

**BRIEF SUMMARY: USES OF THE *PASSATO PROSSIMO* & THE *IMPERFETTO***

Any verb can be expressed in either the Passato Prossimo or the Imperfetto; what we must learn to be aware of, however, is that each tense implies something different about that action or condition.

The difference between the tenses is a matter of focus on the action or condition in the past: how the speaker regards the action, how s/he looks at it, what s/he wants to imply about it.

### THE PASSATO PROSSIMO

The passato prossimo is used to simply state that somebody did something in the past or that something happened. You merely want to report “after the fact” that it occurred.

- some special cases:**
- to tell a single occurrence of an action: *I did the homework.*
  - to tell a series of several actions that occurred once, one after the other: *He opened the door, walked in, and sat down.*
  - to tell for how long (the total amount of time an action occurred or for how long somebody did something): *My parents lived in Rome for twenty years.*  
*It rained all day.*
  - to “sum up” an event in a total way, after the fact (after it’s all over): *(In the end) It was a horrible day.*  
*I liked the movie.*  
*The party was great.*
  - to tell how someone felt as the result of an action: *My friend showed up and I was (became) happy.*

### THE IMPERFETTO

The imperfect tense does not report actions as completed, after the fact. Instead, the imperfect looks at an action, condition or situation while it’s taking place, as if we were back in the past, re-living it.

The imperfect provides “background information”, while the preterite tells “what happened”-- Thus, it is often the case that a sentence with the imperfect tense seems like an “incomplete thought”.

- specific cases:**
- to present an action or activity in progress: *I was doing the homework... (when she called).*
  - -- or more than one action in progress together: *The students talked (were talking) while the speaker gave (was giving) his speech.*
  - to present a condition while it is in progress or in effect: *It was sunny and warm (that day)...*  
*It was two-thirty in the afternoon...*  
*I was thirteen that summer...*  
*I felt (was feeling) sick that day...*  
*I thought she was already married.*
  - to describe what people, places and things were like during a period of time in the past: *(When he was in high school) ... John was tall and thin...*  
*(In those days) ... Firenze was still a quiet city...*
  - to present an activity as happening routinely or habitually in the past: *Sue would always go for a run in the morning.*  
*I used to fight a lot with my sister when we were kids.*

**STUDY THIS SUMMARY AND EXPLANATION**  
**OF THE CONTRAST IN USES BETWEEN THE PASSATO PROSSIMO & IMPERFETTO**

(Excerpted from *Oggi in Italia, 7th ed.* Merlonghi, Merlonghi, Tursi, & O'Connor. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. pp.228-229)

**PASSATO PROSSIMO (PP) o IMPERFETTO (I)?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to describe what people were like during some past time period (*Maria was young and pretty then.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to indicate that something happened at a specific moment in the past (*I got home at 8:00.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to present a condition in effect at some past moment (*It was hot and humid that day.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to indicate that an action occurred routinely or habitually during some past time period (*We would always go out on Fri.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to indicate the hour in the past (*It was 11:00 when Maria arrived.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to indicate a condition over an entire defined past time period (*Maria was sick all last week.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to give an “after-the-fact” summary statement or comment (*We had a good time.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to tell that an action did not occur (*I didn't go out last night.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to tell what somebody did next after something else happened (*My cell phone rang, and I turned it off.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to tell what was going on when something happened (*I was studying when you called.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ • is used to tell what happened when some condition(s) was(were) in effect (*I got sick when I was in Italy.*)

**PRATICA**

**ESERCIZIO A:** Read each passage, and choose *passato prossimo* or *imperfetto* for each verb, then conjugate accordingly.

- 1) Quando \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) bambini Giorgio ed io, \_\_\_\_\_ (ABITARE) nello stesso palazzo. Spesso \_\_\_\_\_ (GIOCARE) insieme.
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) le undici della notte quando io \_\_\_\_\_ (ARRIVARE) a casa.
- 3) Io \_\_\_\_\_ (ASCOLTARE) i miei CD mentre \_\_\_\_\_ (LAVORARE).
- 4) In quel tempo, i miei genitori \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) ancora giovani. Mio padre \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) studente di Masters, e \_\_\_\_\_ (STUDIARE) all'università. Mia madre \_\_\_\_\_ (STARE) a casa con me.
- 5) Il fine settimana scorso io non \_\_\_\_\_ (USCIRE) venerdì sera con gli amici.
- 6) Ieri, gli amici ed io \_\_\_\_\_ (ANDARE) al parco. \_\_\_\_\_ (FARE) un picnic, \_\_\_\_\_ (GIOCARE) al football, e \_\_\_\_\_ (PRENDERE) il sole. \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) una bella giornata.
- 7) Ieri sera io \_\_\_\_\_ (CHIAMARE) i miei genitori alle otto, ma loro non \_\_\_\_\_ (ci ESSERE).
- 8) Ieri sera, io \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) in camera e \_\_\_\_\_ (STUDIARE), e mi \_\_\_\_\_ (TELEFONARE) mio padre.
- 9) Quando io \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) bambino, mi \_\_\_\_\_ (PIACERE) salire sugli alberi (*climb trees*).
- 10) Ieri sera io \_\_\_\_\_ (ANDARE) al cinema con gli amici, e noi \_\_\_\_\_ (VEDERE) il nuovo film di Mike Myers. Ci \_\_\_\_\_ (PIACERE) moltissimo.

