

Passé Composé vs. Imparfait

The Passé Composé is used to...

- recall a completed action or event
- recall an event or action that happened only once
- recall an event or action when the time frames are stated
- talk about the beginning or the ending of an event or action

Examples in English:

~*She caught the ball.*

~*He scored a touchdown.*

~*The Redskins won the game.*

~*I ate dinner at 6:00 last night.*

~*It rained for three hours.*

~*He walked at the age of one. (He began to walk then.)*

~*I found out the truth. (I began to know the truth.)*

The Imparfait is used to...

- tell time in the past
- tell age in the past
- describe in the past (details, scene setting)
- relate mental, physical, or emotional states in the past
- relate that somebody /something used to _____
- relate that somebody /something was/were _____ing
- talk about habitual, repeated, customary events in the past
- make general statements about that past that are not specific
- focus on one or more actions in progress at a certain point in the past
- describe what happens during the middle of an event

Examples in English:

~ *It was 5:00 in the morning.*

~ *She was 12 years old.*

~ *We were very happy.*

~ *We used to play baseball everyday after school.*

~ *She was studying.*

~ *It was a dark and stormy night*

~ *Once upon a time*

Key Words & Phrases to Know

L'IMPARFAIT

le lundi

en général

normalement

d'habitude

pendant que

de temps en temps

rarement

tous les jours

tous les étés

toujours

souvent

chaque jour

il était une fois

autrefois

LE PASSÉ COMPOSÉ

lundi

au ce moment

soudain

tout à coup

brusquement

un jour

ce jour là

quand/lorsque

une fois

jamais

hier/hier soir

à ___ heures

finalement/enfin

au début

Un Peu de Pratique!

Read the following paragraphs in English. Each verb in the past tense is underlined. Above each underlined word write PC if it would be written in the passé composé in French or IMP if it would be written in the imparfait. Please be able to defend your reasoning!

We looked everywhere for the dog, but we had little success. Obviously, somebody stole him, because he was such a valuable animal. We all cried ourselves to sleep, knowing that we were never going to see our friend again. My father tried to console us, but he couldn't. It was then that I came to realize that life was that way.

When I was six years old, my parents took me to a very elegant hotel. The hotel was very big and luxurious. It had one indoor pool and the other was outside. All the employees were very kind and the guests were very happy, except for the one who complained constantly.

When the child saw that his parents weren't in the lobby, he began to cry. The manager found them in the gift shop. They were buying lots of presents for their other children at home. When the manager brought them to their lost son, the boy gave a little squeak and giggle and ran over to them.

We were on the beach when, suddenly, a cloud covered the sun and it began to rain. When she saw that it was raining again, Anne became very sad, because it was the last day of her vacation and she had to go to work the following Monday.

Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful young lady. Her name was Isabella. Isabella was looking for her Prince Charming. One day, Isabella was invited to the Royal Ball. She dressed very elegantly and wore her most precious set of pearls. At the ball, she met the prince. It was love at first sight! They married a year later and lived happily ever after!

The students in Mrs. Rivett's class were awesome. They did their homework everyday. One day, the students learned about the past tense in class. They were frustrated because they could not understand the difference between the passé composé and the imparfait. Usually, the class understood what she taught, but today was a different story.