

# Past Tense

*How is the past tense formed in Czech?*

*How can it be translated into English?*

*What complications of past-tense usage need to be noted?*

The past tense in Czech is formed by combining an **auxiliary** verb – which indicates the person and number of the verb’s subject – with a **past form of the main verb**. The past form of the main verb is called the **past participle** or the ***l*-participle**, and it **agrees in gender and number** with the subject of the verb.

Here are some examples of the past tense that have been analyzed for auxiliary verb (bolded) and *l*-participle (bolded and underlined):

Tam **jsme** celou noc **tancovali**.  
We **danced** all night there.

**Byli jste** někdy v České republice?  
**Have you** ever **been** in the Czech Republic?

Když **jsem** **byla** malá, **bydlela jsem** v Austrálii.  
When **I was** little, **I used to live** in Australia.

Už máš, co **jsi** **chtěl**?  
Do you already have what you **wanted**?

Moře **vypadalo** jako zrcadlo.  
The sea **looked** like a mirror.

Hokejisté **vyhráli** zlato!  
The hockey players **won** gold!

Nečekaně **zemřel** zpěvák Petr Muk.  
The singer Petr Muk **has** unexpectedly **died**.

Psi **štěkali** a kočky **mňoukaly**.  
The dogs **were barking** and the cats **were meowing**.

Notice that the **Czech past tense can be translated variously** into English. Thus the past-tense form *Bydlel/Bydlela jsem...* could be rendered — depending on the context that it occurs in — as *I was living...*, *I lived...*, *I have lived...*, or *I used to live...*

Notice also that the auxiliary verb **in third-person singular and plural** (the last four examples above) is a null verb. In other words, **there is no auxiliary verb** for these cases; the *l*-participle alone suffices to render the past tense.

Finally note the various forms of the *l*-participle as it **takes endings appropriate to the number and gender** of the subject: ***-l*** (masculine singular); ***-la*** (feminine singular or neuter plural); ***-lo*** (neuter singular); ***-li*** (masculine animate plural); ***-ly*** (feminine plural and masculine inanimate plural).

Given their need to be in grammatical agreement, ***l*-participles for the pronoun *vy* cover a whole range** of possibilities depending on the number and gender of the *vy* subject:

<b><u>Byl</u> jste</b> někdy v Praze?	The addressee is one male.
<b><u>Byla</u> jste</b> někdy v Praze?	The addressee is one female.
<b><u>Byli</u> jste</b> někdy v Praze?	The addressee is plural and contains at least one male.
<b><u>Byly</u> jste</b> někdy v Praze?	The addressee is plural and all female.

To see how these factors play out in all the past-tense forms of a given verb, here is the past paradigm of *být* followed by some examples of its usage:

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
(já) <b>byl / byla jsem</b>	(my)	<b>byli / byly jsme</b>	
(ty) <b>byl / byla jsi</b>	(vy)	<b>byli / byly jste</b>	[sg formal: <b>byl / byla jste</b> ]
(on) <b>byl</b>	(oni)	<b>byli</b>	
(ona) <b>byla</b>	(ony)	<b>byly</b>	
(ono) <b>bylo</b>	(ona)	<b>byla</b>	

**Byla jsem** celý víkend v práci.  
I [**fem**] **was** at work all weekend.

Všichni tři **byli** docela normální kluci.  
All three **were** completely normal boys.

Ještě **jsme** v Americe **nebyly**.  
We [**fem pl**] **haven't been** to America yet.

Holky **byly** unavené.  
The girls **were** tired.

Okno **bylo** rozbito.  
The window **was** broken.

S kým **jsi byl** nejvíce spokojen?  
Who **were you** [**masc sg**] most satisfied with?

Kde **jste byli** minulý týden?  
Where **were you** [**masc pl**] last week?

Kdo už **byl** někdy v Evropě?  
Who **has** ever **been** to Europe?



psát:	psal, psala...
minout:	minul, minula...

**Some monosyllabic verbs in -át retain the long vowel** in the past; common examples include *hrát* (*hrál, hrála*), *stát* (*stál, stála*), *bát se* (*bál se, bála se*), and *přát* (*přál, přála*).

**Many verbs have *l*-participles that cannot be predicted from the infinitive and must be memorized**, although sometimes they share something in common with the non-past conjugation. Some common examples include the following:

péct:	pekl, pekla...	
říct:	řekl, řekla...	non-past: řeknu, řekneš...
číst:	četl, četla...	non-past: čtu, čteš...
jíst:	jedl, jedla...	non-past: (oni) <u>je</u> dí
pomocť:	pomohl, pomohla...	
mocť:	mohl, mohla...	non-past: (já) <u>mo</u> hu
jít:	šel, šla...	

### Word order and the past tense

Past-tense **auxiliary verbs** are generally **found in the second position in a sentence** or clause. This is evident in all the examples given here.

### Some further complications

For **reflexive verbs used in the past-tense *ty* form**, the auxiliary verb *jsi* combines with the reflexive *se* and *si* to yield *ses* and *sis* respectively:

Jak bylo? **Měla ses** dobře? Povědej a nic nevynech!  
 How was it? **Did you have** a good time? Tell me and don't leave anything out!  
 mít se = měla ses

Co **sis koupil** jako suvenýr?  
 What **did you buy yourself** for a souvenir?  
 koupit si = koupil sis

Mlčky jsi stál a **ty ses bál** mluvit.  
 You stood quietly and **you were afraid** to speak.  
 bát se = bál ses

In spoken Czech, the **-l** of the masculine singular form of some *l*-participles is often **dropped**. These are usually short verbs and always end in a stem-final consonant. Common examples include:

říct:	řekl > řek
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mocht:            mohl > moh

Also **in spoken Czech, the *jsi* auxiliary can shorten to -s and combine with the initial word of the clause.** Examples include:

Tys tam **nebyla!**  
**You weren't** there!

Je skvělý, žeš všechny ty testy tak **zvládla.**  
It's great that **you aced** all those tests.

Cos tam **dělal?**  
What **were you doing** there?