

used to

English B1

What this topic teaches

Some past habits are gone forever. You *used to* believe in a summer holiday that felt endless. The form **used to + base verb** describes past habits and states that are **no longer true**.

- *I **used to play** football every day.* (Then: every day. Now: not any more.)
- *She **used to be** shy.* (A past state, now gone.)
- Chinese does this with 有 : 有. English changes the verb form instead.
- Memory hook: *used to* is a museum label: “this habit lived here; it doesn’t any more.”

The forms

	Form	Example
statement	used to + base	I used to play football.
negative	didn’t use to + base	I didn’t use to like coffee.
question	Did + subject + use to?	Did you use to live here?

- △ In the negative and question, the *d* disappears: *didn’t **use** to*, *Did you **use** to?* The *did* eats the *d*, the same appetite as always.
- Spoken English often keeps the *d* anyway, and in writing the exam answer is *didn’t use to*. Write it the exam’s way.
- There is no present form. “*I use to play football every day*” (meaning now) × – that’s just the present simple: *I play football every day*. The museum is for old exhibits only.

used to or would?

Would can also describe past habits – but only **actions**, never states.

	used to	would
repeated action	I used to play football.	I would play football every weekend.
past state	I used to be shy.	× – never “ <i>I would be shy</i> ”

- *would* sounds literary , like the start of a story: *Every summer, we would cycle to the river.*
- △ States take *used to* only: *I used to have a bike*, never “*I would have a bike*” (that one means something else entirely – B2’s problem).

The three families of “used to”

Form	Meaning	Example
used to + base verb	past habit, now gone	I used to drink milk.
be used to + -ing/noun	be accustomed to	I am used to getting up early.
get used to + -ing/noun	the process of becoming accustomed	I’m getting used to the new school.

- △ *be used to* has nothing to do with the past habit form. In *I am used to the cold*, the *to* is a preposition, so the next verb takes *-ing*: *I’m used to **getting** up early* ✓, “*I’m used to get up early*” ×.
- = *I used to drink milk.* = *I’m used to getting up early.* Same characters’ neighbourhood, different grammar planet.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **The vanishing d.** “*I use to play*” in past-habit writing is missing the *d*: *used to*. (After *didn’t*, drop it: the helper ate it.)
- △ **used to + state, would + action.** “*I would be shy*” × for a past state; *I used to be shy* ✓.
- △ **Don’t confuse the families.** “*I am used to drink milk*” mixes the museum with the present: either *I used to drink milk* (past habit) or *I am used to drinking milk* (accustomed now).
- △ **Not for single past events.** “*I used to break my arm last year*” × – one event, one break, one past simple: *I broke my arm last year*. The museum labels habits, not accidents.

Say it aloud

Open your personal museum.

- I used to believe the homework would do itself. I was young and hopeful.
- I didn’t use to like vegetables. Now I am used to eating them. Growth is real.
- Every summer, we would cycle to the river, and the river would win.
- Did you use to have a pet? – Yes, I did. A goldfish. We used to understand each other.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *I _____ (play) football every day – not any more.* – **used to play**. A past habit, gone.
2. *She _____ (be) shy as a child.* – **used to be**. A past state; *would* can't carry states.
3. *Did you _____ (use/used) to live here?* – **use**. *Did* ate the *d*.
4. *I'm used to _____ (get) up early.* – **getting**. After *be used to*, the *to* is a preposition, so *-ing*.
5. *"I would have a bike."* (meaning: a past state) – $\times \rightarrow$ **I used to have a bike**. States take *used to* only.