FLASHFEED STUDY GUIDE

Spanish Verbs 2: The Past

Study guide by FlashFeed

November 2026 edition · pack version 1.0.8

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Spanish Verbs 2: The Past: study guide

Talk about the past in Latin American Spanish: the preterite for what happened, with its spelling changes and irregular verbs, the imperfect for how things were and what you used to do, and how to choose between them. Part of the Spanish collection, after Spanish Verbs 1.

Edition	November 2026 (2026-11-21)
Pack version	1.0.8
Contents	6 lessons · 240 cards in the app · 90 self-test questions · 4 pictures
In the app	flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/spanish-verbs-2

How to use this guide

Take one lesson at a time: read the study guide, then go over any key facts. Where a lesson has a self-test, try it from memory before you check the answer key at the back. Follow the Go deeper links when you want more.

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LESSON 1 OF 6

Lesson 1: The Preterite of Regular Verbs

Part 1: What the Preterite Does · Part 2: Regular -ar Verbs in the Preterite · Part 3: Regular -er and -ir Verbs in the Preterite

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Recognize that the preterite tells finished past actions and events in a row, and use time words like anteayer, el lunes pasado and hace dos días.
- Conjugate hablar, trabajar, estudiar and comprar in the preterite, use the accents on -é and -ó, and recognize that the nosotros form matches the present.
- Conjugate regular -er and -ir verbs in the preterite, use the accents on -í and -ió, and recognize when the nosotros form matches the present.

The Preterite of Regular Verbs

So far you have talked about the present and about what you are going to do. This lesson gives you your first past tense, the **preterite**, which is how Spanish says what happened: *I worked*, *we ate*, *they lived*. You will learn what the preterite is for, then how to build its forms for regular **-ar**, **-er** and **-ir** verbs. With it you can talk about yesterday, last week or last year.

What the Preterite Does

The **preterite** (**el pretérito**) tells what happened. It presents a past action as finished: the action took place at a definite time, or it filled a stretch of time with a clear beginning and end. Some books call this tense the **pretérito perfecto simple** or the **pretérito indefinido**. All three names mean the same tense.

- **Ayer hablé con mi mamá.** — *Yesterday I talked with my mom.*
- **Trabajé ocho horas.** — *I worked eight hours.*

In the first sentence, **ayer** points to one definite day. In the second, the work filled a span of eight hours with a clear start and finish.

The preterite is the usual tense for telling single events, and also for telling one event after another. Each verb in a series is a new event that follows the one before it:

- **Estudié dos horas y después comí tacos.** — *I studied for two hours and then I ate tacos.*

Certain time words often go with the preterite, because they name a finished moment or period in the past:

- **ayer** — *yesterday*
- **anoche** — *last night*
- **anteayer** — *the day before yesterday*

- **el lunes pasado** — *last Monday*
- **la semana pasada** — *last week*
- **el año pasado** — *last year*
- **hace dos días** — *two days ago*

In phrases like these, **pasado** means *last* and usually comes after the noun. With a past-tense verb, **hace** plus a stretch of time means *ago*. Here are some of these time words in sentences:

- **Anoche comí en casa de mi abuela.** — *Last night I ate at my grandmother's house.*
- **La semana pasada compré un libro.** — *Last week I bought a book.*
- **Hace dos días recibí un mensaje.** — *Two days ago I received a message.*

Every verb in these examples is regular: it follows the standard pattern of its family. The next two parts show you how to build those forms.

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Regular -ar Verbs in the Preterite

To build the preterite of a regular **-ar** verb, drop **-ar** to get the stem, then add one of five endings. In a regular verb the stem stays the same and only the ending changes. **Hablar** (*to speak*) is the model, with the stem **habl-**:

- **yo** hablé — *I spoke*
- **tú** hablaste — *you spoke (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** habló — *you spoke (formal) / he, she spoke*
- **nosotros / nosotras** hablamos — *we spoke*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** hablaron — *you all spoke / they spoke*

The preterite endings of regular **-ar** verbs are **-é**, **-aste**, **-ó**, **-amos** and **-aron**. Here are three more verbs that take them. Each line gives the verb, its stem and its five forms, in the same order as the list above (so **trabajé** means *I worked*, **trabajaste** means *you worked*, and so on):

- **trabajar** (*to work*), stem **trabaj-**: **trabajé**, **trabajaste**, **trabajó**, **trabajamos**, **trabajaron**
- **estudiar** (*to study*), stem **estudi-**: **estudié**, **estudiaste**, **estudió**, **estudiamos**, **estudiaron**
- **comprar** (*to buy*), stem **compr-**: **compré**, **compraste**, **compró**, **compramos**, **compraron**

Here they are in sentences:

- **Compré tamales en el mercado.** — *I bought tamales at the market.*
- **¿Compraste pan dulce?** — *Did you buy sweet bread?*
- **Ella estudió en Guadalajara.** — *She studied in Guadalajara.*
- **Ustedes trabajaron mucho.** — *You all worked a lot.*

Watch the accents. The **yo** form ends in **-é** and the **usted / él / ella** form ends in **-ó**, and both carry a written accent. The accent shows that the stress falls on the last syllable: **ha-BLÓ**, not **HA-blo**. It also

changes the meaning. **Hablo**, with no accent, is the present tense, *I speak*, but **habló** is the preterite, *he, she spoke*. Dropping the accent turns *he, she spoke* into *I speak*.

- **Hablo con mi mamá.** — *I talk with my mom.*
- **Ella habló con mi mamá.** — *She talked with my mom.*

The **nosotros** form of a regular **-ar** verb is the same in the present and the preterite, so **hablamos** can mean *we speak* or *we spoke*. A time word or the context tells you which:

- **Ahora trabajamos en Monterrey.** — *Now we work in Monterrey.*
- **El año pasado trabajamos en Oaxaca.** — *Last year we worked in Oaxaca.*

Some verbs do not follow this pattern exactly; later lessons cover them.

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Regular -er and -ir Verbs in the Preterite

Regular **-er** and **-ir** verbs share one set of preterite endings: **-í**, **-iste**, **-ió**, **-imos** and **-ieron**. Drop **-er** or **-ir** to get the stem, then add one of the five. The models are **comer** (*to eat*), with the stem **com-**, and **vivir** (*to live*), with the stem **viv-**. First, **comer**:

- **yo** comí — *I ate*
- **tú** comiste — *you ate (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** comió — *you ate (formal) / he, she ate*
- **nosotros / nosotras** comimos — *we ate*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** comieron — *you all ate / they ate*

Now **vivir**, with the same endings:

- **yo** viví — *I lived*
- **tú** viviste — *you lived (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** vivió — *you lived (formal) / he, she lived*
- **nosotros / nosotras** vivimos — *we lived*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** vivieron — *you all lived / they lived*

Five more verbs take the same endings. Each line gives the verb, its stem and its five forms, in the same order as above (so **bebí** means *I drank*, **bebiste** means *you drank*, and so on):

- **beber** (*to drink*), stem **beb-**: **bebí**, **bebiste**, **bebió**, **bebimos**, **bebieron**
- **aprender** (*to learn*), stem **aprend-**: **aprendí**, **aprendiste**, **aprendió**, **aprendimos**, **aprendieron**
- **escribir** (*to write*), stem **escrib-**: **escribí**, **escribiste**, **escribió**, **escribimos**, **escribieron**
- **abrir** (*to open*), stem **abr-**: **abrí**, **abriste**, **abrió**, **abrimos**, **abrieron**
- **recibir** (*to receive*), stem **recib-**: **recibí**, **recibiste**, **recibió**, **recibimos**, **recibieron**

Here they are in sentences:

- **Aprendí mucho en la clase.** — *I learned a lot in class.*
- **Ella escribió un mensaje.** — *She wrote a message.*
- **Abrí la puerta.** — *I opened the door.*
- **Ella bebió café.** — *She drank coffee.*
- **Recibieron cien pesos.** — *They received a hundred pesos.*

The **yo** form ends in **-í** and the **usted / él / ella** form ends in **-ió**, and both carry a written accent. As with **-ar** verbs, the accent marks a stressed last syllable. Compare the present and the preterite: **como** (*I eat*) and **comí** (*I ate*), or **come** (*he, she eats*) and **comió** (*he, she ate*).

The **nosotros** form depends on the family. For **-ir** verbs it is the same in the present and the preterite, so **vivimos** can mean *we live* or *we lived*. For **-er** verbs the two tenses differ: **comemos** is *we eat* and **comimos** is *we ate*.

- **Ahora vivimos en Guadalajara.** — *Now we live in Guadalajara.*
- **El año pasado vivimos en Oaxaca.** — *Last year we lived in Oaxaca.*
- **Anoche comimos tamales.** — *Last night we ate tamales.*

Some verbs do not follow this pattern exactly; later lessons cover them.

Sources

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Key facts

> **The preterite tells what happened as a finished action**
>
> The **preterite** (**el pretérito**) tells what happened. It presents a past action as finished: it took place at a definite time, or it filled a stretch of time with a clear beginning and end. **Ayer hablé con mi mamá.** (*Yesterday I talked with my mom.*) **Trabajé ocho horas.** (*I worked eight hours.*) The names **pretérito perfecto simple** and **pretérito indefinido** mean the same tense.

> **The preterite tells single events and one event after another**
>
> The preterite is the usual tense for telling single events, and also for telling one event after another. Each verb in a series is a new event that follows the one before it: **Estudié dos horas y después comí tacos.** (*I studied for two hours and then I ate tacos.*)

Time words that often go with the preterite

Time words that name a finished moment or period often go with the preterite: **ayer** (*yesterday*), **anoche** (*last night*), **anteayer** (*the day before yesterday*), **el lunes pasado** (*last Monday*), **la semana pasada** (*last week*), **el año pasado** (*last year*), **hace dos días** (*two days ago*). **Pasado** means *last* and usually comes after the noun. With a past-tense verb, **hace** plus a stretch of time means *ago*. **La semana pasada compré un libro.** (*Last week I bought a book.*) **Hace dos días recibí un mensaje.** (*Two days ago I received a message.*)

Hablar is the preterite model for regular -ar verbs

To build the preterite of a regular **-ar** verb, drop **-ar** to get the stem, then add one of five endings. **Hablar** (*to speak*), stem **habl-**: **yo hablé** (*I spoke*), **tú hablaste** (*you spoke, informal*), **usted / él / ella habló** (*you spoke, formal / he, she spoke*), **nosotros / nosotras hablamos** (*we spoke*), **ustedes / ellos / ellas hablaron** (*you all spoke / they spoke*). The endings are **-é**, **-aste**, **-ó**, **-amos** and **-aron**.



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Trabajar, estudiar and comprar take the same -ar endings

Three more verbs take the same endings, in the same order. **Trabajar** (*to work*), stem **trabaj-**: **trabajé**, **trabajaste**, **trabajó**, **trabajamos**, **trabajaron**. **Estudiar** (*to study*), stem **estudi-**: **estudié**, **estudiaste**, **estudió**, **estudiamos**, **estudiaron**. **Comprar** (*to buy*), stem **compr-**: **compré**, **compraste**, **compró**, **compramos**, **compraron**. **Compré tamales en el mercado.** (*I bought tamales at the market.*)

Written accents change meaning, and hablamos fits both tenses

The **yo** form ends in **-é** and the **usted / él / ella** form (**habló**) ends in **-ó**; both carry a written accent, which shows the stress falls on the last syllable (**ha-BLÓ**, not **HA-blo**) and changes the meaning: **hablo**, with no accent, is the present, *I speak*, but **habló** is the preterite, *he, she spoke*. **Hablo con mi mamá.** (*I talk with my mom.*) **Ella habló con mi mamá.** (*She talked with my mom.*) The **nosotros** form is the same in the present and the preterite, so **hablamos** can mean *we speak* or *we spoke*. A time word or the context tells you which.

Regular -er and -ir verbs share one set of preterite endings

Regular **-er** and **-ir** verbs share one set of preterite endings: **-í**, **-iste**, **-ió**, **-imos** and **-ieron**. **Comer** (*to eat*), stem **com-**: **yo comí** (*I ate*), **tú comiste** (*you ate, informal*), **usted / él / ella comió** (*you ate, formal / he, she ate*), **nosotros comimos** (*we ate*), **ustedes / ellos / ellas comieron** (*you all ate / they ate*). **Vivir** (*to live*), stem **viv-**: **viví**, **viviste**, **vivió**, **vivimos**, **vivieron**, in the same order.

Beber, aprender, escribir and abrir take the same endings

More verbs take the same endings. **Beber** (*to drink*), stem **beb-**: **bebí**, **bebiste**, **bebió**, **bebimos**, **bebieron**. **Aprender** (*to learn*), stem **aprend-**: **aprendí**, **aprendiste**, **aprendió**, **aprendimos**, **aprendieron**. **Escribir** (*to write*), stem **escrib-**: **escribí**, **escribiste**, **escribió**, **escribimos**, **escribieron**. **Abrir** (*to open*), stem **abr-**: **abrí**, **abriste**, **abrió**, **abrimos**, **abrieron**. **Aprendí mucho en la clase.** (*I learned a lot in class.*) **Abrí la puerta.** (*I opened the door.*)

Accents mark -í and -ió, and nosotros depends on the family

The **yo** form (**comí**) ends in **-í** and the **usted / él / ella** form (**comió**) ends in **-ió**, and both carry a written accent that marks a stressed last syllable. Compare **como** (*I eat*) and **comí** (*I ate*), or **come** (*he, she eats*) and **comió** (*he, she ate*). The **nosotros** form depends on the family. For **-ir** verbs it is the same in the present and the preterite, so **vivimos** can mean *we live* or *we lived*. For **-er** verbs the tenses differ: **comemos** is *we eat* and **comimos** is *we ate*.

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

anteayer → the day before yesterday

el lunes pasado → last Monday

tú + hablar, ayer → hablaste

ustedes + trabajar, ayer → trabajaron

ellos + vivir, el año pasado → vivieron

Abrí la puerta. → I opened the door.

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. Your coworker tells you: "Trabajé ocho horas." What does the preterite show about those eight hours?

A) They are a finished stretch of time
B) They have a vague start and end
C) They are planned for tomorrow
D) They are still going on now

2. You tell a friend about your Saturday: "Estudié dos horas y después comí tacos." In what order did you do those two things?

A) You studied but skipped tacos
B) You studied, then you ate tacos
C) You studied while you ate tacos
D) You ate tacos, then you studied

3. You tell a friend that last night you ate at your grandmother's house. Which sentence says it?

A La semana pasada comí en casa de mi abuela.
B Anteayer comí en casa de mi abuela.
C Anoche comí en casa de mi abuela.
D El año pasado comí en casa de mi abuela.

4. A friend texts you: "El año pasado compré un libro." What does the message tell you?

A Two days ago I bought a book.
B Last night I bought a book.
C Last week I bought a book.
D Last year I bought a book.

