Grammar Reference

'Used to'

Meaning and use

We use the phrase **used to** when we want to talk about something we did regularly in the past, but we don't do now. We also use it to talk about a past fact which is no longer true.

*I **used to** work at a restaurant, but now I work at a library.*

*Shari **didn't use to** take the bus to school, but now she does.*

NOT: *I used to eat some cake last Saturday night.* ('Saturday night' was just one time, so it was not something done regularly.)

Used to can help us to compare activities in the past and now.

*I **used to work** at a restaurant in the past, and **now I work** at a library.*

When we say **used to**, we do not do something now.

*I **used to** work at a restaurant. I quit that job, and then got a new job at a library.*

Form

The different forms of this phrase are **used to** or **did/did not/didn't + use to**.

Used to is used in positive sentences. **Use to** is used in negative and question forms.

Positive

*Alan **used to** wear his hat every day until he left it on the bus.*
*My aunt **used to** have a dog called Charlie.*

Negative
*Marsha **didn't use to** enjoy skiing, but now she loves it.*
*I was surprised that you **didn't use to** live in Shanghai.*

Question

*Which road **did** you **use to** take to the village before they built the new one?*

***Did** Martin **use to** have a flat in this building?*

Negative question

***Didn't** Paula **use to** study French?*
***Didn't** William **use to** work at night?*

Take note: adverbs

Used to already means that something happened regularly in the past. You don't need to add adverbs most of the time. However, if you want to stress a time period, you can add an adverb.

*John **didn't use to** go shopping **often,** but now he does.*
*We **used to** visit Mexico **yearly,** but lately, we've been going to Chile.*

Spoken English

In conversation, used to is sometimes pronounced as **/juːstə/**. And you don't say the 'd' and 't' as separate sounds.

In fact, it is nearly impossible to hear the difference between **used to** and **use to**. Even if you can't hear it, you can still pronounce this phrase correctly by saying /juːzd tə/ for both **use to** and **used to.** However, when you are writing, it is important to write the correct form. Remember, if there is a **did** or **didn't** in the phrase, write **use to.** Otherwise, write **used to.**