

FREE RESOURCE · GRAMMAR

Used to

Used to + base verb describes past habits and states that are no longer true: I used to live in a village. Would describes repeated past actions only. Be used to + -ing means familiar with something now, and get used to + -ing means becoming familiar with it.

What to know

Used to + base verb: past habits and states

Use **used to** + base verb for things that were true or regular in the past but are not true now. It works for actions and for states: I used to play football every weekend. We used to live in a flat near the sea. She used to be very shy.

- *I used to walk to school. · I do not walk now*
- *My city used to have a tram. · it does not have one now*

Negatives and questions

In negatives and questions, use did and drop the d from used: Did you use to play an instrument? I did not use to like fish. This is the standard written form in British English.

Used to or would?

Would can describe repeated actions in the past: When I was a child, we would visit my grandmother every Sunday. But would cannot describe a state. You can say I used to have a dog, but not I would have a dog.

Be used to + -ing: being familiar with something

This is a different structure. **Be used to** means you are familiar with something, so it does not feel strange or difficult any more. The word to is a preposition, so it is followed by a noun or the -ing form: I am used to the cold weather. She is used to working at night.

Get used to + -ing: becoming familiar

Get used to describes the process of becoming familiar: It took me a few months to get used to living abroad. You will get used to the noise. Like be used to, it is followed by a noun or the -ing form.

Exercises

1. When I was a child, our family _____ a small farm.
 - a. would own
 - b. used to own
 - c. are used to own
2. I _____ get up at five every morning when I worked in the bakery.
 - a. would
 - b. am used to

c. get used to

3. It took me a month to _____ the cold weather in Canada.

a. used to

b. get used to

c. use to

4. Our teacher is used to _____ questions in class.

a. answer

b. answered

c. answering

5. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) I (2) use to (3) play tennis (4) every weekend.

6. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) He is not used (2) to drive (3) on the left.

7. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): use / city? / you / Did / live / to / the / used / in

8. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): the / new / to / timetable. / am / getting / use / I / used

9. Correct this: *I am used to live alone.*

10. Correct this: *When I was young, I would be shy.*

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/used-to/practice/

IELTS tip. Speaking Part 1 and Part 2 often ask about childhood, past hobbies and changes in your hometown, which are perfect for used to. Say I used to... once or twice, then follow with the past simple for details. Use I am used to... when you describe living or studying somewhere new.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

Used to

AIM	Learners distinguish used to, would, be used to and get used to, and use them accurately to talk about childhood, change and adaptation.
TIME	30 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Show two photos of the same place long ago and now. Ask learners to say what has changed, and write their sentences with used to on the board.

Lesson steps

1. Present used to for past habits and states with examples about learners' own childhoods.
2. Practise negatives and questions with a mingle: Did you use to...? Find someone who...
3. Contrast used to and would with a sorting task: which sentences allow would?
4. Teach be used to and get used to with a short story about moving abroad, then ask learners to retell it.
5. Learners write six sentences about their own life using all four structures.

Extension

Learners record a Part 2 answer on 'a place that has changed' and check the forms from the recording.

Answer key

1. b) used to own. Own is a state in the past, so use used to. Would is only for repeated actions.
2. a) would. Would + base verb describes a repeated past action. The other two options need -ing.
3. b) get used to. Get used to describes the process of becoming familiar.
4. c) answering. In be used to, to is a preposition, so the verb takes -ing.
5. Part 2: *use to* → **used to**. The past habit form is used to, with a d.
6. Part 2: *to drive* → **to driving**. After be used to, use the -ing form.
7. Did you use to live in the city? In questions with did, the form is use to without the d.
8. I am getting used to the new timetable. Getting used to describes the process of becoming familiar with something.
9. I am used to living alone. Be used to is followed by -ing.
10. When I was young, I used to be shy. Would is not used for states. Use used to or the past simple.

Questions learners often ask

What is the difference between used to and be used to? Used to + base verb is for a past habit or state that has ended. Be used to + -ing or a noun means you are familiar with something now.

Can I use would instead of used to? Only for repeated actions. You cannot use would for states, so say I used to have a car, not I would have a car.

How do I make questions and negatives with used to? Use did and drop the d: Did you use to smoke? I didn't use to like coffee.

Why is it used to living and not used to live? In be used to and get used to, the word to is a preposition. Prepositions are followed by a noun or an -ing form.

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage, 4th edition. Oxford University Press.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006). Cambridge Grammar of English. Cambridge University Press.

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