

Dutch Past Tense Cheat Sheet

A handy overview of the two main Dutch past tenses (OVT & VTT). Keep this sheet in your binder as a quick reference.

1. Simple Past (OVT)

Used in **storytelling**, **background**, and **chronological events**.

Regular Verbs (Weak)

werken → werkte / werkten

wandelen → wandelde / wandelden

Rule: 't kofschip / soft ketchup

Irregular Verbs (Strong)

lezen → las / lazen

gaan → ging / gingen

zien → zag / zagen

Mnemonic: If the stem ends in t, k, f, s, ch, p → use -te/-ten. Otherwise → use -de/-den.

Tip: 'Soft ketchup' is an easier way to remember the letters.

2. Present Perfect (VTT)

Most common in daily speech. Focuses on result or experience.

Form

Auxiliary (hebben/zijn) + past participle
(ge-...-d/t or irregular)

Examples

Ik heb gewerkt.

Wij hebben een boek gelezen.

Hij is naar huis gegaan.

Most verbs use *hebben*. Use *zijn* with movement or change of state verbs.

3. OVT vs. VTT – Which one to use?

- OVT: storytelling, background, chronological order.
- VTT: daily conversation, result matters now.

OVT Example

Gisteren werkte ik thuis.
(Yesterday I worked at home.)

VTT Example

Ik heb vandaag veel gewerkt.
(I worked a lot today.)

4. Quick Key Points

- Two main past tenses: OVT (simple past) & VTT (present perfect).
- Regular verbs: follow 't kofschip / soft ketchup rule.
- Irregular verbs: vowel changes (see free verb list).
- Most verbs use hebben; verbs of movement/change use zijn.
- Daily Dutch: VTT is preferred; OVT is used for stories.

