

A Comparison of the Preterit and the Imperfect

- The preterit and the imperfect are two tenses in Spanish used to talk about the past.
- The preterit usually corresponds to the simple past in English, whereas the imperfect is similar to the past progressive tense (*was/were + -ing* form) or the combination of *used to* or *would* + the infinitive in English.

El imperfecto	El pretérito
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refers to an ongoing action or state in the past. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refers to a single completed action or state in the past.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used for describing actions or states in the past, descriptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used to describe or narrate a complete action.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used to describe repeated habitual action in the past. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refers to the beginning or end of an action.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used for telling time, the date, the weather, or the season in the past. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used for interrupted actions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used for emotional or mental states in the past. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used for age or possession in the past. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Used for parallel actions in the past. 	

- A combination of the imperfect and the preterit tenses is used with **interrupted action**.
 - The imperfect is used to describe an action that was in progress when another action took place (preterit).
 - ▣ *La madre miraba la tele cuando el bebé empezó a llorar.*
The mother was watching TV when the baby began to cry.
 - ▣ *Comíamos cuando llegó Oscar.*
We were eating when Oscar arrived.
 - ▣ *Mientras estudiaba en la biblioteca, sonó su teléfono celular.*
While he was studying in the library, his cell phone rang.
- Only the imperfect is used for **parallel actions** (When two separate actions are occurring at the same time).
 - ▣ *Llovía mientras manejábamos.*
It was raining while we were driving.
 - ▣ *La maestra estaba enojada porque los estudiantes hablaban mientras explicaba la lección.*
The teacher was angry because the students were talking while she was explaining the lesson.