

## Lezione 6B2 – Imperfetto vs. passato prossimo

Although the *passato prossimo* and the **imperfetto** are both past tenses, they have distinct uses and are not interchangeable. The choice between these two tenses depends on the context and on the point of view of the speaker.

- *Anche stamattina stavo bene. Sei stata male a causa di una leggera depressione.*

### Uses of the *passato prossimo* and the *imperfetto*

#### Passato prossimo

To express actions completed at a specific moment or within a definite time period in the past:

Lisa si **è rotta** il braccio due volte.

Lisa **broke** her arm  
two times.

Mia sorella **ha parlato** con il  
farmacista stamattina.

My sister **spoke** with the  
pharmacist this morning.

#### Imperfetto

To express ongoing actions with no reference to beginning or end or for an unspecified period of time in the past:

Da giovane **ero** sempre in buona salute.

When I was young **I was** always  
in good health.

Mia sorella **parlava** mentre **cercavo**  
la ricetta.

My sister **was talking** while **I was**  
**looking** for the prescription.

### Uses of the *passato prossimo* and the *imperfetto*

#### Passato prossimo

To refer to the beginning or end of a past action or event:

**Abbiamo cominciato** a controllare  
la linea due anni fa.

We **began** to watch our weight  
two years ago.

Il dolore **è sparito** all'improvviso.  
The pain **disappeared** suddenly.

#### Imperfetto

To refer to habitual or recurring past actions and events:

Ogni giorno **andavamo** in palestra  
per fare esercizio.

We **used to go** to the gym every day  
to exercise.

Di solito il dottore ci **faceva** le punture.  
Usually the doctor **gave** us shots.

## Uses of the *passato prossimo* and the *imperfetto*

Passato prossimo	Imperfetto
<p>To express a change in mental, physical, or emotional state in the past:  <b>Mi sono ammalato</b> perché ho dimenticato la giacca.  <i>I got sick</i> because I forgot my jacket.</p>	<p>To describe past mental, physical, or emotional states and conditions, including age:  Raffaella <b>era</b> incinta e <b>si sentiva</b> spesso male.  <i>Raffaella was pregnant</i> and <i>she often felt ill</i>.</p>
<p>To narrate a series of past actions or events:  <b>Sono caduto, mi sono rotto</b> il braccio e <b>sono andato</b> al pronto soccorso.  <i>I fell down, broke my arm, and went</i> to the emergency room.</p>	<p>To describe weather and talk about time in the past:  <b>Erano</b> le sei e <b>pioveva</b> ancora.  <i>It was six o'clock</i> and <i>it was still raining</i>.</p>

The **passato prossimo** and the **imperfetto** are often used together for narrative purposes.

Ieri il tempo **era** bello e la neve mi **sembrava** perfetta. **Ho deciso** di andare a sciare in montagna e **sono uscito** di casa. Non c'**era** nessuno in giro quando **sono salito** in cima. Improvvisamente, **ho sentito** un rumore che **veniva** dal bosco. Santo cielo, **era** lo Yeti!

*Yesterday the weather was beautiful and the snow seemed perfect to me. I decided to go skiing in the mountains and I left the house. There was no one around when I climbed the summit. Suddenly, I heard a sound that was coming from the woods. Good heaven! It was the Abominable Snowman!*

Certain verbs have different meanings in the **imperfetto** and *passato prossimo*.

Compare the use of *conoscere* and *sapere* in these examples.

Il chirurgo **conosceva** Anna.

**Ho conosciuto** il chirurgo.

The surgeon **knew** Anna.

I **met** the surgeon.

Luisa **sapeva** cosa fare per guarire.

Luisa **knew** what to do to get better.

Carla **ha saputo** che Luisa era malata.

Carla **found out** that Luisa was sick.

**Dovere**, **potere**, and **volere** have slightly different meanings in the **imperfetto**, too.

The **imperfetto** describes intention or capability but doesn't specify the outcome, whereas the *passato prossimo* indicates that an action was carried out.

\*Anna **doveva** andare dal medico.

Anna **è dovuta** andare dal medico.

Anna **was supposed to** go to the doctor.

Anna **had to (and did)** go to the doctor.

\*Il dottore **poteva** curarlo.  
*The doctor **could (had the ability to)** heal him.*

Il dottore **ha potuto** curarlo.  
*The doctor **was able to (and did)** heal him.*

\*Rosa non **voleva** fare esercizio, ma è andata in palestra lo stesso.  
Rosa **did not want** to exercise, but she went to the gym anyway.

Rosa non **ha voluto** fare esercizio, e allora è restata a casa.  
Rosa **did not want to** exercise, so she stayed home.

**Provalo! Scrivi la forma corretta del verbo indicato.**

**passato prossimo**

1. cominciare (lui) \_\_\_\_\_
2. andare (tu) \_\_\_\_\_
3. bere (noi) \_\_\_\_\_
4. fare (loro) \_\_\_\_\_
5. nascere (io) \_\_\_\_\_

**imperfetto**

6. giocare (noi) \_\_\_\_\_
7. essere (tu) \_\_\_\_\_
8. dire (lei) \_\_\_\_\_
9. avere (voi) \_\_\_\_\_
10. leggere (io) \_\_\_\_\_