Used to vs. would

When we talk about something that happened regularly or repeatedly in the past but not now, we often use the structures `used to + infinitive' and `would + infinitive'.

used to + simple form

We use **used to + simple form** when we talk about things that happened in the past but do not happen now.
In the negative we say **didn't use to + simple form**:

I **used to live** in a large city, but now I live by the seaside.

I **didn't use to go** swimming everyday.
Did you use to live in a small or large city?

We can use this structure with both states and actions:

Paul **used to be** very calm when he was younger. Now he's stressed all the time. (STATE)
Paul **used to work** full-time, but now he only takes on part-time jobs. (ACTION)

would + simple form

When we are telling a story or recalling a situation from a long time ago, we often prefer to use **would** to describe repeated behaviour in the past, although both **would** and **used to** are possible:

I remember growing up in the countryside. It was a peaceful and simple life. I **would pick** vegetables every day and from time to time I **would feed** the chickens with my mother.

Note that **would** can only describe past events and actions. It is not usually used with states. To describe past states, we can only use **used to**:

Paul ~~would be~~ **used to be** very calm when he was younger. Now he's stressed all the time.

Things to remember

- We can also use the **simple past** to talk about repeated past states and actions.
- If a past action did not happen regularly or repeatedly, we cannot use **used to** or **would**
  -- we must use the **simple past**: I **moved** to London in 2014.
- We normally use **would** in the context of telling a story or recalling a time in the past. If we simply want to state that we had or did something regularly in the past, we use **used to** for example I **used to play** tennis every weekend.
- However, if we recall a time in the past, we can use **used to** or **would**: When I was at school, I **would play**/**used to play** tennis every weekend.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Would + simple form

Complete the story below with would plus the following verbs.
One of the verbs is used in the negative.

eat **go out** **see** **spend** **study** **wake up**

When James was a student, his lifestyle was completely different. He didn't have a lot of money, so he_____in cheap student canteens instead of restaurants. During the year, he_____with his friends to student bars and have fun. It was the best time of his life.
In his third year, he studied abroad in Italy -- he didn't have a lot of lectures, so he _____ late and go sightseeing during the day.
However, in his final year, he _____very often because he had a lot of exams. He _____ a lot of time in the library and he _____ his friends as much

Would or used to

Complete the sentences below with *used to* or *would*.
If both structures are possible, use *would*.

1. Living with Angela was great. Every Friday evening, we _____ (go) to a restaurant.
2. I _____ (think) that eating a lot of bread is good for you.
3. When I was living in Greece, I _____ (go) to the beach every day.
4. My father _____ (work) very hard. He's retired now.
5. Jacob's wife _____ (tolerate) his difficult character. Now she can't stand him.
6. Living with my flatmate was difficult at first. We _____ (argue) all the time.
7. _____ (play) a musical instrument when you were younger?
8. It _____ (be) very expensive to travel by plane. Nowadays there are plenty of budget airlines.
9. Before Harry won the lottery, he _____ (eat) sardines for dinner every day.
10. People _____ (write) letters to each other.
11. It _____ (not/rain) so much in my country. This must be the effect of global warming.
12. Jack _____ (have) lots of free time. These days, however, he is very busy.

Now answer the following questions using the structures from this lesson:



1. Talk about some things you did regularly in your childhood.
2. How was life different before the Internet?
3. Think about a time in the past prior to lockdown when your life was different. Talk about your lifestyle.

LIVEWORKSHEETS