

## Perfective (past tense)

The perfective is probably the most immediately useful verb form to learn, as indicated by the fact that it is by far the most salient form found in Tlingit texts. The Tlingit perfective is roughly equivalent in meaning to the English past tense. It indicates a situation which is complete, translating as “s/he did it”. Example perfective forms are *aawaxáa* “s/he ate it” and *woogaaX* “s/he cried”. The perfective form for some state verbs translates as “became that way” or “got to be that way” (see the “verb types” section for a description of state verbs). For example, the perfective form of the state verb *wusi.áax’w* means “it got sour” and the perfective form of the state verb *kooowligóos* means “it got cloudy”.

The perfective can be either affirmative or negative. The affirmative perfective is characterized by the perfective prefix *wu-*, and the +I form of the classifier for all verb types. Remember that +I classifiers contain the vowel *i-* (except for *ya-*), and are limited to these: *si-*, *dzi-*, *shi-*, *ji-*, *li-*, *dli-*, *ya-*, and *di-*. The perfective prefix *wu-* occurs after any thematic prefixes (such as *ka-*, *ya-*, *tu-*, *ji-*, etc.) and before the subject prefix. The perfective prefix contracts with neighboring prefixes, making it difficult for the untrained eye to spot. Let’s consider a few straightforward perfective forms first and then move on to a systematic discussion of common contractions with the prefix *wu-*. The examples below clearly show the perfective prefix *wu-* and the +I form of the classifiers (*si-* and *di-*). In general, verb stem forms are unpredictable with respect to vowel tone and length in the perfective. Hyphens have been inserted in the verbs below to show their component parts. The final two examples have first person plural (“we”) subjects and therefore have the subject prefix *tu-*.

<i>asgeiwúX wu-si-tee</i>	“s/he became a seiner”
<i>aX éet wu-di-shée</i>	“s/he helped me”
<i>kóox wu-tu-si-ée</i>	“we cooked rice”
<i>wu-tu-di-xaash</i>	“we did some cutting”

The perfective prefix *wu-* systematically contracts with certain subject prefixes. Charts have been completed which illustrate all prefix combinations and are included in this resource. Please refer to the perfective chart to find all prefix combinations associated with the perfective aspect. The major details of the perfective prefix combinations will be discussed here to help clarify the information found in the chart. We will begin with the combination of the perfective prefix *wu-* with each subject prefix, using the verb “drink it”, which has the +I classifier *di-* in the affirmative perfective.

First person singular: *wu-* + *xa-* = *xwa-*

Ex: *xwadináa* “I drank it”

Second person singular: *wu-* + *ee-* = *yi-*

Ex: *yidináa* “you drank it”

Third person (transitive): *a-* (3<sup>rd</sup> person object prefix) + *wu-* + *ø-* = *aw-*

Ex: *awdináa* “s/he drank it”  
*has awdináa* “they drank it”

Note that when both the subject and object are third person (“he, she, it, they”), the third person object pronoun *a-* is present, as is the case in the example above. The third person object pronoun *a-* is present ONLY when the subject is also third person. For third person intransitive verbs (those with no object) there is no *a-* prefix.

Third person (intransitive): *wu-* + *ø-* = *wu-*

Ex: *at wudináa* “s/he drank (something)”  
*at has wudináa* “they drank (something)”

First person plural: *wu-* + *tu-* = *wutu-*

Ex: *wutudináa* “we drank it”

Note that the vowel in the first person plural subject prefix *tu-* becomes long (*too-*) when followed by a classifier that has no vowel. This is shown on the perfective prefix combination chart.

Second person plural: *wu-* + *yi-* = *yeey-*

Ex: *yeeydináa* “you all drank it”

Fourth person: *wu-* + *du-* = *wudu-*

Ex: *wuduwanáa* “someone drank it”

The above contractions hold true under the following conditions: 1) when the verb has no thematic prefixes (such as *ka-*, *tu-*, *ji-*, *a-*, *etc.*), and 2) in the presence of all classifiers except for the classifier *ya-*. For verbs with thematic prefixes, the vowel on the subject prefix often drops out. Please refer to the perfective prefix combination chart to see the various combinations. The perfective prefix *wu-* and the subject prefixes further contract with the classifier *ya-* rendering the forms below, illustrated by the verbs “eat it” and “sing it”. It will be necessary to know that “eat it” is a zero (*ø-*) conjugation verb and “sing it” is a *ga-* conjugation verb.

