
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

Used to and be/get used to



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Catherine

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

Callum

And me, Callum. Hello.

Catherine

In this programme we're looking at the phrase **used to** for talking about the past.

Callum

And we're also looking at the phrases **be used to** and **get used to**.

Catherine

Now **used to** and **be used to** sound very similar, but the meaning and forms are different. So we'll explain the differences and give you lots of examples.

Callum

And we'll have a quiz to see how much you've learnt, so let's get started. Now **used to** is always followed by the infinitive of the verb. It tells us that an action happened regularly in the past but it doesn't happen now. Here's Rob with an example.

Rob

I **used to eat** meat, but now I'm a vegetarian.

Catherine

And **used to** can also describe a past situation which is no longer true. Rob.

Rob

I **used to be** a bit overweight, but I'm much slimmer now.

Callum

That's straightforward. So what about **be used to** or **get used to**? Well, if you **are used to** something, it means that it isn't unusual or difficult for you because you have experienced it before. Rob.

Rob

When I first became a vegetarian, I missed eating meat, but now I'm **used to** it.

Catherine

So Rob's familiar and comfortable with not eating meat now. He could also say:

Rob

I **got used to** it after a few weeks.

Callum

Yes, **got** is like **became**. He became familiar with it.

Catherine

Now in those examples, **be used to** and **get used to** are followed by the pronoun **it**. But we can also use the **-ing form** of a verb in the same position. Listen.

Rob

I'm **not used to eating** food without salt. I find it really tasteless.

Callum

Rob's not familiar with food without salt. I know how he feels - but doctors are advising us all to **get used to eating** less salt.

Catherine

I can't get used to eating no salt on my chips.

Callum

No, that's just wrong. It's wrong. So there's **used to** with the infinitive and **be** or **get used to** with the **-ing** verb. Another difference is that **used to** is only for the past. There is no present or future form of **used to**.

Catherine

But we can use **be** or **get used to** in the present, past or future. Rob.

Rob

In the past, British people **weren't used to eating** pasta and pizza.

Callum

That's true. Pasta and pizza were new to Britain. But we all love them now don't we?

Catherine

Yes, I think we **got used to** them pretty quickly! Even if we can't have slat on them.

IDENT

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

Catherine

And we're looking at the phrases **used to** and **be** or **get used to**. And there's another difference between them.

Callum

Yes, with **used to**, we form questions, short answers and negatives with **did** and **didn't**. And in questions and negatives, we lose the **d** on the end of **used**. You can't hear this because we don't pronounce the **d** on **used** anyway. But it's important in writing. Here's an example. Catherine, **did you use to have** rice and curry when you were a child!

Catherine

No, I **didn't**. In fact **we didn't use to have** foreign food at all in our house.

Callum

Neither did we. I think the most foreign food we had was a Cornish Pasty.

Catherine

Very British!

Callum

But with **be used to** and **get used to**, we form questions, short answers and negatives with the verb **be**. And we keep the **d** on the end of **used**. Catherine, **are you used to buying** international food now?

Catherine

Yes, I am, most definitely. There's all sorts of foreign food here in London and I've tried most of it.

Callum

Just a couple more points. There are two alternative negative forms for **used to**. Instead of **I didn't use to**, we sometimes say **I never used to** or **I used not to**. Listen

Rob

I never **used to eat** many vegetables.

I used not to eat many vegetables.

Callum

Just remember that **used not to** sounds very formal, and is mainly used in writing nowadays. Now Catherine, are there any types of foreign food that you **aren't used to**?

Catherine

Well, I tried Japanese food a few times, but **I can't get used to it.**

Callum

And there is the modal auxiliary **can't** with **get used to**. It's a very useful piece of language. We can use it in the past as well. Rob?

Rob

I couldn't get used to living in the countryside, so I moved back to the city.

Catherine

And now it's quiz time! Is this sentence correct or wrong? I've been in this job for three months so I used to it now. I've been in this job for three months so I used to it now.

Callum

That's not correct. It's **I'm used to it**, with the verb **be**. Number two. **Did you use to** living in London when you were a child?

Catherine

That's wrong. The correct sentence is: Did you use to live in London? And number three. I don't really like Japanese food but I hope I'll be used to it.

Callum

That's not correct. It should be **I'll get used to it**.

Catherine

It should! Well done at home if you got those right.

Callum

There's more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

Both

Bye.