5. Your friend texts you: "Ayer hablé con mi mamá." Why is the preterite the right tense for this sentence?

A The talk happened at some unspecified time
B The talk is a finished action on one definite day
C The talk is happening right now
D The talk is something you plan for next week

6. After a day at the market in Oaxaca, you text a friend: "I bought tamales at the market." Which sentence do you send?

A Compramos tamales en el mercado.
B Compró tamales en el mercado.
C Compraron tamales en el mercado.
D Compré tamales en el mercado.

7. Your friend texts you: "Hablo con mi mamá." What does the message say?

A I talked with my mom.
B She talked with my mom.
C I talk with my mom.
D She talks with my mom.

8. At a bakery in Oaxaca, you ask your friend, informally, whether she bought sweet bread. Which question do you ask?

A ¿Compraste pan dulce?
B ¿Compramos pan dulce?
C ¿Compraron pan dulce?
D ¿Compré pan dulce?

9. A friend writes: "El año pasado trabajamos en Oaxaca." Trabajamos is also a present form. What tells you the meaning here?

A The ending -amos is used only in the past
B The stem trabaj- changes to show the past
C The accent on trabajamos shows it is the past
D The time words put it in the past: we worked

10. Look at "Ella estudió en Guadalajara." What does the written accent on estudió tell you about the word?

A The stress falls on the first syllable
B The stress falls on the last syllable
C The verb is in the present tense
D The verb is the nosotros form

11. Your classmate just finished her first Spanish class. You ask her, informally, whether she learned a lot. Which question do you ask?

A ¿Aprendieron mucho en la clase?
B ¿Aprendí mucho en la clase?
C ¿Aprendiste mucho en la clase?
D ¿Aprendimos mucho en la clase?

12. Your friend texts you: "Comí tamales." What does the message say?

(A) I ate tamales.
(B) I eat tamales.
(C) He ate tamales.
(D) We ate tamales.

13. Your two cousins got home first. You tell a friend: "They opened the door." Which sentence do you say?

(A) Abrimos la puerta.
(B) Abrieron la puerta.
(C) Abrí la puerta.
(D) Abrió la puerta.

14. A note from your coworker says: "Ella escribió un mensaje." What does the note say?

(A) She writes a message.
(B) They wrote a message.
(C) I wrote a message.
(D) She wrote a message.

15. You know that comí means I ate. Using the same endings, how do you say "I lived" with vivir?

(A) vivimos
(B) vivió
(C) viví
(D) vivieron

Go deeper

WATCH Three Names, One Tense 0:30
One Spanish past tense has 3 names: the preterite, the pretérito perfecto simple and the pretérito indefinido.

WATCH Hablo or Habló 0:31
Hablo means I speak. Habló, with an accent, means he or she spoke. Drop the accent, and the past becomes the present.

WATCH Comimos or Vivimos 0:31
Spanish -er and -ir verbs share one set of preterite endings: comí, comiste, comió, comimos, comieron.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/spanish-verbs-2/lesson-1-the-preterite-of-regular-verbs

STUDY Spanish Verbs 2: The Past in the FlashFeed app flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/spanish-verbs-2

LESSON 2 OF 6

Lesson 2: Spelling and Stem Changes in the Preterite

Part 1: Verbs in -car, -gar and -zar · Part 2: Leer, Creer and the Y Forms · Part 3: Stem Changes in -ir Verbs Only

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Conjugate -car, -gar and -zar verbs in the yo form (busqué, llegué, empecé), use regular forms for everyone else, and keep the stem of empezar and jugar.
- Conjugate leer and creer: y in usted/él/ella and ustedes/ellos/ellas (leyó, creyeron), accented í in the other forms (leí, leímos), and place the accents.
- Conjugate -ir stem changers with e to i or o to u in usted/él/ella and ustedes/ellos/ellas only (pidió, durmió), and keep the stem of pensar and volver.

Spelling and Stem Changes in the Preterite

In Lesson 1 you learned the regular preterite endings. Many everyday verbs use those same endings but change a letter or a vowel in some forms. This lesson covers three patterns: verbs in **-car**, **-gar** and **-zar**, verbs like **leer** that use a **y**, and **-ir** verbs with a stem change. Each pattern is predictable, so once you know it you can apply it to many verbs.

Verbs in -car, -gar and -zar

Verbs that end in **-car**, **-gar** or **-zar** change their spelling in the **yo** form of the preterite, and only in that form. The change keeps the sound of the stem's last consonant before the **-é** ending:

- **-car** becomes **-qué**: **buscar** (*to look for*) gives **busqué**.
- **-gar** becomes **-gué**: **llegar** (*to arrive*) gives **llegué**, and **pagar** (*to pay*) gives **pagué**.
- **-zar** becomes **-cé**: **empezar** (*to start*) gives **empecé**.

Here is why. In Latin American Spanish, **c** before **e** sounds like *s*, and **g** before **e** sounds like a strong English *h*. So before **é**, Spanish writes **qu** and **gu** to keep the *k* sound and the hard *g* sound (as in *go*); the **u** is silent. Spanish does not usually write **z** before **e**, so it writes **c** instead.

Every other form uses the regular endings from Lesson 1, which begin with **a** or **o** and need no change. **Buscar** is the model:

- **yo** busqué — *I looked for*
- **tú** buscaste — *you looked for (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** buscó — *you looked for (formal) / he, she looked for*
- **nosotros / nosotras** buscamos — *we looked for*

- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** buscaron — *you all looked for / they looked for*

The other verbs work the same way:

- **llegar** (*to arrive*): **yo** llegué, **tú** llegaste, **usted / él / ella** llegó, **nosotros / nosotras** llegamos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** llegaron
- **pagar** (*to pay*): **yo** pagué, **tú** pagaste, **usted / él / ella** pagó, **nosotros / nosotras** pagamos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** pagaron
- **empezar** (*to start*): **yo** empecé, **tú** empezaste, **usted / él / ella** empezó, **nosotros / nosotras** empezamos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** empezaron
- **jugar** (*to play*): **yo** jugué, **tú** jugaste, **usted / él / ella** jugó, **nosotros / nosotras** jugamos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** jugaron

Empezar changes **e** to **ie** in the present (**empiezo**, *I start*), and **jugar** changes **u** to **ue** (**juego**, *I play*), but neither one changes its stem in the preterite.

In sentences:

- **Llegué a Guadalajara ayer.** — *I arrived in Guadalajara yesterday.*
- **Empecé a estudiar español el lunes pasado.** — *I started studying Spanish last Monday.*
- **Jugué dominó con mi abuelo.** — *I played dominoes with my grandfather.*
- **Mi mamá buscó un regalo.** — *My mom looked for a gift.*

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Leer, Creer and the Y Forms

In verb forms, when an unstressed **i** would land between two vowels, Spanish writes it as **y**. That changes the preterite: in most **-er** and **-ir** verbs whose stem ends in a vowel, the **i** of **-ió** and **-ieron** becomes **y**. **Leer** (*to read*) and **creer** (*to believe*) are the models: **leyó**, **leyeron** and **creyó**, **creyeron**. Their stems, **le-** and **cre-** (the infinitive without **-er**), both end in a vowel.

Only two forms take the **y**: **usted / él / ella** and **ustedes / ellos / ellas**. The other forms keep the **i**, and because the stressed **í** follows an **e**, it carries a written accent: **leí**, **leíste**, **leímos** and **creí**, **creíste**, **creímos**. **Leyó** has its written accent on the **ó**, and **leyeron** has none.

Leer (*to read*):

- **yo** leí — *I read*
- **tú** leíste — *you read (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** leyó — *you read (formal) / he, she read*
- **nosotros / nosotras** leímos — *we read*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** leyeron — *you all read / they read*

Creer (*to believe*):

- **yo** creí — *I believed*
- **tú** creíste — *you believed (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** creyó — *you believed (formal) / he, she believed*
- **nosotros / nosotras** creímos — *we believed*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** creyeron — *you all believed / they believed*

In sentences:

- **Leí un libro sobre Oaxaca.** — *I read a book about Oaxaca.*
- **Mi abuela leyó la carta.** — *My grandmother read the letter.*
- **Los niños leyeron un cuento.** — *The kids read a story.*
- **Anoche leímos el menú.** — *Last night we read the menu.*
- **Creí la noticia.** — *I believed the news.*
- **Mis amigos no creyeron la historia.** — *My friends did not believe the story.*

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Stem Changes in -ir Verbs Only

In the preterite, most **-ar** and **-er** verbs that change their stem vowel in the present keep the stem regular: **pienso** (*I think*) has the change, but **pensé** (*I thought*) does not.

- **pensar** (*to think*): **yo** pensé, **tú** pensaste, **usted / él / ella** pensó, **nosotros / nosotras** pensamos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** pensaron
- **volver** (*to return, to come back*): **yo** volví, **tú** volviste, **usted / él / ella** volvió, **nosotros / nosotras** volvimos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** volvieron

Empezar does the same: **empecé** (*I started*), **empezó** (*he, she started*).

-ir verbs are different. Most that change their stem in the present change it in the preterite too, but only in two forms: **usted / él / ella** and **ustedes / ellos / ellas**. The change is only **e** to **i** or **o** to **u**, whatever the present-tense change is. **Pedir** (*to ask for, to order*) is the model:

- **yo** pedí — *I asked for*
- **tú** pediste — *you asked for (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** pidió — *you asked for (formal) / he, she asked for*
- **nosotros / nosotras** pedimos — *we asked for*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** pidieron — *you all asked for / they asked for*

Three more follow it:

- **servir** (*to serve*): **yo** serví, **tú** serviste, **usted / él / ella** sirvió, **nosotros / nosotras** servimos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** sirvieron
- **repetir** (*to repeat*): **yo** repetí, **tú** repetiste, **usted / él / ella** repitió, **nosotros / nosotras** repetimos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** repitieron
- **dormir** (*to sleep*): **yo** dormí, **tú** dormiste, **usted / él / ella** durmió, **nosotros / nosotras** dormimos, **ustedes / ellos / ellas** durmieron

Dormir changes **o** to **ue** in the present (**duermo**, *I sleep*), but only **o** to **u** in the preterite (**durmió**). The other forms are regular: **pedí**, **pediste**, **pedimos**; **dormí**, **dormiste**, **dormimos**.

Querer and **poder** have irregular preterites and wait for Lesson 4.

In sentences:

- **Volví a Oaxaca el viernes pasado.** — *I came back to Oaxaca last Friday.*
- **Pedí un café.** — *I ordered a coffee.*
- **Ana pidió tacos.** — *Ana ordered tacos.*
- **Mis amigos pidieron la cuenta.** — *My friends asked for the check.*
- **Mi hijo durmió ocho horas.** — *My son slept eight hours.*
- **Anoche dormimos en Oaxaca.** — *Last night we slept in Oaxaca.*

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Key facts

-car, -gar and -zar verbs change spelling in the yo form only

-car becomes **-qué**, **-gar** becomes **-gué** and **-zar** becomes **-cé**, in the **yo** form of the preterite and only there: **buscar** (*to look for*) gives **busqué**, **llegar** (*to arrive*) gives **llegué**, **pagar** (*to pay*) gives **pagué**, and **empezar** (*to start*) gives **empecé**. In Latin American Spanish, **c** before **e** sounds like *s* and **g** like a strong English *h*, so Spanish writes **qu** and **gu** to keep the *k* and hard *g* sounds. It does not usually write **z** before **e**, so it writes **c**.

Buscar, llegar and pagar: busqué, llegué, pagué, then regular endings

Only the **yo** form changes; every other form uses the regular endings from Lesson 1, which begin with **a** or **o** and need no change. In the order **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **buscar** (*to look for*): **busqué, buscaste, buscó, buscamos, buscaron**; **llegar** (*to arrive*): **llegué, llegaste, llegó, llegamos, llegaron**; **pagar** (*to pay*): **pagué, pagaste, pagó, pagamos, pagaron**.

Empezar and jugar keep their stem in the preterite

Empezar (*to start*) changes **e** to **ie** in the present (**empiezo**), and **jugar** (*to play*) changes **u** to **ue** (**juego**), but neither one changes its stem in the preterite. In the order **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **empecé, empezaste, empezó, empezamos, empezaron** and **jugué, jugaste, jugó, jugamos, jugaron**. **Jugué dominó con mi abuelo.** (*I played dominoes with my grandfather.*)

In leer and creer, the i of -ió and -ieron becomes y

In verb forms, when an unstressed **i** would land between two vowels, Spanish writes it as **y**. So in most **-er** and **-ir** verbs whose stem ends in a vowel, the **i** of **-ió** and **-ieron** becomes **y**. **Leer** (*to read*) and **creer** (*to believe*) are the models, with stems **le-** and **cre-**: **leyó**, **leyeron** and **creyó**, **creyeron**. Only two forms take the **y**: **usted / él / ella** and **ustedes / ellos / ellas**.

Creer: creí, creíste, creyó, creímos, creyeron

Creer (*to believe*) is the second model, in the order **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **creí** (*I believed*), **creíste** (*you believed, informal*), **creyó** (*you believed, formal; he, she believed*), **creímos** (*we believed*), **creyeron** (*you all believed; they believed*).

Most -ar and -er stem-changers keep a regular stem in the preterite

In the preterite, most **-ar** and **-er** verbs that change their stem vowel in the present keep the stem regular: **pienso** (*I think*) has the change, but **pensé** (*I thought*) does not. In the order **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **pensar** (*to think*): **pensé, pensaste, pensó, pensamos, pensaron**; **volver** (*to return, to come back*): **volví, volviste, volvió, volvimos, volvieron**. **Empezar** does the same: **empecé**, **empezó**.

Pedir: e changes to i in pidió and pidieron only

-ir verbs are different. Most that change their stem in the present change it in the preterite too, but only in the **usted / él / ella** and **ustedes / ellos / ellas** forms, and only **e** to **i** or **o** to **u**, whatever the present-tense change is. **Pedir** (*to ask for, to order*), in the order **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **pedí, pediste, pidió, pedimos, pidieron**.

Servir, repetir and dormir follow pedir; dormir goes o to u

Three more follow **pedir**, in the order **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**. **Servir** (*to serve*): **serví, serviste, sirvió, servimos, sirvieron**. **Repetir** (*to repeat*): **repetí, repetiste, repitió, repetimos, repitieron**. **Dormir** (*to sleep*): **dormí, dormiste, durmió, dormimos, durmieron**. **Dormir** changes **o** to **ue** in the present (**duermo**), but only **o** to **u** in the preterite (**durmió**). The other forms are regular.

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

yo + pagar, ayer → pagué

ellos + empezar, anoche → empezaron

ellos + leer, ayer → leyeron

tú + creer, ayer → creíste

ellos + repetir, anoche → repitieron

nosotros + repetir, anoche → repetimos

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. You are telling a friend about your trip. You say, about yourself, that you arrived in Guadalajara yesterday. Which sentence do you say?

