Life Before Smartphones

(Reading & Grammar Review – The Simple Past)
Adapted from "What Did People Do Before Smartphones?" by Ian Bogost, The Atlantic, July 7, 2023

1. Before Reading
A. Choose the correct answer.
1. What did people use to do when they were bored before smartphones?
A. Scroll Instagram B. Play online games ✅ C. Watch TV or read magazines D. Send texts E. Watch TikTok videos
2. How did people contact their friends in the 1990s?
✅ A. By phone calls or letters B. By Snapchat C. By group chat D. By video call E. By email

3. What did people use to find directions before Google Maps?
A. They never travelled ✅ B. They used paper maps or printed directions C. They used GPS apps D. They asked AI E. They used voice assistants

4. What did teenagers use to listen to music?
B. Spotify C. YouTube ✅ A. Cassettes and CDs D. Streaming apps E. USB keys

5. What was life like before smartphones?
B. People were never bored C. Everyone had a mobile ✅ A. It was slower and calmer D. Social media already existed E. Internet was everywhere

B. Answer the questions.

1. How do you usually spend your free time when you have no Internet?
   → I read, listen to music or go outside.
2. What were the advantages of life before smartphones?
   → People talked more and spent more time together.
3. What were the disadvantages?
   → It was harder to contact people and they often got bored.

C. Match the words with their definitions. Write the number next to the right definition

Vocabulary	Definitions
1. BlackBerry	a vibration or sound made by a device
2. buzz	instructions to go somewhere
3. MapQuest	the feeling of having nothing interesting to do
4. idle time	electronic messages sent from a computer or phone ☐
5. social media	a mobile device for email before smartphones
6. television	time when you have nothing to do
7. boredom	a website where you could print maps
8. print (out)	websites for sharing photos and posts
9. directions	to produce a paper copy of something
10. email	a machine people watched before streaming

2. Reading: What Did People Do Before Smartphones?
In 2000, I got the RIM 957, my first BlackBerry. It received, in real time, emails sent to my work account. Such receipt would cause the device to flash a light and buzz, pager-style. It buzzed constantly.
Over the years that followed, I kept clicking on my keyboard phones until eventually the iPhone replaced them. I have memories of using a Palm Treo on the train and my BlackBerry at lunch through most of the

LIVEWORKSHEETS

2000s. But I can't remember how I'd spent my idle time in the years before. Literally, what did we do? I cannot recall.
Some things are easy to reconstruct. Email came to you at your desk. MapQuest was around, but you had to print out directions before you went anywhere. Photography was less a part of daily life, absent social media on which to post.
Television was another way of killing time. We watched a lot of it — game shows, daytime soaps, sitcoms, the evening news, MTV. Television was just sort of on, sort of all the time.
Before smartphones, people didn't invest their in-between time into forging social bonds or doing self-improvement. They mostly suffered through constant, endless boredom. Now there is too much happening, but before, nothing ever happened.

3. After Reading

A. Choose the correct answer.

1. What was the writer's first device?
B. iPhone C. Palm Treo ✅ A. BlackBerry RIM 957 D. Nokia
2. What did the device do when an email arrived?
✅ A. It buzzed and flashed. B. It made no sound. C. It played music. D. It showed a photo.
3. What did people have to do before using MapQuest?
C. Ask a friend ✅ A. Print directions B. Use GPS D. Call a taxi company
4. What did the author say about photography?
✅ A. It was less common without social media. B. It was everywhere. C. It was free. D. It was better.
5. What did people often do to kill time?
✅ A. Watch TV B. Check Instagram C. Read emails D. Play games
6. How does the author describe life before smartphones?
✅ A. Boring and empty B. Exciting C. Stressful D. Peaceful

B. Answer the questions.

1. What examples does the author give of things people did before smartphones?
   → They watched TV, printed maps, and read magazines.
2. Why can't the author remember what he did during his idle time?
   → Because people didn't do much, they were just bored.
3. Do you agree with him that "nothing ever happened" before smartphones?
   → I partly agree: life was slower, but people also talked more face to face.

🧠 **4. Grammar: The Simple Past**

A. Reminder

We use the **simple past** to talk about **finished actions or habits in the past.**

- Regular verbs → add **-ed** (watch → watched, play → played)
- Irregular verbs → change form (go → went, have → had, be → was/were)
- Negative → **didn't + base verb**
- Question → **Did + subject + base verb?**

B. Complete the sentences.

☐ 1. People _____ (not have) smartphones before 2000.
→ didn't have
☐ 2. The author _____ (get) his first BlackBerry in 2000.
→ got
☐ 3. He _____ (watch) television during his free time.
→ watched
☐ 4. People _____ (print) maps before they travelled.
→ printed
☐ 5. They _____ (feel) bored when they had nothing to do.
→ felt

LIVEWORKSHEETS

C. Rewrite the sentences in the negative form.

1. People used GPS to find their way. → People didn't use GPS to find their way.
2. He remembered everything he did before smartphones. → He didn't remember everything he did.
3. Everyone had a smartphone in 1995. → Everyone didn't have a smartphone in 1995.

D. Ask two questions in the simple past.

1. social media / 1990/ People /have /? _____
2. be / bored / they / do / what/ when / they? _____

5. Règles du Prétérit

On emploie le **prétérit (simple past)** pour parler d'actions **terminées** dans le passé.

Les verbes **réguliers** prennent la terminaison **-ed**.

Les verbes **irréguliers** ont une forme **spéciale** qu'il faut apprendre par cœur.

À la forme **négative**, on utilise **didn't + base verbale**.

À la forme **interrogative**, on met **Did** au début de la phrase.

Exemple : *Did they go to school yesterday? – No, they didn't.*

6. Conjugate the verbs in brackets in the Simple Past.

1. People _____ (not use) smartphones before the 2000s.
2. She _____ (buy) her first computer in 1998.
3. Teenagers _____ (send) letters to their friends instead of texts.
4. _____ (you / go) to the cinema more often when you were younger?
5. We _____ (play) board games every weekend.
6. He _____ (not understand) how the Internet worked.
7. _____ (students / study) with paper dictionaries at school?
8. My parents _____ (drive) to work every morning.
9. It _____ (rain) a lot during our holiday last year.
10. What _____ (people / do) when they _____ (feel) bored before smartphones?

LIVEWORKSHEETS