First person singular: *wu-* + *xa-* + *ya-* = *xwaa-*

Ex: *xwaa~~x~~áa* “I ate it”

*xwaashee* “I sang it”

Second person singular: *wu-* + *ee-* + *ya-* = *iya-* / *yee-*

Ex: *iyaxáa* “you ate it”

*yeeshee* “you sang it”

Note that this combination renders two different contractions: *iya-* and *yee-*. The choice of contraction depends on the conjugation prefix of the verb. Zero (*ø-*) conjugation verbs such as “eat it” use the *iya-* contraction while all other conjugations (*na-*, *ga-*, *ca-*) use the *yee-* contraction, as does the *ga-* conjugation verb “sing it” given above. The conjugation prefix of any given verb in this resource is given in the Leer-Edwards theme in parentheses following the verb type (see the “Leer-Edwards theme” section for more information).

Third person (transitive): *a-* (3<sup>rd</sup> person object prefix) + *wu-* + *ø-* + *ya-* = *aawa-*

Ex: *aawaxáa* “s/he ate it”

*has aawaxáa* “they ate it”

*aawashee* “s/he sang it”

*has aawashee* “they sang it”

Third person (intransitive): *wu-* + *ø-* + *ya-* = *uwa-* / *woo-*

Ex: *at uwaxáa* “s/he ate”

*at wooshee* “s/he sang”

Again, it must be noted that this combination renders two possible contractions: *uwa-* and *woo-*, and that the conjugation prefix of the verb determines the choice of contraction. Zero conjugation verbs use *uwa-* while all others use *woo-*.

First person plural: *wu-* + *tu-* + *ya-* = *wutuwa-*

Ex: *wutuwxáa* “we ate it”

*wutuwashee* “we sang it”

Second person plural: *wu-* + *yi-* + *ya-* = *yeey-*

Ex: *yeeyxáa* “you all ate it”

*yeeyshee* “you all sang it”

Fourth person: *wu-* + *du-* + *ya-* = *wuduwa-*

Ex: *wuduwxáa* “someone ate it”

*wuduwashee* “someone sang it”

Assuming that you know the perfective verb stem shape and the conjugation prefix of the verb, you can construct perfective verb forms on your own by using the perfective prefix combination chart and the

information in this introduction. For example, given the verb *xwaa.éex'* “I invited him/her”, which is the first person singular form and a *ga*-conjugation verb, we should be able to come up with the second person singular form. The contraction *xwaa-* in the above verb tells us that the classifier in this verb is *ya-* (remember that *wu-* + *xa-* + *ya-* = *xwaa-*). To construct the second person singular form, we must replace the *xa-* with *ee-*. We know that *wu-* + *ee-* + *ya-* = *iya-/yee-*. We also know that *iya-* is the contraction used for zero conjugation verbs. Since this is a *ga*-conjugation verb, the contraction used is *yee-*. The second person singular form then is *yee.éex'* “you invited him/her”.

