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| **Meaning changes with tense used** |
| In a few cases, two distinct English verbs are needed to express what Spanish can express by the use of the preterite or the imperfect of a given verb. Note that, in all of the following examples, the preterite expresses an action at either its beginning or ending point, while the imperfect expresses an ongoing condition. |

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| **Verbs** | **Preterite:Action** | **Imperfect:Ongoing Condition** |
| **conocer** | **Conocí** a mi mejor amigo en 1980.I **met** (beginning of our friendship) my best friend in 1980. | **Conocía** a mi mejor amigo en 1985.I **knew** (ongoing state) my best friend in 1985. |
| **pensar** | De repente yo **pensé** que él era inocente.**It suddenly dawned on me** (beginning of knowing) that he was innocent. | Yo **pensaba** que él era inocente.I **thought** (ongoing opinion) that he was innocent. |
| **poder** | **Pude** dormir a pesar del ruido de la fiesta.I **managed** to sleep (action takes place) in spite of the noise from the party. | **Podía** hacerlo pero no tuve ganas.I **was able** to (had the ability to) do it, but I didn't feel like it. |
| **no** **querer** | Me invitó al teatro pero **no quise** ir.She invited me to the theater, but I **refused** to go (action-saying no-takes place). | Me invitó al teatro pero **no quería** ir.She invited me to the theater, but I **didn't want** to go (ongoing mental state, no action implied). |
| **querer** | El vendedor **quiso** venderme seguros.The salesman **tried** to sell me insurance (action takes place). | El vendedor **quería** venderme seguros.The salesman **wanted** to sell me insurance (mental state, no action implied). |
| **saber** | Elvira **supo** que Jaime estaba enfermo.Elvira **found out** (beginning of knowing) that Jaime was sick. | Elvira **sabía**, que Jaime estaba enfermo.Elvira **knew** (ongoing awareness) that Jaime was sick. |
| **tener** | **Tuve** un accidente.I **had** (action takes place) an accident. | **Tenía** varios amigos.I **had** (ongoing situation) several friends. |
| **tener que** | **Tuve** que ir a la oficina.I **had to** go (and did go) to the office. | **Tenía** que ir a la oficina.I **was supposed to** go (mental state, no action implied) to the office. |