# ESOL Entry 3 – Past Habits and States

# 1 of 18 - Welcome

In this unit, you will learn to use used to to talk about past habits and states.

We will also look at using would. We don’t normally look at this in Entry 3, but it is very common so it will be a good challenge for you.

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

* Use **used to** to talk about things you often did in the past
* Talk about past habits
* Talk about past states
* Use **would** to talk about past habits

# 2 of 18 - Defining habit and state What do we mean by a habit and what do we mean by a state?

# A habit is something that we typically do. We use the **present simple** to talk about present habits:

# ‘I **get up** at 7, have a shower and then **make** some coffee.’

# A habit means we do this thing more than once:

# ‘I always **go to** Waitrose to buy my veg, but I **buy** other things from Asda.’

A state is something we feel. It isn’t a repeated action. We often use the verb **be** to show states:

‘I**’m** usually tired when I get home from work, so I go straight to bed.’

Some verbs are used to show states, such as feel, think, enjoy, live:

‘I **live** on a farm.’

# 3 of 18 – Talking about past habits and states

How do we talk about past habits and states?

If we say: “we went for a walk along the river” that doesn’t tell us that it was a habit.  
Maybe, we went for the walk just one time. So, we can’t just use the past simple.

1. We can use words, such as often, usually or sometimes, to tell us it was a regular activity:  
   *We often went for a walk along the river.*
2. Or we can use used to + verb. This tells us that the habit or state was in the past:  
   *I used to be tired when I got home from work.  
   I used to live on a farm.*

# 4 of 18 – Other ideas for ‘used to’ Used to shows a past habit or a past state:

# ‘I **used to** go to the gym twice a week.’

# Notice that we don’t change the verb to the past.

Used to can also give us the idea that this habit is finished:

‘I **used to** get up at 7, but now I get up at 8.’

However, this habit or state might still be true now:

‘When I was a kid, I **used to** love horror films, and I still do.’

# 5 of 18 – Structures of ‘used to’

**Used to** can be in a positive form:

Positive - I **used to** go to the gym twice a week.

**Used to** can be in a negative form:

Negative - I didn’t **use to** **go to** the gym at all, but now I go twice a week.

**Used to** can be in a question form:

Question - Did you **use to go** to the gym?

Notice how used to changes:

* Positive – used to
* Negative – didn’t use to
* Question – did … use to

# 6 of 18 – Question 1

Chose the best sentence that best describes the following statement:

A young girl who is unhappy playing football.

1. When I was younger, I used to like football
2. When I was younger, I didn’t use to like football

The correct answer is, b

# 7 of 18 – Question 2

Chose the best sentence that best describes the following statement:

A young girl is swimming in a swimming pool with her mum.

1. When I was younger, I used to go swimming with my mum
2. When I was younger, I didn’t use to go swimming with my mum.

The correct answer is, a

# 8 of 18 – Question 3

Chose the best sentence that best describes the following statement:

A young boy is being told of by his teacher in a classroom.

1. When I was younger, I used to do my homework
2. When I was younger, I didn’t use to do my homework

The correct answer is, b

# 9 of 18 – Question 4

Chose the best sentence that best describes the following statement:

A young boy sat playing video games late at night.

1. When I was younger, I used to stay up late playing computer games
2. When I was younger, I didn’t use to stay up late playing computer games

The correct answer is, a

# 10 of 18 – Question 5

Chose the best sentence that best describes the following statement:

A young girl sat at a dinner table not wanting to eat the vegetables on her plate.

1. When I was younger, I used to like eating vegetables
2. When I was younger, I didn’t use to like eating vegetables

The correct answer is, b

# 11 of 18 – Differentiating ‘used to’ and ‘would’

This next idea is a bit of a challenge.

In English, we often think have nostalgic thoughts about the past. Nostalgia is the nice feeling we get when we think about a happy time in the past. Maybe we would like to go back to those days, but unfortunately, we can’t travel back in time! It is very common in English to talk about nice routines from the past.