A. Llegué a Guadalajara ayer.
B. Llegé a Guadalajara ayer.
C. Llegaste a Guadalajara ayer.
D. Llegamos a Guadalajara ayer.

2. A friend asks what you did with your grandfather. You answer, about yourself, that you played dominoes with him. Which sentence do you say?

A. Jugaste dominó con mi abuelo.
B. Jugamos dominó con mi abuelo.
C. Juegué dominó con mi abuelo.
D. Jugué dominó con mi abuelo.

3. You tell a friend what your mom did yesterday: she looked for a gift. Which sentence do you say?

A. Mi mamá buscaron un regalo.
B. Mi mamá buscó un regalo.
C. Mi mamá buscamos un regalo.
D. Mi mamá busqué un regalo.

4. A friend asks who paid the check at dinner last night. You answer, about yourself, that you did. Which sentence do you say?

A) Anoche pagé la cuenta.
B) Anoche pagaste la cuenta.
C) Anoche pagué la cuenta.
D) Anoche pagaron la cuenta.

5. You ask a classmate, using the informal tú, whether she started studying yesterday. Which question do you ask?

A) ¿Empezamos a estudiar ayer?
B) ¿Empezaron a estudiar ayer?
C) ¿Empezaste a estudiar ayer?
D) ¿Empecé a estudiar ayer?

6. A coworker asks whether your friends believed the story from your trip. You answer that they did. Which sentence do you say?

A) Mis amigos creyó la historia.
B) Mis amigos creieron la historia.
C) Mis amigos creímos la historia.
D) Mis amigos creyeron la historia.

7. A friend asks if you learned anything about Oaxaca. You say, about yourself, that you read a book about it last week. Which sentence do you say?

A) Leyó un libro sobre Oaxaca.
B) Leí un libro sobre Oaxaca.
C) Leímos un libro sobre Oaxaca.
D) Leyí un libro sobre Oaxaca.

8. You ask your friend, using the informal tú, whether she read the menu last night. Which question do you ask?

A) ¿Leíste el menú anoche?
B) ¿Leyeron el menú anoche?
C) ¿Leyiste el menú anoche?
D) ¿Leímos el menú anoche?

9. You tell a friend that your grandmother did not believe the news. Which sentence do you say?

A) Mi abuela no creyó la noticia.
B) Mi abuela no creímos la noticia.
C) Mi abuela no creí la noticia.
D) Mi abuela no creió la noticia.

10. You and your sister heard a wild story. You tell a friend, speaking for both of you, that you believed it. Which sentence do you say?

A) Creyimos la historia.
B) Creí la historia.
C) Creyeron la historia.
D) Creímos la historia.

11. At a restaurant, a friend asks what Ana ordered. You tell your friend that she ordered tacos. Which sentence do you say?

A) Ana pedió tacos.
B) Ana pidió tacos.
C) Ana pidieron tacos.
D) Ana pedí tacos.

12. A friend asks when you got back to Oaxaca. You say, about yourself, that you came back last Friday. Which sentence do you say?

A Volvimos a Oaxaca el viernes pasado.
B Vuelví a Oaxaca el viernes pasado.
C Volví a Oaxaca el viernes pasado.
D Volvió a Oaxaca el viernes pasado.

13. After a family breakfast, you tell a friend that your mom served the coffee. Which sentence do you say?

A Mi mamá sirvió el café.
B Mi mamá serví el café.
C Mi mamá servió el café.
D Mi mamá sirvieron el café.

14. You tell a neighbor that your friends came back home last night. Which sentence do you say?

A Mis amigos volvió a casa.
B Mis amigos vuelvieron a casa.
C Mis amigos volvieron a casa.
D Mis amigos volvimos a casa.

15. You and your family stayed in Oaxaca. You tell a friend, speaking for all of you, that you slept there last night. Which sentence do you say?

A Anoche dormí en Oaxaca.
B Anoche dormimos en Oaxaca.
C Anoche durmieron en Oaxaca.
D Anoche durmimos en Oaxaca.

Go deeper

WATCH Busqué, Llegué, Empecé 0:31
Busqué, llegué, empecé. Verbs that end in -car, -gar and -zar change their spelling in the preterite, but only in the yo form.

WATCH Leyó, With a Y 0:29
In the past, leer becomes leyó, with a y. When an unstressed i would land between two vowels, Spanish writes it as y.

WATCH Pidió and Durmió 0:32
In the preterite, most -ar and -er verbs drop their present stem changes. Pienso, I think, but pensé, I thought.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/spanish-verbs-2/lesson-2-spelling-and-stem-changes-in-the-preterite

STUDY Spanish Verbs 2: The Past in the FlashFeed app flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/spanish-verbs-2

LESSON 3 OF 6

Lesson 3: Ser, Ir, Dar, Ver and Hacer

Part 1: Ser and Ir: The Same Forms · Part 2: Dar and Ver · Part 3: Hacer

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Conjugate ser and ir in the preterite, use the whole sentence to tell which verb a form is, and recognize that these forms take no written accent.
- Conjugate dar and ver in the preterite, recognize that di, dio, vi and vio take no accent, and recognize dimos (we gave) as different from damos (we give).
- Conjugate hacer in the preterite, recognize that hizo is spelled with z, and use hacer to ask and say what someone did or made.

Ser, Ir, Dar, Ver and Hacer

In Lessons 1 and 2 you built the preterite of regular verbs and of verbs with spelling and stem changes. This lesson adds five everyday verbs whose preterite you learn as a set: **ser** (*to be*), **ir** (*to go*), **dar** (*to give*), **ver** (*to see, to watch*) and **hacer** (*to do, to make*). You use them whenever you say where you went, what you saw, what you gave or what you did.

Ser and Ir: The Same Forms

In the present, **ser** and **ir** have different forms (**soy** and **voy**, **somos** and **vamos**). In the preterite they share one set of forms: **fui**, **fuiste**, **fue**, **fuimos**, **fueron**. Learn it once and you have both verbs.

ser — *to be*

- **yo** fui — *I was*
- **tú** fuiste — *you were (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** fue — *you were (formal) / he, she was*
- **nosotros / nosotras** fuimos — *we were*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** fueron — *you all were / they were*

ir — *to go*

- **yo** fui — *I went*
- **tú** fuiste — *you went (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** fue — *you went (formal) / he, she went*
- **nosotros / nosotras** fuimos — *we went*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** fueron — *you all went / they went*

A form on its own does not say which verb it is, so the meaning of the whole sentence does. Two patterns help, but they are tendencies, not rules. When a place follows, introduced by **a** or **al**, the verb is

usually **ir**: **Fui al mercado.** — *I went to the market.* When a noun or an adjective follows, the verb is usually **ser**: **Fue un buen día.** — *It was a good day.* The same form can begin both kinds of sentence: **Mis primos fueron a Guadalajara.** — *My cousins went to Guadalajara.***Mis primos fueron muy amables.** — *My cousins were very kind.* Be careful with **a**: it also introduces times, as in **a las tres** (*at three*), and a time is not a place.

The usual pattern for saying where someone went is **ir** + **a** + the place: **Fuimos a Oaxaca.** — *We went to Oaxaca.* Remember that **a** + **el** becomes **al**, as in **al mercado**. Add a time word and another verb from Lesson 1, and you can tell a short story: **Ayer fui al mercado y compré fruta.** — *Yesterday I went to the market and bought fruit.*

None of these forms has a written accent. **Fui** and **fue** have one syllable, and Spanish normally puts no written accent on a one-syllable word. (The exceptions are accents that tell apart two words spelled alike, such as the one on **tú**.) **Fuiste**, **fuimos** and **fueron** are stressed on the next-to-last syllable, where words ending in a vowel, -n or -s are normally stressed, so they need no accent either. Compare **hablé** and **habló** from Lesson 1: they are stressed on the last syllable, so they do carry one.

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Dar and Ver

You know **doy** (*I give*) and **veo** (*I see*) from the present. In the preterite, **dar** (*to give*) and **ver** (*to see, to watch*) both take the endings of **-er** and **-ir** verbs from Lesson 1: **-í**, **-iste**, **-ió**, **-imos**, **-ieron**. Two of those endings lose their written accent here, as you will see below. For **ver**, an **-er** verb, the preterite is simply the regular pattern on a stem of just one letter, **v-**. **Dar** is an **-ar** verb, which is what makes it unusual: in the preterite it takes **-er/-ir** endings instead of **-ar** endings.

dar — *to give*

- **yo** di — *I gave*
- **tú** diste — *you gave (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** dio — *you gave (formal) / he, she gave*
- **nosotros / nosotras** dimos — *we gave*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** dieron — *you all gave / they gave*

ver — *to see, to watch*

- **yo** vi — *I saw*
- **tú** viste — *you saw (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** vio — *you saw (formal) / he, she saw*
- **nosotros / nosotras** vimos — *we saw*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** vieron — *you all saw / they saw*

The one-syllable forms **di**, **dio**, **vi** and **vio** have no written accent, unlike **comí** and **comió** from Lesson 1. The reason is the one you met with **fui** and **fue**: a one-syllable word normally takes no accent. So write **dio** and **vio**; the older spellings with an accent (**dió**, **vió**) now count as mistakes. The longer forms (**diste**, **dimos**, **dieron**, **viste**, **vimos**, **vieron**) are stressed on the next-to-last syllable, so they need no accent either.

Watch the vowel when you compare tenses: **damos** (*we give*) but **dimos** (*we gave*), and **vemos** (*we see*) but **vimos** (*we saw*). Because **dar** takes **-er/-ir** endings, its **nosotros** form, unlike **hablamos**, is not the same in the present and the preterite.

In sentences:

- **Ayer di veinte pesos.** — *Yesterday I gave twenty pesos.*
- **Mis papás dieron cien pesos.** — *My parents gave a hundred pesos.*
- **Fuimos al cine y vimos una película.** — *We went to the movies and saw a movie.*
- **¿Viste la película?** — *Did you see the movie?*

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Hacer

Hacer (*to do, to make*) has its own preterite stem: **hic-** replaces **hac-**. The endings are **-e**, **-iste**, **-o**, **-imos** and **-ieron**, and none of them carries a written accent.

hacer — *to do, to make*

- **yo** hice — *I did or made*
- **tú** hiciste — *you did or made (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** hizo — *you did or made (formal) / he, she did or made*
- **nosotros / nosotras** hicimos — *we did or made*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** hicieron — *you all did or made / they did or made*

The **usted / él / ella** form is **hizo**, spelled with z to keep the s sound. In Mexico and most of Latin America, c before e or i sounds like s (**hice**, **hiciste**, **hicimos**, **hicieron**), but c before o would sound like k, so the spelling changes to z. **Hizo** is the only preterite form of **hacer** spelled with z.

Hice and **hizo** need no accent because they are stressed on the next-to-last syllable, as words ending in a vowel normally are. Compare **hablé** and **habló** from Lesson 1, which are stressed on the last syllable.

Compare the present: **hago** (*I do*) but **hice** (*I did*), and **hace** (*he, she does*) but **hizo** (*he, she did*).

Two common questions use these forms:

- **¿Qué hiciste ayer?** — *What did you do yesterday?*
- **¿Qué hicieron el fin de semana?** — *What did you all do over the weekend? / What did they do over the weekend?*

With a person's name, use the **él / ella** form: **¿Qué hizo Marta anoche?** — *What did Marta do last night?*

As in the present, **hacer** usually means *to do* for an activity and *to make* for something you create:

- **Hice la tarea.** — *I did my homework.*
- **Anoche hicimos tacos.** — *Last night we made tacos.*
- **Mi abuela hizo tamales.** — *My grandmother made tamales.*

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Key facts

> **Ser and ir share one preterite: fui, fuiste, fue, fuimos, fueron**
>
> In the present, **ser** and **ir** differ (**soy** and **voy**). In the preterite they share one set of forms, so you learn it once and have both verbs. **yo fui** — *I was / I went* **tú fuiste** — *you were / you went (informal)* **usted / él / ella fue** — *you were / you went (formal); he, she was / went* **nosotros / nosotras fuimos** — *we were / we went* **ustedes / ellos / ellas fueron** — *you all were / went; they were / went*

The whole sentence tells you whether fue is ser or ir

A form like **fue** does not say which verb it is; the meaning of the whole sentence does. Two tendencies, not rules: a place introduced by **a** or **al** usually signals **ir** (**Fui al mercado.** — *I went to the market.*), and a noun or an adjective usually signals **ser** (**Fue un buen día.** — *It was a good day.*). The same form can begin both: **Mis primos fueron a Guadalajara.** — *My cousins went to Guadalajara.* **Mis primos fueron muy amables.** — *My cousins were very kind.* Careful: **a** also introduces times, as in **a las tres** (*at three*), and a time is not a place.

None of fui, fuiste, fue, fuimos, fueron has a written accent

None of these forms has a written accent. **Fui** and **fue** have one syllable, and Spanish normally puts no written accent on a one-syllable word. **Fuiste**, **fuimos** and **fueron** are stressed on the next-to-last syllable, so they need no accent either. Compare **hablé** and **habló** from Lesson 1: they are stressed on the last syllable, so they do carry one.

Dar and ver: di, diste, dio, dimos, dieron and vi, viste, vio, vimos, vieron

In the preterite, **dar** (*to give*) and **ver** (*to see, to watch*) both take the endings of **-er** and **-ir** verbs: **-í, -iste, -ió, -imos, -ieron**. Two of those endings lose their written accent here. **Dar** is an **-ar** verb, which is what makes it unusual. Each line gives **dar**, then **ver**. **yo di / vi** — *I gave / I saw* **tú diste / viste** — *you gave / you saw (informal)* **usted / él / ella dio / vio** — *you (formal), he, she gave / saw* **nosotros / nosotras dimos / vimos** — *we gave / we saw* **ustedes / ellos / ellas dieron / vieron** — *you all, they gave / saw*

Di, dio, vi and vio have no written accent

The one-syllable forms **di**, **dio**, **vi** and **vio** have no written accent, unlike **comí** and **comió** from Lesson 1. A one-syllable word normally takes no accent, so write **dio** and **vio**: the older spellings **dió** and **vió** now count as mistakes. The longer forms (**diste**, **dimos**, **dieron**, **viste**, **vimos**, **vieron**) are stressed on the next-to-last syllable, so they need no accent either.

