# Imperfect Tense Forms

The imperfect tense (el imperfecto) is one of the several past tenses in Spanish. It is used mainly to describe past habitual actions or to set the scene in the past, what a person “used to” do or “was” doing. Below you will find when to use it as well as how to conjugate it for regular and irregular verbs.

### **Regular Imperfect Forms**

There are only two sets of endings for regular imperfect verbs, one for -ar verbs and one for both -er and -ir verbs. Simply remove the infinitive ending and add the correct imperfect ending depending on the subject of the action.

#### Regular Imperfect Verb Endings

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **-ar verbs** | **-er and -ir verbs** |
| **yo** | -aba | -ía |
| **tú** | -abas | -ías |
| **usted, él, ella** | -aba | -ía |
| **nosotros** | -ábamos | -íamos |
| **vosotros** | -abais | -íais |
| **ustedes, ellos, ellas** | -aban | -ían |

Since the 1st person and 3rd person singular have the same conjugation endings, context and subject pronouns will indicate the subject if it is ambiguous.

* Yo **caminaba** por el parque cada domingo. (I walked through the park every Sunday.)
* Mi abuela **caminaba** por el parque cada sábado. (My grandmother walked through the park every Saturday.)
* Yo **tenía** un perro. (I used to have a dog.)
* Mi vecino **tenía** un perro. (My neighbor used to have a dog.)

#### Irregular Imperfect Forms

There are only three verbs with irregular conjugations in the imperfect. No stem-changes, no spelling-changes, only these three:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ir** **(to go)** | | **ser** **(to be)** | | **ver** **(to see)** | |
| iba | íbamos | era | éramos | veía | veíamos |
| ibas | ibais | eras | erais | veías | veíais |
| iba | iban | era | eran | veía | veían |

### **Uses of the Imperfect Tense**

In general, the imperfect can translate to what someone was doing or used to do. It sets the background knowledge or scenery for a story.

#### **1. Actions Repeated Habitually**

These are the activities that you did over and over for a long period of undetermined time.

* **Almorzábamos** cada día. (We used to eat lunch together every day.)
* Todos los sábados las mujeres **iban** de compras. (Every Saturday the ladies would go shopping.)

#### **2. Actions that Set the Stage for other Actions**

The imperfect verb is interrupted by a [preterite](http://www.spanishdict.com/topics/show/show/57) verb.

* **Estaba** durmiendo cuando el teléfono sonó. (I was sleeping when the telephone rang.)
* **Estaba** cocinando la cena cuando entré la casa. (He was cooking dinner when I came in the house.)

#### **3. Telling Time and Dates in the Past**

* **Eran** las tres de la tarde. (It was three o´clock in the afternoon.)
* **Era** el jueves, el 9 mayo. (It was Thursday, the 9th of May.)

#### **4. Describing a Scene or Person in the Past**

* La niña **tenía** 4 años. (The little girl was 4 years old.)
* Mi profesor **era** alto y tenía el pelo ondulado. (My professor was tall and had wavy hair.)
* El campo **era** bello. (The countryside was beautiful.)
* **Hacía** calor esa noche. (It was hot that night.)

#### **5. Describing Mental/Emotional States or Desires in the Past**

* **Me sentía** feliz con mi trabajo nuevo. (I was happy with my new job.)
* **Quería** mudarme a otro país. (I wanted to move to another country.)