



SPANISH TABLE

Preterite vs. Imperfect



Verbs with different meanings in the preterite and the imperfect

Verb		Example	
saber to know	Meaning in the preterite	to find out	<i>Supé que ganaste la beca.</i> [I found out you won the scholarship.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to know for a while	<i>Sabía que estabas esperando la respuesta.</i> [I knew you were waiting for an answer.]
querer to wish, to want	Meaning in the preterite	to try to (affirmative), to refuse to (negative)	<i>Quise llamarte pero era tarde.</i> [I wanted to call you but it was late; I tried to call you but it was late.] <i>No quise ir a la fiesta.</i> [I didn't want to go to the party; I refused to go to the party.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to want something for a while	<i>Quería comer helado pero la heladería estaba cerrada.</i> [I wanted to eat ice cream but the ice cream parlor was closed.]
poder to be able to	Meaning in the preterite	to finally be able to do something (affirmative); to fail (negative)	<i>Pudimos llegar al aeropuerto a pesar del tráfico.</i> [We were able to get to the airport despite the traffic.] <i>No pude abrir la puerta.</i> [I failed at opening the door.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to always be able to do something	<i>Antes podíamos llegar más rápido.</i> [Before we could arrive faster.]
tener to have	Meaning in the preterite	to receive, to get	<i>¿Tuviste noticias de Camilo?</i> [Did you get any news from Camilo?]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to wear, to own (possession)	<i>Te vi ayer en la fiesta. Tenías un vestido verde, ¿no?</i> [I saw you at the party yesterday. You wore a green dress, right?] <i>Tenía muchos amigos en la escuela secundaria.</i> [I had many friends in secondary school.]
estar to be	Meaning in the preterite	to become, to get	<i>Estuve preocupada por ti.</i> [I was worried about you.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to be	<i>Estaba en la reunión con Patricia.</i> [I was at the meeting with Patricia.]



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tener que to have to	Meaning in the preterite	to fulfill an obligation in the past <i>Tuvimos que ayudar a Marina.</i> [We had to help Marina.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to be supposed to do something <i>Teníamos que llegar a las 3, pero no fue posible.</i> [We were supposed to arrive at 3, but it wasn't possible.]
conocer to know	Meaning in the preterite	to meet for the first time <i>Conocí a la hermana de Diego.</i> [I met Diego's sister.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to know for some time <i>Yo conocía a Diego de hace muchos años.</i> [I knew Diego many years ago.]
deber must	Meaning in the preterite	should (not), ought (not) <i>Debiste hablar conmigo primero.</i> [You should have spoken to me first.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to have an obligation <i>Siempre debíamos terminar la tarea antes de cenar.</i> [We should have always finished our homework before dinner.]
acabar de to finish	Meaning in the preterite	to finish <i>Acabé de trabajar temprano.</i> [I finished work early.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to just have done something <i>Carlos acababa de dormirse cuando sonó la alarma.</i> [Carlos had just fallen asleep when the alarm went off.]
ir a to go	Meaning in the preterite	to go (went) <i>Fuimos a clase y no llegó el profesor.</i> [We went to class and the professor didn't arrive.]
	Meaning in the imperfect	to be about to do something <i>Justo iba a llamarte.</i> [I was about to call you.]

