

the past: habitual events and specific incidents

narrative tenses: describing specific incidents in the past

This happened when I was about five years old. My father had gone away on business for a few days and my brother and I were sleeping in my parents' bedroom. Before we went to bed that night, I had been reading a very scary story about a wicked witch. In the middle of the night, I woke up with a start and saw that a figure in a dark coat was standing in the doorway. I screamed at the top of my voice.



When we describe specific incidents in the past, we use **narrative tenses**, i.e. the past simple, past continuous, and past perfect simple or continuous.

- We use the past simple to talk about the main actions in a story (*We went to bed..., I woke up..., I screamed*).
- We use the past continuous to set the scene (*We were sleeping in my parents' bedroom*) and to describe actions in progress in the past (*Somebody was standing in the doorway*).
- We use the past perfect and the past perfect continuous to talk about the earlier past, i.e. things which happened before the main event (*My father had gone away..., I had been reading a story*).

used to and would: describing habitual events and repeated actions in the past

- 1 Every summer, my family **used to rent** an old house in the south of France. My sister and I **often walked** to the harbour in the morning, where we **used to watch** the fishermen cleaning their nets.
- 2 Every night before we went to bed, my mother **would tell** us stories, but she **would never read** them from a book – she **would always make them up** herself.
- 3 When I was a teenager, my friends **were always teasing** me because of my red hair.

- 1 We often use **used to + infinitive** as an alternative to the past simple to talk about things that we did repeatedly in the past.
 - We can also use **used to + infinitive** to talk about situations or states which have changed, e.g. *I used to have much longer hair when I was younger*.
- 2 We use **would + infinitive** as an alternative to **used to** to talk about things that we did repeatedly in the past over a period of time.
 - We **don't use would** with stative verbs, i.e. to talk about situations or states which have changed. **NOT** *I would have much longer hair when I was younger*.
 - We **don't use would** without a time reference, e.g. *I used to play the violin*. **NOT** *I would play the violin*.
- 3 We can also use **always + past continuous** for things that happened repeatedly, especially when they were irritating habits.

used to and be / get used to

Be careful not to confuse **used to** and **be / get used to**. **used to** only describes states or repeated actions in the past, **be / get used to** means **be / get familiar with**, e.g. **We used to live in London. We moved to the country last year, but we're still not used to it. It's too quiet for me, and my husband can't get used to having to drive everywhere.**

a **Circle** the correct form. Tick (✓) if both are possible.

Corinne and I **used to be** / **would be** very close, but recently we've grown apart.

- 1 When I came into the room, my aunt sat / **was sitting** with her back to me. When she turned round, I could see that she **had been crying** / **had cried**.
- 2 Our grandmother **always used to have** / **would always have** a surprise waiting for us when we visited.
- 3 My sister **used to live** / **would live** on her own, but then she was buying / **bought** a flat with her boyfriend.
- 4 My brother **didn't use to look** / **wouldn't look** at all like my father, but now he does.
- 5 When I was small, I **was always getting** / **always used to get** into trouble at school and my parents **used to punish** / **would punish** me by not letting me play with my friends at the weekend.
- 6 Suddenly, we heard a tremendous bang and we saw that a car **crashed** / **had crashed** into a tree and petrol **poured** / **was pouring** onto the road.

b Complete the text with the verb in brackets using a narrative tense or **would / used to**.**My earliest memory**

When I was about four or five, my grandmother, who was Polish, **was living** (live) in London and we children often ¹ **spent** (spend) weekends at her flat. My grandfather ² **had died** (die) a couple of years earlier, so I suppose she was in need of company. We loved going there, as my grandmother ³ **would cook** (cook) special meals for us and ⁴ **would take** (take) us for lovely walks in Regent's Park, which was quite nearby. One occasion that I remember really well was when she ⁵ **invited** (invite) me to stay with her on my own, without my brothers and sisters. On the first day, after lunch, my grandmother ⁶ **went** (go) for her rest. I ⁷ **tried** (try) to sleep too, but I couldn't, so after a while I ⁸ **got up** (get up) and ⁹ **decided** (decide) to explore the flat. Everything was very quiet, so I was convinced that my grandmother ¹⁰ **was sleeping** (sleep). The room I most ¹¹ **wanted** (want) to explore was my grandfather's study, I imagine, precisely because she ¹² **had told** (tell) me not to go in there. I opened the door and went in, and was immediately drawn to his large old desk. I ¹³ **climbed** (climb) onto the chair and ¹⁴ **saw** (see) on the desk a green pen in a kind of stand, with a bottle of ink. I ¹⁵ **had been asking** (ask) my parents for a real pen for a long time, but they ¹⁶ **had refused** (refuse), foreseeing the mess that I was almost bound to make with the ink. I picked up the pen and then tried to open the bottle of ink. At that moment, I ¹⁷ **heard** (hear) my grandmother's voice saying, 'Christina? Where are you? What are you doing?' To my horror, I ¹⁸ **realized** (realize) that my grandmother ¹⁹ **had got up** (get up) and ²⁰ **was coming** (come) towards the study. Two seconds later, she ²¹ **opened** (open) the door. I will never forget the awful feeling of shame that she ²² **had caught** (catch) me doing something that she ²³ **had forbidden** (forbid) me to do.

pronouns

generic pronouns

- 1 If you mispronounce a word, people might not understand **you**.
- 2 **One** tends to have problems understanding very strong accents.
- 3 When **we** talk about an accent, **we** must not confuse this with pronunciation.
- 4 **They** always say that it's never too late to learn a new language.
They should make it compulsory for people to learn two languages at school.
- 5 If someone phones me, tell **them** to call back later.
Could the person who left **their** bag in the library please come and see me?