Compare tenses: damos but dimos, vemos but vimos

Watch the vowel when you compare tenses: **damos** (*we give*) but **dimos** (*we gave*), and **vemos** (*we see*) but **vimos** (*we saw*). Because **dar** takes **-er/-ir** endings, its **nosotros** form, unlike **hablamos**, is not the same in the present and the preterite. **Ayer di veinte pesos.** — *Yesterday I gave twenty pesos.* **Mis papás dieron cien pesos.** — *My parents gave a hundred pesos.* **Fuimos al cine y vimos una película.** — *We went to the movies and saw a movie.* **¿Viste la película?** — *Did you see the movie?*

Hacer has its own preterite stem: hice, hiciste, hizo, hicimos, hicieron

Hacer (*to do, to make*) has its own preterite stem: **hic-** replaces **hac-**. The endings are **-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -ieron**, and none of them carries a written accent. **yo hice** — *I did or made* **tú hiciste** — *you did or made (informal)* **usted / él / ella hizo** — *you did or made (formal); he, she did or made* **nosotros / nosotras hicimos** — *we did or made* **ustedes / ellos / ellas hicieron** — *you all did or made; they did or made*

Hizo is spelled with z; hice and hizo take no written accent

The **usted / él / ella** form is **hizo**, spelled with **z** to keep the s sound. In Mexico and most of Latin America, **c** before **e** or **i** sounds like s (**hice**, **hiciste**, **hicimos**, **hicieron**), but **c** before **o** would sound like k, so the spelling changes to **z**. **Hizo** is the only preterite form of **hacer** spelled with z. **Hice** and **hizo** need no accent because they are stressed on the next-to-last syllable. Compare **hablé** and **habló** from Lesson 1, which are stressed on the last syllable.

Hacer in use: past questions, names, and to do versus to make

Compare the present: **hago** (*I do*) but **hice** (*I did*), and **hace** (*he, she does*) but **hizo** (*he, she did*). **¿Qué hiciste ayer?** — *What did you do yesterday?* **¿Qué hicieron el fin de semana?** — *What did you all do over the weekend?* With a person's name, use the **él / ella** form: **¿Qué hizo Marta anoche?** — *What did Marta do last night?* **Hacer** usually means *to do* for an activity and *to make* for something you create: **Hice la tarea.** — *I did my homework.* **Anoche hicimos tacos.** — *Last night we made tacos.*

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

tú + ser, anoche → fuiste

ella + ir, ayer → fue

nosotros + dar, ayer → dimos

ella + ver, anoche → vio

tú + hacer, ayer → hiciste

ellos + hacer, anoche → hicieron

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. You and your sister spent last weekend in Oaxaca. You tell a friend where the two of you went. Which sentence fits?

A Fueron a Oaxaca.
B Fui a Oaxaca.
C Fue a Oaxaca.
D Fuimos a Oaxaca.

2. Your friend Luis sends four short messages. Which one tells you how some people were, rather than where someone went?

A Mis primos fueron muy amables.
B Ella fue a Oaxaca.
C Mis primos fueron a Guadalajara.
D Fui al mercado.

3. Your friend Ana was out all day yesterday. You ask her, informally, whether she went to the market. Which question fits?

A ¿Fuimos al mercado ayer?
B ¿Fueron al mercado ayer?
C ¿Fuiste al mercado ayer?
D ¿Fui al mercado ayer?

4. At the end of a great Saturday, you tell your mom that it was a good day. Which sentence says that?

A Fuimos un buen día.
B Fue un buen día.
C Fui un buen día.
D Fueron un buen día.

5. Your two cousins were away last week. Speaking to both of them (ustedes), you ask whether they went to Guadalajara. Which question fits?

A ¿Fueron a Guadalajara la semana pasada?
B ¿Fuimos a Guadalajara la semana pasada?
C ¿Fue a Guadalajara la semana pasada?
D ¿Fui a Guadalajara la semana pasada?

6. Last night you and two friends went to the movies. You tell a coworker what the three of you saw. Which sentence fits?

A Vio una película.
B Vi una película.
C Vieron una película.
D Vimos una película.

7. Your parents gave your cousin some money for her trip. You tell a friend it was a hundred pesos. Which sentence fits?

A Mis papás dio cien pesos.
B Mis papás dieron cien pesos.
C Mis papás di cien pesos.
D Mis papás dimos cien pesos.

8. After the weekend, you ask a friend, informally, whether he saw the movie everyone is talking about. Which question fits?

A ¿Vi la película?
B ¿Vieron la película?
C ¿Viste la película?
D ¿Vimos la película?

9. Your mom asks how your evening was. You tell her that last night you watched a movie at home, alone. Which sentence fits?

A Anoche viste una película.
B Anoche vi una película.
C Anoche vimos una película.
D Anoche vieron una película.

10. Your friend Luis says he gave some money to a boy outside the school yesterday. You ask him, informally, whether it was twenty pesos. Which question fits?

A ¿Dieron veinte pesos?
B ¿Di veinte pesos?
C ¿Diste veinte pesos?
D ¿Dimos veinte pesos?

11. Your cousins just got back from a weekend trip. Speaking to all of them (ustedes), you ask what they did over the weekend. Which question fits?

A ¿Qué hicieron el fin de semana?
B ¿Qué hizo el fin de semana?
C ¿Qué hice el fin de semana?
D ¿Qué hicimos el fin de semana?

12. A friend was at a party with Marta last night, and you were not. You ask your friend what Marta did. Which question fits?

A ¿Qué hice Marta anoche?
B ¿Qué hicieron Marta anoche?
C ¿Qué hico Marta anoche?
D ¿Qué hizo Marta anoche?

13. A friend you have not seen all week is back. You ask him, informally, what he did yesterday. Which question fits?

A ¿Qué hicieron ayer?
B ¿Qué hiciste ayer?
C ¿Qué hicimos ayer?
D ¿Qué hice ayer?

14. You meet your friend's mother and speak to her formally, with usted. You ask her what she did last week. Which question fits?

A ¿Qué hice la semana pasada?
B ¿Qué hicieron la semana pasada?
C ¿Qué hizo la semana pasada?
D ¿Qué hicimos la semana pasada?

15. You and your friend Luis went out the day before yesterday, and now you are trying to remember it. You ask him what the two of you did. Which question fits?

A ¿Qué hicimos anteayer?
B ¿Qué hicieron anteayer?
C ¿Qué hizo anteayer?
D ¿Qué hice anteayer?

Go deeper

WATCH Fui and Fui 0:32
In the past, ser and ir share one set of forms. Fui means I was, and also I went.

WATCH Dio, Not Dió 0:31
Dar is an -ar verb. But in the past, it takes -er and -ir endings: di, diste, dio, dimos, dieron.

WATCH Hice, but Hizo 0:29
Hacer has its own past stem: hic. Hice, I did. Hiciste, you did.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/spanish-verbs-2/lesson-3-ser-ir-dar-ver-and-hacer

STUDY Spanish Verbs 2: The Past in the FlashFeed app flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/spanish-verbs-2

LESSON 4 OF 6

Lesson 4: Irregular Preterite Stems

Part 1: Tener, Estar and Poder · Part 2: Poner, Querer, Venir and Saber · Part 3: Decir and Traer

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Conjugate tener, estar and poder in the preterite with their irregular stems, and recognize that forms like tuve and pudo carry no written accent.
- Conjugate poner, querer, venir and saber in the preterite with their irregular stems, and recognize that saber usually means to find out.
- Conjugate decir and traer in the preterite with their j stems, and say dijeron and trajeron, not the nonstandard dijieron and trajieron.

Irregular Preterite Stems

In Lesson 3 you met **hacer**, which has its own preterite stem, **hic-**, and no written accents: **hice** (*I did*), **hizo** (*he, she did*). This lesson adds nine more everyday verbs with irregular stems: **tener**, **estar**, **poder**, **poner**, **querer**, **venir**, **saber**, **decir** and **traer**. Lesson 2 set **poder** and **querer** aside for this lesson. With these verbs you can say what you had, where you were, what you were able to do, what you said and what you brought.

Tener, Estar and Poder

A group of common verbs takes an irregular stem in the preterite, plus its own set of unaccented endings: **-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -ieron**. The stem is irregular in all five forms, not just in two as in Lesson 2, and the endings are the same for -ar, -er and -ir verbs. Only the yo ending (-e) and the usted / él / ella ending (-o) differ from the regular -er and -ir endings you know: compare **comí** (*I ate*) and **comió** (*he, she ate*).

tener (stem **tuv-**) — *to have*

- **yo** tuve — *I had*
- **tú** tuviste — *you had (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** tuvo — *you had (formal) / he, she had*
- **nosotros / nosotras** tuvimos — *we had*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** tuvieron — *you all had / they had*

Ayer tuve mucho trabajo. — *Yesterday I had a lot of work.* **Tuvimos que salir temprano.** — *We had to leave early.*

estar (stem **estuv-**) — *to be*

- **yo** estuve — *I was*
- **tú** estuviste — *you were (informal)*

- **usted / él / ella** estuvo — *you were (formal) / he, she was*
- **nosotros / nosotras** estuvimos — *we were*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** estuvieron — *you all were / they were*

Estar ends in -ar, but in the preterite it takes these endings, not the -ar endings of Lesson 1. **Estuvimos en Oaxaca el fin de semana.** — *We were in Oaxaca over the weekend.* **¿Dónde estuviste ayer?** — *Where were you yesterday?*

poder (stem **pud-**) — *to be able to*

- **yo** pude — *I was able to*
- **tú** pudiste — *you were able to (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** pudo — *you were able to (formal) / he, she was able to*
- **nosotros / nosotras** pudimos — *we were able to*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** pudieron — *you all were able to / they were able to*

Poder changes its stem in the present (**puedo**, *I can*), but its preterite stem is **pud-**. **No pude llegar a tiempo.** — *I wasn't able to arrive on time.* **Mi hermana pudo venir a la fiesta.** — *My sister was able to come to the party.*

None of these forms has a written accent. Regular **hablé** (*I spoke*) and **habló** (*he, she spoke*) carry one because they are stressed on the last syllable. **Tuve** and **pudo** are stressed on the first syllable (**TU**-ve, **PU**-do), and as a general rule Spanish writes no accent on a word that ends in a vowel, n or s and is stressed on the next-to-last syllable.

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Poner, Querer, Venir and Saber

The same endings, **-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -ieron**, go on four more irregular stems. None of these forms has a written accent either.

poner (stem **pus-**) — *to put*

- **yo** puse — *I put*
- **tú** pusiste — *you put (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** puso — *you put (formal) / he, she put*
- **nosotros / nosotras** pusimos — *we put*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** pusieron — *you all put / they put*

Puse los platos en la mesa. — *I put the plates on the table.* **¿Dónde pusiste las llaves?** — *Where did you put the keys?*

querer (stem **quis-**) — *to want*

- **yo** quise — *I tried*
- **tú** quisiste — *you tried (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** quiso — *you tried (formal) / he, she tried*
- **nosotros / nosotras** quisimos — *we tried*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** quisieron — *you all tried / they tried*

The preterite stem of **querer** is **quis-**, not the **quier-** of the present (**quiero**, *I want*). In the preterite, **querer** with an infinitive usually means you tried, not just that you wanted to: **Quise hablar con mi mamá, pero no pude.** — *I tried to talk to my mom, but I wasn't able to.* Lesson 6 has more on verbs like this.

venir (stem **vin-**) — *to come*

- **yo** vine — *I came*

- **tú** viniste — *you came (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** vino — *you came (formal) / he, she came*
- **nosotros / nosotras** vinimos — *we came*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** vinieron — *you all came / they came*

Mis primos vinieron a mi casa. — *My cousins came to my house.* **¿Cuándo viniste a México?** — *When did you come to Mexico?*

saber (stem **sup-**) — *to know*

- **yo** supe — *I found out*
- **tú** supiste — *you found out (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** supo — *you found out (formal) / he, she found out*
- **nosotros / nosotras** supimos — *we found out*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** supieron — *you all found out / they found out*

In the preterite, **saber** usually means *to find out*, which is how the forms above are translated. **Mi mamá supo la noticia anoche.** — *My mom found out the news last night.* Lesson 6 comes back to verbs whose meaning shifts in the preterite.

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Decir and Traer

Decir and **traer** have stems that end in **j**: **dij-** and **traj-**. They take the same endings as the other irregular verbs, with one difference: the ustedes / ellos / ellas form ends in **-eron**, not -ieron. The i drops out after the j. The other four forms keep their usual endings (**-e, -iste, -o, -imos**).

decir (stem **dij-**) — *to say, to tell*

- **yo** dije — *I said*
- **tú** dijiste — *you said (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** dijo — *you said (formal) / he, she said*
- **nosotros / nosotras** dijimos — *we said*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** dijeron — *you all said / they said*

Decir changes its stem in the present (**digo**, *I say*; **dices**, *you say*), but its preterite stem is **dij-** in every form. **Mi mamá dijo que sí.** — *My mom said yes.* **¿Qué dijiste?** — *What did you say?* **Ellos dijeron la verdad.** — *They told the truth.*

traer (stem **traj-**) — *to bring*

- **yo** traje — *I brought*
- **tú** trajiste — *you brought (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** trajo — *you brought (formal) / he, she brought*
- **nosotros / nosotras** trajimos — *we brought*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** trajeron — *you all brought / they brought*

Traje pan dulce. — *I brought pan dulce (sweet bread).* **Mis primos trajeron tamales.** — *My cousins brought tamales.*

Watch for this mistake: every other verb in this lesson has **-ieron**, so it is easy to add the i by habit and say **dijieron** or **trajieron**. Those forms are nonstandard. Say **dijeron** (*they said*) and **trajeron** (*they brought*).

The yo forms of the nine verbs in this lesson are **tuve** (*I had*), **estuve** (*I was*), **pude** (*I was able to*), **puse** (*I put*), **quise** (*I tried*), **vine** (*I came*), **supe** (*I found out*), **dije** (*I said*) and **traje** (*I brought*). None of them has a written accent.

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Key facts

> **Irregular stems take -e, -iste, -o, -imos, -ieron**
>
> A group of common verbs takes an **irregular stem** in the preterite and its own unaccented endings: **-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -ieron**. The stem is irregular in all five forms, and the endings are the same for -ar, -er and -ir verbs. Only the **yo** (**-e**) and **usted / él / ella** (**-o**) endings differ from the regular -er and -ir endings: **comí** (*I ate*), **comió** (*he, she ate*). **tener** (stem **tuv-**, *to have*), for **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **tuve, tuviste, tuvo, tuvimos, tuvieron**.

> **Estar and poder: the stems estuv- and pud-**
>
> **estar** (stem **estuv-**, *to be*): **estuve, estuviste, estuvo, estuvimos, estuvieron**. **poder** (stem **pud-**, *to be able to*): **pude, pudiste, pudo, pudimos, pudieron**. The forms run **yo**, **tú**, **usted / él / ella**, **nosotros**, **ustedes / ellos / ellas**. **Estar** ends in -ar, but in the preterite it takes these endings, not the -ar endings of Lesson 1. **Poder** changes its stem in the present (**puedo**, *I can*), but its preterite stem is **pud-**. **No pude llegar a tiempo.** — *I wasn't able to arrive on time.*

Tuve and pudo: no written accent

None of the preterite forms in this group of irregular verbs, such as **tuve** and **pudo**, has a written accent. Regular **hablé** (*I spoke*) and **habló** (*he, she spoke*) carry one because they are stressed on the last syllable. **Tuve** and **pudo** are stressed on the first syllable (**TU**-ve, **PU**-do). As a general rule, Spanish writes no accent on a word that ends in a vowel, n or s and is stressed on the next-to-last syllable.

