

Habitual Past: Used to vs. Present Reality

INTERMEDIATE

Focus: Past habits, Past states, Repeated actions in the past, Situations no longer true, didn't use to, did you use to, used not to (alternative), Spelling of 'use' vs 'used', Contrast with Present Simple, Time markers like 'now' and 'these days'

1. The Function of "Used to"

We use **used to** to talk about things that happened regularly in the past but **do not happen now**. It is also used for states (situations or feelings) that were true in the past but are **no longer true**.

- **Past Habits:** "I **used to smoke**, but I quit last year." (I don't smoke now).
- **Past States:** "She **used to have** long hair." (She has short hair now).

Note: If an action happened only once, we use the **Past Simple**, not "used to."

- *Incorrect:* I used to go to Paris in 2010.
- *Correct:* I went to Paris in 2010.

2. Sentence Structure & Spelling Rules

The most common mistake at this level is the spelling of **use** in negatives and questions.

Type	Structure	Example
Affirmative (+)	Subject + used to + Verb	I used to live in London.
Negative (-)	Subject + didn't + use to + Verb	I didn't use to like coffee.
Question (?)	Did + Subject + use to + Verb...?	Did you use to play football?

Critical Spelling Rule:

- In affirmative sentences, keep the **'d'**: use ***d to***.
- In negatives and questions (with *did/didn't*), drop the **'d'**: use **to**.

3. Contrast with Present Simple

We often use "used to" to contrast the past with the present using **but now**, **these days**, or **anymore**.

- **Past:** I **used to drive** to work.
- **Present:** ...**but now** I take the bus.
- **Sentence:** "I **used to drive** to work, **but now** I take the bus."

Practice: Past Habits & States

Instruction: Complete the sentences using the correct form of **used to**. Pay close attention to the spelling (used to vs. use to) in negatives and questions.

Tips:

- For **Affirmatives (+)**: Use **used to + verb**.
- For **Negatives (-)**: Use **didn't use to + verb**.
- For **Questions (?)**: Use **Did ... use to + verb**.

1. Before I started this job, I _____ (work) in a library, but now I work in an office.
2. _____ (you/have) blonde hair when you were a child? It looks so dark now!
3. We _____ (not/eat) spicy food, but now we love it.
4. My brother _____ (play) the guitar in a band, but he sold his instrument years ago.
5. Where _____ (people/buy) food before supermarkets existed?
6. I _____ (not/sleep) well, but these days I sleep for eight hours every night.
7. Sarah _____ (be) very shy, but now she is the most confident person I know.
8. _____ (your father/smoke)? I see he has stopped now.
9. They _____ (live) in the countryside, but they moved to the city in 2015.
10. We _____ (not/go) on holiday very often because we didn't have much money.
11. _____ (you/watch) cartoons every Saturday morning when you were little?
12. This building _____ (be) a cinema, but now it is a furniture store.
13. I _____ (not/like) cats, but I adopted one last month and she is lovely.
14. What hobbies _____ (you/have) before you started playing video games?
15. Mr. Banks _____ (teach) math at our school, but he retired last year.

Answer Key

1. **used to work**
2. **Did you use to have**
3. **didn't use to eat** (Alternative formal: *used not to eat*)
4. **used to play**
5. **did people use to buy**
6. **didn't use to sleep**
7. **used to be**
8. **Did your father use to smoke**
9. **used to live**
10. **didn't use to go**
11. **Did you use to watch**
12. **used to be**
13. **didn't use to like**
14. **did you use to have**
15. **used to teach**