**EXERCISE:** For each directed paragraph, come up with sentences in English that tell the type of information as requested by the directions for the paragraph.

Analyze the focus on past activities/conditions that the directions imply, and as represented in the type of English sentences you have suggested, and determine whether you need the **passato prossimo** or **imperfetto** in Italian, or a combination of both tenses.

Lastly, express your English sentences in Italian, in the past tense(s) you have identified.

1) *Tell what things you and others did this morning:*

2) *Tell what things you and others in your family would always do in the morning at home:*

3) *Tell what things were going on in your dorm/apartment/home at one point last night:  
(what things you and other people were doing)*

4) *Tell what was going on or where people were when you got (arrived) home one day recently (or one recent weekend):  
Start your paragraph with, "When I arrived home,..."*

**COMPITI: paragrafi con il passato prossimo e l'imperfetto**

*For each instruction, write a paragraph of AT LEAST 5-6 sentences. For each paragraph, select either the **passato prossimo** or the **imperfetto** or a combination of **both** tenses, to write the paragraph.*

1) In a paragraph, tell what highlight events and activities you and others did in January. (between the semesters)

2) In a paragraph, tell in detail what was going on at one point last Sunday afternoon, wherever you were. Tell what different people and groups of people were all in the process of doing simultaneously, during one point in time Sunday afternoon. (Do NOT tell a chronological series of actions that people did, one thing after another.)

3) In a paragraph, tell in detail what was going on (what was in progress, what other people were doing) at the moment you went to bed last night. Start your paragraph by writing in Spanish, "When I went to bed last night,..." (Do NOT tell what things you did; the only thing you did is go to bed. Tell what OTHER people were doing.)

4) In a paragraph, tell in detail the things you and others used to do routinely or habitually when you were a child (age 5-10). Start your paragraph with, "When I was a child,..."

**USING THE PASSATO PROSSIMO vs. THE IMPERFETTO**  
**IN PAST TIME NARRATIVES**

(Excerpted from *Oggi in Italia, 7th ed.* Merlonghi, Merlonghi, Tursi, & O'Connor. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. p.229)

So, to sum up:

**Passato prossimo:** *If you answer "YES" to any of these questions, the tense you need is the PASSATO PROSSIMO.*

- 1) Is this a single instance of the action?
- 2) Is this telling what happened next?
- 3) Is this a reaction to something else? : *"I heard a sound, and I was (became) afraid."*
- 4) Is this presenting the start or end of an action? : *"I started studying." "It stopped raining."*

<i>to start doing something:</i>	<b>COMINCIARE a</b> (+ infinitive)
<i>to start happening (e.g. "raining") :</i>	<b>COMINCIARE a</b> (+ infinitive)
<i>to finish doing something:</i>	<b>FINIRE di</b> (+ infinitive)
<i>to stop doing something:</i>	<b>SMETTERE di</b> (+ infinitive) (past participle: <b>smesso</b> )
<i>to stop happening (e.g. "raining") :</i>	<b>SMETTERE di</b> (+ infinitive) (past participle: <b>smesso</b> )
- 5) Is the sentence summing up an event? Is the sentence an "after-the-fact summary statement"? :
  - total amount of time: *"i worked there for three months."*
  - after the fact, in a total way: *"I had a good time." / "I loved the movie." / "It was a great day."*

**Imperfetto:** *If you answer "YES" to any of these questions, the tense you need is the IMPERFECT.*

- 1) Is this a habitual action during some period of time in the past?
- 2) Is this an action in progress in the past?
- 3) Is this a condition in progress or in effect in the past? (*how someone looked, or felt -- a description*)
- 4) Is the sentence "describing the scene"? (*description*)

