

Review of past tenses

There are two tenses in the indicative mood to refer to an action in the past: the *preterite* and the *imperfect*. To understand the difference, we must think of an action as having three stages:

beginning middle end

Preterite: We use the preterite to mark the **beginning** or **end** of an action, or to show the whole action as a **completed event**:

Ayer **comimos** a la una
(Yesterday we ate at one o'clock)

Emphasis on the beginning: we started to eat at one, and we don't know how long the dinner took.

Julia **llegó** a la una
(Julia arrived at one o'clock)

Emphasis on the end: there is no action after one

José **vivió** en Chile
José lived in Chile

The whole action is completed, he's no longer living in Chile.

Imperfect: It shows the action in the **middle** or **in progress**, without any reference to the beginning or end. The English progressive form **was + -ing** form of the verbs, translates the imperfect best, because this tense shows an action in its middle stage.

Cuando llegué, él no **estaba** allí
(When I arrived, he wasn't there)

My arrival occurred in the midst of his not being there

Trabajaba en la escuela en ese tiempo
(I was working at the school at that time)

I was in the midst of working there at some time in the past

It can also be used to express habitual actions in the past. It is then translated as **used to + infinitive**

Cuando **era** pequeña, **tomaba** clases de Ballet los martes.
(I used to take ballet classes when I was a child.)

I had the habit of going to ballet classes every Tuesday.

Another use of the imperfect is giving background information, f.e. saying how somebody was feeling, what time it was, what was the weather like...

Eran las 5 de la tarde y **hacía** un día estupendo, pero yo **estaba** muy cansada.
(It was 5 in the evening and it was a beautiful day, but I was very tired.)

Combination of Imperfect and Preterite.

It is very common to use the imperfect to indicate the **background** for the preterite, that is, to show an ongoing action in the background (imperfect) when something else happened in the **foreground** (preterite):

Cuando mi esposa **cocinaba**, mi madre **llamó** por teléfono
(My mother called on the phone when my wife was cooking)

IMPERFECTO

Regular verbs: Stem of the infinitive (no stem changes) + following -ar, -er, -ir

Pronombres	-AR:	-ER:	-IR:
	estudiar	comer	vivir
yo	estudi- aba	com- ía	viv- ía
tú	estudi- bas	com- ías	viv- ías
él, ella, usted	estudi- aba	com- ía	viv- ía
nosotros/nosotras	estudi- ábamos	com- íamos	viv- íamos
vosotros/vosotras	estudi- abais	com- íais	viv- íais
ellos, ellas, ustedes	estudi- aba	com- ían	viv- ían

Irregular verbs

Pronombres	SER: to be	IR: to go	VER: to see
yo	era	iba	veía
tú	eras	ibas	veías
él, ella, usted	era	iba	veía
nosotros/nosotras	éramos	íbamos	veíamos
vosotros/vosotras	erais	ibais	veíais
ellos, ellas, ustedes	eran	iban	veían

EL PRETERITO:

Regular verbs: Stem of the infinitive (no stem changes) + following -ar, -er, -ir

Pronombres	-AR:	-ER:	-IR:
	estudiar	comer	vivir
yo	estudi- é	com- í	viv- í
tú	estudi- aste	com- iste	viv- íste

él, ella, usted	estudi-ó	com-ió	viv-ió
nosotros/nosotras	estudi-amos	com-imos	viv-imos
vosotros/vosotras	estudi-asteis	com-isteis	viv-isteis
ellos, ellas, ustedes	estudi-aron	com-ieron	viv-ieron

A. Irregular verbs in the preterite

Pronombres	SER: to be IR: to go	DAR: to give	VER: to see
yo	fui	di	vi
tú	fuiste	diste	viste
él, ella, usted	fue	dió	vio
nosotros/nosotras	fuimos	dimos	vimos
vosotros/vosotras	fuisteis	disteis	visteis
ellos, ellas, ustedes	fueron	dieron	vieron

B. Stem-changing verbs

andar: to walk	anduv-	
estar: to be	estuv-	
tener: to have	tuv-	
poder: to be able to	pud-	-e
poner: to put	pus-	-iste
saber: to know	sup-	-o
haber: there is, (aux)	hub	-imos
hacer: to do	hic-(z)	-isteis
querer: to want	quis-	-(i)eron
venir: to come	vin-	
decir: to say	dij-(eron)	
traer: to bring	traj- (eron)	
conducir: to drive	conduj-(eron)	

* all verbs with prefixes added to the above verbs are conjugated in the same manner.

C. Irregular verbs in the third person only

o > u	e > i	i > y	add y
dormir (ue,u)	pedir (ie,i)	leer	construir
dormí	pedí	leí	construí
dormiste	pediste	leíste	construiste
durmió	pidió	leyó	construyó
dormimos	pedimos	leímos	construimos
dormisteis	pedisteis	leísteis	construisteis
durmieron	pidieron	leyeron	construyeron

o > u: morir

e > i: advertir, competir, concebir, conseguir, corregir, despedirse, divertirse, elegir, herir, impedir, invertir, medir, mentir, perseguir, preferir, referir, repetir, requerir, seguir, sentir, servir, conseguir, subvertir, sugerir, vestirse

i > y: creer, poseer, proveer, oír

add y: atribuir, concluir, constituir, contribuir, destruir, disminuir, distribuir, excluir, huir, incluir, instruir, obstruir, sustituir

D. Irregular verbs in the first person singular only

Spelling-changes for CAR (c>qu before e)). GAR (g>gu before e), and ZAR (z>c before e) verbs only in the first person singular of the preterite

Pronombres personales	CAR (c>qu) buscar	GAR (g>gu) jugar	ZAR (z>c) comenzar
yo	busqué	jugué	comencé
tú	buscaste	jugaste	comenzaste
él, ella, usted	buscó	jugó	comenzó
nosotros/nosotras	buscamos	jugamos	comenzamos
vosotros/vosotras	buscásteis	jugásteis	comenzásteis
ellos, ellas, ustedes	buscaron	jugaron	comenzaron

HOW TO SPELL SPANISH SOUNDS:

Sonido	Vocales fuertes	Vocales débiles
/k/ as in <i>scar, casa, queso</i>	ca, co, cu	que, qui
/θ/ or /s/ as in <i>thin, zona, cena</i>	za, zo, zu	ce, ci
/g/ as in <i>good, gato, guiso</i>	ga, go, gu	gue, gui
/x/ as in <i>hijo, genio</i>	ja, jo, ju	ge / je, gi / ji