

## USES OF THE IMPERFECT

### A. Habitual Actions.

The imperfect is used to talk about things that happened in the past. It has several specific uses.

- The imperfect is used to describe habitual or customary actions. It is often used with expressions such as *todos los días*, *generalmente*, *siempre*, *muchas veces*, etc.

De niño, jugaba fútbol todos los sábados. As a kid, I used to play soccer every Saturday. Siempre íbamos a la biblioteca. We always used to go to the library. Cuando llovía, veíamos películas. When it rained, we would watch movies.

- The imperfect is used to tell time in the past.

Era mediodía y hacía mucho calor. It was noon and it was very hot. Eran las once de la noche y los niños tenían sueño.

It was 11:00 at night and the children were sleepy.

- The imperfect is used to express age in the past.

Julia tenía siete años en 1993. Julia was seven in 1993. Todavía era fuerte cuando tenía setenta y cinco años.

She was still strong when she was seventy five.

## *B. Continuing Actions*

- Past actions may be viewed as either completed or continuing. Those seen as *continuing or in progress are expressed in the imperfect.*

*Hablaban mientras caminaban. They were speaking while they were walking. Hacía su tarea a esa hora. He was doing his homework at that hour.*

- Sometimes a continuing action is interrupted by another action. In this case *the continuing action is expressed in the imperfect and the interrupting action is in the preterite.*

*Abuelita llamó mientras comíamos. Grandma called while we were eating. Jugaba muy bien cuando chocó con su defensor. He was playing very well when he ran into a guard.*

### C. Description

• In addition to describing habitual actions, telling time in the past and talking about age in the past, the imperfect is used when describing an ongoing situation, and physical, emotional, or mental states. Generally, possession and physical location are considered ongoing situations and the imperfect is used.

Ongoing situations:

Tenía muchos amigos. I had a lot of friends. Había muchas carpetas en el pupitre. There were a lot of folders on the desk.

La jaula estaba en el jardín. The cage was in the garden.

Physical, emotional, or mental states:

Tenía dolor de cabeza. I had a headache. Ese invierno mamá no se sentía bien. That winter Mom didn't feel well.

Yo lo amaba, pero él ya no me quería. Estaba nerviosísima. I loved him, but he no longer loved me. I was really nervous. Estábamos aburridos. We were bored.

• The imperfect is frequently used to provide the background for other imperfect or preterite actions. It describes what was happening before other actions began.

Había una vez una viejita que no confiaba en nadie. Un día decidió poner todo su dinero en... Once upon a time there was a little old lady who didn't trust anybody. One day she decided to put all her money in...