

FORGET-FORGOT-FORGOTTEN-ME-NOT

Tips on how to teach, practise and test irregular verbs

by Anna Roszkowska

1. Are they really so irregular?

To encourage your students to learn the verb forms you can help them find certain patterns in the irregularity. Cutting the lengthy list into a few shorter ones should make the task more approachable and less daunting. Why don't you ask your students to colour-code verbs of the same pattern or split them into separate categories in the table below.

PATTERN	EXAMPLE	MORE EXAMPLES
no change	<i>bet</i>	
two forms not three	<i>bring - brought</i>	
'-en' third form	<i>bitten</i>	
-t not -ed	<i>built</i>	
i - a - u	<i>begin - began - begun</i>	
-ay > -aid	<i>lay - laid</i>	
- ew and -own /-awn	<i>blow- blew - blown</i>	
?		

2. Pronunciation - the real challenge!

All too often our students studying for an irregular verbs test memorize the written form only, which may have disastrous consequences on their speaking skills!

a. Recognition exercises

e.g. Play any recording and ask your students to note down all irregular past simple and past participle forms they hear. Tell them to compare their lists in pairs or groups and then decide if they are spelled correctly.

b. Interactive games

e.g. Ask the class to stand in a circle and throw a ball or a foot bag to one another. Each time they throw the ball to someone they say one verb form. The person who catches the ball has to provide the other two forms of this verb. (e.g. **go** ... *went, gone* or **brought** ... *bring brought*)

c. Association method

As the pronunciation of some of the verb forms seems to be more difficult to remember than of the others, we need to focus on them while teaching. The simple association method might be of help:

On the board, list the following verbs - *catch, read, ride, eat, win*; tell the students to think of their past simple forms and put them on the board as well. Model the pronunciation and ask the group to think of other words that are pronounced the same way:

caught - kot (the Polish word for 'cat');
read - red; rode - road;
ate - eight; won - one

and join the pairs in sentences e.g.:

I caught a KOT; He read a red book;
Tom rode a horse on a road;
She ate eight rolls; Sam won one prize;

3. Meaning - another important issue!

Memorizing a list of words without recognising their meaning doesn't make much sense, does it? If so, why in so many cases our students can provide the correct verb form but do not understand what they have written? To avoid such situations you can try one of the following ideas:

a. Always teach in context!

Use every opportunity to present words in context, either a large one such as a text or just a sentence. The context will allow the students to associate the word with something meaningful and, in result, they will learn more effectively. Personalisation is another technique that provides immediate meaningful context for new lexical items.

b. Always test in context!

The way we test affects the way the students learn. If we don't want our students to learn lists by heart we cannot test in lists either! It's not possible to tell the difference between **lie-lied-lied** and **lie-lay-lain** without a context.

c. Use collocations!

Collocations seem to be the shortest but equally effective context. What's more, they can be used in a number of games.

A simple collocation game:

Divide the class into groups of three or four. Hand out a set of collocation cards per group. The task is to draw a card with a word or a phrase and come up with as many verbs (irregular) to collocate the phrase as possible. The verbs should be used in a sentence in the required grammatical structure e.g. present perfect. The student with the most (correct) sentences is the winner.

PHRASE CARDS:

A BIKE	A BOOK	A CUP OF TEA	A SONG
A FILM STAR	A CAR	A LETTER	SPAGHETTI
A PLANE	A TEST	A HAND	A FLOWER
FAST	A TABLE	A BALL	A FIRE
A LONG TIME	THE SUN	A TV PROGRAMME	NEWS
TEN POUNDS	A WORD	A FISH	IN A RESTAURANT
A/THE PHONE	TO DANCE	A T-SHIRT	A BALOON

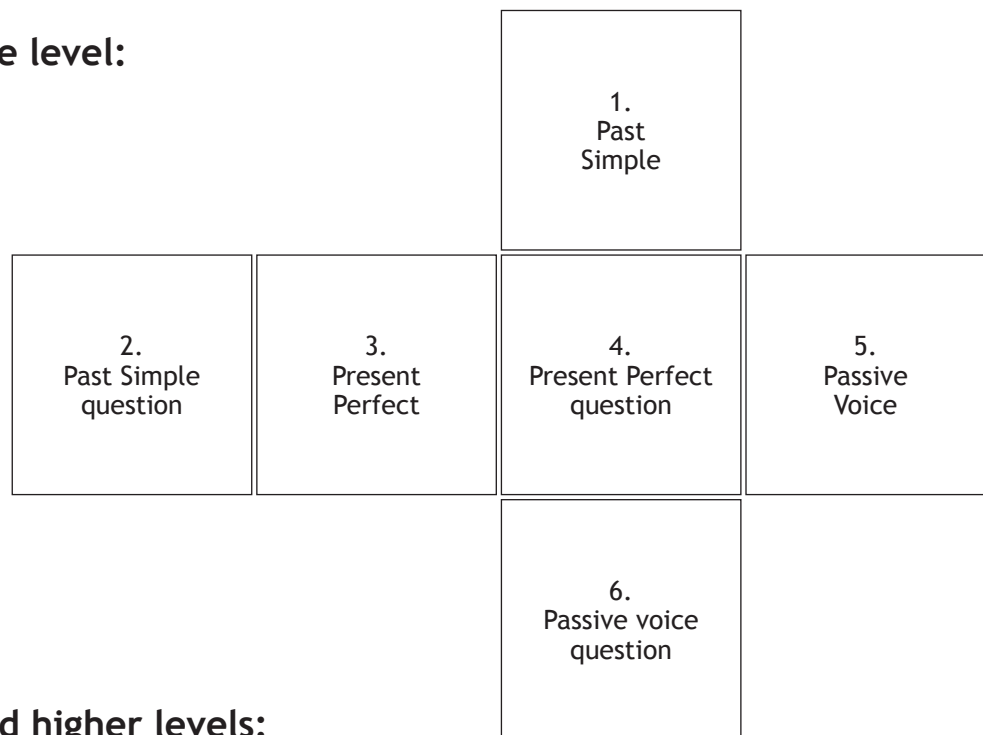
4. Grammatical frequency- does it matter?

