

IMPERFECT VS. PRETERIT

Pattern: The imperfect and preterit tenses are both used to refer to actions in the past. It is important to know the difference.

In General

The imperfect is used in the following situations:

1. Ongoing activities or habitual actions.
2. Describing characteristics and conditions
3. Expressions of time, age, or state of mind

The preterit is used in the following situations:

1. Completed actions

Examples:

Imperfect:

*Cuando yo **era** joven, siempre **íbamos** al lago durante el verano.*

When I was young, we always went (used to go) to the lake during the summer.

Preterit:

*De repente, él **gritó** y **cayó** al suelo. **Fuimos** a ver lo que **pasó**.*

Suddenly, he screamed and fell to the ground. We went to see what happened.

Change of Meaning

Some verbs undergo a change in meaning in the preterit:

<u>Infinitive Verb</u>	<u>Imperfect Meaning</u>	<u>Preterit Meaning</u>
<i>Conocer</i>	knew, was acquainted with	met
<i>Poder</i>	was able	succeeded
<i>Querer</i>	wanted	tried
<i>No Querer</i>	didn't want	refused
<i>Saber</i>	knew (fact)	found out