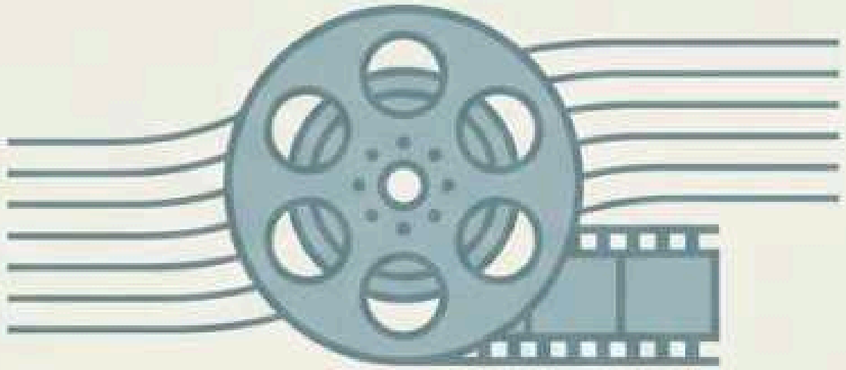
4.1



The preterite tells us what happened.

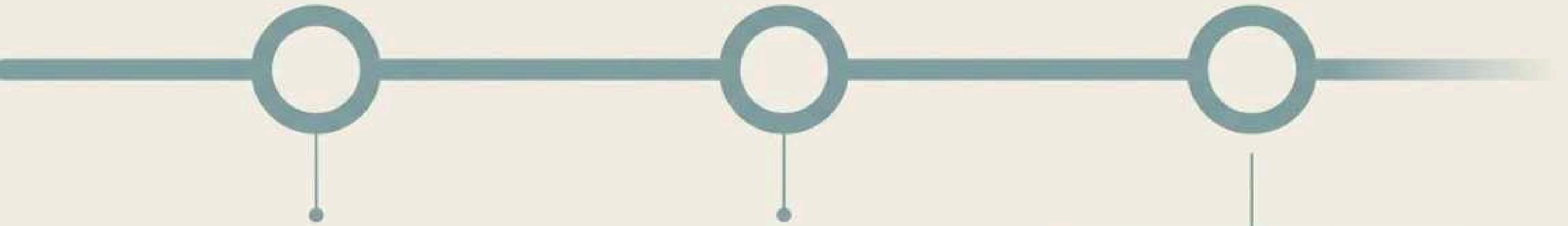


The imperfect tells us what things were like.

Describe the past: how you used to live, what the weather was, and what was going on when something else happened. Two tenses, side by side.

4.2

Use the imperfect for the past that is ongoing, repeated, or descriptive, with no stated end.



De niño, jugaba al fútbol.

As a child, I used to play football.

Era un día frío.

It was a cold day.

English uses *used to*, *was*, and *were*, where Spanish uses a single tense.

4.3

Regular -ar Verbs (hablar)

habla**ba**	habl**ábamos**
habla**bas**	habla**bais**
habla**ba**	habla**ban**

Only the nosotros form has a written accent, on the first 'a' of the ending.

4.4

Regular -***er*** and -***ir*** verbs share identical endings in the imperfect, just as in the preterite.

comer	
com***ía***	com***íamos***
com***ías***	com***íais***
com***ía***	com***ían***

vivir	
viv***ía***	viv***íamos***
viv***ías***	viv***íais***
viv***ía***	viv***ían***

Every form carries a written accent.

