

Used to

What is used to?

We use this structure to talk about habits or recurring events in the past, but which no longer happen. For example:

I *used to* smoke a pack of cigarettes a day. (Now I don't smoke a pack of cigarettes.)

I *used to* live in New York. (Now I don't live in New York.)

What is the sentence structure?

Used to uses the following sentence structure:

subject | used to | infinitive | object / complement

I | used to | work | for a large company.

My dad | used to | collect | rare coins.

She | used to | bite | her nails.

Use the following structures for question and negative sentences:

Did you use to work for a large company?

Did your dad use to collect rare coins?

I *didn't use to* work for a large company.

My dad *didn't use to* collect rare coins.

How do we use the target language?

Used to + the infinitive expresses something that doesn't happen anymore, typically a habit or event. In each of the above examples, the sentences express that the action has finished. Let's look at the following examples:

I *used to* work for a large company. (But now I don't. I work for a small company.)

She *used to* bite her nails. (But now she doesn't.)

Note that all the examples are in the past tense. To talk about present habits or states, the simple present tense is used without used to. For example:

I work for a large company now.

She bites her nails all the time.

Is there additional information on sentences with used to?

Yes. The structure doesn't just express a past event, but more specifically an earlier stage in a person's life which has now finished. For example, a person wouldn't talk about his life in the following manner:

Work was crazy last month. I used to work nonstop. And because I worked so much, I used to drink two pots of coffee every day. I used to be so exhausted.

The events are too recent to use this target language. However, if the person worked eighteen hour days years ago, it would be okay to say the following because it describes a much earlier and complete situation:

Work used to be crazy when I was much younger. I used to work nonstop. And because I worked so much, I used to drink two pots of coffee every day. I used to be so exhausted. I used to work nonstop when I was younger.

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