Poner: the stem pus- with the same endings

The same endings, **-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -ieron**, go on four more irregular stems, and none of these forms has a written accent either. **poner** (stem **pus-**, *to put*), for **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **puse, pusiste, puso, pusimos, pusieron**. **Puse los platos en la mesa.** — *I put the plates on the table.* **¿Dónde pusiste las llaves?** — *Where did you put the keys?*

Querer and venir: the stems quis- and vin-

querer (*to want*) has the preterite stem **quis-**, not the **quier-** of the present (**quiero**, *I want*): **quise, quisiste, quiso, quisimos, quisieron**. **venir** (stem **vin-**, *to come*): **vine, viniste, vino, vinimos, vinieron**. The forms run **yo**, **tú**, **usted / él / ella**, **nosotros**, **ustedes / ellos / ellas**. With an infinitive, **querer** usually means you tried, not just that you wanted to: **Quise hablar con mi mamá, pero no pude.** — *I tried to talk to my mom, but I wasn't able to.* **¿Cuándo viniste a México?** — *When did you come to Mexico?*

Saber in the preterite usually means to find out

saber (stem **sup-**): **supe, supiste, supo, supimos, supieron**, for **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**. In the preterite, **saber** usually means *to find out*, which is how these forms are translated: **supe** is *I found out*, **supimos** is *we found out*. **Mi mamá supo la noticia anoche.** — *My mom found out the news last night.*

Decir: the j stem dij- and the ending -eron

Decir and **traer** have stems that end in **j**: **dij-** and **traj-**. The ustedes / ellos / ellas form ends in **-eron**, not -ieron: the i drops out after the j. The other four forms keep their usual endings (**-e, -iste, -o, -imos**). **decir** (*to say, to tell*), for **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**: **dije, dijiste, dijo, dijimos, dijeron**. **Mi mamá dijo que sí.** — *My mom said yes.* **¿Qué dijiste?** — *What did you say?*

Say dijeron and trajeron, not the nonstandard dijieron or trajieron

Watch for this mistake with the nine verbs whose **yo** forms are **tuve, estuve, pude, puse, quise, vine, supe, dije** and **traje**: it is easy to add the i by habit and say **dijieron** or **trajieron**, because all the other verbs among them have **-ieron**. Those forms are nonstandard. Say **dijeron** (*they said*) and **trajeron** (*they brought*). None of those **yo** forms has a written accent.

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

ella + poder, ayer → pudo

estuvimos → we were

ellos + venir, ayer → vinieron

nosotros + querer, ayer → quisimos

yo + decir, ayer → dije

trajimos → we brought

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. Last night you and your friends had to leave a party early. Telling a coworker about it, as one of the group, which sentence fits?

A Tuve que salir temprano.
B Tuvimos que salir temprano.
C Tuvieron que salir temprano.
D Tuviste que salir temprano.

2. A coworker asks why you were late yesterday. You answer, about yourself, that you weren't able to arrive on time. Which sentence fits?

A No pude llegar a tiempo.
B No pudimos llegar a tiempo.
C No pudiste llegar a tiempo.
D No pudo llegar a tiempo.

3. You ask a close friend, in the informal way, where she was yesterday. Which question fits?

A ¿Dónde estuvieron ayer?
B ¿Dónde estuvimos ayer?
C ¿Dónde estuviste ayer?
D ¿Dónde estuve ayer?

4. You tell a friend that your sister had a lot of work yesterday. Which sentence fits?

A Tuvimos mucho trabajo ayer.
B Tuve mucho trabajo ayer.
C Tuvieron mucho trabajo ayer.
D Tuvo mucho trabajo ayer.

5. Your cousins were able to come to the party last night. Telling a friend, which sentence fits?

A Pude venir a la fiesta.
B Pudimos venir a la fiesta.
C Pudiste venir a la fiesta.
D Pudieron venir a la fiesta.

6. A classmate is visiting from abroad. In the informal way, you ask her when she came to Mexico. Which question fits?

A ¿Cuándo viniste a México?
B ¿Cuándo vinieron a México?
C ¿Cuándo vine a México?
D ¿Cuándo vinimos a México?

7. Yesterday you tried to talk to your mom. Telling a friend, about yourself, which sentence fits?

A Quiso hablar con mi mamá.
B Quise hablar con mi mamá.
C Quisieron hablar con mi mamá.
D Quisimos hablar con mi mamá.

8. You can't find your keys. In the informal way, you ask your roommate where she put them last night. Which question fits?

A ¿Dónde puse las llaves?
B ¿Dónde pusimos las llaves?
C ¿Dónde pusiste las llaves?
D ¿Dónde pusieron las llaves?

9. You found out some news last night. Telling your mom, about yourself, which sentence fits?

A Supe la noticia anoche.
B Supo la noticia anoche.
C Supiste la noticia anoche.
D Supieron la noticia anoche.

10. Last night your sister tried to come to the party. Telling a friend, which sentence fits?

A Quise venir a la fiesta.
B Quiso venir a la fiesta.
C Quisimos venir a la fiesta.
D Quisieron venir a la fiesta.

11. Yesterday your neighbors were asked what happened, and they told the truth. Telling a friend, which sentence fits?

A Dijieron la verdad.
B Dije la verdad.
C Dijimos la verdad.
D Dijeron la verdad.

12. Last night you arrived at a family dinner with pan dulce. A cousin asks what you brought, and you answer about yourself. Which sentence fits?

A Trajo pan dulce.
B Trajiste pan dulce.
C Traje pan dulce.
D Trajimos pan dulce.

13. A friend mumbled and you missed it. In the informal way, you ask her what she said. Which question fits?

A ¿Qué dije?
B ¿Qué dijiste?
C ¿Qué dijimos?
D ¿Qué dijeron?

14. Your mom brought tamales to the party last night. Telling a friend, which sentence fits?

A Traje tamales a la fiesta.
B Trajimos tamales a la fiesta.
C Trajo tamales a la fiesta.
D Trajeron tamales a la fiesta.

15. Last night your mom asked you and your cousins to help, and the group said yes. Telling a friend, as one of the group, which sentence fits?

A Dijimos que sí.
B Dije que sí.
C Dijeron que sí.
D Dijo que sí.

Go deeper

WATCH Tuve, Estuve, Pude 0:32
Some common verbs get a new stem in the past. Tener becomes tuv: tuve, I had.

WATCH Quise Means I Tried 0:31
In the past, querer with an infinitive usually means you tried.

WATCH Dijeron, Not Dijieron 0:30
Decir and traer have past stems that end in j. Dije, I said. Traje, I brought.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/spanish-verbs-2/lesson-4-irregular-preterite-stems

STUDY Spanish Verbs 2: The Past in the FlashFeed app flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/spanish-verbs-2

LESSON 5 OF 6

Lesson 5: The Imperfect

Part 1: Regular Imperfect Forms · Part 2: Ser, Ir and Ver · Part 3: What the Imperfect Describes

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Conjugate regular -ar, -er and -ir verbs in the imperfect, including verbs irregular in the present, and use the subject to tell yo from usted, él or ella.
- Conjugate ser, ir and ver in the imperfect with their accents, recognize them as the only three irregular verbs, and tell ser from ir (era, iba).
- Use the imperfect for habits, descriptions, age and clock time, and actions in progress, and recognize clue words like siempre as hints, not rules.

The Imperfect

Lessons 1 to 4 gave you the preterite, the tense for what happened. This lesson adds the imperfect, the tense for how things were, what used to happen and what was going on. Nearly every verb is regular in the imperfect: only three are not. The English in the first two parts mostly says *used to*; the last part adds the other meanings. Lesson 6 then shows how to choose between the two tenses.

Regular Imperfect Forms

To form the imperfect (**el imperfecto**, also **el pretérito imperfecto**), drop -ar, -er or -ir and add an ending. Regular verbs have two sets of endings: one for -ar verbs, one shared by -er and -ir verbs.

The -ar endings are **-aba, -abas, -aba, -ábamos, -aban**. Here is **hablar** (*to speak*):

- **yo** hablaba — *I used to speak*
- **tú** hablabas — *you used to speak (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** hablaba — *you used to speak (formal) / he, she used to speak*
- **nosotros / nosotras** hablábamos — *we used to speak*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** hablaban — *you all used to speak / they used to speak*

In -ar verbs, only the **nosotros** form has a written accent: a word stressed on the third syllable from the end (ha-**BLÁ**-ba-mos) always takes one.

- **Hablábamos español.** — *We used to speak Spanish.*

Both -er and -ir verbs use the endings **-ía, -ías, -ía, -íamos, -ían**. Here are **comer** (*to eat*) and **vivir** (*to live*):

- **yo** comía — *I used to eat*
- **tú** comías — *you used to eat (informal)*

- **usted / él / ella** comía — *you used to eat (formal) / he, she used to eat*
- **nosotros / nosotras** comíamos — *we used to eat*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** comían — *you all used to eat / they used to eat*
- **yo** vivía — *I used to live*
- **tú** vivías — *you used to live (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** vivía — *you used to live (formal) / he, she used to live*
- **nosotros / nosotras** vivíamos — *we used to live*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** vivían — *you all used to live / they used to live*

Every -er and -ir ending has a written accent on the **í**, which keeps it a separate syllable (co-**MÍ**-a).

The **yo** form and the **usted / él / ella** form are the same: **hablaba**, **comía**, **vivía**. A pronoun, a name or the context shows who.

- **Yo vivía en Guadalajara. Ana vivía en Monterrey.** — *I used to live in Guadalajara. Ana used to live in Monterrey.*

Apart from **ser**, **ir** and **ver**, which come next, verbs with a stem change or an odd form in the present are regular in the imperfect. So **quiero, puedo, tengo, hago, digo** and **estoy** become **quería, podía, tenía, hacía, decía** and **estaba**. In full:

- **querer** (*to want*): **quería, querías, quería, queríamos, querían**
- **poder** (*can*): **podía, podías, podía, podíamos, podían**
- **tener** (*to have*): **tenía, tenías, tenía, teníamos, tenían**
- **hacer** (*to do, make*): **hacía, hacías, hacía, hacíamos, hacían**
- **decir** (*to say*): **decía, decías, decía, decíamos, decían**
- **Ana tenía una hermana en Oaxaca.** — *Ana had a sister in Oaxaca.*

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Ser, Ir and Ver

Only three verbs are irregular in the imperfect: **ser**, **ir** and **ver**. Every other verb takes the regular endings you have just learned, even one that is irregular or stem-changing in the present.

Learn each of the three as a set. **Ser** (*to be*):

- **yo** era — *I was*
- **tú** eras — *you were (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** era — *you were (formal) / he, she was*
- **nosotros / nosotras** éramos — *we were*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** eran — *you all were / they were*

Ir (*to go*):

- **yo** iba — *I used to go*

- **tú** ibas — *you used to go (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** iba — *you used to go (formal) / he, she used to go*
- **nosotros / nosotras** íbamos — *we used to go*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** iban — *you all used to go / they used to go*

Ver (*to see*) takes the same endings as **comer** and **vivir**, added to the stem **ve-**:

- **yo** veía — *I used to see*
- **tú** veías — *you used to see (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** veía — *you used to see (formal) / he, she used to see*
- **nosotros / nosotras** veíamos — *we used to see*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** veían — *you all used to see / they used to see*

The accents follow the rules you already know. **Ser** and **ir** have a written accent only on the **nosotros** form, **éramos** and **íbamos**, because the stress falls on the third syllable from the end, as in **hablábamos**. **Ver** has an accent on the **í** in every form, as **comer** and **vivir** do.

The **yo** form and the **usted / él / ella** form are the same in all three verbs: **era**, **iba**, **veía**.

In the preterite, **ser** and **ir** share one set of forms (**fui**, **fue**). In the imperfect they are different: **era** belongs to **ser** and **iba** belongs to **ir**, so you can tell them apart.

- **Mi abuela era maestra.** — *My grandmother was a teacher.*
- **Íbamos a Oaxaca en verano.** — *We used to go to Oaxaca in the summer.*
- **Iba al mercado con mi mamá.** — *I used to go to the market with my mom.*
- **Veíamos películas los sábados.** — *We used to watch movies on Saturdays.*

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What the Imperfect Describes

The preterite from Lesson 1 tells a finished event. The imperfect describes the past as ongoing or repeated, not as a finished event: it does not mark when an action started or ended. English has no single match for it. Depending on the sentence, it comes out as *used to*, *would*, *was* or *were* plus an -ing word, or a plain past such as *was* or *had*.

The imperfect does four main jobs.

First, use it for habits and repeated actions, in English *used to* or *would*. Here *would* means *used to*, not the *would* of a hypothetical such as *I would go if I could*.

- **De niño, jugaba en el parque todos los días.** — *As a child, I used to play in the park every day.*
- **Cada verano íbamos a Oaxaca.** — *Every summer we would go to Oaxaca.*
- **Mi abuela siempre hacía tamales.** — *My grandmother always made tamales.*

Second, use it for descriptions and background: how people, places and the weather were.

- **La casa era grande.** — *The house was big.*
- **En verano hacía mucho calor.** — *In summer it was very hot.*

Third, use it for age and clock time in the past. Spanish gives age with **tener** (*to have*) and **años** (*years*): **Tengo diez años** means *I'm ten years old*. In the past, the imperfect usually gives someone's age at that time. For the clock, **es la una** and **son las dos** become **era la una** and **eran las dos**: **era** goes with one o'clock (**la una**), and the other hours (**las dos**, **las tres** and so on) take **eran**.

- **Yo tenía diez años.** — *I was ten years old.*
- **Era la una.** — *It was one o'clock.*
- **Eran las tres.** — *It was three o'clock.*

Fourth, use it for an action in progress, in English *was* or *were* plus an -ing word. Two actions that go on at the same time can both be in the imperfect, joined by **mientras** (*while*).

- **Yo leía en la sala.** — *I was reading in the living room.*
- **Mi papá trabajaba mientras yo estudiaba.** — *My dad was working while I was studying.*

Words that often go with the imperfect are **siempre** (*always*), **todos los días** (*every day*), **cada verano** (*every summer*), **de niño** (*as a child*; **de niña** for a girl), **antes** (*before, in the past*) and **mientras** (*while*).

- **Antes vivíamos en Monterrey.** — *We used to live in Monterrey.*

These words are clues, not guarantees: the meaning of the sentence decides.

