

Higher Spanish

The Imperfect Tense

The Imperfect Tense in Spanish is usually used to express an action which is incompleated or which was a habit.

In English this tense can be translated in a number of ways:

Hablaba = I spoke
I was speaking
I used to speak

To form the Imperfect Tense of regular -AR verbs you remove the -AR infinitive ending and add the following:

- ABA	hablABA
- ABAS	hablABAS
- ABA	hablABA
- ÁBAMOS	hablÁBAMOS
- ABAIS	hablABAIS
- ABAN	hablABAN

The imperfect endings for -ER and -IR verbs are the same. Again remove the -ER or -IR infinitive ending and add the following:

- ÍA	comÍA	vivÍA
- ÍAS	comÍAS	vivÍAS
- ÍA	comÍA	vivÍA
- ÍAMOS	comÍAMOS	vivÍAMOS
- ÍAIS	comÍAIS	vivÍAIS
- ÍAN	comÍAN	vivÍAN

In the Imperfect Tense radical stem changers do not change.

e.g.	EMPEZAR	PODER	PEDIR
	empezaba	podía	pedía
	empezabas	podías	pedías
	empezaba	podía	pedía
	empezábamos	podíamos	pedíamos
	empezabais	podíais	pedíais
	empezaban	podían	pedían

Irregular Verbs in the Imperfect Tense

There are only three: SER (to be), IR (to go) and VER (to see)

SER	IR	VER
era	iba	veía
eras	ibas	veías
era	iba	veía
éramos	íbamos	veíamos
erais	ibais	veíais
eran	iban	veían

Uses of the Imperfect Tense

1. Continuing Action:

The Imperfect Tense is used to talk about an action in the past which has not been completed or which is a habit. This can be translated into English by *was/were doing* or *used to do*.

e.g. Paseaba con el perro *todas las mañanas* = habit I walked the dog *every morning*

Estudiaba en la cocina = was + -ing I was studying in the kitchen

Antes trabajaba en un hotel Before I used to work in a hotel

There are some phrases which indicate the idea of habit and therefore require the use of the imperfect tense:

siempre	always	con frecuencia	frequently
a menudo	often	frecuentemente	frequently
a veces	sometimes	de vez en cuando	sometimes
muchas veces	many times	cada año(día,mes)	every year(day, month)
todos los días	every day		

2. Mental Activity:

Verbs which deal with mainly mental processes such as thinking, wishing, etc. are often expressed in the Imperfect Tense.

e.g.	querer	to want	desear	to desire
	preferir	to prefer	poder	to be able
	sentir	to regret	pensar	to think
	saber	to know	creer	to believe

3. Description in the past:

The Imperfect Tense is used to express description in the past.

e.g.	Weather	Hacía sol	It was sunny
	Time	Eran las cinco	It was 5 o'clock
	Physical description	Tenía el pelo rubio	He had blond hair
	States	Tenía sueño	He was sleepy

Translate each of the sentences below.

Habitual / Repeated Action

1. I used to study with John.
2. He used to work in a bank.
3. I used to read a lot of magazines.
4. They called us every night.
5. He used to swim in our pool.
6. We used to go to Florida every summer.

Description

7. The windows were open, but the door was closed.
8. I had lots of friends in primary school.
9. The cat was black and white.
10. You wore uniforms to school.

Was -ing / Were -ing

11. I was taking a shower while they were eating their breakfast.
12. Carmen was preparing the dinner.
13. The children were playing in the garden.
14. Why were you watching the television while I was doing my homework?
15. He was walking and I was running.

Mental or Emotional Action in the past

16. They didn't believe me.
17. He hated his new boss.
18. I liked the flowers in the garden.
19. How did you feel during the journey?
20. She worried about me a lot.
21. We were sad for a very long time.

"Would" or "Could" in the past

22. As a child, John would watch the television every day after school.
23. Last year they couldn't speak Spanish.
24. When Jane worked at the bank, she would drink 15 cups of coffee a day.
25. We couldn't call you because the telephone wouldn't work.
26. The meal was so awful that I couldn't eat it.

With key words or phrases

27. I always studied before a test.
28. He frequently called me after 10pm.
29. You often wrote long letters.
30. Sometimes he didn't earn as much as his wife.
31. All the time that I was there, you never said anything.
32. She was never happy. She complained every day.
33. At times we read, and at times we wrote.

Time and Age

34. I was twenty-two when I bought a car.
35. It was 2:30 when you called me.
36. They were 18 when they finished secondary school.
37. When I got up it was 6:30.
38. Where did you live when you were 14.

There was / There were

39. There were twenty people at the party.
40. There was a lot of noise during the storm.
41. There wasn't enough time for questions.
42. There were more women at the meeting than men.
43. There was so much fog that I couldn't drive.
44. There were lots of people in the streets in summer.
45. There was a fly in my soup.