Now let’s move on to the negative perfective. Like the affirmative perfective, the negative perfective requires the perfective prefix *wu-*. It does NOT however, require the irrealis prefix *u-* found in the negative imperfective. The perfective prefix *wu-* and the irrealis prefix *u-* do not co-occur. While the affirmative perfective uses the +I form of the classifier, the negative perfective uses the –I form of the classifier. Below is a table representing the classifiers organized into four groups of four, the +I forms in the left column of each group and the –I forms on the right. In order to determine the classifier used in the negative perfective for a given verb, find the form used in the affirmative perfective first and then locate the classifier to its direct right on the chart. For example, in this affirmative perfective form *xwasikóo* “I know it; I knew it”, the (+I) classifier is *si-*. To locate the classifier for the negative perfective, look at the form to the right of *si-* on the chart in the –I column and you will find *sa-*. The negative perfective form of this verb is *tlél xwasakú* “I don’t know it; I didn’t know it”. Another example is the affirmative perfective form *át axwdligén* “I looked at it”, which has the *dli-* classifier. (Also note that the thematic prefix *a-* causes the vowel to drop from the subject prefix *xa-*, resulting in *axw-*. The breakdown of this verb is as follows: *a-* + *wu-* + *xa-* + *dli-* + *-gein*. This combination of thematic prefix plus the perfective prefix plus the subject prefix can be found on the attached prefix combination chart.) Looking at the classifier table below, we know that the negative perfective form will have the corresponding –I classifier *l-*. The negative perfective form of this verb is *tlél át axwalgein* “I didn’t look at it”.

	+I	-I		+I	-I		+I	-I		+I	-I
-D	<i>si-</i>	<i>sa-</i>		<i>shi-</i>	<i>sha-</i>		<i>li-</i>	<i>la-</i>		<i>ya-</i>	<i>Ø-</i>
+D	<i>dzi-</i>	<i>s-</i>		<i>ji-</i>	<i>sh-</i>		<i>dli-</i>	<i>l-</i>		<i>di-</i>	<i>da-</i>

For some verbs, the verb stem changes in vowel length and tone between the affirmative and negative perfective, although this is not a predictable pattern from verb to verb. Using the same verbs as above in the affirmative description, the tables below give the affirmative and negative forms side by side. The only changes we will see between the affirmative

and negative forms will be the classifier (from +I in the affirmative to -I in the negative) and the verb stem for some verbs.

Drink it (*ø* conjugation)

Subject	Affirmative Perfective (+I clf = <i>di-</i> )	Negative Perfective (-I clf = <i>da-</i> )	Translation of Negative Perfective
1.sg.	<i>ɣwadináa</i>	<i>tlél ɣwadaná</i>	"I didn't drink it"
2.sg.	<i>yidináa</i>	<i>tlél yidaná</i>	"you didn't drink it"
3-3. (trans.)	<i>awdináa</i>	<i>tlél awdaná</i>	"s/he didn't drink it"
3. (intrans.)	<i>at wudináa</i>	<i>tlél at wudaná</i>	"s/he didn't drink"
1.pl.	<i>wutudináa</i>	<i>tlél wutudaná</i>	"we didn't drink it"
2.pl.	<i>yeeydináa</i>	<i>tlél yeeydaná</i>	"you all didn't drink it"
4.	<i>wuduwanáa</i>	<i>tlél wuduná</i>	"nobody drank it"

Eat it (*ø* conjugation)

Subject	Affirmative Perfective (+I clf = <i>ya-</i> )	Negative Perfective (-I clf = <i>ø-</i> )	Translation of Negative Perfective
1.sg.	<i>ɣwaaxáa</i>	<i>tlél ɣwaxá</i>	"I didn't eat it"
2.sg.	<i>iyaxáa</i>	<i>tlél yixá</i>	"you didn't eat it"
3-3. (trans.)	<i>aawaxáa</i>	<i>tlél awuxá</i>	"s/he didn't eat it"
3. (intrans.)	<i>at uwaxáa</i>	<i>tlél at wuxá</i>	"s/he didn't eat"
1.pl.	<i>wutuwxáa</i>	<i>tlél wutooxá</i>	"we didn't eat it"
2.pl.	<i>yeeyxáa</i>	<i>tlél yeeyxá</i>	"you all didn't eat it"
4.	<i>wuduwxáa</i>	<i>tlél wuduxá</i>	"nobody ate it"

Sing it (*ga* conjugation)