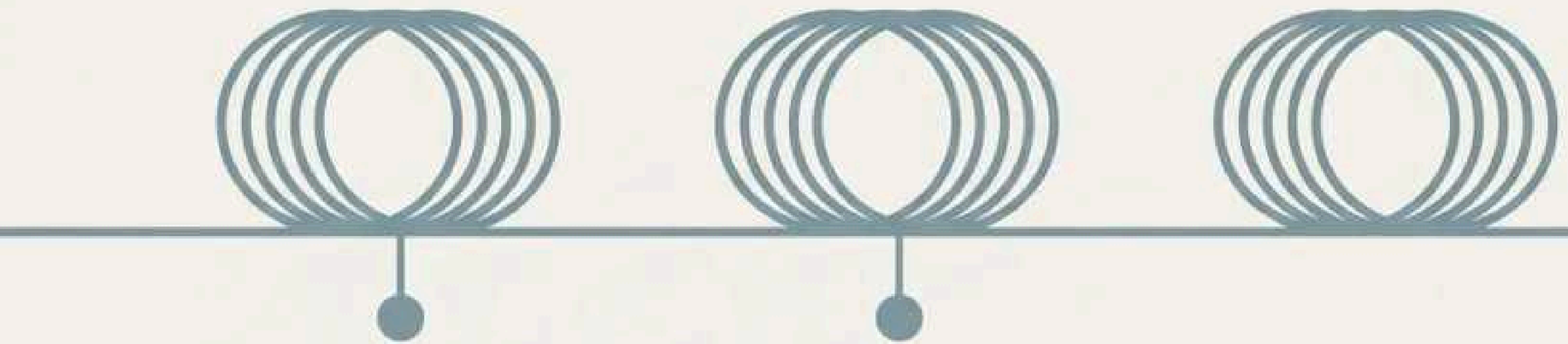
4.5

The good news: The Only Three Irregulars.
All other verbs are regular.

Ser	Ir	Ver
era	iba	veía
eras	ibas	veías
era	iba	veía
éramos	íbamos	veíamos
erais	ibais	veíais
eran	iban	veían

4.6

The first use is habit.



Cuando era niño, jugaba al fútbol todos los días

(When I was a child, I played football every day.)

Mi abuela cocinaba cada domingo

(My grandmother cooked every Sunday.)

Clue Words

Words that point to the imperfect: siempre, a menudo, cada verano, de niño.

4.7

The second use is description. The imperfect describes age, time, weather, and feelings in the past.

Scene Setting



Tenía diez años
(I was ten)



Eran las tres
(It was three o'clock)



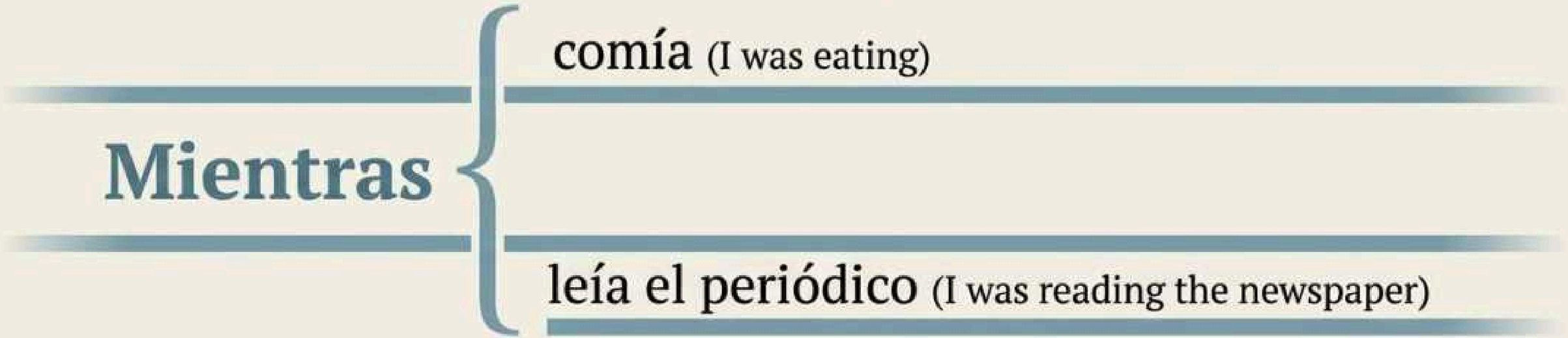
Hacía frío
(It was cold)



Estaba cansada
(She was tired)

4.8

The third use is an action in progress. Both verbs are in the imperfect because both were going on together, with no clear start or end.



