How to use the "to be" verb

The "to be" is a verb used to describe something or someone.

In English, it can be used to say different things according to the context. However, the most common **use of the to be verb** is to talk about names, ages, feeling, nationalities, and professions, especially when talking in the **present tense**.

The most tricky thing about this verb, however, is that It's also one of the most irregular verbs in the **English language**. This means, that unlike regular verbs, which barely change when used when different subjects -or even in different tenses-, and when they do, they follow a pattern, the "to be" verb changes almost completely in most of its forms.

Forms of "to be"

Since the to be verb is highly irregular, it's written in different ways according to the tense of the verb (whether if it's present, past, future, or even in mixed tenses), and it also varies according to the subject. Let's see the forms this verb can take when used next to the subjects.

Base form: Be

This is the most basic form of the verb, and it's how we can find it in the dictionary. It's mostly used when using imperatives, and also as the infinitive. Some examples are:

Be *nice to your sister!* (imperative)
*I like to **be** at my house.* (infinitive)

Present

This form of the verb is mainly used in the **simple present**, and its meaning can change depending on the use in the context. Also, when writing, the present form of the to be verb can be shortened.

Here is the to be for all the subjects in both long and short forms for affirmative sentences, and also for negative sentences with to be.

Verb "to be": Present

Pronoun	Affirmative	Negative
I	I am – I'm	I am not – I'm not
you	you are – you're	you are not – you aren't
he	he is – he's	he is not – he isn't
she	she is – she's	she is not – she isn't
it	it is – it's	it is not – it isn't
we	we are – we're	we are not – we aren't
they	they are – they're	they are not – they aren't
you	you are – you're	you are not – you aren't

Affirmative:

I am – I'm

you are – you're

he/she/it is – he's/she's/it's

we/you/they are – we're/you're/they're

Negative:

I am not – I'm not

you are not – You aren't

he/she/it isn't

we/you/they aren't

Let's see some examples of this for sentences with the "to be" verb.

For names:
*She **is** Sheila*

For ages:
*He **is** 6 years old.*

For feelings:
*Lauren and Sandra **are** happy.*

For nationalities:
*We **are** from Thailand.*

For professions:
*You **aren't** a painter, you **are** a singer.*

Past: Was / Were

When **talking about the past,** the to be verb changes its form again. This is how it looks with the different subject pronouns.

Verb "to be": Past

Pronoun	Affirmative	Negative
I	I was	I was not – I wasn't
you	you were	you were not – you weren't
he	he was	he was not – he wasn't
she	she was	she was not – she wasn't
it	it was	it was not – it wasn't
we	we were	we were not – we weren't
they	they were	they were not – they weren't
you	you were	you were not – you weren't

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I was – I wasn't

you were – You weren't

he/she/it was – he wasn't/she wasn't/it wasn't

we/they/you were – we weren't/they weren't/you weren't

Some examples of the past form of the to be are:

I *was* at the school yesterday

You *were* 10 years old last year.

Billy and Elliot *were* students, now they are doctors.

It *was* raining a while ago.