The Imperfect

The imperfect is used to describe a state of mind and being in the past, as well as continous or habitual past actions.

*Il faisait beau = the weather was nice*

*Ils étaient heureux = they were happy*

*Quand il était petit, il jouait au basket tous les week-ends = he used to play*

*Ils se promenaient dans le parc quand il a commencé à pleuvoir = they were walking in the park when it started to rain*

To form the imperfect :

* Take the *nous* form of the present tense
* Remove the *–ons* ending to get the stem of the imperfect
* Add the imperfect endings :

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Je +ais | Nous +ions |
| Tu +ais | Vous +iez |
| Il/elle/on +ait | Ils/elles +aient |

Exemple : boire = to drink

1. Nous buvons (*nous* form of the present tense)
2. *Buv-* will be the stem
3. Add the endings :

Je buvais nous buvions

Tu buvais vous buviez

Il buvait ils buvaient

Verbs with spelling changes in the present tense *nous-form*, such as **manger** and **commencer**, retain those spelling changes in the imperfect (except in the *nous* and *vous* forms)

Je commen**ç**ais (I started)

Je mangeais (I ate)

Tu partageais (you shared)

Ils voyageaient (they travelled)

Depending on the context, the imperfect can be the equivalent of several different tenses in English :

Il travaillait :

>> he was working

>> he used to work

>> he worked

Imperfect of Être :

The verb *être* has an irregular stem in the imperfect :

J’étais nous étions

Tu étais vous étiez

Il était ils étaient

**Different uses of the Imperfect :**

1. Description :

It describes the background, a situation that existed in the past, a state of mind

Exemples : *il* ***pleuvait***

*Les tableaux* ***étaient*** *merveilleux*

1. Habitual action :

It describes past events that were repeated in the past. In that case, it will translate as *used to* or *would*

Exemples : *Elle* ***travaillait*** *pour Air France (she used to work for Air France)*

*Elle* ***cassait*** *toujours ses jouets (she would always break her toys)*

3.Interrupted action

It describes a continuous action that was going on in the past when another action interrupted it. The interruption is expressed by the passé composé.

Exemple : *Fabien* ***dormait*** *quand le téléphone a sonné (Fabien* ***was sleeping*** *when the phone rang)*

1. *The imperfect with DEPUIS :*

*Il* ***travaillait*** *depuis des heures quand il a décidé d’aller au cinéma (he* ***had been*** *working for hours when he decided to go to the cinema)*

1. *The imperfect with PENDANT :*

*Elle* ***se reposait*** *pendant qu’il faisait la cuisine (she was resting while he was cooking)*

1. *Using the imperfect to make a suggestion :*

Use si + on :

*Si on* ***allait*** *au cinéma ?*

1. Using the imperfect to express a wish or regret

Use si + seulement :

*Si seulement* ***j’avais*** *plus de temps ! (if only I had more time !)*

*Si seulement je* ***pouvais*** *y aller ! (if only I could go !)*

*Si seulement* ***j’étais*** *riche ! (if only I was rich !)*

1. The imperfect with VENIR DE

It describes an action that **had just happened at a given time**

*Elle* ***venait*** *de partir quand il est arrivé (she had just left when he arrived)*