

33 used to and would

Sir Ranulph Fiennes is an explorer. He **used to be** a soldier but started exploring in the 1960s. When he was younger, he **used to go** on very difficult expeditions and he **would take** risks that many other explorers wouldn't. In 2000, for example, he attempted to walk to the North Pole, alone and unsupported.



1 Form of used to

POSITIVE	<i>I used to work there. He used to be a soldier. We used to have a cat.</i>
NEGATIVE	<i>I did not (didn't) use to work.* He did not (didn't) use to be an explorer. They did not (didn't) use to have a cat.</i>
QUESTIONS	<i>Did you use to work? (Yes, I did.) Did they use to have a cat? (No, they didn't.) Where did he use to work?</i>

* It is also possible to form the negative and question with *used to*: *didn't used to / did you used to?*

- ⚠ There is no present form of *used to*: **X** *I use to go to work by bus.* ✓ *I go to work by bus.*
- ⚠ Do not confuse *used to do* with *be/get used to doing*:
I'm used to spending time on my own. (= I'm often alone; it isn't unusual for me.)
I used to spend time on my own. (= I spent time on my own in the past; I don't any more.)

2 used to

We use *used to* + infinitive to talk about regular past actions that do not happen now:
I used to take the bus to work every day. (But now I take the train.)
People used to write a lot of letters. (But now they send emails.)

We often use adverbs of frequency (e.g. *always, once a week, every year*) with *used to*:
I always used to swim before breakfast. *We often used to hold parties for our friends.*
We never used to stay up late when we were young! (= We didn't use to stay up late.)

We also use *used to* + infinitive when we talk about past situations that are no longer true:
He used to be a soldier. (But now he's an explorer.) *France used to have a king.*

🔊 Pronunciation ▶ 1.13

3 would

We can also use *would* + infinitive to talk about regular past actions that do not happen now: *When we first moved here, people would stop and talk in the street. They don't now.*
When we start descriptions of past actions with *used to*, we usually continue with *would*:
When he was younger, he used to go on very difficult expeditions and he would take risks ...

- ⚠ *Would* is used for past actions, not situations:
X *France would have a king.* ✓ *France used to have a king.*

🔊 Pronunciation ▶ 1.14

4 used to or past simple?

We often use *used to*, not the past simple, when we want to emphasise a difference between the past and the present: *My sister works in an office now but she used to work on a farm.*
We use the past simple for

- single actions in the past: **X** *I used to have an exam last week.* ✓ *I had an exam last week.*
- periods of time: **X** *He used to be in Greece for two years.* ✓ *He was in Greece for two years.*
- a number of times: **X** *We used to swim in the pool twice when we stayed there.*
✓ *We swam in the pool twice when we stayed there.*