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Key facts

> **Hablar takes the imperfect endings -aba, -abas, -aba, -ábamos, -aban**
>
> To form the imperfect, drop **-ar** and add **-aba, -abas, -aba, -ábamos, -aban**. **Hablar** (*to speak*): **yo hablaba** (*I used to speak*), **tú hablabas** (*you used to speak, informal*), **usted / él / ella hablaba** (*you used to speak, formal / he, she used to speak*), **nosotros hablábamos** (*we used to speak*), **ustedes / ellos / ellas hablaban** (*you all used to speak / they used to speak*). In -ar verbs, only the **nosotros** form has a written accent: **Hablábamos español.** (*We used to speak Spanish.*)



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Comer and vivir share the endings -ía, -ías, -ía, -íamos, -ían

Both -er and -ir verbs use **-ía, -ías, -ía, -íamos, -ían**, with a written accent on every **í**. **Comer** (*to eat*): **comía, comías, comía, comíamos, comían**. **Vivir** (*to live*): **vivía, vivías, vivía, vivíamos, vivían**. The forms run **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**. The **yo** and **usted / él / ella** forms are the same, so a pronoun, a name or the context shows who: **Yo vivía en Guadalajara. Ana vivía en Monterrey.**

Verbs with a stem change or odd present form are regular in the imperfect

Apart from **ser**, **ir** and **ver**, which come next, verbs with a stem change or an odd form in the present are regular in the imperfect. **Quiero, puedo, tengo, hago, digo** and **estoy** become **quería, podía, tenía, hacía, decía** and **estaba**. **Querer** (*to want*): **quería, querías, quería, queríamos, querían**. **Poder** (*can*): **podía, podías, podía, podíamos, podían**. **Tener** (*to have*): **tenía, tenías, tenía, teníamos, tenían**. **Hacer** (*to do, make*): **hacía, hacías, hacía, hacíamos, hacían**.

Ser is era, eras, era, éramos, eran; ir is iba, ibas, iba, íbamos, iban

Only three verbs are irregular in the imperfect: **ser**, **ir** and **ver**. Every other verb takes the regular endings. **Ser** (*to be*): **era, eras, era, éramos, eran**, as in *I was* and *we were*. **Ir** (*to go*): **iba, ibas, iba, íbamos, iban**, as in *I used to go* and *we used to go*. The forms run **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**.

Ver adds the -ía endings to ve-: veía, veías, veía, veíamos, veían

Ver (*to see*) takes the same endings as **comer** and **vivir**, added to the stem **ve-**: **veía, veías, veía, veíamos, veían**, for **yo, tú, usted / él / ella, nosotros, ustedes / ellos / ellas**. Ver has a written accent on the **í** in every form. **Ser** and **ir** have one only on the **nosotros** form, **éramos** and **íbamos**, as in **hablábamos**. In all three verbs the **yo** and **usted / él / ella** forms are the same: **era**, **iba**, **veía**.

In the imperfect ser and ir differ: era is ser, iba is ir

In the preterite, **ser** and **ir** share one set of forms (**fui**, **fue**). In the imperfect they are different: **era** belongs to **ser** and **iba** belongs to **ir**, so you can tell them apart. **Mi abuela era maestra.** (*My grandmother was a teacher.*) **Íbamos a Oaxaca en verano.** (*We used to go to Oaxaca in the summer.*) **Iba al mercado con mi mamá.** (*I used to go to the market with my mom.*) **Veíamos películas los sábados.** (*We used to watch movies on Saturdays.*)

The imperfect gives habits and descriptions, not finished events

The imperfect describes the past as ongoing or repeated, not as a finished event. Use it for habits and repeated actions, in English *used to* or *would* (not the *would* of *I would go if I could*): **De niño, jugaba en el parque todos los días.** (*As a child, I used to play in the park every day.*) **Cada verano íbamos a Oaxaca.** (*Every summer we would go to Oaxaca.*) **Mi abuela siempre hacía tamales.** (*My grandmother always made tamales.*) For descriptions and background: **La casa era grande.** (*The house was big.*) **En verano hacía mucho calor.** (*In summer it was very hot.*)

The imperfect gives age and clock time in the past: tenía, era, eran

The imperfect gives age and clock time in the past. Age uses **tener** (*to have*) and **años** (*years*), and the imperfect usually gives someone's age at that time: **Yo tenía diez años.** (*I was ten years old.*) For the clock, **es la una** and **son las dos** become **era la una** and **eran las dos**: **era** goes with one o'clock, and the other hours take **eran**. **Era la una.** (*It was one o'clock.*) **Eran las tres.** (*It was three o'clock.*)



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The imperfect gives an action in progress; clue words only lean

The imperfect also gives an action in progress, in English *was* or *were* plus an -ing word: **Yo leía en la sala.** (*I was reading in the living room.*) Two actions at the same time can both be in the imperfect, joined by **mientras** (*while*): **Mi papá trabajaba mientras yo estudiaba.** (*My dad was working while I was studying.*) Words that often go with it are **siempre**, **todos los días**, **cada verano**, **de niño**, **antes** and **mientras**, as in **Antes vivíamos en Monterrey.** (*We used to live in Monterrey.*) They are clues, not guarantees: the meaning decides.

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

nosotros + hablar, antes (before) → hablábamos

ellos + querer, antes (before) → querían

nosotros + ser, antes (before) → éramos

tú + ver, antes (before) → veías

Yo tenía diez años. → I was ten years old.

Yo leía en la sala. → I was reading in the living room.

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. You ask a friend, using tú, whether she used to eat tamales every summer. Which question works?

A ¿Comían tamales cada verano?

B ¿Comíamos tamales cada verano?

C ¿Comabas tamales cada verano?

D ¿Comías tamales cada verano?

2. You tell a coworker that, growing up, you and your sister could speak Spanish at home. Which sentence says it?

A Puedíamos hablar español.

B Podíamos hablar español.

C Podían hablar español.

D Podía hablar español.

3. You tell a friend that when you were small, your mom and dad used to talk with your grandmother every day. Which sentence says it?

A Mi mamá y mi papá hablaban con mi abuela todos los días.
B Mi mamá y mi papá hablaba con mi abuela todos los días.
C Mi mamá y mi papá hablían con mi abuela todos los días.
D Mi mamá y mi papá hablábamos con mi abuela todos los días.

4. You ask Ana, using tú, whether she had a big house in Oaxaca when she was little. Which question do you ask?

A Ana, ¿tenían una casa grande en Oaxaca?
B Ana, ¿teníamos una casa grande en Oaxaca?
C Ana, ¿tenías una casa grande en Oaxaca?
D Ana, ¿tengías una casa grande en Oaxaca?

5. You tell a coworker that, as a child, you wanted to live in Oaxaca. Which sentence says it?

A De niño, quería vivir en Oaxaca.
B De niño, querían vivir en Oaxaca.
C De niño, quiería vivir en Oaxaca.
D De niño, queríamos vivir en Oaxaca.

6. You tell a coworker about your childhood. Which sentence says, "I used to go to the market with my mom"?

A Era al mercado con mi mamá.
B Iba al mercado con mi mamá.
C Iban al mercado con mi mamá.
D Íbamos al mercado con mi mamá.

7. A classmate says tener must be irregular in the imperfect because tengo is irregular in the present. Which of these verbs really is irregular in the imperfect?

A querer
B tener
C hacer
D ver

8. You tell a friend that on Saturdays Ana and your sister used to watch movies. Which sentence says it?

A Ana y mi hermana veíamos películas los sábados.
B Ana y mi hermana veía películas los sábados.
C Ana y mi hermana veían películas los sábados.
D Ana y mi hermana víamos películas los sábados.

9. You ask Ana, using tú, whether she went to the park every day when she was little. Which question do you ask?

A Ana, ¿iban al parque todos los días?
B Ana, ¿eras al parque todos los días?
C Ana, ¿ibas al parque todos los días?
D Ana, ¿íbamos al parque todos los días?

10. You tell your grandmother, using tú, "You were a teacher." Which sentence do you say?

A Abuela, tú ibas maestra.
B Abuela, tú éramos maestra.
C Abuela, tú eran maestra.
D Abuela, tú eras maestra.

11. A friend from Monterrey tells you, "Cada verano íbamos a Oaxaca." What does she mean?

A. We went there just once.
B. We used to go every summer.
C. We are going next summer.
D. We would go if we could.

12. Which sentence uses the imperfect to describe how a place was, not to say what someone used to do?

A. La casa era grande.
B. Cada verano íbamos a Oaxaca.
C. De niño, jugaba en el parque todos los días.
D. Mi abuela siempre hacía tamales.

13. Telling a story about the past, which sentence says, "It was one o'clock"?

A. Era la una.
B. Éramos la una.
C. Eran la una.
D. Es la una.

14. Your friend says, "Mi papá trabajaba mientras yo estudiaba." What does that tell you?

A. Both will happen later.
B. Both were happening at the same time.
C. One ended, then the other began.
D. Dad works and I study right now.

15. A new neighbor tells you, "Antes vivíamos en Monterrey." What does she mean?

A. We never lived in Monterrey.
B. We live in Monterrey now.
C. We used to live in Monterrey.
D. We will live in Monterrey.

Go deeper

WATCH Almost All Regular 0:31
Nearly every Spanish verb is regular in the imperfect. Only 3 are not.

WATCH Era, Iba, Veía 0:31
Only 3 Spanish verbs are irregular in the imperfect: ser, ir and ver.

WATCH Used To 0:29
The Spanish imperfect has no single English match. It can mean used to, would, or was and an -ing word.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/spanish-verbs-2/lesson-5-the-imperfect

STUDY Spanish Verbs 2: The Past in the FlashFeed app flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/spanish-verbs-2

LESSON 6 OF 6

Lesson 6: Preterite or Imperfect?

Part 1: Event or Background · Part 2: Signal Words and Interruptions · Part 3: Verbs That Shift Meaning, and the Recent Past

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Choose the preterite for events and the imperfect for the scene, including one verb in both tenses (estuve, estaba).
- Use signal words as hints, choose the tense by meaning when they disagree, and use the imperfect with the preterite for interruptions and mientras.
- Use conocer, saber, querer and poder in the preterite (met, found out, tried or refused, managed) and recognize the preterite for the recent past.

Preterite or Imperfect?

You know two past tenses now: the preterite for what happened and the imperfect for how things were. A real story needs both, so this lesson teaches you to choose between them, to use both in one sentence, and to spot the few verbs that change meaning with the tense. It ends with one tendency that often sets Mexican and Latin American Spanish apart from the Spanish of Spain.

Event or Background

When you tell a story, you mix the two most common past tenses, the preterite and the imperfect, and each has its own job.

- The preterite tells the events: what happened, one after another. It answers *What happened?*
- The imperfect sets the scene: the background, the description, what was going on and what used to happen. It answers *What was going on?*

Here is a short story with both:

- **Era sábado.** — *It was Saturday.*
- **Mis amigos y yo estábamos en casa.** — *My friends and I were at home.*
- **A las seis fuimos al cine.** — *At six we went to the movies.*

The first two sentences set the scene, so they use the imperfect (**era**, **estábamos**). The third tells an event, so it uses the preterite (**fuimos**).

Events that follow one another each take the preterite:

- **Anoche llegamos a casa, comimos y vimos una película.** — *Last night we got home, ate and watched a movie.*

The imperfect can describe, and it can say what used to happen:

- **La casa era grande.** — *The house was big.*
- **De niño, jugaba en la calle todos los días.** — *As a child, I used to play in the street every day.*

The same verb can take either tense, because each tense shows the action from a different view:

- **Estuve en Monterrey tres días.** — *I was in Monterrey for three days.* This is a closed stay, with a beginning and an end.
- **Estaba en Monterrey cuando me llamaste.** — *I was in Monterrey when you called me.* This tells where you were at that moment: the background to the call.

To choose, decide whether you are telling something that happened or setting the scene around it. A handy check: if English could say *used to* or *was/were* plus *-ing*, Spanish usually needs the imperfect.

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Signal Words and Interruptions

Some words are clues to the tense. They lean one way, but they do not decide, so treat them as hints.

These words often go with the preterite: **ayer** (*yesterday*), **anoche** (*last night*), **una vez** (*once*), **de repente** (*suddenly*) and **el año pasado** (*last year*).

- **Ayer compré pan dulce.** — *Yesterday I bought sweet bread.*
- **Una vez fui a Oaxaca.** — *Once I went to Oaxaca.*
- **De repente, mi hermano abrió la puerta.** — *Suddenly, my brother opened the door.*
- **El año pasado viví en Guadalajara.** — *Last year I lived in Guadalajara.*

These words often go with the imperfect: **siempre** (*always*), **todos los días** (*every day*), **de niño** (*as a child*) and **mientras** (*while*).

- **Siempre comíamos en casa de mi abuela.** — *We always ate at my grandmother's house.*
- **De niño, vivía en Oaxaca.** — *As a child, I lived in Oaxaca.*

The meaning decides, not the word. A hint can point the wrong way:

- **Anoche estudiaba cuando me llamó Ana.** — *Last night I was studying when Ana called me.* **Anoche** leans preterite, but **estudiaba** names an action in progress, so it takes the imperfect.
- **Estudié todos los días durante una semana.** — *I studied every day for a week.* **Todos los días** leans imperfect, but a stretch of time with a clear start and end, such as *for a week*, usually takes the preterite.

Interrupted actions combine both tenses. Use the imperfect for what was going on and the preterite for what interrupted it. The interruption often comes after **cuando** (*when*):

- **Comíamos cuando llegó mi hermano.** — *We were eating when my brother arrived.*
- **Leía cuando me llamó mi mamá.** — *I was reading when my mom called me.*

In each sentence the first verb (**comíamos**, **leía**) was in progress, and the second (**llegó**, **llamó**) cut in.

When **mientras** joins two actions that were both in progress, both verbs take the imperfect:

- **Yo leía mientras mi hermano veía la televisión.** — *I was reading while my brother was watching television.*

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Verbs That Shift Meaning, and the Recent Past

Four verbs describe states: knowing, wanting and being able. They tend to appear in the imperfect. In the preterite they usually name one event instead: the start of knowing, a try, a refusal or a success. English uses a different verb for each.

- **Conocer: conocía** is *I knew*; **conocí** is *I met*.
- **Saber: sabía** is *I knew*; **supe** is *I found out*.
- **Querer: quería** is *I wanted*; **quise** is *I tried*; **no quise** is *I refused*.
- **Poder: podía** is *I could*; **pude** is *I managed*; **no pude** is *I couldn't (I tried and failed)*.