To this this, we typically use **would:**

1. When I a boy, me and my friends **would** play football at dinner time.
2. My dad and I **would** go fishing. If we caught anything, we**’d** take it home.
3. On Christmas Day, we**’d** get up very early and open our presents.
4. In my country, my mum **would** cook the most wonderful meals.

‘d = would

# 12 of 18 – Describing past habits

We can use used to or would to talk about any past habits. They don’t have to be nostalgic. In this way, used to and would mean the same thing.

*A few years ago, I* ***used to*** *eat chocolate for breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

*A few years ago, I* ***would*** *eat chocolate for breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

Would and used to can both be used for repeated actions. However, we can only use used to to talk about past states:

1. When I was younger, I **used to** be a vegetarian.
2. When I was younger, I **would** be a vegetarian.
3. When I was younger, I **used to** live on a farm.
4. When I was younger, I **would** live on a farm.

2 and 4 are not repeated actions, they are past states.

# 13 of 18 – Question 6

Fill in the blanks in the following statements with ‘used to’ if we can only use used to, or ‘both’ if we can use both used to and would.

1. Before I started going to the gym, I **BLANK** just sit around drinking tea all day.
2. Before we had kids, we **BLANK** go out whenever we wanted.
3. Before I had ESOL lessons, I **BLANK** take a dictionary with me everywhere.
4. In my old job, I **BLANK** be unhappy working double shifts.
5. My dad **BLANK** be very kind to us. He **BLANK** buy us anything we wanted.
6. I **BLANK** have lot of friends, but when I moved here, I don’t have so many.
7. We **BLANK** live on a farm. My dad **BLANK** get up very early to feed the cows.

The corrects answers are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Statement | Used to or both |
| 1 | Both |
| 2 | Both |
| 3 | Both |
| 4 | Used to |
| 5 | Used to / both |
| 6 | Used to |
| 7 | Used to / both |

# 14 of 18 – Understanding ‘used to’ and ‘would’

Talking about the past.

* Used to
* Would

*I used to be a smoker and I used to drink. But now, I go to the gym. I would stay in bed all day. Every day I would read the paper. I would never leave the house. I would smoke 20 cigarettes a day, and I would drink too much. I used to live in a rough neighbourhood, but now I live in a nice area.*

Let’s look at this in more detail.

‘I **used to** be a smoker’. – This is a past state.

‘I **would** smoke 20 cigarettes every day’. – This is a past habit.

We could also say, ‘I **used to** smoke 20 cigarettes every day’. – This is a past habit.

* We can only use would for past habits, not states
* We can use would or used to for past habits

# 15 of 18 – Final plenary

Let’s look again at the main ideas of used to and would.

**used to** and **would** are both used to talk about repeated actions (habits):

1. When I was a teenager, I **used to** go to the cinema all the time.
2. When I was a teenager, I **would** go to the cinema all the time.

However, when we are talking about past states (being and feeling) then we can only use **used to**:

‘When I was a teenager, I **used to** have a Saturday job.’

We wouldn’t say, ‘when I was a teenager, I **would** have a Saturday job.’

# 16 of 18 – Question 7

Here is a challenge for you. This will help us to focus on using used to and would.

Are these sentences grammatically correct or incorrect?

1. What did you use to do before you moved to the UK?
2. Where would you live before you moved here?
3. Did you use to do any sports when you were younger?
4. Before you could speak English, would you understand anything people said to you?
5. When you were little, would you have many friends?
6. How did you use to travel before you learnt to drive?

The answers are:  
a, c and f are grammatically correct.   
b, d and c are grammatically incorrect.

# 17 of 18 – Task

Download the ‘Write about your life - used to and would’ PDF and complete the task. ​

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This is designed to help you use your understanding of the unit in order to write about your life.

# 18 of 18 – End

Well done. You have completed this session on talking about past habits and states.

You should now be able to:

* Use **used to** to talk about things you often did in the past
* Talk about past habits
* Talk about past states
* Use **would** to talk about past habits

If you are unsure or have any questions about any of these topics, make a note and speak to your tutor for more help.