Subject	Affirmative Perfective (+I clf = <i>ya-</i> )	Negative Perfective (-I clf = <i>ø-</i> )	Translation of Negative Perfective
1.sg.	<i>ɣwaashee</i>	<i>tlél ɣwashee</i>	"I didn't sing it"
2.sg.	<i>yeeshee</i>	<i>tlél yishee</i>	"you didn't sing it"
3-3. (trans.)	<i>aawashee</i>	<i>tlél awushee</i>	"s/he didn't sing it"
3. (intrans.)	<i>at wooshee</i>	<i>tlél at wushee</i>	"s/he didn't sing"
1.pl.	<i>wutuwashee</i>	<i>tlél wutooshee</i>	"we didn't sing it"
2.pl.	<i>yeeshee</i>	<i>tlél yeeshee</i>	"you all didn't sing it"
4.	<i>wuduwashee</i>	<i>tlél wudushee</i>	"nobody sang it"

One phenomenon not fully revealed in the tables above requires explanation. The topic is transitive verbs (that is, verbs with both a subject and an object) in the negative perfective that have third person subject and third person object. Under these conditions, the object prefix *a-*, the perfective prefix *wu-*, and the (-I) classifier render different contractions, depending on the classifier. Remember that the -I classifier set consists of: *sa-*, *s-*, *sha-*, *sh-*, *la-*, *l-*, *ø-*, *da-*. If the classifier is *ø-*, the contraction is simply *awu-*, as seen in the above tables for “eat it” and “sing it” in the row marked “3-3. (trans.)”. Here is another example, using the verb “cut it”.

*tlél awuxaash* (*a- + wu- + ø- + -xaash*) “s/he didn’t cut it”

If the classifier is *da-*, the contraction is *awda-*, as can be seen in the table above for “drink it”. Another example is the verb “put them on (pants, shoes)”.

*tlél x’oosx awdayeek* (*a- + wu- da- + -yeek*) “s/he didn’t put them on”

If the classifier is *sa-*, *s-*, *sha-*, *sh-*, *la-*, or *l-*, the contraction is *awu-* plus the consonant portion of the classifier only (*s-*, *sh-*, or *l-*), producing *awus-*, *awush-*, and *awul-* respectively. Note that the vowel *a-* drops out of the classifier in these contractions. Following are examples, giving both first person subject and third person subject for comparison. Note that for first person subject “I”, the vowel does not drop out of the classifier.

*tlél xwasa.í* (*x-a- + wu- + sa- + -.í*) “I didn’t cook it”  
*tlél awus.í* (*a- + wu- + sa- + -.í*) “s/he didn’t cook it”

*tlél xwashak’aan* (*x-a- + wu- + sha- + -k’aan*) “I didn’t hate him/her/it”  
*tlél awushk’aan* (*a- + wu- + sha- + -k’aan*) “s/he didn’t hate him/her/it”

*tlél xwalasháat* (*x-a- + wu- + la- + -sháat*) “I didn’t hold it”  
*tlél awulsháat* (*a- + wu- + la- + -sháat*) “s/he didn’t hold it”

Some verbs, especially state verbs, lack a perfective form. Three examples (given in the imperfective) are *tuli.aan* “s/he is kind”, *yéi tuwatee* “s/he feels like doing that”, and *yawóol* “it has holes in it”. To give these verbs a past tense meaning, the decessive form is used. The decessive gives the specific meaning “used to, but not anymore”. These are the decessive forms of the verbs just given: *tula.aanín* “s/he used to be kind (but isn’t anymore)”; *yéi tootéeyín* “s/he felt like doing that (but

changed his/her mind)”; and *wóolin* “it had holes in it (but has been repaired)”. Please see the “decessive” section for a full description of this form. [Forthcoming]

There are additionally a few act verbs that lack perfective forms. Three common examples are *yéi adaanéi* “s/he is working on it, doing it; s/he works on it, does it”, *yéi adaayaká* “s/he is telling him/her that; s/he tells him/her that”, and *ayatéen* “s/he can see it”. These act verbs, which primarily only occur in the imperfective, have “partner” event verbs which lack imperfective forms but have perfective forms. The “partner” event verbs have the same stem as the corresponding act verbs, but have different classifiers. To give a past tense meaning to the act verbs given above, these related event verbs are used: *yéi awsinei* “s/he fixed it; s/he did it”, *yóo ayawsikaa* “s/he told him/her”, and *awsiteen* “s/he saw it”.