



Five College Center for the Study of World Languages

Conversation Preparation Guides

Title: Combining Different Types of Past Discourse

Topic: Telling Stories

Level: Advanced

Practice on Your Own

- In the language you are studying, is there more than one way to talk about the past? 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 combining different types of past discourse. If the language you are studying distinguishes between specific events in the past and things that happened regularly or habitually in the past, you might use both of these types of past discourse in one story. For example:

“My family used to go to Cape Cod every summer. The year that I turned 14, something very exciting happened there. Usually the weather was warm, and we went to the beach a lot. But that day it was cold and I was inside reading. Suddenly there was a knock at the door...”

- Similarly, you might need to talk about both the recent past and the distant past. For example:

“When I was in elementary school, my friend Alex lived on my street. Then my family moved to another state, and I didn’t talk to her very much. But this morning I got a phone call from Alex...”

- There may be other distinctions as well. For example, in English “I read that book,” “I was reading that book,” and “I had read that book” all have different meanings. If you have not yet learned all the different ways of talking about the past in the language you are studying, focus on the ones you do know.
- Practice combining different types of past discourse. You may find it helpful to do some written practice, but also talk to yourself out loud. Focus on the distinctions that are most important in the language you are studying, or the aspects that are most difficult for you personally.
 - Practice talking about both yourself and others, and include some negative sentences as well as positive ones.

Practice in Conversation Session

Online at: langmedia.fivecolleges.edu

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- Be prepared to practice telling stories using different types of past discourse. These may include stories from your own life, stories about your friends or family, stories from books or movies, and/or stories you make up.
 - Your conversation partner may bring photos or drawings and ask you to make up stories based on the images.