

Used to (do)

A

Study this example situation:

a few years ago

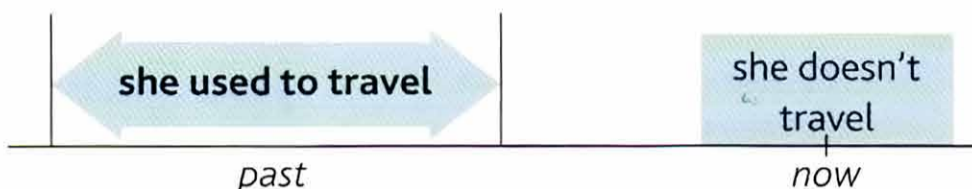


Nicola doesn't travel much these days. She prefers to stay at home.

But she **used to travel** a lot. She **used to go** away two or three times a year.

She **used to travel** a lot = she travelled a lot often in the past, but she doesn't do this any more.

these days



B

Something **used to** happen = it happened often in the past, but no longer happens:

- I **used to play** tennis a lot, but I don't play very much now.
- David **used to spend** a lot of money on clothes. These days he can't afford it.
- 'Do you go to the cinema much?' 'Not now, but I **used to.**' (= I used to go)

We also use **used to** ... for things that were true, but are not true any more:

- This building is now a furniture shop. It **used to be** a cinema.
- I **used to think** Mark was unfriendly, but now I realise he's a very nice person.
- I've started drinking tea recently. I never **used to like** it before.
- Lisa **used to have** very long hair when she was a child.

C

'I **used to** do something' is past. There is no present. You cannot say 'I use to do'. To talk about the present, use the present simple (I **do**).

Compare:

| | | | |
|----------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>past</i> | he used to play | we used to live | there used to be |
| <i>present</i> | he plays | we live | there is |

- We **used to live** in a small village, but now we **live** in London.
- There **used to be** four cinemas in the town. Now there **is** only one.

D

The normal question form is **did (you) use to ... ?**:

- Did you use to eat** a lot of sweets when you were a child?

The negative form is **didn't use to ...** (**used not to ...** is also possible):

- I **didn't use to** like him. (or I **used not to** like him.)

E

Compare **I used to do** and **I was doing**:

- I **used to watch** TV a lot. (= I watched TV often in the past, but I no longer do this)
- I **was watching** TV when Rob called. (= I was in the middle of watching TV)

F

Do not confuse **I used to do** and **I am used to doing** (see Unit 61). The structures and meanings are different:

- I **used to live** alone. (= I lived alone in the past, but I no longer live alone)
- I **am used to living** alone. (= I live alone, and I don't find it strange or difficult because I've been living alone for some time)