'Would' for past habits

'Used to' and 'would' are both used to describe something that happened regularly in the past but doesn't happen any longer, e.g.

- I used to smoke, but I quit last year.
- Whenever I craved a cigarette, I would chew gum instead.

However, there are two important differences. The first difference is that 'would' should not be used unless it has already been established that the time frame is in the past, while 'used to' does not require this. This example, with 'used to' at the beginning, sounds natural:

- I used to watch cartoons every Saturday morning when I was very little. Now I rarely watch TV.

However, when 'used to' is replaced with 'would', the same example becomes awkward and ungrammatical:

- I would watch cartoons every Saturday morning when I was very little. Now I rarely watch TV.

But if the past time frame is established before 'would' appears, 'would' sounds fine.

- When I was little, I would get up and watch cartoons every Saturday morning. Now I rarely watch TV.

The second difference between 'used to' and 'would' is that 'would' is not used with stative verbs (also known as state verbs or non-continuous verbs) such as 'love', 'be', 'understand', and 'feel'. Compare these two sentences with the stative verb 'love':

- When I was a student, I used to love sleeping late on the weekends. (natural and grammatical)

- When I was a student, I would love sleeping late on weekends. (awkward and ungrammatical)

To summarize, the use of 'would' is more restricted than that of 'used to'. Therefore, if you aren't sure which one to use, it's best to choose 'used to'.

Notes

1. It should also be mentioned that 'would' is somewhat more formal, sounds more 'bookish' and usually conveys the idea that the speaker is reminiscing about the past. It is often used in writing to talk about the past in a misty-eyed, sentimental way, e.g.

- When I was a child I would wake up to the sound of birds singing.

2. 'Would' for past habits is frequently used with adverbs of frequency such as 'always', 'usually' 'often' etc.