

When to Use "Used to" and "Would"

We use both of these expressions to refer to things we did in the past but no longer do.

For example:

- *When I was a toddler, I used to sleep after lunch. I don't do it anymore.*
- *When I was a toddler, I would sleep after lunch. I don't do it anymore.*

As you can see, we can use both forms to express a past habit. Is there a difference between them? Let's find out.

USED TO

The phrase "used to" expresses past habits, regularly repeated actions in the past and past states.

For example:

- *Sara used to travel a lot. Now she hardly ever leaves her neighbourhood. (past habit)*
- *When I was younger, I used to visit the dentist every three months. (regularly repeated action)*
- *We used to have a dog. Now we have a cat. (state)*

To make a negative sentence, use ***didn't use to***.

- *Brian didn't use to listen to music much before he started dating a band singer.*
- *I didn't use to like cooking when I was younger.*
- *Sean never used to drink much coffee.*
- *I never used to be the best student, but I used to do my homework regularly.*

To make a question, use ***did you use to?***

For example:

- *Did you use to read a lot when you were a student?*
- *Did your children use to believe in the Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus?*
- *How early did you use to get up at your previous job?*
- *Which sport did you use to go in for when you were younger?*

WOULD

We use would in the same way as used to; but we can't use it with stative verbs, only action verbs.

For example:

- *We would go and play tennis every Sunday when we lived abroad.*
- *I would sleep till noon on Saturdays when I was younger.*
- *Simon would play basketball every day when he was a teenager.*

But remember not to use would with stative verbs:

- ~~*My parents would be nice and polite.*~~ (*My parents used to be very nice and polite.*)
- ~~*Tara would have a big car.*~~ (*Tara used to have a big car.*)
- ~~*My family would believe in me when I was a student*~~ (*My family used to believe in me when I was a student.*)

We normally use would to talk about things from the past with nostalgia.

For example:

When I was very young, I would visit my grandparents every summer. My grandma would make pancakes for breakfast and we would eat together. She would tell me stories about my father when he was my age. After that, we would sit in the garden or go swimming in the river nearby. Sometimes, I miss those days and my grandparents a lot.

We form negative sentences by adding NOT to WOULD.

- *I wouldn't eat bacon for the world when I was a kid.*
- *They wouldn't start learning for the exam until it was very close to the time.*

To form a question, just put would before the subject of the sentence.

- *Would you stay up all night in high school?*
- *How hard would you study for your exams?*

Conclusion

To sum up, we use used to with habitual and repeated actions and states in the past. We use would for actions, but not for states.

For example:

Peter used to go fishing. He would get up early, around 4 o'clock, he would pack his fishing equipment and wouldn't come back before he caught a full bag of fish.

- *Our teacher used to be a young, intelligent lady. (not would be)*
- *There would be a lot of spectators watching the famous swimmer jump into the pool from a height of 10 meters.*

Remember that you can use used to without establishing the time period, but not would.

For example:

Bob used to drink a lot. (we don't know when)

Bob would drink a lot before he got married. (Bob would drink a lot doesn't mean anything without the time reference.)

Let's say that would is more formal than used to. It means that we use used to in casual everyday conversation, while would is more formal and polite.