The word mientras (while) often signals this. Mientras comía, leía el periódico.

4.9

Imperfect Markers

- siempre
- todos los días
- a menudo
- generalmente
- de niño
- cada verano
- mientras

Preterite Markers

- ayer
- anoche
- una vez
- de repente
- el lunes

These are clues, not strict rules, but they are helpful.

4.10

The central contrast.



The **imperfect** tells what was going on: the background, the scene. The film running.
(Llovía... / It was raining...)

The **preterite** tells what happened: a completed event, which moves the story forward. A camera click.
(....cuando salí / ...when I went out)

4.11

The most common pattern is the interruption.
A longer action is interrupted by a shorter action.



4.12

In a story, use the imperfect to set the scene and the preterite for the events.

Scene

Era una noche oscura. Hacía viento y todos dormían.

(The first three verbs describe the scene.)

Event

De repente, se abrió la puerta.

(A single event that changes things.)

A few verbs change meaning between the two tenses.

Verb	Imperfect meaning	Preterite meaning
Conocer	**Conocía** → I knew someone	**Conocí** → I met them
Saber	**Sabía** → I knew a fact	**Supe** → I found out
Querer	**Quería** → I wanted	**Quise** → I tried
No Querer	**(No quería)** → I didn't want	**No quise** → I refused

4.14

Here is a short model story. Notice how the verbs sort **themselves into scene** and **event.**

Era un día de verano. Hacía calor y yo tenía diez años. Jugaba con mis primos en el jardí.De repente, oí un ruido. Corrí a la casa y encontré a mi abuelo en la puerta.

= Scene (Imperfect) = Event (Preterite)

4.15

Say what you were about to do with **iba a** + infinitive.

Iba a llamarte

(I was going to call you).

Describe an action in progress with **estaba** + gerund.

estaba comiendo

(I was eating).

This progressive form emphasises the moment, but the plain imperfect often works just as well.

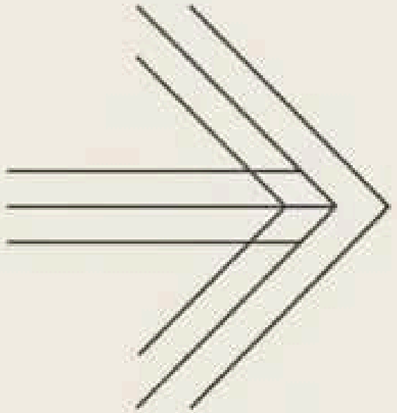
4.16

To ask about the past, use the imperfect for descriptions.

¿Cómo era tu casa de niño?
(What was your house like as a child?)

Qué hacías los fines de semana?
(What did you do at weekends?)

¿Dónde vivías?
(Where did you live?)



Answer with the imperfect, and give details.

4.17

Compare two sentences about the same day. This is the choice every speaker makes, and the choice is yours.

Preterite Tense
(The Camera Click)

Ayer llovió.
(It rained).

Presented as a closed event.

Imperfect Tense
(The Film)

Ayer llovía cuando salí.
(It was raining when I left).

Presented as an open background.

Both are correct, but they present the rain differently.

4.18

Here is a dialogue about childhood.

— ¿Dónde **vivías** de niño?
— **Vivía** en un pueblo pequeño. Mi familia **tenía** una granja.
— ¿Qué **hacías** allí?
— **Ayudaba** a mi padre y **jugaba** con los animales.

Read it aloud, then answer the questions yourself.

4.19

Practice for this lecture.

- [ ] Write six sentences about your childhood in the imperfect.
- [ ] Write three sentences in the preterite about one particular day.
- [ ] Write one sentence in which a short event interrupts a long one.



Say all ten aloud today,
and again tomorrow.

4.20

In lecture five, we study verbs whose stems change, and learn to compare people and things.