**Past Tense Spanish Verbs (Preterite and Imperfect Verbs)**

Many students have trouble knowing when to use the [preterite tense](http://www.spanishdict.com/guide/spanish-preterite-tense-forms) or [the imperfect tense](http://www.spanishdict.com/guide/spanish-imperfect-tense-forms), as they both refer to actions in the past. There are several general rules you can follow to know when to use one tense or another. Additionally, many Spanish phrases tend to be used only with the preterite or only with the imperfect, so memorizing them is very helpful! Here, we’ll take a look at the general uses of both tenses, as well as helpful “trigger” phrases.

**Pair Work**

One way this pair of tenses is often used is to talk about an ongoing action or event that was interrupted in the past. In such case, the **interrupted** action is given in the imperfect tense, while the **interrupting** action is given in the preterite.

For example:

Imperfect Verb Preterite Verb

|  |
| --- |
| ↓ ↓  **Yo caminaba por el centro cuando me encontré con el hermano de mi mejor amiga.**  *I was walking downtown when I ran into my best friend's brother.*  Imperfect Verb Preterite Verb  ↓ ↓ |
| **Lourdes y Marco hablaban del examen cuando llegué a clase.**  *Lourdes and Marco were talking about the test when I got to class.* |

**The Preterite**

Generally, the preterite is used for **completed actions** (actions that have definite beginning and end points.) These can be actions that can be viewed as **single events**, actions that were **part of a chain of events**, actions that were repeated a **very specific number of times**, or actions that **specifically state the beginning and end of an action**.

Check out these examples:

|  |
| --- |
| Preterite Verb  ↓  **Fui al baile anoche.**  *I went to the dance last night.*  Preterite Verbs  ↓ ↓ ↓ |
| **Caminé al mercado, compré unos plátanos, y regresé a casa.**  *I walked to the market, bought some bananas, and returned home.*  Preterite Verb  ↓ |
| **Él te llamó tres veces.**  *He called you three times.*  Preterite Verb  ↓ |
| **Hablé con mi madre de las dos hasta las tres.**  *I spoke with my mother from two o’clock until three o’clock.* |

**Useful Phrases that “*Trigger*” the Preterite** There are many helpful words and phrases that indicate specific time frames, therefore signaling that the preterite should be used. Here are a few:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Spanish** | **English** | **Spanish** | **English** |
| **una vez** | *one time* | **el otro día** | *the other day* |
| **ayer** | *yesterday* | **entonces** | *then* |
| **anteayer** | *the day before yesterday* | **anteanoche** | *the night before last* |
| **ayer por la mañana** | *yesterday morning* | **ayer al mediodía** | *yesterday at noon* |
| **anoche** | *last night* | **ayer por la noche** | *last night* |
| **esta mañana** | *this morning* | **esta tarde** | *this afternoon* |
| **la semana pasada** | *last week* | **el mes pasado** | *last month* |
| **el año pasado** | *last year* | **en ese momento** | *at that moment* |
| **ayer por la tarde** | *yesterday afternoon* | **hoy por la mañana** | *this morning* |
| **hace (dos) años** | *(two) years ago* | **hace (dos) días** | *(two) days ago* |
| **el (lunes) pasado** | *last (Monday)* | **la semana pasada** | *last week* |
| **durante (tres) siglos** | *for (three) centuries* | **desde el primer momento** | *from the first moment* |

**Verbs that are Preterite by Nature**

Some verbs used to talk about events with a very definite beginning and end are almost always used in the preterite. Here are a few examples.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Spanish** | **English** | **Spanish** | **English** |
| **casarse** | *to get married* | **graduarse** | *to graduate* |
| **cumplir años** | *to turn a certain age* | **llegar** | *to arrive* |
| **darse cuenta de** | *to realize* | **morir** | *to die* |
| **decidir** | *to decide* | **nacer** | *to be born* |
| **descubrir** | *to discover* | **salir** | *to leave* |

**The Imperfect** The imperfect tense is generally used for actions in the past that do not have a definite end. These can be actions that are **not yet completed** or refer to a time **in general in the past**. It can also be used to talk about:

* actions that were repeated habitually
* actions that set the stage for another past tense event
* time and dates
* a person’s age in the past
* characteristics
* mental or physical states

Check out these examples:

Imperfect Verbs

↓ ↓

|  |
| --- |
| **Cuando era niña, jugaba con muñecas.**  *When I was a girl, I used to play with dolls.*  Imperfect Verb  ↓ |
| **Los chicos hablaban en español.**  *The boys were speaking in Spanish.*  Imperfect Verb Preterite Verb  ↓ ↓ |
| **Estaba** durmiendo**cuando el teléfono sonó.**  *I was sleeping when the telephone rang.*  Imperfect Verbs  ↓ ↓ |
| **Cuando él tenía tres años, era muy pequeño.**  *When he was three years old, he was very small.* |

