

Passé Composé vs Imparfait

Languages

Choosing between the two past tenses, with the test that decides it.

Passé composé

- A completed action
- A specific moment or number of times
- Moves the story forward
- Hier, j'ai mangé au restaurant
- soudain, une fois, hier

Imparfait

- Ongoing or habitual
- Description, background, feelings
- Sets the scene
- Quand j'étais petit, je mangeais...
- toujours, souvent, chaque jour

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Je regardais la télé (background) quand le téléphone a sonné (event). One sets the scene, the other interrupts it.

Age, weather, time and states of mind are almost always imparfait, whatever else is happening.