

44 Past simple of *be*

Deborah Kerr and Ingrid Bergman were film stars in the 1950s, but they weren't American. Deborah Kerr was British and Ingrid Bergman was Swedish.



1 Form

We make the past tense of the verb *be* with *was* and *were*:

POSITIVE		
I/He/She/It	was	French.
We/You/They	were	

There are no short forms of *was* and *were* in positive sentences.

NEGATIVE		SHORT FORM	
I/He/She/It	was not	(wasn't)	there.
We/You/They	were not	(weren't)	

NATURAL ENGLISH We use the short forms *wasn't* and *weren't* when we are speaking to someone and in informal writing.

QUESTIONS	SHORT ANSWERS
Was I/he/she/it there?	Yes, I/he/she/it was. No, I/he/she/it wasn't (was not).
Were we/you/they there?	Yes, we/you/they were. No, we/you/they weren't (were not).
Where were you? How much was it? What was the name of the film?	

 Pronunciation > 1.16, 1.17

2 Use

We use the past simple tense of *be* to talk about people and situations in the past. We often use dates and times with *was* and *were*:

Deborah Kerr and Ingrid Bergman were film stars in the 1950s.

Was he in the beginners' class last year?

It wasn't very cold in December.

Compare *was/were* with *is/are*:

The weather was hot yesterday but it's cooler today.

1920s films were in black and white but now most films are in colour.

Present simple of *be* > Unit 35 To talk about actions in the past > Unit 47

