

GAME OF THE WEAK

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English verbs are traditionally divided into two great classes, according to the way they form their past tense and past participle:

- * Strong (or irregular) verbs are so called because they have within themselves the resources to indicate a change in tense without recourse to an ending. Such verbs usually form their past tense through a change in vowel and form their past participle by adding -n or -en, along with the vowel shift. Examples are begin, began, begun; write, wrote, written.
- * Weak (or regular) verbs exhibit a pattern in which the root-vowel never changes, but -d, -ed, or -t are affixed to form the past tense and past participle. Examples are finish, finished, finished; walk, walked, walked.

Finally, there is a special class of verbs that show both strong and weak characteristics in that they add a -d or -t to form their past tense but may also undergo a vowel change. Examples are lose, lost, lost; teach, taught, taught.

The history of the language is marked by a progressive winning out of the weak verb form over the strong. Thus, Old English helpan, healp, holpen has become help, helped, helped, and, except in the most poetic of settings, crowed has supplanted crew as the past tense of to crow. Moreover, we have come to accept the weak verbs as the "normal" pattern so that all new verbs that enter the language are invariably conjugated weakly, radioed and televised being two twentieth century instances.

Despite this trend, we shake our heads and our fingers at the illiterate who uses knowed for knew, goed for went, or seed for saw, and we smile patronizingly at the little child who innocently creates drawed, teached, and writed.

The ten -ed past tense verbs that follow may look like the abusing or amusing coinages of an unschooled adult or child; but they are, in fact, perfectly legitimate forms in their proper settings. Before looking at Answers and Solutions, try to use each verb correctly in an English sentence.

FLIED	LEAVED	RINGED	SPITTED	TREADED
HANGED	LETTED	SHINED	STICKED	WEAVED