



Five College Center for the Study of World Languages

Conversation Preparation Guides

Title: Past Routines and Habits

Topic: Describing the Past

Level: Intermediate

Practice on Your Own

- How does one talk about the past in the language you are studying? Are there one or more past verb tenses? Do you need to include a word or phrase that indicates the time, such as “last year,” “when I was a child,” etc.? Are there distinctions between the recent past and the distant past, or between events that happened at a specific time and things that happened regularly or habitually in the past?
- In these activities, you will practice talking about things that happened regularly or habitually in the past. In English, we often say “used to” or “would” in these situations (for example, “She used to play soccer” or “When I was a child, my family would always go to my grandparents’ house for Thanksgiving”).
- Practice talking about your past routines and habits out loud. For example:
 - What sports or activities did you used to do?
 - Can you describe your weekly routine last semester? (“On Mondays, I would go to chemistry class in the morning...”)
 - What about things you used to do as a child? Did you always vacation in a certain place? How did your family celebrate holidays?
- Also practice talking about what other people did regularly or habitually in the past. What activities did your brother used to do? How did your grandparents used to spend their vacations? Feel free to make things up if you run out of ideas.
- Practice saying what you or others did NOT used to do as well.

Practice in Conversation Session

- You may do a number of different activities to practice talking about things that happened regularly or habitually in the past. Possibilities include:
 - Talking about your daily or weekly routine last semester
 - Describing your daily life during your semester/year abroad (real or imagined)
 - Sharing how your family celebrated birthdays or holidays when you were a child
 - Telling what life was like in a place you lived or visited in the past (How was the weather/climate? What did people do for fun?)
 - Making up a story about what someone used to do (perhaps based on a photo or drawing)

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- Comparing your daily routine last summer with your routine during the semester
 - Talking about activities you did with your friends when you were a child
 - Role play interviewing an elderly person about what life was like when she/he was younger
 - Describing how a friend or family member used to spend their vacations
 - Telling about the duties you performed in a past job or internship
 - And there are many other possibilities...
- You may be asked to listen to your conversation partner or another student tell about what she/he used to do and then repeat that information to someone else.
 - To practice comprehension, your conversation partner may say different sentences or paragraphs and ask you to identify when something takes place (past, present, or future) and whether it is a one-time event or habitual.