

PRETERITE AND IMPERFECT

English Grammar Connection: English has only one simple tense to describe events that happened in the past. Spanish used two past tenses: The **preterite** and the **imperfect**.

You have learned two verbs forms used for the past tense: The **preterite** and the **imperfect**. How do you know when to use each one?

Here's how: decide whether an action had a specific beginning and ending. Use the **preterite** if the action started and ended at the definite time.

La guerra **empezó** en 1846.
*The war **began** in 1846.*

Santa Ana **fue** presidente de México.
*Santa Ana **was** the president of Mexico.*

Use the **imperfect** to talk about past actions without saying when they began or ended.

Los guerreros no **tenían** miedo del enemigo.
*The warriors **were not afraid** of the enemy.*

El ejército **peleaba** valientemente.
*The army **fought** bravely.*

You can apply both tenses to talk about two overlapping events.

- The **preterite** for the actions that occurred.
- The **imperfect** for what was going on the time.

Cuando la Guerra **terminó**, Santa Ana **era** presidente de México.
*When the war **ended**, Santa Ana **was** president of Mexico.*

NOTE that you use the preterite of **ser (fue)** to say that Santa Ana was once president of Mexico, but you use the imperfect of **ser (era)** to say that Santa Ana was president during an unspecified time.