

PAST STATES and HABITS

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to prepare for your
Cambridge English Exam?



USED TO

'Used to' can be used to talk about past states as well as past habits (repeated actions).

used to + infinitive

- I used to live in New York when I was a kid.
- We used to go out more often.
- She used to work for a large insurance company.

NEGATIVE

didn't use to

QUESTION

did + use to...?

Sometimes we write it with a final -d (didn't used to/ did + used to...?), sometimes not. Both forms are common, but many people consider the form with the final -d to be incorrect, and you should not use it in exams:

- I didn't use to eat chips when I was younger.
- Did you use to work with Mike?
- Didn't you use to have long hair?

used not to

In very formal styles, we can use the negative form **used not to**:

- You used not to smoke, did you?

WOULD

'Used to' is for past states or actions, but would is for past actions only.

'Would' is not used with stative verbs (verbs that describe a state and not an action), such as be, understand, feel or love.

Would for past habits is **slightly more formal than used to**. It is often used in stories. We don't normally use the negative or question form of would for past habits

- Every Saturday I would go on a long bike ride.
- My dad would read me amazing stories every night at bedtime.

SIMPLE PAST

We can also use the past simple to talk about past states or habits.

The main difference is that the past simple doesn't emphasise the repeated or continuous nature of the action or situation. Also, the past simple doesn't make it so clear that the thing is no longer true.

- I had a dog when I was young.
- I played tennis a lot when I was younger.

COMMON MISTAKE: using would with stative verbs (verbs that describe a state and not an action)

✗ When I was a kid I would love playing football. (love is a stative verb)

✓ When I was a kid I used to love playing football.