

## Beginning/End vs. Habitual

Use the preterite to . . .

- tell about the beginning or the end of a past action

El sábado pasado, el partido de fútbol **empezó** a la una. **Terminó** a las cuatro. El entrenador **habló** a las cinco.

*Last Saturday, the soccer game began at one. It ended at four. The coach spoke (began to speak) at five.*

Use the imperfect to . . .

- talk about the habitual nature of an action (something you always did)

**Había** un partido todos los sábados. Muchas personas **jugaban** todas las semanas.

*There was a game every Saturday. Many people played every week.*

## Completed vs. Ongoing

Use the preterite to . . .

- express an action that is viewed as completed

El partido **duró** tres horas. **Ganaron** Los Lobos, de Villalegre.

*The game lasted three hours. The Lobos of Villalegre won.*

Use the imperfect to . . .

- tell what was happening when another action took place and tell about simultaneous events (with **mientras** = *while*)

Yo no vi el final del partido. **Estaba** en la cocina cuando **terminó**.

*I didn't see the end of the game. I was in the kitchen when it ended.*

Mientras mi amigo **veía** el partido, **hablaba** con su novia.

*While my friend was watching the game, he was talking with his girlfriend.*

## Series of Completed Actions vs. Background

Use the preterite to . . .

- express a series of completed actions

Durante el partido, los jugadores **corrieron**, **saltaron** y **gritaron**.

*During the game, the players ran, jumped, and shouted.*

Use the imperfect to . . .

- give background details of many kinds: time, location, weather, mood, age, physical and mental characteristics

**Llovía** un poco durante el partido. Todos los jugadores **eran** jóvenes; **tenían** 17 ó 18 años. ¡Y todos **esperaban** ganar!

*It rained a little bit during the game. All the players were young; they were 17 or 18 years old. And all of them hoped to win!*

Preterit

Imperfect

## Interrupting vs. Interrupted

The preterite and the imperfect frequently occur in the same sentence. In the first sentence the imperfect tells what was happening when another action—conveyed by the preterite—broke the continuity of the ongoing activity. In the second sentence, the preterite reports the action that took place because of a condition—described by the imperfect—that was in progress or in existence at that time.

Miguel **estudiaba** cuando **sonó** el teléfono.  
*Miguel was studying when the phone rang.*

Olivia **comió** tanto porque **tenía** mucha hambre.  
*Olivia ate so much because she was very hungry.*

## Action vs. the Stage (Background)/Conditions/Ongoing

The preterite and imperfect are also used together in the presentation of an event. The preterite narrates the action while the imperfect sets the stage, describes the conditions that caused the action, or emphasizes the continuing nature of a particular action.

Era un día hermoso. **Hacía** mucho sol pero no **hacía** mucho calor. Como no **tenía** que trabajar en la oficina, **compré** unas flores de primavera y **salí** vestida de camiseta y pantalones cortos para trabajar todo el día en el jardín.  
*It was a beautiful day. It was very sunny but it wasn't very hot. Since I didn't have to work in the office, I bought some spring flowers and I went out dressed in a T-shirt and shorts to work in the garden all day.*