**Useful Phrases that Trigger the Imperfect**

Here are some helpful words and phrases that often signal that a verb should be used in the imperfect.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Spanish** | **English** | **Spanish** | **English** |
| **a menudo** | *often* | **frecuentemente** | *frequently* |
| **rara vez** | *rarely* | **a veces** | *sometimes* |
| **generalmente** | *usually* | **siempre** | *always* |
| **algunas veces** | *at times* | **mientras** | *while* |
| - | *so many times* | todos los años | *every year* |
| **cada día** | *every day* | **muchas veces** | *many times* |
| **todas las semanas** | *every week* | **todo el tiempo** | *all the time* |
| **con frecuencia** | *frequently* | **casi nunca** | *almost never* |
| **mucho** | *a lot* | **nunca** | *never* |
| **por lo general** | *generally* | **todos los días** | *every day* |
| **de vez en cuando** | *once in a while* | **por un rato** | *for a while* |
| **en aquella época** | *at that time* | **varias veces** | *several times* |

***What do these verbs look like?***

Examples of **regular** **Imperfect Verbs** Examples of **regular** **Preterite Verbs**

have these endings: have these endings:

↓ ↓

**hablar (to speak, to talk) hablar (to speak, to talk)**

yo habl**aba** nosotros habl**ábamos** yo habl**é** nosotros habl**amos**

tú habl**abas** tú habl**aste**

él habl**aba** ellos habl**aban** él habl**ó** ellos habl**aron**

ella habl**aba** ellas habl**aban** ella habl**ó** ellas habl**aron**

usted habl**aba** ustedes habl**aban** usted habl**ó** ustedes habl**aron**

**correr (to run) correr (to run)**

yo corr**ía** nosotros corr**íamos** yo corr**í** nosotros corr**imos**

tú corr**ías** tú corr**iste**

él corr**ía** ellos corr**ían** él corr**ió** ellos corr**ieron**

ella corr**ía** ellas corr**ían** ella corr**ió** ellas corr**ieron**

usted corr**ía** usted corr**ían** usted corr**ió** ustedes corr**ieron**

**Instructional Packet (#17 - 21)**

**Spanish 4**

We have seen past tense verbs in the Imperfect Tense and the Preterite Tense earlier this semester as we were reading ***Vida o muerte en el Cusco*** and in episodes 11 - 20 of ***El cuarto misterioso***. Instructional Packets # 17 - 21 will focus on how these two past tense verbs are different from each other. Here are some places to find out more:

1. **Past Tense Spanish Verbs (Preterite and Imperfect Verbs)** document (above ↑)
2. Blue Verb Chart
3. Green Verb Chart
4. Verb pages in back of ***Realidades*** textbook
5. www.spanishdict.com

***ESPAÑOL 2*** PAQUETE DE TAREA #17

IMPERFECT **OR** PRETERITE? Read the document ***Past Tense Spanish Verbs (Preterite and Imperfect Verbs)***, to learn how these two past tense verbs are different. Then, match the following English and Spanish sentences:

1. Yo iba a Kennywood cuando era niño a veces. \_\_\_ I always gave my sister some money.

2. Yo fui a Kennywood hace diez años. \_\_\_ I lived in Morgantown.

3. Casi nunca leía el libro. \_\_\_ I lived for three years in Morgantown.

4. Ayer leí el libro. \_\_\_ I spoke with my sister this last week.

5. Yo vivía en Morgantown. \_\_\_ I went to Kennywood when I was a boy sometimes.

6. Yo viví durante tres años en Morgantown. \_\_\_ This morning I gave my sister some money.

7. Todos los días yo hablaba con mi hermana. \_\_\_ I went to Kennywood ten years ago.

8. Yo hablé con mi hermana la semana pasada. \_\_\_ Yesterday I read the book.

9. Esta mañana le dí algo de dinero a mi hermana. \_\_\_ I almost never read the book.

10. Siempre le daba algo de dinero a mi hermana. \_\_\_ I spoke with my sister every day.

***ESPAÑOL 2*** PAQUETE DE TAREA #18

IMPERFECT **OR** PRETERITE? Read the document ***Past Tense Spanish Verbs (Preterite and Imperfect Verbs)***, to learn how these two past tense verbs are different. Then, match the following English and Spanish sentences:

