

# El imperfecto....the imperfect

In grammatical terms, the word “**perfect**” means **completed**. The prefix **im-** means “**not**,” so imperfect means **not completed**.

Thus, the imperfect tense is generally used in situations where the **completion of the verb is not certain**, or at least **not the point of the sentence**.

The acronym **WATERS** will help you remember that the imperfect is generally used to **express ongoing situations** that sort of “**flow on**” and **have no specific place in time**.

Each word that represents a letter in **WATERS** indicates a situation when an imperfect verb will be used. In the following examples, verbs in the imperfect are in **bold**.

## Weather

**Llovía.**

It was raining.



## Age

Cuando **tenía tres años, quería** ser bombera.  
When I was three, I wanted to be a firefighter.



## Time

**Eran** las cuatro.

It was four o'clock.



## Emotion

**Estaba** cansada después de limpiar la casa.  
I was tired after cleaning the house.



## Repetition or simultaneous actions

Yo **visitaba** a mi abuela **de vez en cuando**.  
I used to visit my grandmother from time to time.

Mi hermana y yo comíamos mientras mirábamos la televisión.  
My sister and I were eating while we were watching television.



## Setting or description / background information

El sol **brillaba** y la vista **era** bonita.  
The sun was shining and the view was pretty.



The the imperfect is used to begin a fairytale.

**Había** una vez – Once upon a time

**Había una vez una niña muy bonita. Su madre le había hecho una capa roja y la muchachita la llevaba tan a menudo que todo el mundo la llamaba Capercita Roja.**



# El pretérito (the preterit)

There are certain situations in the past that will be stated using the preterite tense.

Usually preterite situations have something to do with **completed actions** that can be placed at a **specific point in time**.

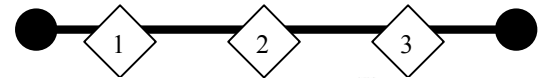
The acronym **SAFE** will help you remember the types of situations in the past that require you to use the preterite tense.

In the English examples below, the verbs in bold would be conjugated in the preterite in Spanish because of the way they are used in the sentence.

Use the preterite tense of the verb when the sentence indicates:

## Specific instance or number of instances

Le llamó **tres veces**. Él me llamó ayer.  
I called him three times. He called me yesterday.



## Action that interrupts ongoing events

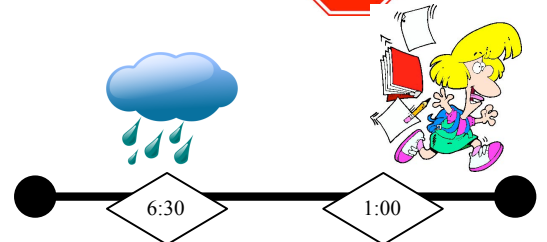
Yo miraba la television cuando ella **llamó**.  
I was watching television when she called.



## Focus on beginning or ending of action

**Llovió** a las seis y media en punto.  
It rained at exactly 6:30.

La clase **terminó** a la una.  
The class ended at one o'clock.



## Enclosed amount of time, or limited and completed time frame

Los árabes **controlaron** la mayoría de España por más de **700 años**.  
The Arabs controlled much of Spain for over 700 years.

Yo **hablé** por teléfono con mi mejor amiga **por 2 horas**.  
I talked on the phone with my best friend for 2 hours.



12:00 ---→ 2:00



If you the when (beginning or end), how many times, for how long an event/ action took place.....use the **PRETERITO**.



### Spicy - preterite.

S=series of completed actions in the past  
 P=past actions occurring only once or a specific number of times  
 I=interrupting actions of an ongoing action  
 C= one time completed actions in the past  
 y="yesterday" or other specific times.

### Toadstew - imperfect

T=thoughts or feelings (mental, emotional or physical states)  
 O=other past actions occurring more than once or simultaneous  
 A=age, attitude and/or appearance  
 D=descriptions in the past;  
 S=scene setting or background information  
 T=time (clock time)  
 E=existing conditions already in progress (verb with -ing ending in English)  
 W=weather (when used as background information)



## Pretérito

- **ONE TIME** -One time completed action
- **INTERRUPTION** – Interruption in BG information
- **SERIES** - Completed action in a series of actions
- **DURATION** -Action completed with a known duration of time
- **NUMBER OF TIMES** -Action completed with know number of times completed
- **BEGINNING**- known time when an action began
- **END**- know time when an action ended

## Imperfecto

Back ground information before interruption or unknown time

- **Time**
- **Weather**
- **Age**
- **Ongoing action / background information**
- **Habitual / repeated action**
- **Description** – state of being or physical, background info
- **Simultaneous actions** –actions occurring at the same time, but is considered back ground information

## **El pretérito**

**S**pecific instance or number of instances  
**A**ction that interrupts ongoing events  
**F**ocus on beginning or ending of action  
**E**nclosed amount of time, or limited and completed time frame

## **El imperfecto**

**W**eather  
**A**ge  
**T**ime  
**E**motion  
**R**epetition or simultaneous actions  
**S**etting or description/ background information

## Pitfalls

Many books explain the imperfect as the “use to” “was ...ing” tense.

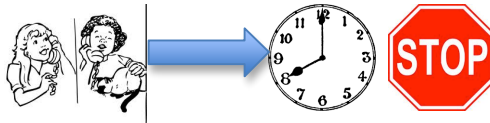
### Be careful here because:

“**I was talking to her till about 8:00**” is better translated using the pretérito because the action is seen as **completed**.

Yo hablé con ella hasta las ocho.

Pero

Yo hablaba con ella cuando el reloj sonó las ocho.



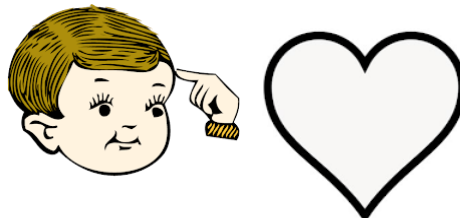
The same for:

“**She used to be an actress**” (but then retired) is better translated “**Ella fue actriz**” to indicate the end of her career.

### SABER, CONOCER, QUERER, PODER, TENER en el pasado.

These verbs have different meanings in the preterite and the imperfect.

	imperfecto	preterito
conocer	to have known someone	to have met someone
saber	to have known something	to have found something out
querer	wanted	tried
no querer	didn't want	refused
poder	was able to	managed to
no poder	wasn't able to	failed to



Some verbs often used in the imperfect:

<b>amar</b>	to love	<b>molestar</b>	to be bothersome to
<b>conocer a</b>	to know a person	<b>odiar</b>	to hate
<b>creer</b>	to believe	<b>pensar (en)</b>	to think (about)
<b>dolor</b>	to be painful (gustar like)	<b>poder</b>	to be able
<b>esperar</b>	to hope, wait (for)	<b>querer</b>	to want
<b>estar</b>	to be	<b>saber</b>	to know (fact)
<b>gustar</b>	to be pleasing to	<b>sentir</b>	to regret, feel sorry
<b>llevarse bien con</b>	to get along with	<b>sentirse</b>	to feel
		<b>tener</b>	to have