

Super Irregular Verbs

Most people know about **irregular verbs**. They are verbs of which past forms and past participle do not follow the regular pattern of most verbs. The fact that there is a group of verbs which are irregular even in **simple always**¹ normally referred to with the misnomer simple present doesn't seem to get the attention it deserves.

Most **auxiliary verbs** are irregular even within **simple always**¹. They don't simply take an **s** for **third person singular** like other verbs do and some have more than two forms in **simple always**. Moreover, while other verbs have only one form in the past, the verb **to be**, also in the past, has a different form. Therefore the suggestion to call them **super irregular verbs**. Pronunciation of some super irregular verbs changes different from what would be expected from the spelling, for example, say [seɪ] and said [seɪd]. In those cases, phonetic transcription is given using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).²

to be

Simple Always¹

singular	1st person	I	am
	2nd person	you	are
	3rd person	the rest	is
plural	1st person	we	are
	2nd person	you	are
	3rd person	they	are
Past singular	1st person	I	was (were)
	2nd person	you	were
	3rd person	the rest	was (were)
plural	1st person	we	were
	2nd person	you	were
	3rd person	they	were
Past participle:	been		

Note: in past conditional phrases, which are considered hypothetical, **were** is used with all grammatical persons including first and third person singular.

to have

I	have	had
you	have	had
the rest	has	had
we	have	had
you	have	had
they	have	had
past participle	had	

¹An explanation about why **simple always** is a better term than simple present in the handout Verb Grammar: an analytic approach. Available via: <http://www.held.com.br/resources/#tenses>

²In this hand-out, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) from the International Phonetic Association (also IPA) is used. To hear the sounds which are indicated by the characters of the IPA, click on the symbols in one of the following IPA charts.

www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/IPAcharts/inter_chart_2018/IPA_2018.html

or

www.seeingspeech.ac.uk/ click on [IPA charts]

to do

I	do [du]	did
you	do	did
the rest	does [dʌz]	did
we	do	did
you	do	did
they	do	did

past participle done

Enfos

Note: one could say that third person form of **to do** is actually irregular only in pronunciation.

Contraction

In most cases, forms of **auxiliary verbs** in **simple always** can be contracted with the previous word, using an apostrophe. However, most verbs which normally are **auxiliary verbs** can also function as **main verbs**. Contracted forms are not used when the **auxiliary verb** functions as a **main verb** or when it is the last word of a clause.

I am because I think.
I think therefore I am.
Are you hungry? Yes, I am.
I've got a car.
I have a car

Not: ~~I'm because I think.~~
Not: ~~I think therefore I'm.~~
Not: ~~Yes, I'm.~~
Not: ~~I've a car~~

Modal verbs

Modal verbs are a type of auxiliary verbs. They are super irregular in the sense that they don't take an **s** for third person singular.

If a sentence has a modal verb, it is normally the first verb of the sentence. Only the first verb in a sentence can take third person singular **s**. This results in sentences containing modal verbs normally not having any verb taking third person singular **s**.

Tomorrow Susan goes swimming.
Tomorrow Susan will go swimming.
Tomorrow Susan might go swimming.
Tomorrow Susan can go swimming.
Tomorrow Susan may go swimming.

Mrs. Brown has lived in the same house for 36 years.
Mrs. Brown may have lived in the same house for 36 years.

Modal verbs have no **present participle**, or **past participle**. Some **modal verbs** are actually the past of other **verbs**, **modal** or not but their meanings have become so different that now they can be considered different words. This might, in part, explain their strange behaviour.

The verb to say

Although the verb **to say** is not an **auxiliary verb** it still is a **super irregular verb**. Strange is that for **third person singular**, there is an unpredictable change in pronunciation. The change in spelling is regular but the change in pronunciation is irregular. It causes many learners to make mistakes with this.

to say

I	say [seɪ]	said [seɪd]
you	say	said
the rest	says [seɪz]	said
we	say	said
you	say	said
they	say	said
past participle	said [seɪd]	