Taaldus

DUTCH VERBS · CHEAT SHEET

Simple Past *(imperfectum, onvoltooid verleden tijd)*

The *SoFTKeTCHuP* rule for *-te* or *-de*, its pitfalls, and the irregular verbs that change their vowel.

How to form it

Formula: stem + *-te(n)* or *-de(n)*, and which ending you use depends on the stem's last consonant.

Take *werken* and *groeien* as examples:

1. Start with the infinitive: *werken*, *groeien*.
2. Drop *-en* to get the stem: *werk*, *groei*.
3. Check the stem's last consonant. If it's one of *S, F, T, K, CH, P* (the letters of *SoFTKeTCHuP*, also called *'t kofschip*), add *-te*; otherwise add *-de*. Add an extra *-n* for the plural. For:
   - *werk* ends in *k*: *+te → werkte*, *+ten → werkten*
   - *groei* ends in a vowel: *+de → groeide*, *+den → groeiden*

	REGULAR		IRREGULAR	
Pronoun	**werken**	**groeien**	**zijn**	**hebben**
ik, jij, u, hij, zij, het	werk**te**	groei**de**	was	had
wij, jullie, zij	werk**ten**	groei**den**	waren	hadden

> *Hij **werkte** vorig jaar in een restaurant.*
> He worked at a restaurant last year.

Choosing -te or -de: two pitfalls

Judge the consonant from the infinitive, not the present-tense stem. *Reizen* has a *z* (not the *s* you see in the stem *reis*), so it takes *-de*: *reisde*. Same for *leven → leefde*.

A stem that already ends in *-t* still gets *-te*: *praten → praatte*. You write the double *t* or *d* (*landen → landde*), even though you don't hear it.

Irregular verbs: vowel change instead of -te/-de

Many of the most common Dutch verbs ignore the rule above completely. They change their vowel instead: *lezen → las*, *komen → kwam*. There is no formula; these forms are memorized.

Common mistakes

> A common mistake: adding *-te* or *-de* to an irregular verb. *Gaan* doesn't become *gaande*, it's *ging*. If a verb changes its vowel, the SoFTKeTCHuP rule doesn't apply at all.

> Another one: reaching for the imperfectum to report a single recent event in conversation. Spoken Dutch tends to prefer the perfectum there: *Ik heb gisteren gewerkt* sounds more natural than *Ik werkte gisteren* for a one-off fact. The imperfectum is for background, habits and descriptions, not for announcing that something happened.

Practice the simple past in the Verb Quiz
taaldus.com/verb-conjugation-quiz

Full explanation
taaldus.com/verb-grammar/simple-past