1. Mi papá me decía historias. \_\_\_ She was always looking for shoes.

2. Mi papá me dijo la historia una vez. \_\_\_ I played basketball with my dad every day.

3. Ella siempre buscaba los zapatos. \_\_\_ She went out with her friends last Saturday.

4. Ella buscó los zapatos anoche. \_\_\_ She went out with her friends every Saturday.

5. Yo jugaba al baloncesto con mi papá cada día. \_\_\_ They studied English yesterday afternoon.

6. Yo jugué al baloncesto con mi papá hace dos días. \_\_\_ They studied English every day.

7. Ella salía con sus amigas todos los sábados. \_\_\_ My dad told me the story once.

8. Ella salió con sus amigas el sábado pasado. \_\_\_ She looked for shoes last night.

9. Ellos estudiaban el inglés cada día. \_\_\_ My dad told me stories.

10. Ellos estudiaron el inglés ayer por la tarde. \_\_\_ I played basketball with my dad two days ago.

***ESPAÑOL 2*** PAQUETE DE TAREA #19

IMPERFECT **OR** PRETERITE? Read the document ***Past Tense Spanish Verbs (Preterite and Imperfect Verbs)***, to learn how these two past tense verbs are different. Then, match the following English and Spanish sentences:

1. Íbamos a visitar a mis abuelos. \_\_\_ She saw rain every day.

2. Fuimos a visitar a mis abuelos el domingo. \_\_\_ We did homework every day.

3. Ella veía la lluvia todos los días. \_\_\_ I never wanted to go to the store.

4. Ella vio la lluvia ayer. \_\_\_ I didn´t want to go to the store on Wednesday.

5. Hacíamos la tarea cada día. \_\_\_ He always had $20 in his wallet.

6. Hicimos la tarea hoy. \_\_\_ We used to go visit my grandparents.

7. Yo nunca quería ir a la tienda. \_\_\_ She saw rain yesterday.

8. Yo no quise ir a la tienda el miércoles. \_\_\_ He had $20 in his wallet the day before yesterday.

9. Él siempre tenía $20 en su billetera. \_\_\_ We did homework today.

10. Él tuvo $20 en su billetera anteayer. \_\_\_ We went to visit my grandparents on Sunday.

***ESPAÑOL 2*** PAQUETE DE TAREA #20

IMPERFECT **OR** PRETERITE? Read the document ***Past Tense Spanish Verbs (Preterite and Imperfect Verbs)***, to learn how these two past tense verbs are different. Then, match the following English and Spanish sentences:

1. Ellos caminaban en el parque de vez en cuando. \_\_\_ I saw the movie several times.

2. Ellos caminaron en el parque el viernes. \_\_\_ We were in Mexico for a while.

3. Ella esquía en Canaan Valley antes. \_\_\_ Did you practice the guitar at that time?

4. Ella esquió en Canaan Valley ayer. \_\_\_ They walked in the park on Friday.

5. ¿Practicabas la guitarra en aquella época? \_\_\_ I saw the movie one time.

6. ¿Practicaste la guitarra hoy por la mañana? \_\_\_ We were in Mexico for two months.

7. Estábamos en México por un rato. \_\_\_ She skied in Canaan Valley before.

8. Estuvimos en México durante dos meses. \_\_\_ Did you practice the guitar this morning?

9. Yo miraba la película varias veces. \_\_\_ She skied in Canaan Valley yesterday.

10. Yo miré la película una vez. \_\_\_ They walked in the park once in a while.

***ESPAÑOL 2*** PAQUETE DE TAREA #21

IMPERFECT **OR** PRETERITE? Read the document ***Past Tense Spanish Verbs (Preterite and Imperfect Verbs)***, to learn how these two past tense verbs are different. Then, match the following English and Spanish sentences:

1. Ella escribía el ensayo todos los días. \_\_\_ They danced a lot.

2. Ella escribió el ensayo anoche. \_\_\_ He was rarely sick.

3. Ellos bailaban mucho. \_\_\_ We didn´t know the truth at that time.

4. Ellos bailaron la semana pasada. \_\_\_ We didn´t know the truth until four o´clock.

5. Él estaba enfermo rara vez. \_\_\_ The baby cried this morning.

6. Él estuvo enfermo el año pasado. \_\_\_ The baby cried every day.

7. No sabíamos la verdad en aquella época. \_\_\_ He was sick last year.

8. No supimos la verdad hasta las cuatro. \_\_\_ She wrote the essay last night.

9. El bebé lloró esta mañana. \_\_\_ She wrote the essay every day.

10. El bebé lloraba todos los días. \_\_\_ They danced last week.