

## Summary and Contrast of the Preterit and the Imperfect

### Preterit

Use the preterit when you wish:

- to indicate an action that took place in the past.

Ellos se casaron el mes pasado.      *They got married last month.*

- to express an action completed at a definite moment in the past.

Los Ortega regresaron anoche.      *The Ortegas returned last night.*  
Yo estuve en su casa por tres horas.      *I was in their house for three hours.*

- to express a series of actions or events completed in the past.

Tú entraste, miraste a Felipe y le diste la mano.      *You entered, looked at Felipe, and shook his hand.*

- to express actions that, because of their nature, are not usually repeated, such as: *to get married (casarse), to turn a specific age (cumplir años), to realize (something) (darse cuenta de), to decide (decidir), to graduate (graduarse), to die (morir), etc.*

El hijo de Antonio nació en ese hospital.      *Antonio's son was born in that hospital.*

Here are some expressions associated with the use of the preterit:

anoche	last night	entonces	then
anteanoche	(the) night before last	finalmente	finally
anteayer	(the) day before yesterday	la semana pasada	last week
ayer	yesterday	por fin	finally
de pronto	suddenly	por primera vez	for the first time
de repente	suddenly	un día	one day
el mes pasado	last month	una noche	one night
en ese (aquel) instante	at that moment	una vez	once
en ese (aquel) momento	at that moment		

## Imperfect

Use the imperfect tense:

- to describe actions that took place on a regular basis, that were repeated, or were habitual or customary in the past.

Yo **veía** a mis primos todas las semanas.     *I used to see my cousins every week.*

- to describe continuing or ongoing conditions or actions in the past.

El teatro **tenía** tres salidas.     *The theater had three exits.*

- to describe people or states of indefinite duration in the past with no reference to its beginning or end.

Su esposo **era** alto.     *Her husband was tall.*

Nosotros **estábamos** muy nerviosos.     *We were very nervous.*

- to express age in the past.

Mis abuelos **tenían** sesenta años.     *My grandparents were sixty years old.*

- to express time in the past.

**Eran** las diez.     *It was ten o'clock.*

- to express a mental state or a mental action.

Ellos **pensaban** en sus parientes.     *They were thinking (used to think) about their relatives.*

Here are some expressions associated with the use of the imperfect:

<b>a menudo</b>	often, frequently	<b>mientras</b>	while
<b>a veces</b>	at times	<b>muchas veces</b>	many times
<b>algunas veces</b>	sometimes	<b>normalmente</b>	normally
<b>cada día, cada noche</b>	each day, each night	<b>por lo general</b>	generally
<b>con frecuencia</b>	frequently, often	<b>siempre</b>	always
<b>constantemente</b>	constantly	<b>todas las mañanas,</b>	every morning,
<b>de costumbre</b>	usually	<b>tardes...</b>	afternoon . . .
<b>de vez en cuando</b>	from time to time	<b>todos los meses,</b>	every month,
<b>frecuentemente</b>	frequently	<b>años...</b>	year . . .
<b>generalmente</b>	generally		