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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute Grammar

### Used to



*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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**Neil**

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Neil.

**Catherine**

And me, Catherine. Hello.

**Neil**

In today's programme we're talking about things we **used to** do ...

**Catherine**

... in other words, things we did regularly in the past.

**Neil**

Yes, we'll look at the phrase **used to** in positive and negative sentences, and in questions.

**Catherine**

We'll bring you some spelling and pronunciation tips...

**Neil**

And we'll finish of course with a quiz.

**Catherine**

So, let's start with some example sentences from Rob. Hello Rob.

**Rob**

Hello.

**Catherine**

Listen carefully and answer this question: What activities did these people do regularly in the past?

**Rob**

Petra used to eat junk food, but now she eats salads and vegetables.

I used to play computer games, but now I read a lot.

**Neil**

So, Petra used to eat junk food and Rob used to play computer games. The words **used to** in front of an infinitive verb, like **used to eat** or **used to play** tell us that someone did an activity regularly, or several times, in the past. Now pronunciation-wise, we say **used to** with a short /ju/ sound, used to, not a long /ju:/ like in 'Can I use your phone please?' It's not use, it's use. Here they are together:

**Rob**

I used to use a desktop computer, but now I've got a tablet.

**Catherine**

Thanks Rob. And we can see from that example that we often use **used to** with a **verb** when the present situation is different to the past - so in the past Rob had a desktop, but now he's got a tablet.

**Neil**

Now, **used to** with an **infinitive** means the activity happened regularly, or repeatedly, in the past. It can also describe a past state or situation, for example: I **used to live** in Japan, but now I live in London. But to say you did something just once in the past, use the past simple.

**Catherine**

So, the sentence **I used to go to the gym on Saturdays** means: I went to the gym on many Saturdays in the past. But the sentence **I went to the gym last Saturday** describes one event in the past, it's the past simple. To talk about what happens now, use a present tense.

**Rob**

I used to go running every day, but now I go running once a week.

**IDENT**

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

**Catherine**

And we're talking about **used to**. Let's take a look at negatives. Rob.

**Rob**

My sisters **didn't use to talk** to each other much but now they speak every day. Esra **didn't use to have** short hair, but **she had** a haircut last week.

### Catherine

Thanks Rob. And the phrase **didn't use to** helps us talk about past states and activities that didn't happen in the past, but they do now. And for all persons, it's **subject plus didn't plus use to plus an infinitive**: **My sisters didn't use to talk; Esra didn't use to have short hair**. And there's a spelling note here isn't there Neil?

### Neil

Yes there is. In positive sentences, **used** is spelt **u-s-e-d**, but in negative sentences and questions, it's just **use**: **u-s-e**, without the **d** at the end. But when we're speaking, they sound almost exactly the same. Listen to this:

### Rob

**I didn't use to get up** early at the weekend. **I used to stay** in bed all morning.

### Catherine

Thanks Rob. Now, let's take a look at questions. Neil, **which school did you use to go to?**

### Neil

I used to go to the local school.

### Catherine

OK. So, for questions like **which school did you use to go to**, it's **did plus subject plus use to plus infinitive**. And it's the same for **yes/no** questions. Neil, did you use to walk to school?

### Neil

No, I didn't. I used to get the bus.

### Catherine

So, for questions: **did, subject, use to and infinitive**. And remember, used to is spelt **u-s-e**; no **d**.

### Neil

Ok, it's time for a quiz. Question 1. How do you spell **used** in this sentence? I didn't **use to** have a tablet.

### Catherine

It's **u-s-e** without **d** because it's a negative.

### Neil

That's right. Number 2. What's the missing word? I [BLANK] to use social media every day, but now I only use it once a week.

**Catherine**

And the answer is **used** with a **d**. I used to use social media every day.

**Neil**

...is the correct answer. And number three. Is this sentence right or wrong? I used to go to the gym last Friday.

**Catherine**

And that's wrong, because it's a past event that happened only once. You can say **I went to the gym last Friday**, or you can say **I used to go to the gym every Friday**.

**Neil**

And that's the end of the quiz – and the end of the show. But there's more about **used to** at [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

**Both**

Bye.