Ways of talking about the past habits

We use **used to + infinitive** to refer to past habits and states. In such cases, **used to** can be replaced by the Past Simple with no difference in meaning: He used to go out when he was younger. = He went out when he was younger.

We use the Past Simple not used to, for actions which happened at a definite time in the past: He visited Paris last month.

Forms: He used to live in Paris. He didn’t use to live in Paris. Did he use to live in Paris?

**Be used to / get used to:**

*Be used to* + noun / pronoun / -ing form: to be accustomed to, to be in habit of

*Get used to* + noun / pronoun / -ing form: become accustomed to

Look at the following examples of how we use be/get used to: She wasn’t used to working at night (She wasn’t accustomed to working at night). Simon had never lived in a tropical country before, but he quickly got used to it (He became accustomed to it).

**Used to and Would: Contrast**

*Would* is also used to talk about past habits.

When we use **would** to talk about a past habit, it is necessary to use a past time reference. **Used to** can be used with or without a past time reference: I used to go out late. *Before I got this job*, I used to / would go out a lot.

When we talk about *past situations* (not actions), we can use **used to** but we can’t use would: We used to live in a flat in the town centre.

*Complete these sentences with use(d) to + a suitable verb*:

1) Dennis gave up smoking two years ago. He … 40 cigarettes a day. 2) Liz … a motorbike, but last year she sold it and bought a car. 3) We came to live in Manchester a few years ago. We … in Nottingham. 4) I rarely eat ice cream now but I … it when I was a child. 5) Jim … my best friend but we aren’t friends any longer. 6) It only takes me about 40 minutes to get to work since the new road was opened. It … more than an hour. 7) There … a hotel opposite the station but it closed a long time ago. 8) When you lived in London, … to the theatre very often?

*Rewrite each person’s comment using used to or didn’t use to*:

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| 1) Sally – ‘I don’t walk to work any more’.  2) Gordon – ‘I’ve got a dog now’.  3) Lisa – ‘I don’t eat junk food any more’.  4) Jane – ‘I go to the gym every night now’. | 5) Paul – ‘I’m not shy any more’.  6) Edward – ‘I live in a big house now’.  7) Helen – ‘I haven’t got long hair any more’.  8) Frank – ‘I eat lots of vegetables now’. |

*Choose the correct form of the verbs*:

1) Mary met her husband while she *worked / was working / used to work* in the States. 2) Why does Warren keep shouting at people? He *wasn’t / wasn’t being / didn’t use to be* so bad-tempered. 3) How long is it since you *had / were having / used to have* a holiday? 4) The government *provided / were providing / used to provide* much more help for disabled people than they do now. 5) It’s all very well complaining you haven’t any money, but while you were travelling around the world, I *studied / was studying / used to study* sixteen hours a day for my exams. 6) The only time I ever rode / was riding / used to ride a horse, I *fell / was falling / used to fall off* in the first five minutes.

*Complete the sentences using the past continuous (was doing) or ‘used to’. Use the verb in brackets.*

1) I haven’t been to the cinema for ages now. We **used to go** a lot. (go) 2) Ann didn’t see me wave to her. She **was looking** in the other direction. (look) 3) I … a lot but I don’t use my car very much these days. (drive) 4) I asked the driver to slow down. She … too fast. (drive) 5) Rose and Jim met for the first time when they … at university. (study) 6) When I was a child, I … a lot of bad dreams. (have) 7) When the phone rang, I … a shower. (have) 8) ‘Where were you yesterday afternoon?’ ‘I … volleyball’. (play) 9) ‘Do you do any sports?’ ‘Not these days. I … volleyball’. (play) 10) George looked very nice. He … a very nice suit. (wear)

*Write these sentences, putting one verb into the correct form of ‘used to’ and the other into the past simple.*

1) I (smoke), but I (give it up) last year.

2) I (not like) him, but then I (change) my mind.

3) He (live) in London before he (go) abroad.

4) I (earn) a lot of money, but then I (lose) my job.

5) I’m surprised that they (join) the tennis club. They (not like) tennis.

6) (you travel) a lot before you (get) this job?

7) I (work) in a factory before I (become) a teacher.

8) She (drive) a lot before she (have) the accident.

9) That old radio (work) before I (drop) it.

10) We (see) them every week, but then we (have) an argument.

11) I (work) in a restaurant before I (go) to college.

12) She (play) a lot of tennis before she (break) her leg.

13) We (have) a garden, but then we (move) to a different house.

14) She (live) in Wales, but then she (move) back to Scotland.

15) I (drive) a lorry before I (start) this business.

*Complete the sentences with ‘would’ and’ used to’. Where either form is possible, write them both. Where there is a word in brackets, put it in the correct position:*

1) I …. have lots of free time before I started working here.

2) In the long summer holidays, we …. go out somewhere with a picnic every day.

3) When I was a newly-trained teacher, I …. work till late every night preparing lessons.

4) They …. be happy together but they’re not now.

5) When they came to London, they …. (never) travel anywhere on the tube.

6) When I had a car, I …. drive everywhere, but now I’m much fitter because I always walk or cycle.

7) During my last year at university, I …. go to the library to start work at 9 o’clock every morning.

8) When we shared a flat together, we …. (often) stay up talking late into the night.

9) When Amy was a baby, people …. (often) come up to me and tell me how beautiful she was.

10) He …. be very overweight but he’s much slimmer now.

11) When I was at school, I …. (never) do my weekend homework until Sunday evening.

12) I …. work in the same department as your sister.

13) When I was a teenager, I …. (often) spend the whole evening just listening to music.

14) She …. have a lot of boyfriends when she was younger.

15) He …. go for a run every day.