What happened last night?


JUSTIFICATION

How many times we've taught a grammar lesson out of context? How many long faces we've seen in the class while explaining the difference between the use of the past perfect or the present perfect? That's why before teaching an item, it is essential that we understand it well, to do some research and careful thinking. Then, think about the exceptions and typical student problems, etc. It's also highly recommended to list situations, places and relations in which the language is typically used. I'm personally in favour to make the students participate in the process. So after each explanation I ask my students to come to the board and write an example each one of them and in that way I check that they've understood my explanation. You can also use their power of observation making them to think about the general rule and exceptions. But the most important of all: decide and announce the target. Here, it will be a narrative in which each learner will try to remember what they've done a night partying or after a short loss of memory.

GRAMMAR EXPLANATION

It's essential to consider some variations, keeping the grammar but changing the vocabulary. By showing situations which are all different, but the core meaning is always there. Explain the following on the board always trying to be very straight-to-the-point.

Used/Would:
‘used to + infinitive’. We use ‘used to’ to talk about things that happened in the past – actions or states – that no longer happen now.

"She used to be a football player when she was younger".

"I used to eat meat but I became a vegetarian 5 years ago".

The negative is ‘didn’t use to’ and questions are formed with ‘Did you use to ...?’ There is no present tense equivalent of ‘used to’. To talk about present habits we use the present simple and an adverb of frequency (usually, always, often, never, etc.)

"I often eat at the Japanese restaurant in the city centre".

A lot of students have trouble with the difference between ‘used to’ and ‘would’. We use both of these to talk about things in the past which we don't do now or are not happening now. Sometimes both ‘used to’ and ‘would’ are OK in one sentence - sometimes only ‘used to’.

We use 'used to' to talk about actions or situations that continued for some time in the past, not for events which happened suddenly or just for a moment. So we can’t say: ‘I used to have a really good idea when I listening to music,’ because ‘having a really good idea’ happens suddenly - in one
The difference between 'would' and 'used to':

We only use 'would' to describe actions or situations that were repeated again and again... But we use 'used to' for any extended action or situation in the past.

'Would' is only good for actions or situations that were repeated many times; 'Used to' is good for any action or situation that continued for a period of time in the past, including repeated actions or situations.

- "When he was at school, he used to play football every Saturday." = "When he was at school, he would play football every Saturday". Here the meaning is the same.

- "She used to hate her job until she got a promotion." Did she 'hate her job' many times? No, this isn't a repeated action, so in this example 'would' isn’t possible. We have to use 'used to'.

Get used to /Be used to:

People often get confused about the use of used to + infinitive and be/get used to + ‘ing’ form because they look similar. They are, however, completely different. If you are used to something,

you are accustomed to it – you don’t find it unusual. If you get used to something or you are getting used to something you are becoming accustomed to it – it was strange, now it’s not so strange.

- "I used to live in the city but I'm getting used to living in a town".

- "After living 5 years in a town, I'm used to living there".

Both 'be used to' and 'get used to' are followed by a noun (or pronoun) or the gerund – the ‘ing’ form of a verb.

"He’s not used to the weather here yet. He’s finding it very cold".

'Be/get used to’ can be used with past, present and future tenses.

- Past Simple and Continuous

We use the past simple to talk about:

1. something that happened once in the past: "They got home very late last night".

2. something that happened again and again in the past: "When I was a boy I walked to school every day".

3. something that was true for some time in the past: "She enjoyed being a student".

- we often use phrases with ago with the past tense: "I met my girlfriend a long time ago."

- in questions and negatives use did to make questions with the past: "Did you live abroad?"
Except with who: "Who wrote The Picture of Dorian Gray?" We use didn’t (did not) to make negatives with the past tense.

We use the past continuous to talk about the past:

1. for something which continued before and after another action:"The children were doing their homework when I got home."

2. to show that something continued for some time: “Everyone was shouting.”

3. for something that was happening again and again: "I was practising every day, three times a day."

4. with verbs which show change or growth: “Her English was improving.”

Past Perfect Simple and Continuous

We use the verb had and the past participle for the past perfect:’I had finished my homework on Moodle’

The past perfect continuous is formed with had been and the -ing form of the verb:’I had been finishing my homework on Moodle’

We use the past perfect:

1. for something that started in the past and continued up to a given time in the past:"She didn’t want to move. She had lived in Barcelona all her life."

2. when we are reporting our experience and including up to the (then) present:"My eighteenth birthday was the worst day I had ever had."

3. for something that happened in the past but is important at the time of reporting:”I couldn’t get into the house. I had lost my keys”.

We normally use the past perfect continuous for something we had done several times up to a point in the past and continued to do after that point:’I had been watching the programme every week, but I missed the last episode”. We often use a clause with since to show when something started in the past:’I had been watching that programme every week since it started, but I missed the last episode”.

Present Perfect Simple and Continuous

The present perfect is formed from the present tense of the verb have and the past participle of a verb and the present perfect continuous is formed with have/has been and the -ing form of the verb:

We use the present perfect tense:

1. for something that started in the past and continues in the present:”She has lived in Barcelona all her life”.

2. for something we have done several times in the past and continue to do:”I’ve played the guitar ever since I was a teenager” We often use a clause with since to show when something started in the past. We often use the adverb ever to talk about experience up to the present:”My last birthday was the best I have ever had.”
3. for something that happened in the past but is important at the time of speaking: "I can’t get into the house. I’ve lost my keys."

4. But we can use it to refer to a time which is not yet finished: "Have you seen Alexander today?"

5. We use the present perfect of be when someone has gone to a place and returned: "I’ve just been out to the supermarket." But when someone has not returned we use have/has gone: "She’s gone to Paris for a week. She’ll be back tomorrow."

6. We often use the present perfect with time adverbials which refer to the recent past like just; only just; recently: We have just got back from our holidays. Or adverbials which include the present like ever (in questions); so far; until now; up to now; yet (in questions and negatives):

   Have you finished your homework yet?

   WARNING: We do not use the present perfect with an adverbial which refers to past time which is finished: "I have seen that film yesterday."

   As well as the present perfect simple, we can use the present perfect continuous tense to talk about events with a connection to the present.

   - Look at these 2 sentences:

     I’ve been decorating the house this summer. The focus is on the action – decorating – and the action is unfinished.

     I’ve painted the living room blue. The focus is on the finished result. The activity is finished but we can see the result now.

   We use the present perfect continuous when the focus is on an activity that is unfinished.

   - Look at these two sentences.

     I’ve read that book you lent me. I finished it yesterday.

     I’ve been reading that book you lent me. I’ve got another 15 pages to read.

   The present perfect simple (I’ve read) gives the idea of completion while the present perfect continuous (I’ve been reading) suggests that something is unfinished.

   - Look at these two sentences.

     She’s been writing her English assignment for half an hour.

     She’s written many messages.

   The present perfect continuous (has been writing) talks about how long something has been happening. The present perfect simple (has written) talks about how much/how many have been completed.

   - Look at these two sentences.
I’ve worked here for thirty years.

I usually work in London but I’ve been working in Berlin for the last 2 weeks.

We can use the present perfect simple to talk about how long when we view something as permanent. But the present perfect continuous is often used to show that something is temporary.

Bibliografía


Spratt, M; Pulverness, A. &Williams, M. 2011. The TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) Course. Cambridge: CUP