

Preterite vs Imperfect

Languages

Two past tenses, and the question that decides between them.

Pretérito — completed

- A finished action with a clear end
- Ayer comí paella
- A sequence of events in a story
- Specific number of times
- hablé · comí · viví

Imperfecto — ongoing

- Background, description, habit
- Cuando era niño, comía paella
- What was happening when something else occurred
- Age, time, weather, feelings
- hablaba · comía · vivía

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

In one sentence: Mientras estudiaba (imperfect background), sonó el teléfono (preterite event).

Only three verbs are irregular in the imperfect: ir, ser and ver. Everything else is completely regular.