenly, all at once because, you know, it’s a really difficult thing to actually speak in a second language. And pay attention to the end of a verb to determine if it’s voiced or voiceless. This is really difficult. So it’s a slow change, and the first step is just being aware that these pronunciation rules exist in the first place.
- Suzanne: I agree.

Andrew: Guys, I highly recommend that you visit our website, Culips.com, to download the study guide for this episode. There's a lot of information that we gave you today, and you can have it all conveniently right at your fingertips in the study guide by just downloading it on Culips.com. So if you wanna get deeper into making your pronunciation sound more natural, visit the website to get the study guide. Once again, it is Culips.com.

Thanks for teaching us today, Sue, it was a very educational lesson today. Thank you.

Suzanne: Yeah, my pleasure.

Andrew: We'll talk to you next time, everybody. Bye.

Suzanne: Bye.

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Practice exercises

1. Practice saying these past tense verbs. Write each verb's final sound after the arrow. For example: Parked → KT

| | | |
|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Packed → | Pleaded → | Reached → |
| Jumped → | Opened → | Tweeted → |
| Rubbed → | Tasted → | Obeded → |
| Backed → | Screamed → | Spiked → |
| Allowed → | Pasted → | Moved → |

2. Organize the verbs according to their “-ed” sound.

Worked
Retreated
Placed
Rained
Played

Begged
Armed
Pleated
Brushed
Matched

Hoped
Created
Visited
Changed
Ended

/t/

/d/

/ɪd/

| | | |
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| | | |

3. Listen and repeat using the following dialogues.

MP3 Files can be downloaded by visiting this link:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1hn_LUS_T3GBzxH0BtKUI9gcShCUM12hj

A: I love the paint color you picked!

B: Thanks, it was inspired by my trip to Italy.

A: Oh, you travelled to Italy?

B: Yeah, we picked Italy for our honeymoon and worked our way south to Sicily.

A: You backpacked your way down?

B: Yeah. We stayed in hostels and hitchhiked our way down the coast.

A: Wow, that sounds like a vacation I've only dreamed about, honestly.

A: Hey, Mike, here's the new key. The landlord changed the old ones.

B: Oh, thanks. Yeah, he popped his head in yesterday and let me know he called the locksmith. Hey, by the way, I introduced myself to the new roommate. She moved in yesterday.

A: Oh cool, yeah. I haven't managed to speak to her yet.

B: She cooked us some lunch! Fried up some chicken!

A: Ha! Well, sounds like we definitely scored in the roommate department.

Answers

1.

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Packed → KT | Pleaded → DID | Reached → CHT |
| Jumped → PT | Opened → ND | Tweeted → TID |
| Rubbed → BD | Tasted → TID | Obeded → YD |
| Backed → KT | Screamed → MD | Spiked → KT |
| Allowed → WD | Pasted → TID | Moved → VD |

2.

| /t/ | /d/ | /ɪd/ |
|------------|------------|-------------|
| Worked | Armed | Retreated |
| Placed | Rained | Created |
| Brushed | Played | Pleated |
| Hoped | Changed | Ended |
| Matched | Begged | Visited |

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