


The imperfect tense (**l'imparfait**) has two primary uses: to describe on-going actions and states of being in the past, and to state habitual actions in the past. The imparfait also has several **idiomatic uses**. The passé composé and imparfait are each used quite differently in **narration**.

states of being or past description

The imparfait is used to describe people, places, conditions or situations in the past. Some verbs occur more frequently in the imparfait when they are in the past since they typically describe states of being: **être**, **avoir**, **vouloir**, **pouvoir**. But these verbs do sometimes occur in the passé composé.

 Quand Edouard **était** adolescent, il n'**avait** qu'un rêve – devenir un grand cuisinier. Il **voulait** créer des chefs-d'oeuvre culinaires. Notre jeune escargot gourmand, qui **adorait** la cuisine française classique, **fréquentait** les meilleures tables de Paris.


When Edouard was a teenager, he had only one dream – to become a great chef. He wanted to create culinary masterpieces. Our young food-enthusiast snail, who loved classical French cooking, frequented the best Parisian restaurants.



habitual actions in the past

The imparfait is also used to state habitual actions in the past. These past habits are often translated as 'used to, or 'would.' Distinguish between the use of 'would' for habitual past actions (imparfait) and the use of 'would' for the **conditional**. Note that the imparfait may also be translated by the simple past in English; however, the context, and often adverbs, let you know the action is a past habit.

Listen to Edouard reminiscing:

 Edouard: Tu te rappelles, en été à Paris, quand il **faisait** chaud? On **allait** toujours à 10 heures du soir chez Berthillon ... Oh, là, là, leurs glaces, leurs sorbets--fraise, framboise, noisette, pistache, des parfums exotiques. Et puis, on **se promenait** le long des quais, on **voyait** la Seine qui **coulait**, on **chantait**, on **se récitait** même des vers. Ah, Paris la nuit, Paris là-bas, mmm, en été.

Edouard: Do you remember, in the summer in Paris, when the weather was hot? We always used to go to Berthillon's at 10 o'clock in the evening ... Oh, la, la, their ice cream, their sorbets--strawberry, raspberry, hazelnut, pistachio, exotic flavors. And then, we would take walks along the quays. We would see the Seine which was flowing. We would sing, we would even recite verses. Ah, Paris in the night, Paris over there, mmm, in the summer.



fill in the blanks

Give the imparfait of the verb indicated in parentheses.

1. En France, Tammy _____ du shopping tous les jours. (faire)
2. Chez les nonnes ('nuns'), Tex _____ la Bible chaque jour. (lire)
3. Fiona: Joe-Bob, est-ce que tu _____ beaucoup dans ton enfance? (chanter)
4. Tex: En France, je _____ dans le parc après la messe. (se promener)

5. Fiona: Joe-Bob et Corey, est-ce que vous _____ à vos parents? (obéir)
6. Tex: Rita, est-ce que nous _____ ensemble avant mon départ? (jouer)
7. Tammy et Bette _____ une vie heureuse avec un homme unique. (imaginer)
8. Tex et Edouard _____ à obtenir des ingrédients français pour la recette. (ne pas penser)
9. Tammy: Bette _____ de mauvaise humeur hier soir! (être)
10. Tammy: Tex et moi, nous _____ très contents à Lyon. (être)
11. Edouard: En France, je _____ ! (ne jamais grossir)
12. Dans son enfance, Joe-Bob _____ toujours ses devoirs. (perdre)