

Ask about English

Verbs past endings



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Claudio asks:

My question is the following: How can I pronounce the end of the regular verb the best? Sometimes it sounds like t sometimes d, sometimes like id. I want to know the rules.

Professor Michael Swan answers:

Claudio, that's an interesting question, thanks. Let's start by thinking about the difference between two kinds of sound: some sounds are what we call voiced – if you pronounce "m" or "l" or "v" or "d" you make a sound in your throat. We call that voicing and if you put your hand on your throat when you say those sounds, you can feel vibrations.

Try it, put your hand on your throat and say "m" "l" "v" "d".

Those are voiced sounds. Vowels are voiced too. If you say "A" "e" "o" you can feel the voicing and if you didn't voice them, they would be quite different "a" "e" "o". But some sounds are not voiced. For example "p" "t" "k" "f" if you say them, "p" "t" "k" "f", there's no vibration in your throat at all. They're whispered, unvoiced.

OK, now let's get back to past tenses. If a verb ends with a voiced sound like "m" "l" "v" or a vowel, we make the regular past with another voiced sound, "d", so we say "seemed, filled, lived, played". The voicing isn't very strong, especially if you're talking fast, but it's more or less there. And if a verb ends with an unvoiced sound like "p" or "k" or "f" we make the past with another unvoiced sound "t" so we say "hoped, looked, stuffed". So that's the difference between past forms with "ed" and past forms with "t".

Now what about "id"?

Well, we use this after a "t" or a "d". It's pretty hard to say "wait't" or "end'd" so we add a vowel and we say "waited" (waitid) or "ended" (Endid).

So those are the three possibilities: "d" after a voiced sound, t after an unvoiced sound and "id" after "t" or "d". There you are. It's a bit complicated, but I hope it's clear.

And now, something for you to think about; plural "s" can be pronounced in three ways: "z" "ss" or "is". Days, books, buses and the same goes for third person "s" and possessive "s": "z" "ss" or "is". So, when do we use which one? See if you can work it out.

Good luck with your English studies Claudio, and thanks very much for your interesting question.

Claudio:

It was a great pleasure to talk to you.

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