## SOME SPECIAL CASES:

### VERBS or CONSTRUCTIONS WITH SPECIAL DISTINCTIONS WHEN USED IN THE PASSATO PROSSIMO vs. THE IMPERFETTO

<u>VERB:</u>	<u>PASSATO PROSSIMO</u>	<u>IMPERFETTO</u>
<b>CONOSCERE</b>	“met” (made the acquaintance of): <b><u>Ho conosciuto</u> Luigi nel 2002.</b> <i>(I met Luigi in 2002.)</i>	“knew” (was acquainted with): <b><u>Conoscevo</u> Carolina bene.</b> <i>(I knew Carolina well.)</i>
<b>SAPERE</b>	“found out” (became aware of): <b><u>Ho saputo</u> ieri che Luigi non viene.</b> <i>(I found out yesterday that Luigi's not coming.)</i>	“knew” (had knowledge of): <b><u>Sapevo</u> che Carolina era in Italia.</b> <i>(I knew that Carolina was in Italy.)</i>
<b>ESSERE</b>	“was/were” (for the entire time): <b><u>Sono stato</u> in Italia due settimane.</b> <i>(I was in Italy (for) two weeks.)</i>  <b><u>Sono stato</u> un buono studente al liceo.</b> <i>(I was a good student throughout high school.)</i>	“was/were” (state in progress -- background): <b><u>Ero</u> in Italia quando è morto il Papa.</b> <i>(I was in Italy when the Pope died.)</i>  <b><u>Ero</u> un buono studente al liceo.</b> <b><u>Sempre facevo</u> i compiti, ...</b> <i>(While in high school, I was a good student. I always did the homework, ...)</i>
<b>VOLERE</b> + infinitive	“wanted to do” (and did do):  <b>Non sono andato alla festa perché <u>ho voluto</u> studiare.</b> <i>(I didn't go to the party because I wanted to study [and I did study].)</i>	“wanted to do” (merely had a desire to do; had the intention to do):  <b><u>Volevo</u> andare di vacanza in Italia, ma non avevo i soldi.</b> <i>(I wanted to go on vacation in Italy, but I didn't have the money.)</i>
<b>DOVERE</b> + infinitive	“had to do” (and did do):  <b>Non sono andato con loro perché <u>ho dovuto</u> lavorare.</b> <i>(I didn't go with them because I had to work.)</i>	“had to do” (was supposed to do; had the need or obligation to do):  <b><u>Dovevo</u> fare i compiti, ma sono uscito con gli amici.</b> <i>(I needed to do (was supposed to do) the homework, but I went out with my friends.)</i>
<b>POTERE</b> + infinitive	“was able to do” (and managed to do):  <b><u>Ho potuto</u> fare i compiti.</b> <i>(I was able to do the homework -- [and I did it].)</i>	“was able to do” (had the ability/time to do; may imply that did not do):  <b><u>Potevo</u> andare in Italia, ma ho deciso di no.</b> <i>(I could go (could have gone) to Italy, but I decided not to.)</i>

(With **DOVERE** and **POTERE** in the Passato Prossimo, use **AVERE** or **ESSERE** for the helping verb based on the INFINITIVE being used with the verb: **Ho dovuto fare i compiti.** vs. **Sono dovuto andare dal dottore.** )

**ESERCIZIO A:** Which Italian past tense -- *passato prossimo* or *imperfetto* -- should be used to express each verb in the following paragraph? Explain why in each case.

It was a beautiful day. The weather was nice, and the sun was shining. I didn't have anything to do when all of a sudden the telephone rang. It was my friend, Lucio. He asked me if I wanted to go to the park with him. I said "Sure!". So then I left for his house, and we went to the park in his car.

**ESERCIZIO B:** Leggere il brano seguente (*the following passage*), e scegliere *passato prossimo* o *imperfetto* per ogni verbo. Poi coniugare l'infinito segnalato con il tempo scelto.

\_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) una bella giornata e \_\_\_\_\_ (FARE) bel tempo.  
 Piero \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) felice perché \_\_\_\_\_ (ANDARE) allo stadio per vedere giocare il Milan e l'Inter. Piero \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) tifoso per il Milan.  
 Quando lui \_\_\_\_\_ (ARRIVARE) allo stadio, ancora \_\_\_\_\_ (BRILLARE) il sole. Ma, all'improvviso (*suddenly*), il tempo \_\_\_\_\_ (CAMBIARE) ed \_\_\_\_\_ (COMINCIARE) a piovere! Si \_\_\_\_\_ (SOSPENDERE) la partita!  
 Piero \_\_\_\_\_ (TORNARE) a casa, tutto bagnato e di cattivo umore!

