



Past Tenses

Past Simple, Past Continuous and Past Perfect

Uses of the past tenses

Summary

Past Simple	Past Continuous	Past Perfect
1. Past actions which happened one after the other	1. Action in the middle of happening at a stated past time	1. Past action which happened before another action / time in the past
2. Past habits or states	2. Past action interrupted by another past action (Longer action = past continuous)	2. Complete past action with visible results in the past
3. Action which happened at a definite time in the past	3. Two or more past actions happening at the same time	3. Past version of the present perfect

Past Simple

1. Past actions which happened one after the other

● Use the past simple tense to talk about actions in the past that happened one after the next:

- **I brushed my teeth, got changed and went to bed.**
(brushed teeth → got changed → went to bed)
- **Lucy finished her homework, then watched television.**
(finished homework → watched television)
- **I tidied my room, cleaned the bathroom and relaxed with a book.**
(tidied room → cleaned bathroom → relaxed)

Key word: then

Past Simple

2. Past habits or states

● Use the past simple tense to talk about repeated actions in the past, or habits that people had in the past. Time frequency words (like 'always', 'often', 'every day') are often used.

- **I always went to bed at 9pm when I was in kindergarten.** *(but not anymore)*
- **When I was younger, my mum read me a bedtime story every night.** *(but not anymore)*
- **When my dad was a young man, he took my mum out for dates to this restaurant.**
(a repeated action in the past; doesn't happen anymore)

Key words: always, sometimes, every day, never, often...

Past Simple

3. Action which happened at a definite time in the past

- Use the past simple tense to talk about an action which was completed at a stated time in the past:
 - I met up with my friends yesterday.
 - Last year, we moved to Hong Kong.
 - They got married two years ago.

Key words: yesterday, ago, last night/month/year...

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Past Continuous

1. Action in the middle of happening at a stated past time

- Use the past continuous to talk about an action that was in the middle of happening at a stated time in the past.
 - At 3pm yesterday, I was working.
(I was working before and after 3pm – it was in the middle of happening at 3pm.)
 - You were sleeping at 9am this morning.
(You were sleeping before and after 9am – it was in the middle of happening at 9am.)

Key word: at [time]

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Past Continuous

2. Past action interrupted by another past action

- Use the past continuous tense to talk about a past action which was interrupted by another, shorter past action. The past continuous is used for the long action, and the past simple is used for the shorter action.
 - She was waiting for me when I arrived.
(was waiting = long action; I arrived = short action)
 - He was brushing his hair when the hairbrush broke.
(was brushing = long action; hairbrush broke = short action)

Key word: when

Past Continuous

3. Two or more past actions happening at the same time

- Use the past continuous tense for two or more actions which were happening at the same time in the past. Use the past continuous for both actions.
 - My mum was watching while I was performing.
(both actions happened at the same time)
 - He was eating cereal as I was doing my work. *(both actions happened at the same time)*
 - Someone was talking while she was trying to sleep.
(both actions happened at the same time)

Key words: while, as

Past Perfect (had + past participle)

1. Past action which happened before another action/time in the past

- Use the past perfect tense to talk about an action that happened before another action in the past. The past perfect tense is used for the action which happened first.
- When I had eaten my meal, I washed the dishes. (*ate meal → washed dishes*)
- The meeting had finished by the time I arrived. (*meeting finished → I arrived*)
- We watched the film after we had completed our chores. (*completed chores → watched film*)

Key words: When, by the time, after, by [time]

Past Perfect (had + past participle)

1. Past action which happened before another action/time in the past

- You should also use the past perfect tense to talk about an action that was completed **before** a specified time in the past.
- By 8 o'clock, she had walked many miles. (*walked many miles → 8 o'clock*)
- We had swept the whole yard by lunchtime. (*swept the yard → lunchtime*)
- By 9pm, they had prepared their presentation. (*prepared presentation → 9pm*)

Key words: When, by the time, after, by [time]

Past Perfect (had + past participle)

2. Complete past action with visible results in the past

- Use the past perfect tense to talk about actions which were completed in the past, and had visible results in the past.
- My hands were dirty because I had changed the tyres on my bike. (*changed tyres = past action; dirty hands = result in past*)
- My brother was annoyed because someone had broken his favourite toy. (*someone broke his toy = past action; brother was annoyed = result in past*)
- I was cold because I had not brought a coat. (*didn't bring coat = past action; I was cold = result in past*)

Past Perfect (had + past participle)

3. Past version of the present perfect

- Use the past perfect tense for situations which are in the past, which you would use the present perfect tense for if they were in the present.

I **have** never **travelled** abroad. (*current situation = present perfect*)
I **had** never **travelled** abroad until I went to England last year. (*past situation = past perfect*)

She **has** already **done** her work. (*current situation = present perfect*)
She **had** already **done** her work when she arrived. (*past situation = past perfect*)

He **has** lived in Hong Kong for several years. (*he still lives there = current situation = present perfect*)
He **had** lived in Hong Kong before he moved away. (*doesn't live there anymore = past situation = past perfect*)

Key words: Never, already, just, yet, for, since

Past Tenses: How to form

Summary

	Past Simple	Past Continuous	Past Perfect
Positive Form	Subject + past participle <i>I walked.</i>	Subject + was + present participle <i>I was walking.</i>	Subject + had + past participle <i>I had walked.</i>
Negative Form	Subject + did not + bare infinitive <i>I did not walk.</i>	Subject + was not + present participle <i>I was not walking.</i>	Subject + had not + past participle <i>I had not walked.</i>

Past Tenses: How to form

Past Simple: Positive

I	+ past participle	I worked.
You		You worked.
He/She/It		He worked. She worked. It worked.
We		We worked.
They		They worked.

Past Tenses: How to form

Past Simple: Negative

I	+ did not + bare infinitive	I did not work.
You		You did not work.
He/She/It		He did not work.
We		We did not work.
They		They did not work.

Past Tenses: How to form

Past Continuous: Positive

I	was	+ present participle	I was working,
You	were		You were working.
He/She/It	was		She was working.
We	were		We were working.
They	were		They were working.

Past Tenses: How to form

Past Continuous: Negative

I	was	+ not + present participle	I was not working.
You	were		You were not working.
He/She/It	was		She was not working.
We	were		We were not working.
They	were		They were not working.

Past Tenses: How to form

Past Perfect: Positive

I	had	+ past participle	I had worked.
You			You had worked.
He/She/It			She had worked.
We			We had worked.
They			They had worked.

Past Tenses: How to form

Past Perfect: Negative

I	had not	+ past participle	I had not worked.
You			You had not worked.
He/She/It			She had not worked.
We			We had not worked.
They			They had not worked.