

Preterite vs Imperfect: Part III

You have already learned that the preterite and the imperfect are used in different situations. The preterite is used for actions that are viewed as completed, while the imperfect is used for actions that did not have a definite beginning or a definite end.

Estudié dos horas.

I **studied** two hours.
(completed action)

Yo **estudiaba** antes de los exámenes.

I **used to study** before the tests.
(no definite beginning or end)

Some verbs actually change meaning, depending upon whether they are used in the preterite or the imperfect. This is not surprising, since the difference in meaning can be traced back to the different way in which these two past tenses are used.

conocer

Conocí a Juan hace cinco años.

I **met** Juan five years ago.
(completed action)

En aquella época **conocíamos** muy bien la ciudad.

At that time we **knew** the city very well.
(no definite beginning or end)

querer

María **quiso** comprar la casa.

María **tried** to buy the house.
(completed action)

Juan **quería** comprar la casa.

Juan **wanted** to buy the house.
(no definite beginning or end)

no querer

María **no quiso** comprar la casa.

María **refused** to buy the house.
(completed action)

Juan **no quería** comprar la casa.

Juan **did not want** to buy the house.
(no definite beginning or end)

saber

María lo **supo** ayer.

Maria **found out** yesterday.
(completed action)

Juan **sabía** que María venía.

Juan **knew** that Maria was coming.
(no definite beginning or end)

poder

María **pudo** levantar la mesa.

Maria **succeeded** in lifting the table.
(completed action)

Juan **podía** participar en la manifestación.

Juan **was able** to participate in the demonstration.
(no definite beginning or end)

tener

María **tuvo** una carta de su mamá.

Maria **received** a letter from her mom.
(completed action)

Juan **tenía** un coche nuevo.

Juan **used to have** a new car.
(no definite beginning or end)