L’imparfait et le passé composé
(The imparfait and the passé composé)

Both the *imparfait* and the *passé composé* are used to talk about events in the past. The *imparfait* is used for description. It answers the question “what was it like?” and describes the way things were; what people were like, what they used to do, and what used to happen in general. It is also used to talk about habitual or repeated actions in the past, as opposed to specific events. In short, the *imparfait* is used to set the scene by describing the way things were at the time of a specific event.

The *passé composé* is used to describe specific events that happened in the past. It describes what someone did, or something that happened. It has a definite beginning and a definite end. This also includes actions that occurred a specific number of times. If someone were telling a story in the past, the *passé composé* is the tense that would be used for any plot twists or major events in the story. In short, the tense is used for anything that helps the story move forward. Let’s look at some examples to see how these tenses work together.

- *Je jouais au tennis.* (I used to play tennis.)  
  - imp.
- *J’ai joué au tennis hier.* (I played tennis yesterday.)  
  - p.c.
- *J’allais souvent au cinéma.* (I used to go to the movies often.)  
  - imp.
- *Je suis allé au cinéma hier.* (I went to the movies yesterday.)  
  - p.c.
- *Quand j’avais cinq ans, je suis tombé.* (When I was five, I fell.)  
  - imp.  
  - p.c.
- *Il faisait beau, alors j’ai joué au tennis 3 fois.* (It was nice out, so I played tennis 3 times.)  
  - imp.  
  - p.c.
- *J’étais au parc quand j’ai vu le professeur.* (I was at the park when I saw the professor.)  
  - imp.  
  - p.c.

Remember, the *imparfait* is used to “set the scene,” describing the setting, what was going on, and what the events were like. The *passé composé* is used for specific things that happened at specific times. Using the correct tense is very important to be able to clearly communicate what you’re trying to say, so practice using both tenses together as you speak in the past.