Since the grammar curriculum imposes the introduction of the past simple form first, many students seem to underestimate the importance of the past participle considering it a marginal case. But is it? Apart from perfect tenses it is also the key element of passive voice, participle clauses and adjectives! We can make our students realise how frequent the PP form is by practising it in a variety of grammatical contexts. To do this you may prepare a text or set of sentences for the students to fill-in the gaps with the correct verb form or you may ask your class to play a simple game in groups of three or four:

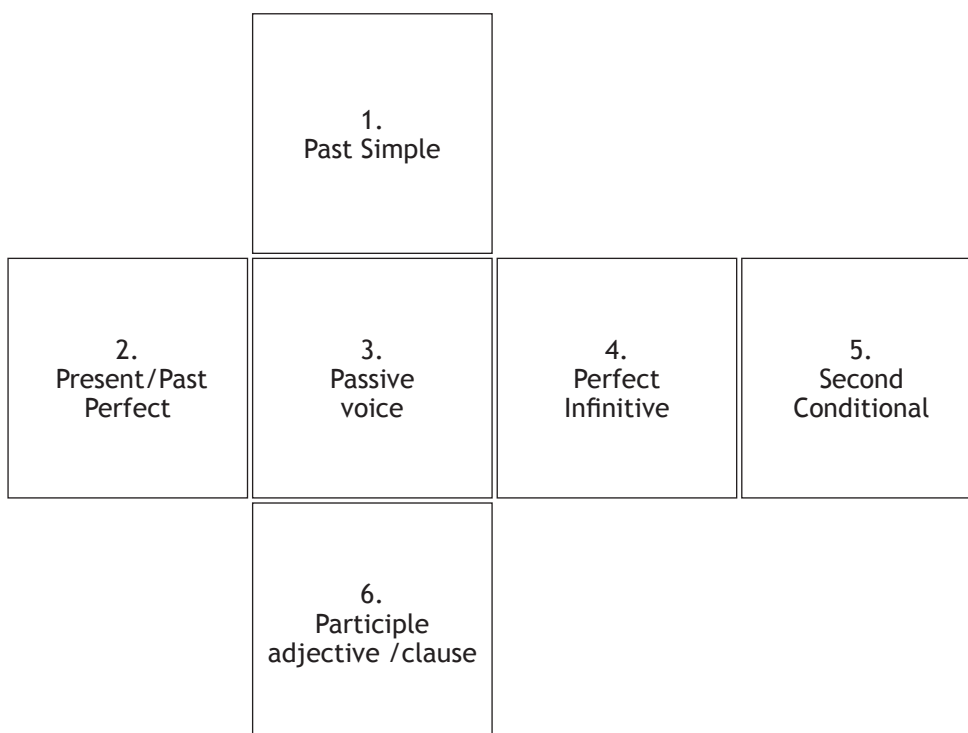
For this game students will need a dice and a set of verb cards. They are going to roll the dice and draw one verb card at a time. Their task is to produce a sentence with the appropriate form of the verb according to the following key:

DICE:

For pre-intermediate level:



For intermediate and higher levels:



VERB CARDS:

BRING	CATCH	TAKE	WRITE	DRAW
EAT	FIND	HIDE	KEEP	LOSE
PAY	SEE	SHOOT	SPEAK	SPREAD
TEACH	THROW	UNDERSTAND	WEAR	BREAK
CHOOSE	FORGET	HEAR	KNOW	SHOW

5. Kill two birds with one stone!

Our students learn quickly but they also forget easily. The young brain, no matter how flexible, requires frequent revisions and practice. It definitely isn't enough to spend a few lessons teaching and practising the pronunciation, spelling and meaning of the irregulars. Luckily, the verb forms can also be recycled while teaching other grammatical and lexical items. For instance, phrasal verbs seem a perfect opportunity! Just make sure that the phrasal verbs practice exercises offer a variety of grammatical structures and your students will revise the verb forms without even knowing it.

6. Peer to peer

Apart from formal testing we can check / revise irregular verbs by involving students themselves in the testing process. Information gap activities are a perfect solution if we do not insist on marking our students' competence but rather intend to check or refresh their memory.

STUDENT A

LIE ON A SOFA	lay	
CATCH A BALL		
DRAW A PICTURE		drawn
FLY A PLANE	flew	
HEAR A SOUND	heard	heard
DIG A HOLE		
TEACH A LANGUAGE	taught	taught
BECOME FAMOUS		become
RING A BELL	rang	
RIDE A BIKE		ridden

STUDENT B

LIE ON A SOFA		lain
CATCH A BALL	caught	caught
DRAW A PICTURE	drew	
FLY A PLANE		flown
HEAR A SOUND		
DIG A HOLE	dug	dug
TEACH A LANGUAGE		
BECOME FAMOUS	became	
RING A BELL		rung
RIDE A BIKE	rode	