



# Talking About the Past in Foreign Languages

KS3

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Ages 11-14



3 min read

## Why Do We Need to Talk About Yesterday?

Every day, we do things and want to tell people about them later. Maybe you went to the park, ate an ice cream, or watched a great film. In real conversations, whether you're speaking **Spanish**, **French**, or **German**, you need to explain what happened in the **past**. That's why learning how to talk about yesterday is super important in any language.

## What is the Past Tense?

The **past tense** is a special way of changing verbs to show that something already happened. Think of verbs as action words — like "play", "eat", "go", or "see". In English, we often add "-ed" to the end (like "played" or "watched"), but other languages do it differently.

Think of it like changing your clothes for different weather. Just as you wear a coat when it's cold and a t-shirt when it's hot, verbs change their form to match whether something is happening now or happened before.

## How Do Different Languages Do It?

Every language has its own rules for the past tense. In **French**, you might say "j'ai mangé" (I have eaten) to describe eating lunch yesterday. In **Spanish**, you could say "comí" (I ate). In **German**, it's "ich aß" (I ate). The structure is different, but the idea is the same: you're telling someone that the action finished in the past.

Many languages also use **time words** to help explain the past. Words like "yesterday", "last week", "this morning", or "two days ago" give clues that you're talking about something that already happened.

## Two Main Ways to Show the Past

Most languages use one of two main systems. Some use a **simple past** — just one word that shows the action is finished. Others use a **compound past** — combining a helper verb (like "have") with the main verb. In English, we say "I went" (simple) or "I have gone" (compound). Both mean the same thing, just described differently.

Think of it like two different ways of describing eating a sandwich. You could say "I ate a sandwich" or "I have eaten a sandwich" — both are true, just said in slightly different ways.

## Why Does This Matter?

Learning to use the past tense helps you become a **confident speaker** in any language. You can share stories about your weekend, talk about holidays, or describe what you did at school. It's one of the building blocks that lets you have real conversations with people from other countries. Practice makes perfect, so don't worry if it feels tricky at first!