

# 15 “Used to” and “would”

When talking about habits or states in the past, “used to” or “would” are often used. English often uses these forms to contrast the past with the present.

See also:

Present simple **1** Past simple **4**

Past continuous **10** Adverbs of frequency **102**

## 15.1 “USED TO”

“Used to” can be used with the base form of a verb to talk about past habits.

Refers to a past habit.

**We used to play tennis every day, but now we prefer golf.**



“Used to” can also be used to talk about fixed states at some indefinite time in the past.

Refers to a past state.

**We used to live in London before we moved to Sydney.**



## FURTHER EXAMPLES

**Did you use to ride** a scooter when you were a student?



**I used to eat** lunch on my own, but now I sit with friends.



**I used to eat** meat, but now I'm a vegetarian.



“Used” becomes “use” in questions and negative forms.

**I didn't use to believe** in ghosts until I visited a haunted house.



**We didn't use to think** England was cold until we moved here.



**I didn't use to be** afraid of spiders until I visited Australia.



## ! COMMON MISTAKES "USED TO" AND THE PAST CONTINUOUS

When talking about habits in the past, "used to" should be used. It is incorrect to use the past continuous in this context.

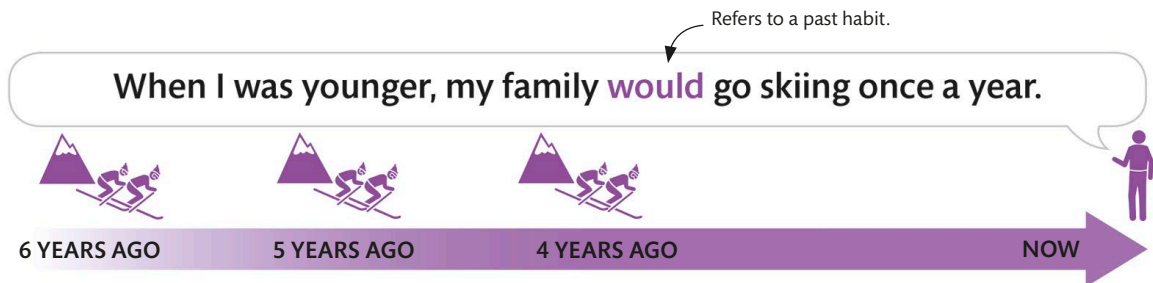
We **used to play** lots of board games when we were younger. ✓

We **were playing** lots of board games when we were younger. ✗

↖ The past continuous shouldn't be used to talk about past habits.

## 15.2 ANOTHER WAY TO SAY "USED TO" WITH HABITS

"Used to" can be replaced by "would" in writing and formal speech, but only to talk about past habits. These statements often include a reference to time to describe when, or how often something happened.



## FURTHER EXAMPLES



When I was little, we **would go** for a picnic every Saturday.



Whenever there were sports on TV, we just **wouldn't do** our homework.



When I was a student in college, I **would spend** as little as possible.



Before I moved abroad, I **wouldn't try** anything new.

## ! COMMON MISTAKES "WOULD" WITH STATES

"Would" cannot be used to talk about states in the past. "Used to" must be used instead.

We **used to live** in London before we moved to Sydney. ✓

We **would live** in London before we moved to Sydney. ✗

↖ "Would" cannot be used in this way with state verbs.