The preterite of the four verbs, with the meanings they usually take:

- **yo** conocí, supe, quise, pude — *I met, found out, tried, managed*
- **tú** conociste, supiste, quisiste, pudiste — *you met, found out, tried, managed (informal)*
- **usted / él / ella** conoció, supo, quiso, pudo — *you (formal) / he, she met, found out, tried, managed*
- **nosotros / nosotras** conocimos, supimos, quisimos, pudimos — *we met, found out, tried, managed*
- **ustedes / ellos / ellas** conocieron, supieron, quisieron, pudieron — *you all / they met, found out, tried, managed*

Examples:

- **Conocí a Ana en la escuela.** — *I met Ana at school.*
- **Conocía a Ana.** — *I knew Ana.*
- **Anoche supe la verdad.** — *Last night I found out the truth.*
- **Sabía la verdad.** — *I knew the truth.*
- **Quise abrir la puerta, pero no pude.** — *I tried to open the door, but I couldn't.*
- **Por fin pude abrir la puerta.** — *I finally managed to open the door.*
- **No quise ir a la fiesta.** — *I refused to go to the party.*
- **No quería ir a la fiesta.** — *I didn't want to go to the party.*

Regions differ on the recent past. In Mexico and much of Latin America, the preterite is the more common choice for the recent past too, with words like **hoy** (*today*) and **ya** (*already*):

- **¿Ya comiste?** — *Have you eaten yet?*
- **Hoy trabajé mucho.** — *I worked a lot today.*

English says *have eaten*, but these Spanish sentences use the preterite. In Spain, especially in the center and south, speakers often use another tense here: the present perfect. It is built from a present form of **haber** (the helper verb *to have*) plus a participle such as **comido** (*eaten*): **¿Ya has comido?** — *Have you eaten yet?* In many places the two are interchangeable; the choice varies from place to place.

This pack teaches the preterite for these sentences. The present perfect is named here only so you recognize it.

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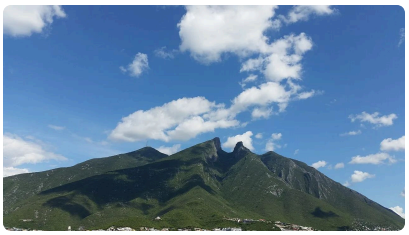
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Key facts

> **The preterite tells events; the imperfect sets the scene**
>
> The preterite tells the events: what happened, one after another. It answers *What happened?* The imperfect sets the scene: the background, the description, what was going on and what used to happen. It answers *What was going on?* **Era sábado.** — *It was Saturday.* **Mis amigos y yo estábamos en casa.** — *My friends and I were at home.* **A las seis fuimos al cine.** — *At six we went to the movies.* The first two set the scene, so they use the imperfect (**era**, **estábamos**). The third tells an event, so it uses the preterite (**fuimos**).

> **Events in a row take the preterite; the imperfect describes**
>
> Events that follow one another each take the preterite: **Anoche llegamos a casa, comimos y vimos una película.** — *Last night we got home, ate and watched a movie.* The imperfect can describe, and it can say what used to happen: **La casa era grande.** — *The house was big.* **De niño, jugaba en la calle todos los días.** — *As a child, I used to play in the street every day.*



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The same verb can take either tense

The same verb can take either tense, because each tense shows the action from a different view. **Estuve en Monterrey tres días.** — *I was in Monterrey for three days.* This is a closed stay, with a beginning and an end. **Estaba en Monterrey cuando me llamaste.** — *I was in Monterrey when you called me.* This tells where you were at that moment: the background to the call. A handy check: if English could say *used to* or *was/were* plus *-ing*, Spanish usually needs the imperfect.

Signal words lean toward a tense, but they do not decide

Some words are clues to the tense. They lean one way, but they do not decide. Often with the preterite: **ayer** (*yesterday*), **anoche** (*last night*), **una vez** (*once*), **de repente** (*suddenly*), **el año pasado** (*last year*). Often with the imperfect: **siempre** (*always*), **todos los días** (*every day*), **de niño** (*as a child*), **mientras** (*while*). **Ayer compré pan dulce.** — *Yesterday I bought sweet bread.* **Una vez fui a Oaxaca.** — *Once I went to Oaxaca.* **De repente, mi hermano abrió la puerta.** — *Suddenly, my brother opened the door.*

The meaning decides, not the signal word

Siempre comíamos en casa de mi abuela. — *We always ate at my grandmother's house.* The meaning decides, not the word. A hint can point the wrong way: **Anoche estudiaba cuando me llamó Ana.** — *Last night I was studying when Ana called me.* **Anoche** leans preterite, but **estudiaba** names an action in progress, so it takes the imperfect. **Estudié todos los días durante una semana.** — *I studied every day for a week.* **Todos los días** leans imperfect, but a stretch of time with a clear start and end, such as *for a week*, usually takes the preterite.

An interruption mixes the imperfect and the preterite

Use the imperfect for what was going on and the preterite for what interrupted it. The interruption often comes after **cuando** (*when*): **Comíamos cuando llegó mi hermano.** — *We were eating when my brother arrived.* **Leía cuando me llamó mi mamá.** — *I was reading when my mom called me.* In each sentence the first verb was in progress and the second cut in. When **mientras** joins two actions that were both in progress, both verbs take the imperfect: **Yo leía mientras mi hermano veía la televisión.** — *I was reading while my brother was watching television.*

Four verbs shift meaning between the imperfect and the preterite

Four verbs describe states: knowing, wanting and being able. They tend to appear in the imperfect. In the preterite they usually name one event instead: the start of knowing, a try, a refusal or a success. **Conocer: conocía** is *I knew*; **conocí** is *I met*. **Saber: sabía** is *I knew*; **supe** is *I found out*. **Querer: quería** is *I wanted*; **quise** is *I tried*; **no quise** is *I refused*. **Poder: podía** is *I could*; **pude** is *I managed*; **no pude** is *I couldn't (I tried and failed)*.

The preterite of conocer, saber, querer and poder

The preterite of the four verbs, with the meanings they usually take: **yo conocí, supe, quise, pude** — *I met, found out, tried, managed* **tú conociste, supiste, quisiste, pudiste** — *you met, found out, tried, managed (informal)* **usted / él / ella conoció, supo, quiso, pudo** — *you (formal) / he, she met, found out, tried, managed* **nosotros / nosotras conocimos, supimos, quisimos, pudimos** — *we met, found out, tried, managed* **ustedes / ellos / ellas conocieron, supieron, quisieron, pudieron** — *you all / they met, found out, tried, managed*

In Mexico, the preterite is the more common choice for the recent past

In Mexico and much of Latin America, the preterite is the more common choice for the recent past too, with words like **hoy** (*today*) and **ya** (*already*): **¿Ya comiste?** — *Have you eaten yet?* **Hoy trabajé mucho.** — *I worked a lot today.* In Spain, especially in the center and south, speakers often use the present perfect here: a present form of **haber** plus a participle such as **comido**, as in **¿Ya has comido?** — *Have you eaten yet?* In many places the two are interchangeable. This pack teaches the preterite; the present perfect is named only so you recognize it.

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

A las seis fuimos al cine. → At six we went to the movies.

Estaba en Monterrey cuando me llamaste. → I was in Monterrey when you called me.

Ayer compré pan dulce. → Yesterday I bought sweet bread.

Leía cuando me llamó mi mamá. → I was reading when my mom called me.

Anoche supe la verdad. → Last night I found out the truth.

No quise ir a la fiesta. → I refused to go to the party.

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. You are telling a friend about last night. Which sentence sets the scene instead of telling what happened?

A. Comimos y vimos una película.
B. Anoche llegamos a casa.
C. A las seis fuimos al cine.
D. Mis amigos y yo estábamos en casa.

2. A coworker asks how long you were in Monterrey. You stayed three days, then came home. What do you answer?

A. Estuve en Monterrey tres días.
B. Estaba en Monterrey cuando me llamaste.
C. Estaba en Monterrey tres días.
D. Estuve en Monterrey cuando me llamaste.

3. You are translating a story into Spanish. Which English sentence would usually need the imperfect?

A Last night we got home, ate and watched a movie.
B As a child, I used to play in the street.
C At six we went to the movies.
D I was in Monterrey for three days.

4. You tell a friend about one Saturday: first the scene (it was Saturday), then one event (at six, you and your friends went to the movies, a single outing). Which pair fits?

A Fue sábado. A las seis fuimos al cine.
B Era sábado. A las seis íbamos al cine.
C Era sábado. A las seis fuimos al cine.
D Fue sábado. A las seis íbamos al cine.

5. Telling your mom about last night, you say that you and your roommates first got home and then ate. Which sentence fits?

A Llegamos a casa y comimos.
B Llegué a casa y comimos.
C Llegamos a casa y comíamos.
D Llegaron a casa y comimos.

6. Telling a friend what life was like when you were a child, you say: "We always used to eat at my grandmother's house." Which sentence fits?

A Siempre comían en casa de mi abuela.
B Siempre comía en casa de mi abuela.
C Siempre comíamos en casa de mi abuela.
D Siempre comimos en casa de mi abuela.

7. You tell a friend that before the exam you studied every day for one week: a stretch with a clear start and end. Which sentence fits?

A Estudiaba todos los días durante una semana.
B Estudié todos los días durante una semana.
C Estudiaste todos los días durante una semana.
D Estudiaron todos los días durante una semana.

8. You tell a friend that you went to Oaxaca by yourself, one single time, and that trip is over. Which sentence fits?

A Una vez fueron a Oaxaca.
B Una vez fuimos a Oaxaca.
C Una vez iba a Oaxaca.
D Una vez fui a Oaxaca.

9. You are telling a story. All was quiet, and then, in one sudden moment, your brother opened the door. Which sentence fits?

A De repente, abrí la puerta.
B De repente, abrió la puerta.
C De repente, abrieron la puerta.
D De repente, abría la puerta.

10. One evening you were in the middle of reading when your brother arrived and cut in. Which sentence tells it?

A Leía cuando llegó mi hermano.
B Leí cuando llegaba mi hermano.
C Leía cuando llegaba mi hermano.
D Leí cuando llegó mi hermano.

11. You struggled with a stuck door at home, and on the fourth try you finally got it open. Telling a friend what you did, which sentence fits?

A Por fin podía abrir la puerta.
B Por fin pudieron abrir la puerta.
C Por fin pude abrir la puerta.
D Por fin pudiste abrir la puerta.

12. A friend visiting from Spain asks you, "¿Ya has comido?" Now you ask your own friend the same thing, using the more common choice in Mexico. What do you say?

A ¿Ya comí?
B ¿Ya comías?
C ¿Ya comieron?
D ¿Ya comiste?

13. You tried once to open a stuck door, but it stayed shut. Which sentence tells a friend that you tried and failed?

A No pude abrir la puerta.
B No quería abrir la puerta.
C No quise abrir la puerta.
D No pudieron abrir la puerta.

14. A friend asks why you looked bored at the party. You went, but you had not felt like going; it was how you felt, not a refusal. Which sentence fits?

A No quise ir a la fiesta.
B No podía ir a la fiesta.
C No pude ir a la fiesta.
D No quería ir a la fiesta.

15. A friend tells you a secret, but it is no surprise: you already knew the truth. What do you say?

A Supe la verdad.
B Supiste la verdad.
C Sabía la verdad.
D Supieron la verdad.

Go deeper

WATCH Event or Scene 0:31
In a Spanish story, two past tenses share the work.

WATCH Cut In 0:30
We were eating when my brother arrived. Spanish uses both past tenses: Comíamos cuando llegó mi hermano.

WATCH Conocí Means I Met 0:31
Conocía means I knew. Conocí means I met. Conocí a Ana en la escuela.

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Answer key

Lesson 1: Lesson 1: The Preterite of Regular Verbs

1. A They are a finished stretch of time

The preterite presents a past action as finished. The eight hours filled a stretch of time with a clear beginning and end, so the work is not still going on now.

2. B You studied, then you ate tacos

In a series, each preterite verb is a new event that follows the one before it, so estudié came first and comí tacos came after. Eating first and studying second would reverse the order.

3. C Anoche comí en casa de mi abuela.

Anoche means last night, so Anoche comí en casa de mi abuela is Last night I ate at my grandmother's house. Anteayer is the day before yesterday, and el año pasado and la semana pasada name much longer periods.

4. D Last year I bought a book.

El año pasado means last year, and compré means I bought. La semana pasada would be last week, anoche last night, and hace dos días two days ago.

5. B The talk is a finished action on one definite day

Ayer points to one definite day, so hablé presents the talk as a finished action. It is not happening now, and it is not a plan for next week.

6. D Compré tamales en el mercado.

The yo form of a regular -ar verb ends in -é with a written accent: compré. Compró is he or she, compramos is we, and compraron is they.

7. C I talk with my mom.

Hablo, with no accent, is the present: I talk. The preterite forms for yo and usted / él / ella carry a written accent, hablé and habló. Dropping the accent turns he, she spoke into I speak.

8. A ¿Compraste pan dulce?

Talking informally to one friend, you use the tú form, which ends in -aste: compraste. Compré is yo, compramos is nosotros, and compraron is ellos or ustedes.

9. D The time words put it in the past: we worked

The nosotros form of a regular -ar verb is the same in the present and the preterite, so a time word or the context tells you which. Here el año pasado puts trabajamos in the past: we worked.

10. B The stress falls on the last syllable

The accent shows that the stress falls on the last syllable, as in ha-BLÓ, not HA-blo. Without it, a form like hablo is the present, so the accent also changes the meaning.

11. C ¿Aprendiste mucho en la clase?

Talking informally to one classmate, you use the tú form, which ends in -iste: aprendiste. Aprendí is yo, aprendimos is nosotros, and aprendieron is ellos or ustedes.

12. A I ate tamales.

Comí, with its written accent, is the yo form of the preterite: I ate. Como is the present, I eat. Comió is he or she, and comimos is we.

13. B Abrieron la puerta.
The ellos form of a regular -ir verb ends in -ieron: abrieron. Abrí is yo, abrió is he or she, and abrimos is nosotros.

14. D She wrote a message.
Escribió, with a written accent, is the usted / él / ella form of the preterite: she wrote. I wrote would be escribí, and they wrote would be escribieron.

15. C viví
Regular -er and -ir verbs share one set of endings, so the yo form of vivir ends in -í, like comí: viví. Vivió is he or she, vivimos is we, and vivieron is they.

Lesson 2: Lesson 2: Spelling and Stem Changes in the Preterite

1. A Llegué a Guadalajara ayer.
Llegar ends in -gar, so the yo form is spelled -gué: llegué. The gu keeps the hard g sound before é; llegé would be read with a strong h and is not a real form. Llegamos goes with nosotros and llegaste with tú.

2. D Jugué dominó con mi abuelo.
Jugar changes u to ue in the present (juego), but not in the preterite. Its yo form is jugué, with gu before é. Juegué adds a stem change that jugar does not have in the preterite. Jugaste goes with tú and jugamos with nosotros.

3. B Mi mamá buscó un regalo.
Mi mamá is singular, so buscar takes the usted / él / ella form: buscó, with the regular ending. The spelling change busqué belongs to the yo form only. Buscamos is nosotros, and buscaron is plural.

