

## ***QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN FACED WITH A CHOICE BETWEEN THE PASSÉ COMPOSÉ OR THE IMPARFAIT***

### ***PASSÉ COMPOSÉ:***

1. Does the action advance the narrative even in the slightest degree? If so, use the *passé composé* rather than the *imparfait*.
2. Is the action limited in time in any way? Use the *passé composé*. Even if the action takes place over 20 years or 20 centuries, if the time is limited, DO NOT USE THE IMPERFECT.
3. Does the action state a past fact, one which does not set a background? Use the *passé composé*.

NOTE: The fact that an action is continued in the past has nothing to do with whether it is *imparfait* or *passé composé*. All actions continue for some time--some much longer than others--but the mere fact that they continue is no criterion for choice. The same holds true for the word "description" in relation to actions or states in the past. A list of what you did yesterday (got up, had breakfast, went to class, beat the dog, etc...) is a description of what you did yesterday, but those are actions and not situations in the past.

### ***IMPARFAIT:***

1. Does the action merely form a background for the plot by describing a state, how things were? Use the *imparfait*.
2. Is it a question of a continuous action which is interrupted by another action? The continuous action is in the *imparfait* (e.g. Je *lisais* quand le téléphone a sonné).
3. Is it a question of a past action expressed in English by *was/were* plus the ***-ing*** form of the verb? Use the *imperfect*.
4. Is it a customary action, repeated regularly, which would be expressed in English by ***would/used to*** plus **VERB**? Use the *imperfect*.
5. Is it a question of a state of mind rather than a change in state of mind? Use the *imperfect*.