Used To, Would and Be Used To

Three forms that look alike but mean different things: how things were, what we did again and again, and what feels normal.

A2–C1 · Philo & Sophia, Lessons 2 and 16

I used to milk by hand. · I'm used to milking.

PAST HABIT	Grandad (SUBJECT)	used to (USED TO)	plough (BASE VERB)	with horses. (NOT ANY MORE)
IT'S NORMAL	Sophia (SUBJECT)	is used to (BE USED TO)	getting up (VERB + -ING)	at five. (IT'S NO PROBLEM)

used to + verb: how things were then, but not now
would + verb: things we did again and again, in a story
be used to + -ing: it feels normal, not strange
get used to + -ing: it is slowly becoming normal

Which form?

past habits and present familiarity

FORM	MEANING	EXAMPLE	NEGATIVE AND QUESTION
used to + verb	a past habit, now finished	We **used to keep** pigs.	We didn't **use to** keep pigs. · Did you **use to**...?
used to + verb	a past state, now changed	There **used to be** a mill here.	There didn't **use to be** a road.
would + verb	a repeated past action, in stories	Every summer we **would sleep** in the hayloft.	Not for states: not "would be a mill"
past simple	one action, or a habit with a length	We **kept** pigs for ten years.	We didn't keep pigs. · Did you keep...?
usually + present	a habit now	I **usually get up** at five.	Not "I use to get up"
be used to + -ing	it feels normal	I'**m used to getting up** early.	I'm not used to the cold. · Are you used to it?
be used to + noun	it feels normal	She'**s used to** hard work.	He isn't used to city life.
get used to + -ing	it is becoming normal	You'll **get used to milking**.	I can't get used to the noise.
got used to + -ing	it became normal	She soon **got used to living** here.	Did you get used to it?

Below the line, to is a preposition, so -ing or a noun follows; be / get used to works in any tense

used to or would?

actions or states

Both for repeated actions:
*We **used to / would** fish in the river.*

Only used to for states:
*We **used to have** a dog.*
not ~~would have a dog~~

Start with used to, then carry on with would

use or used?

spelling and sound

After **did**, drop the d:
*Did you **use to**...? I didn't **use to**...*

Say it /ˈjuːstə/: the s is soft, like *juice*.

*I **used** a spade* (/juːzd/) means I took a spade and dug with it.

used to never goes in the present

There used to be...

how a place has changed

*There **used to be** a mill by the river. Now it's a café.*

*People **used to** walk to market.*

*This field **used to** grow wheat; now it's pasture.*

Then and now: back then, in those days, nowadays

Typical behaviour

C1: will and would

will for typical behaviour now:
He'll sit by the fire for hours.

would for typical behaviour then:
*Grandma **would** always sing while she baked.*

Stressed, it can criticise: *He **would** say that!*

tend to also works: Sheep tend to stay together

Telling a story about the old days

- Set the scene: *When I was a boy, we **used to** live on a farm.*
- Then the habits: *Every morning I'**d** feed the hens. Then I'**d** walk to school.*
- One event: *One day, a fox **got** into the henhouse.*

Spanish speakers, watch out

- *Solía ir* = I **used to** go.
- *Suelo levantarme* = I **usually** get up, not ~~I use to get up~~.
- *Estoy acostumbrado a madrugar* = I'm used to **getting** up early, not ~~used to get up~~.

Quick test

Can you say "**not any more**"? → *used to*
Can you say "**it's normal for me**"? → *be used to*
Is it "**becoming normal**"? → *get used to*

Want more?

Sophia explains **An Incident with a Shelf** (Lesson 2) and **To Go, or Going** (Lesson 16).

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