

# The Preterit & Imperfect

## I. The Preterit:    used for past actions that are seen as completed.

- ★ It is used for completed actions that can be viewed as single events.

**Ella caminó por el parque.**  
She walked through the park.

**Ellos llegaron a las ocho.**  
They arrived at eight o'clock .

- ★ The preterit is used for actions that were repeated a specific number of times, or occurred during a specific period of time.

**Ayer escribí tres cartas.**  
Yesterday I wrote three letters.

**Vivimos allí por cuatro años.**  
We lived there for four years.

- ★ The preterit is used for actions that were part of a chain of events.

**Ella se levantó, se vistió, y salió de la casa.**  
She got up, dressed, and left the house.

- ★ The preterit is used to state the beginning or the end of an action.

**Empezó a nevar a las ocho de la mañana.**  
It began to snow at eight in the morning.

## II. The imperfect:    used for past actions that are not seen as completed                      or with verbs that express states.

- ★ The imperfect is used for actions that were repeated habitually.

**Tocábamos la guitarra juntos todos los días.**  
We played the guitar together every day.

**Las señoras siempre charlaban por las mañanas.**  
The ladies always chatted in the mornings.

- ★ The imperfect is used for actions that "set the stage" for another action. Ongoing actions in the past are expressed with the imperfect; interrupting actions, on the other hand, are expressed with the preterit.

**Yo leía cuando entró mi papá.**

I was reading when my dad entered.

**Mi hermana estudiaba mientras veía la tele.**

My sister was studying while watching TV.

- ★ The imperfect is used for telling time, stating one's age, and describing people, things, locations, or conditions.

**Eran las siete de la noche.**

It was seven o'clock at night.  
old.

**La niña tenía cinco años.**

The little girl was five years

**Mi casa era muy pequeña.**

My house was very small.

**El gato estaba en el garaje.\***

The cat was in the garage.

\*(If

you put a time frame on a location, you  
need to use the preterit:

El

gato estuvo en el garaje por tres horas.)

**Yo estaba muy triste anoche.**

I was very sad last night.  
desk.

**Había un libro en el pupitre.**

There was a book on the

- ★ The imperfect is used for indicating possession.

**Yo tenía dos perros.**

I had two dogs.

- ★ Some verbs express actions (*run, jump, eat...*); others express states (*want, have, be, can...*). Verbs that express states are **almost always** in the imperfect. They are used in the preterit when the state has **explicitly** come to an end.

**Era presidente del club.**

She was president of the club.

**Fue presidente del club por seis años.**

She was president of the club for six years.

Some verbs that are almost always in the imperfect are:

ser, estar, tener, soler, pensar, creer, sentir, querer, poder, haber (había)

## The Preterite

## The Imperfect

-Past actions that happened once  
actions in the past

-The beginning of an event  
in progress in the past

-The end of an event  
of conditions (AL WEPT)

-Interruptions

-Repeated or habitual

-Actions that are

-Descriptions

- ☺ Appearance, attitudes, age
- ☺ Location
- ☺ Weather
- ☺ Emotions
- ☺ Physical attributes
- ☺ Time

### CLUE WORDS:

ayer  
el año pasado  
hace dos semanas  
el sábado  
una vez  
de repente (suddenly)

cuando

pequeño/niño/etc.

### VERB DIFFERENCES:

saber = to find out  
how to

### CLUE WORDS:

todos los días  
siempre  
nunca  
cada día  
a menudo  
los jueves (or any other day)  
generalmente  
muchas veces  
a veces  
de vez en  
mientras  
cuando era

### VERB DIFFERENCES:

saber = to know; know

conocer = to meet  
(acquaintance)

conocer = to know

estar = to become

estar = to be (was)

tener = got; received

tener = had; possessed

It was ten o'clock in the morning and the weather was beautiful.

She was young and beautiful.

The kids were playing soccer in the park. Their mother was reading a book

under a tree. Suddenly, one of the kids fell, hit his head, and began to cry.

When I was a kid, I had three bunnies. They died when I was twelve years old.

I buried them in the backyard. I cried and cried. I cried for three days. I was

so sad! But then I got a dog and I became very happy.

One day I was sitting on my grandparent's dock with a juicy worm in hand. I carefully placed the worm on my new, shiny fishing hook. I cast out my line really far and set my pole down next to me. I waited and waited. All of a sudden, the

line on my reel started to shoot out. I picked up my rod and set the hook into the fish. The fish gave a powerful fight, but I finally got him! It was a giant carp. I was extremely happy but the fish smelled really bad.