4. C Anoche pagué la cuenta.
Pagar ends in -gar, so the yo form is pagué, with gu before é. Pagé keeps the g and is not a real form. Pagaste goes with tú, and pagaron with ustedes, ellos or ellas.

5. C ¿Empezaste a estudiar ayer?
Tú takes the regular ending: empezaste. The spelling change to c belongs to the yo form only (empecé). Empezamos is nosotros, and empezaron is ustedes, ellos or ellas.

6. D Mis amigos creyeron la historia.
Mis amigos is plural, so creer takes the ustedes / ellos / ellas form, and the i of -ieron becomes y: creyeron. Creieron keeps the i and is not a real form. Creyó is singular, and creímos is nosotros.

7. B Leí un libro sobre Oaxaca.
The yo form keeps the i, with a written accent on the í: leí. Leyí wrongly puts the y into the yo form; only usted / él / ella (leyó) and ustedes / ellos / ellas take it. Leímos is nosotros.

8. A ¿Leíste el menú anoche?
Tú takes leíste: the i stays, and the stressed í carries a written accent. Leyiste wrongly adds the y. Leímos goes with nosotros, and leyeron with ustedes, ellos or ellas.

9. A Mi abuela no creyó la noticia.
Mi abuela is singular, so creer takes the usted / él / ella form: creyó, with y between vowels. Creió is not a real form, creí is the yo form, and creímos is nosotros.

10. D Creímos la historia.
Nosotros keeps the i, with a written accent on the í: creímos. Creyimos is not a real form, creí is the yo form, and creyeron is plural.

11. B Ana pidió tacos.
Ana is one person, so pedir takes the usted / él / ella form, and the e changes to i: pidió. Pedió keeps the e and is not a real form. Pedí is the yo form, and pidieron is plural.

12. C Volví a Oaxaca el viernes pasado.
Volver keeps its stem in the preterite: volví. Vuelví carries a stem change into the preterite and is not a real form. Volvió is the usted / él / ella form, and volvimos is nosotros.

13. A Mi mamá sirvió el café.
Mi mamá is singular, so servir takes the usted / él / ella form, with e changed to i: sirvió. Servió keeps the e and is not a real form. Serví is the yo form, and sirvieron is plural.

14. C Mis amigos volvieron a casa.
Mis amigos is plural, so volver takes the ustedes / ellos / ellas form, and the stem stays regular: volvieron. Vuelvieron is not a real form. Volvió is singular, and volvimos is nosotros.

15. B Anoche dormimos en Oaxaca.
Nosotros is one of the regular forms: dormimos, with no change to u. Durmimos is not a real form. Dormí is the yo form, and durmieron is plural.

Lesson 3: Lesson 3: Ser, Ir, Dar, Ver and Hacer

1. D Fuimos a Oaxaca.
You are speaking for yourself and your sister, so use the nosotros form of ir, fuimos: Fuimos a Oaxaca. Fui would mean I went, fueron would mean they went, and fue would mean he or she went.

2. A Mis primos fueron muy amables.
The whole sentence decides. Mis primos fueron muy amables means My cousins were very kind: an adjective follows, which usually means ser. In the other three a place follows (a or al), which usually means ir.

3. C ¿Fuiste al mercado ayer?
You speak to one friend, informally, so ir takes the tú form: ¿Fuiste al mercado ayer? Fui is for yo, fuimos for nosotros, and fueron for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

4. B Fue un buen día.
It was a good day says what the day was like, so the verb is ser, and it takes the same form as usted, él and ella: Fue un buen día. Fui is for yo, fuimos for nosotros, and fueron for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

5. A ¿Fueron a Guadalajara la semana pasada?
You speak to a group, so ir takes the ustedes form, fueron, and a place follows: ¿Fueron a Guadalajara la semana pasada? Fui is for yo, fue is for usted, él and ella, and fuimos is for nosotros.

6. D Vimos una película.
You are speaking for yourself and two friends, so use the nosotros form of ver, vimos: Vimos una película. Vi would mean I saw, vio would mean he or she saw, and vieron would mean they saw.

7. B Mis papás dieron cien pesos.
Mis papás is a plural subject (they), so dar takes dieron: Mis papás dieron cien pesos. Dio is for one person, di is for yo, and dimos is for nosotros.

8. C ¿Viste la película?
You ask one friend, informally, so ver takes the tú form: ¿Viste la película? Vi is for yo, vimos for nosotros, and vieron for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

9. B Anoche vi una película.
You watched it alone, so use the yo form: Anoche vi una película. Viste is for tú, vimos for nosotros, and vieron for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

10. C ¿Diste veinte pesos?
You ask Luis, informally, so dar takes the tú form: ¿Diste veinte pesos? Di is for yo, dimos for nosotros, and dieron for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

11. A ¿Qué hicieron el fin de semana?
You are speaking to a group, so use the ustedes form, hicieron: ¿Qué hicieron el fin de semana? Hizo is for one person (usted, él, ella), hice is for yo, and hicimos is for nosotros.

12. D ¿Qué hizo Marta anoche?
A person's name takes the él / ella form, so hacer is hizo, spelled with z: ¿Qué hizo Marta anoche? Hico is a spelling mistake (c before o would sound like k), hice is for yo, and hicieron is for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

13. B ¿Qué hiciste ayer?
You ask one friend, informally, so hacer takes the tú form: ¿Qué hiciste ayer? Hice is for yo, hicimos for nosotros, and hicieron for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

14. C ¿Qué hizo la semana pasada?
Usted takes the same form as él and ella, so hacer is hizo: ¿Qué hizo la semana pasada? Hice is for yo, hicimos is for nosotros, and hicieron is for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

15. A ¿Qué hicimos anteayer?
You mean the two of you, so hacer takes the nosotros form, hicimos: ¿Qué hicimos anteayer? Hice is for yo, hizo is for usted, él and ella, and hicieron is for ustedes, ellos and ellas.

Lesson 4: Lesson 4: Irregular Preterite Stems

1. B Tuvimos que salir temprano.
You are one of the group, so use the nosotros form of tener: tuvimos. Tuve is for yo, tuviste for tú, and tuvieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

2. A No pude llegar a tiempo.
You speak about yourself, so use the yo form of poder: pude, from the stem pud-. Pudo is for usted / él / ella, pudiste for tú, and pudimos for nosotros.

3. C ¿Dónde estuviste ayer?
You ask your friend directly in the informal way, so use the tú form of estar: estuviste. Estuve is for yo, estuvimos for nosotros, and estuvieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

4. D Tuvo mucho trabajo ayer.
Your sister is one person (she), so use the usted / él / ella form of tener: tuvo. Tuve is for yo, tuvimos for nosotros, and tuvieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

5. D Pudieron venir a la fiesta.
Your cousins are plural (they), so use the ustedes / ellos / ellas form of poder: pudieron. Pude is for yo, pudimos for nosotros, and pudiste for tú.

6. A ¿Cuándo viniste a México?
You ask your classmate directly in the informal way, so use the tú form of venir: viniste, from the stem vin-. Vine is for yo, vinimos for nosotros, and vinieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

7. B Quise hablar con mi mamá.
You speak about yourself, so use the yo form of querer: quise, from the stem quis-, not the quier- of the present. With an infinitive it usually means you tried, as here. Quiso is for usted / él / ella, quisimos for nosotros, quisieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

8. C ¿Dónde pusiste las llaves?
You ask your roommate directly in the informal way, so use the tú form of poner: pusiste. Puse is for yo, pusimos for nosotros, and pusieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

9. A Supe la noticia anoche.
You speak about yourself, so use the yo form of saber: supe. In the preterite saber usually means to find out. Supiste is for tú, supieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas, and supo for usted / él / ella.

10. B Quiso venir a la fiesta.
Your sister is one person (she), so use the usted / él / ella form of querer: quiso, from the stem quis-, and here it means she tried. Quise is for yo, quisimos for nosotros, and quisieron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

11. D Dijeron la verdad.
Your neighbors are they, the ustedes / ellos / ellas form, and decir ends in -eron there: dijeron. Dijieron adds an i by habit and is nonstandard. Dije is for yo and dijimos is for nosotros.

12. C Traje pan dulce.
You speak about yourself, so use the yo form of traer: traje, from the stem traj-. Trajiste is for tú, trajo for usted / él / ella, and trajimos for nosotros.

13. B ¿Qué dijiste?
You ask your friend directly in the informal way, so use the tú form of decir: dijiste. Dije is for yo, dijimos for nosotros, and dijeron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

14. C Trajo tamales a la fiesta.
Your mom is one person (she), so use the usted / él / ella form of traer: trajo. Traje is for yo, trajimos for nosotros, and trajeron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

15. A Dijimos que sí.
You are one of the group, so use the nosotros form of decir: dijimos. Dije is for yo, dijo for usted / él / ella, and dijeron for ustedes / ellos / ellas.

Lesson 5: Lesson 5: The Imperfect

1. D ¿Comías tamales cada verano?
Tú takes -ías for an -er verb: comías. Comíamos is for nosotros and comían for ustedes, ellos and ellas. Comabas borrows the -ar ending, which comer does not take.

2. B Podíamos hablar español.
Nosotros takes -íamos on the stem pod-: podíamos. Podían is for ustedes, ellos and ellas, and podía for one person. Puedíamos is not a form: poder is regular in the imperfect, so puedo does not keep its stem change.

3. A Mi mamá y mi papá hablaban con mi abuela todos los días.
Mi mamá y mi papá is two people, so the verb takes the form of ustedes, ellos and ellas: hablaban. Hablábamos is for nosotros and hablaba for one person. Hablían puts the -er and -ir ending on an -ar verb.

4. C Ana, ¿tenías una casa grande en Oaxaca?

Tú takes -ías: tenías. Teníamos is for nosotros and tenían for ustedes, ellos and ellas. Tengías is not a form: tener is regular in the imperfect, so the g of tengo does not carry over.

5. A De niño, quería vivir en Oaxaca.

For yo the imperfect of querer is quería. Querían is for ustedes, ellos and ellas, and queríamos for nosotros. Quiería keeps the stem change of quiero, but querer is regular in the imperfect.

6. B Iba al mercado con mi mamá.

Yo takes iba, the form of ir shared with usted, él and ella. Íbamos is for nosotros and iban for ustedes, ellos and ellas. Era belongs to ser, not to ir, so it cannot mean going.

7. D ver

Only ser, ir and ver are irregular in the imperfect (veía). Tener, hacer and querer are odd in the present but take the regular endings: tenía, hacía, quería.

8. C Ana y mi hermana veían películas los sábados.

Ana y mi hermana is two people, so ver takes the form of ustedes, ellos and ellas: veían. Veíamos is for nosotros and veía for one person. Víamos drops the e of the stem ve-.

9. C Ana, ¿ibas al parque todos los días?

Tú takes ibas. Íbamos is for nosotros and iban for ustedes, ellos and ellas. Eras belongs to ser, not to ir, so it cannot mean going.

10. D Abuela, tú eras maestra.

Tú takes eras, the tú form of ser. Éramos is for nosotros and eran for ustedes, ellos and ellas. Ibas is the tú form of ir, so it cannot mean you were.

11. B We used to go every summer.

Cada verano (every summer) shows a repeated action, so íbamos means we used to go, or we would go. Here would means used to, not the would of "we would go if we could".

12. A La casa era grande.

La casa era grande describes how a place was. The others tell what people used to do: going to Oaxaca every summer, always making tamales and playing in the park every day are habits.

13. A Era la una.

Era goes with one o'clock (la una). Eran is for the other hours, such as las dos and las tres, éramos is for nosotros, and es la una is the present.

14. B Both were happening at the same time.

Mientras (while) joins two actions that go on at the same time, and both can be in the imperfect: my dad was working while I was studying. It is not a sequence, the future or the present.

15. C We used to live in Monterrey.

Antes (before, in the past) often goes with the imperfect, and here vivíamos means we used to live there. It is not the present, the future or something that never happened.

Lesson 6: Lesson 6: Preterite or Imperfect?

1. D Mis amigos y yo estábamos en casa.

Estábamos is the imperfect: it sets the scene, what was going on. Fuimos, llegamos, comimos and vimos are preterites that tell events, what happened.

2. A Estuve en Monterrey tres días.
A stay of three days has a beginning and an end, so it takes the preterite: estuve. Estaba gives the background to a moment, and neither sentence with cuando me llamaste says how long.

3. B As a child, I used to play in the street.
English used to usually points to the imperfect, which says what used to happen. The other three tell finished events, so they take the preterite; I was in Monterrey for three days is a closed stay.

4. C Era sábado. A las seis fuimos al cine.
Era sets the scene, so it takes the imperfect, and the outing at six is one event, so it takes the preterite: fuimos. The other pairs swap one or both tenses.

5. A Llegamos a casa y comimos.
Two events that follow one another each take the preterite, and nosotros needs llegamos and comimos. Comíamos is the imperfect, while llegué and llegaron name other people.

6. C Siempre comíamos en casa de mi abuela.
Describing what life was like, and used to, point to the imperfect, which says what happened over and over: comíamos. Comimos would sum up a finished event, and comía and comían name other people.

7. B Estudié todos los días durante una semana.
A week has a clear start and end, so the preterite fits even with todos los días: estudié. Estudiaba treats it as an open habit, and estudiaste and estudiaron name other people.

8. D Una vez fui a Oaxaca.
One finished trip is an event, and you went alone, so use the yo preterite: fui. Iba is the imperfect, which does not fit a single closed trip, and fuimos and fueron name other people.

9. B De repente, abrió la puerta.
A sudden single event takes the preterite, and your brother is one person (él): abrió. Abría is the imperfect, which does not fit a sudden event. Abrí is for yo and abrieron for ellos.

10. A Leía cuando llegó mi hermano.
The imperfect gives what was going on (leía) and the preterite gives what cut in (llegó). Llegaba would make the arrival ongoing or repeated, and leí would make the reading a finished event.

11. C Por fin pude abrir la puerta.
Pude means I managed: a success after trying, one event, like opening the door on the fourth try. Podía is I could, a state of being able. Pudiste and pudieron name other people.

12. D ¿Ya comiste?
In Mexico and much of Latin America the preterite is the more common choice for the recent past, with ya: ¿Ya comiste? Comías is the imperfect, and comí and comieron name other people.

13. A No pude abrir la puerta.
No pude means I couldn't: I tried and failed. No quise is I refused, no quería is I didn't want to, and no pudieron names other people.

14. D No quería ir a la fiesta.
No quería is I didn't want to: a state of mind, even though you went. No quise is I refused, which the stem rules out, and no pude and no podía say you were unable, not unwilling.

15. C Sabía la verdad.

Sabía is I knew: a state you were already in. Supe is I found out, a single moment, and supiste and supieron name other people.

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