

Intermediate 2
Unit 8: Grammar
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Habits in the Past

Habit = something that you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it

“used to” + Simple Form of the Verb

We use “use to” when we had a habit in the past, but now we don’t. Similarly, we use “didn’t use to” when we didn’t have a habit in the past, but now we do.

Examples:

Tom **used to** *smoke* 5 years ago. = He smoked 5 years ago, but now he doesn’t.

Sally **didn’t use to** *collect coins*. = She didn’t collect coins in the past, but now she does.

Did Robert use to *bite his nails when he was a child?* = Was Robert in the habit of biting his nails in his childhood?

“would” + Simple Form of the Verb

We can also use “would” followed by the simple form of the verb to mention a habit in the past. But we may still have the habit.

Example:

Robert **would** *study hard when he was a high school student*. = In the past, he studied hard. He may still study hard.

Point:

"Used to" means the habit didn't continue and it stopped at a point in the past. But "would" can be used for both a habit that was given up and a habit that continued.

- If we are sure that a habit still exists, we should use "would".
- If we don't know a habit still exists or not, we should use "would".
- If we know that a habit existed in the past and doesn't exist now, we should use "used to".

Sample Question:

When I was in Greece twenty years ago, the fishermen get up very early and go fishing.

- a) used to b) would c) will d) have to

Correct Answer: b

Option b is the correct answer because even today after so many years, fishermen in Greece get up very early and they have not given up the habit of being early birds.

Important Point:

We can't use "would" when we are talking about:

- **Possession = having or owning something**

Don't Say: I **would** have a bicycle when I was a child.

Say: I **used to** have a bicycle when I was a child.

- **Location = place**

Don't Say: There **would** be a restaurant across the street twenty years ago.

Say: There **used to** be a restaurant across the street twenty years ago.

- **State = how something is**

Don't Say: Mary **would** feel depressed most of the time when she was a teenager.

Say: Mary **used to** feel depressed most of the time when she was a teenager.

Here are some multiple-choice grammar questions focusing on past habits where "used to" is required instead of "would":

1. When I was a child, I _____ play with my friends in the park every day.

- a) would
b) used to
c) will
d) may

2. She _____ have long hair, but she cut it short last year.

- a) would
- b) used to**
- c) will
- d) shall

3. They _____ live in a small village before they moved to the city.

- a) would
- b) used to**
- c) will
- d) have to

4. My brother _____ be very shy, but now he is quite outgoing.

- a) would
- b) used to**
- c) will
- d) can

5. We _____ go to the beach every summer when we were kids.

- a) would
- b) used to**
- c) will
- d) have to

Question 2 deals with possession, question 3 involves a location, and shyness is a state in question 4; therefore, we have to use “used to” and we can’t use “would”.

In questions 1 and 5, the use of “used to” is more appropriate because it clearly indicates that these were regular activities in the past that are no longer happening:

1. “When I was a child, I **used to** play with my friends in the park every day.”
 - This implies that playing with friends in the park was a regular activity in the past, but it is not necessarily true now.

2. “We **used to** go to the beach every summer when we were kids.”
 - This indicates that going to the beach every summer was a regular habit in the past, but it does not happen anymore.

If you use “would” in these sentences without additional context, it might suggest that the actions could still be happening, which can be confusing. “Used to” removes this ambiguity by clearly stating that these were past habits that no longer occur.

Source:

[Intermediate 2 \(anglophone.ir\)](http://intermediate2.anglophone.ir)