

Imperfect or the Preterite tense Help Sheet

This help sheet was created by the Streicher family, and adapted by Señora Swenson

Reasons to use the preterit (é, aste, ó, amos, asteis, aron / í, iste, ió, imos, isteis, ieron)

1. ***Over & done with** – The apple **fell** on the ground.
2. **Change in emotional, physical, or mental state.** She **became** sad. (Implies a change)
3. **Chain of events/actions in the past (doesn't work on the first verb)** – Yesterday, I got up at 7, ate breakfast at 7:30, and left at 7:45.
4. **Interrupts an action already in process (Think wavy line and X – the X is the preterit and the wavy line is what was already going on.** I was watching TV when the electricity went out. (watching TV = action in process / Electricity went out = interrupted the action of watching TV.
5. **The action has a definite beginning or end.** Last year I moved to California.
6. **The subject can't keep “__(verb) __ing”.** She left for school. (In this sentence, she can't “keep leaving”. It's an action that's completed.)

PRETERIT TRANSLATION = I _____ed.

***This is the preterit's strongest “weapon” against the imperfect.**

Reasons to use the imperfect (aba, abas, aba, ábamos, abais, aban / ía, ías, ía, íamos, íais, ían)

Key word in the Imperfect tense: **mientras = while**

1. ***Description in the past** – Her name was Bonita and she had long, red hair.
2. **Story-telling tense** – Once upon a time... (use this reason for the beginnings of stories only) Two ways to say “Once upon a time...” are “Erase una vez...” and “Había una vez...”.
3. **Telling time in the past when you want to say a time on the clock** – It was 7 o'clock. You will use era & eran for this (era la una...eran las cinco...)
4. **Age in the past** – I was eight when we moved. In Spanish, the verb will be tener.
5. **Weather in the past** – It was warm. Often you will use hacer = hacía frío = It was cold.
6. **Setting the stage** – In a land far, far away... or “The forest was calm and dark when we set out for Grandma's house...”
7. **No definite beginning or end** – I was singing...The television was on..., etc.
8. **Habitual action in the past** – When I was young, I played with dolls / On Saturdays we would go to the movies...
9. **An action going on at the same time as another action** – My dad was cooking dinner and my brother was drawing pictures at 8 o'clock.
10. **Emotional, physical, or mental state in the past** – I was scared / I was hungry, etc.
11. **“Was wuzzing”** = I was jumping, I was running, She was eating, They were talking, etc.

IMPERFECT TRANSLATIONS:

- 1) I was _____ing
- 2) I would _____ (in the past).
- 3) I used to _____
- 4) VERY RARELY: I _____ed (Usually you use the preterit to say this).