**ESERCIZIO C: IL DIARIO DI VIAGGIO DI JENNIFER**

Leggere il brano seguente del diario di viaggio di Jennifer, e scegliere *passato prossimo* o *imperfetto* per ogni verbo. Poi coniugare l'infinito segnalato con il tempo scelto. (excerpted from *Prego! 6th ed.*, McGraw Hill, 2004. p.202)

\_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) il 25 aprile. Io \_\_\_\_\_ (ARRIVARE) a Firenze.  
 La mia amica italiana, Silvana, mi \_\_\_\_\_ (ASPETTARE) alla stazione, e subito noi \_\_\_\_\_ (PRENDERE) un tassì. Io \_\_\_\_\_ (VEDERE) che non \_\_\_\_\_ (ci ESSERE) molta gente nelle vie e che \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) chiusi i negozi. Io \_\_\_\_\_ (DOMANDARE) a Silvana perché non \_\_\_\_\_ (LAVORARE) la gente. Silvana mi \_\_\_\_\_ (SPIEGARE) che \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) una festa nazionale: l'anniversario della Liberazione.  
 In poco tempo, noi \_\_\_\_\_ (ARRIVARE) alla casa di Silvana e la sua famiglia. Io \_\_\_\_\_ (CONOSCERE) i genitori di Silvana, e noi \_\_\_\_\_ (MANGIARE) un bel pranzo. Dopo pranzo, io \_\_\_\_\_ (ANDARE) a dormire perché \_\_\_\_\_ (ESSERE) molto stanca dopo il lungo viaggio in treno da Londra.

**ESERCIZIO D: Un torneo finale senza fine.**

Choose the appropriate verbs from the list to complete the following article about a tennis match. Conjugate the verbs in either the *passato prossimo* or *imperfetto*, as required by context. One verb is used more than once.

- |                  |                   |             |                  |                |                |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>ANDARE</b>    | <b>AVERE</b>      | <b>DARE</b> | <b>ESSERE</b>    | <b>ENTRARE</b> | <b>POTERE</b>  |
| <b>ASPETTARE</b> | <b>COMINCIARE</b> | <b>DIRE</b> | <b>ci ESSERE</b> | <b>FARE</b>    | <b>VINCERE</b> |

Ieri \_\_\_\_\_ molta gente nello stadio di Wimbledon. Fra il pubblico \_\_\_\_\_ Guillermo Vilas, il principe Charles e Camilla, Martina Navratilova, ed altre persone famose. Tutti \_\_\_\_\_ lì (*there*) per vedere la gara fra Gabriela Sabatini, dell'Argentina, e la spagnola Arantxa Sánchez. \_\_\_\_\_ molto caldo. \_\_\_\_\_ le due e mezza quando \_\_\_\_\_ nello stadio Sabatini e Sánchez. Il pubblico gli \_\_\_\_\_ un applauso. Le due giocatrici \_\_\_\_\_ alla sua parte rispettiva del campo per cominciare. In quel momento, tutti \_\_\_\_\_ in silenzio; nessuno \_\_\_\_\_ niente, aspettando ansiosamente la prima palla. Allora \_\_\_\_\_ la partita...

Dopo un'ora e mezza di gioco nel caldo intenso, Sánchez \_\_\_\_\_ un incidente, e non \_\_\_\_\_ continuare. Allora Sabatini \_\_\_\_\_ la gara.

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**COMPITO: LA NARRAZIONE NEL PASSATO: *story completion writing assignment***

Following is the beginning of a story. Write it out on a separate sheet of paper, and continue and finish the story in Italian. WRITE **ONE PAGE** BEYOND THE STORY STARTER BELOW. DON'T FORGET TO SKIP LINES!!!

Erano le undici della notte. C'era una tempesta (*storm*) terribile. Stava piovendo a dirotto (*"It was pouring"*), e c'erano tuoni e fulmini (*thunder and lightning*). Io caminavo da solo (*all alone*) per una strada deserta in campagna. All'improvviso (*all of a sudden*), durante un fulmine intenso, ho visto accanto (*next to*) alla strada una villetta abbandonata. ....

**VOCABOLARIO UTILE:**

to go up to:	mi AVVICINARE a	to be dusty:	ESSERE polveroso	dark:	scuro
to go (or walk) in:	ENTRARE in	to hear:	SENTIRE	frightened:	spaventato
to look (seem, appear):	SEMBRARE	to go up the stairs:	SALIRE le scale	a noise:	un rumore
to look in (into):	GUARDARE in	to get scared:	mi SPAVENTARE	ghost:	un fantasma
to look in the window:	GUARDARE per la finestra	to run out of:	USCIRE correndo di	haunted:	abitato dai fantasmi