

The past simple of 'to be'

Introduction



They **were** at the reception desk 5 minutes ago but they are not there now.

Construction

| Affirmative | Negative | Interrogative | |
|------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| | | Full form | Contracted form |
| I was | I was not | I wasn't | Was I? |
| You were | You were not | You weren't | Were you? |
| He was | He was not | He wasn't | Was he? |
| She was | She was not | She wasn't | Was she? |
| It was | It was not | It wasn't | Was it? |
| We were | We were not | We weren't | Were we? |
| They were | They were not | They weren't | Were they? |

Short answers

| | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Question: | 'to be' + subject + adjective/noun | Was she at work? |
| Affirmative answer: | Yes + subject + 'to be' | Yes, she was. |
| Negative answer: | No + subject + 'to be' + not | No, she wasn't. |

Note that

We do not use the contracted form for affirmative answers.

Affirmative

Yes, I was.
Yes, you were.
Yes, she was.
Yes, he was.
Yes, it was.
Yes, we were.
Yes, they were.

Negative

No, I wasn't.
No, you weren't.
No, she wasn't.
No, he wasn't.
No, it wasn't.
No, we weren't.
No, they weren't.

Examples



Hans **was** 35 last year so this year he is 36.



There **was** a lot of traffic in London last night



Tom and Mary **were** in Paris last week, they **were not** in London.



Were your visitors Swiss? No they **weren't**, they **were** French.



We **were** in the Alps for our holiday, it **was** wonderful.



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