

# Used to and Would

As an English teacher, I often meet English students who believe that they don't need to study grammar. I suppose that a native speaker doesn't have to know the grammar of their native language because they'd naturally learned the language when they were very young. However, when it comes to studying a foreign language, good conduct of grammar as rules and system that holds the language together is absolutely necessary. Not only it will help you make natural sentences but you will also become more confident when speaking, which is the key to fluency.

Many English students have been studying English for quite some time but still don't know the difference between **used to** and **would**. I sincerely hope that this blog post will help you clear things up once and for all.

We use both of these expressions to talk about things we did in the past, but we no longer do them.

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** go to the dentist once 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.*

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 Clause?**
- **How early did you use to get up at your previous job?**

## WOULD

We use **would** in the same way as **used to**; but we can't use it with **stative** but **action verbs** only. (Follow the link to learn more about stative and 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** very 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 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.

Do the exercise to perfect your knowledge. Fill in the gaps with used to or would. Sometimes both are correct.

1. Before she started exercising, my mum .... suffer from chronic tiredness.
2. When I was a kid, I ..... play football every day.
3. Sara .....have brown hair. Now she's blond.
4. I ..... stay up and talk to my friends until late when I was a teenager.
5. Michael ..... have a small car. Now he's got a big one.
6. Our children .... eat way too much chocolate when they were toddlers.
7. I remember that my mum ..... use a special cloth for dusting.
8. Our Biology teacher ..... be very strict
9. Whenever they came, we ..... go to the picnic.
10. You ..... be such a polite person. Look at you now!

Answer key:

1. used to 2. both 3. used to 4. both 5. used to 6. both 7. both 8. used to 9. both 10. used to