- 1 We often use *you* to mean people in general.
- 2 We can also use *one* + third person singular of the verb to mean people in general. *one* is much more formal than *you* and is very rarely used in spoken English.
 - We can also use *one's* as a possessive adjective, e.g. *When confronted with danger, one's first reaction is often to freeze.*
- 3 *we* can also be used to make a general statement of opinion which includes the reader / listener.
- 4 In informal English, we often use *they* to talk about other people in general, or people in authority, e.g. *They always say...* (*They* = people in general); *They should make it compulsory...* (*They* = the government).
- 5 We use *they*, *them*, and *their* to refer to one person who may be male or female, instead of using *he* or *she*, *his* or *her*, etc.

reflexive and reciprocal pronouns

- 1 You need to look after **yourself** with that cold.
He's very egocentric. He always talks about **himself**.
- 2 I managed to complete the crossword! I was really pleased with **myself**.
- 3 We decorated the house **ourselves**.
There's no way I'm going to do it for you. Do it **yourself**!
- 4 I don't feel very comfortable going to the cinema **by myself**.
- 5 My ex-husband and I don't talk to **each other** any more.
My mother and sister don't understand **one another** at all.

- 1 We often use reflexive pronouns when the subject and object of a verb are the same person.
 - We don't usually use reflexive pronouns with some verbs which may be reflexive in other languages, e.g. *wash, shave*, etc. **NOT** *He got up, shaved himself, and...*
 - *enjoy* is always used with a reflexive pronoun when not followed by another object, e.g. *Enjoy your meal!* **BUT** *Did you enjoy yourself last night?*
- 2 We can also use reflexive pronouns after most prepositions when the complement is the same as the subject.
 - After prepositions of place we use object pronouns, not reflexive pronouns, e.g. *She put the bag next to her on the seat.* **NOT** *next-to-herself*
- 3 We can use reflexive pronouns to emphasize the subject, e.g. *We decorated the house ourselves.* (= we did it, not professional decorators)
- 4 *by* + reflexive pronoun = alone, on your / her, etc. own.
- 5 We use *each other* or *one another* for reciprocal actions, i.e. A does the action to B, and B does the action to A.

it and there

- 1 **It's** 10 o'clock. **It's** 30 degrees today. **It's** five miles to the coast.
- 2 **It was** great to hear that you and Martina are getting married!
It used to be difficult to buy fresh pasta in the UK, but now it's everywhere.
- 3 **There have been** a lot of storms recently. **There used to be** a cinema in that street.

- 1 We use *it* + *be* to talk about time, temperature, and distance.
- 2 We also use *it* + *be* as a 'preparatory' subject before adjectives. *It was great to hear from you.* **NOT** *To-hear-from-you-was-great.*
- 3 We use *there* + *be* + noun to say if people and things are present or exist (or not). You cannot use *it...* here. **NOT** *it-used-to-be-a-cinema-in-that-street.*

- a Circle the correct pronoun. Tick (✓) if both are possible.

They helped one another / themselves to prepare for the exam.

- 1 *One* / *You* can often tell where people are from by the way they speak.
- 2 Can you put my case on the rack above *yourself* / *you*?
- 3 Sally and her sister look incredibly like *each other* / *one another*. Are they twins?
- 4 Steve is a really private person – he rarely talks about *him* / *himself*.
- 5 Either Suzie or Mark has left *her* / *their* book behind.
- 6 When a person goes to live abroad, it may take *them* / *him* a while to pick up the language.
- 7 *They* / *One* say that eating tomatoes can help protect the body against certain diseases.

- b Complete the sentences with a pronoun.

Don't tell him how to spell it. Let him work it out by himself.

- 1 If anyone has not yet paid _____ course fees, _____ should go to registration immediately.
- 2 Isabel is very quick-tempered. She finds it very hard to control _____.
- 3 I wouldn't stay in that hotel – _____ say the rooms are tiny and the service is awful.
- 4 They've never got on. They just don't like _____ at all.
- 5 Did they enjoy _____ at the festival?
- 6 Are you going to have the flat repainted, or will you and Jo do it _____?
- 7 It's always the same with taxis. _____ can never find one when _____ need one!

- c Complete the sentences with *it* or *there*.

There was a very interesting article about language learning in *The Times* yesterday.

- 1 Look. _____'s a spelling mistake in this word. _____ should be *j*, not *g*.
- 2 _____'s illegal to use a handheld mobile while you're driving. _____ used to be a lot of accidents caused by this.
- 3 How many miles is _____ to Manchester from here?
- 4 _____'s scorching today. _____ must be at least 35 degrees.
- 5 _____'s no need to hurry. The train doesn't leave for ages.
- 6 _____'s not worth reading the paper today. _____'s absolutely nothing interesting in it.