

Past Forms

Past Simple

We use the past simple:

- a) for an action which happened at a definite time in the past. The time is stated, already known or implied.



They **went** camping by the lake last month. (When did they go camping? Last month. The time is stated.)

- b) for actions which happened immediately one after the other in the past.



First she **paid** the driver, then she **got out** of the taxi.

- c) for past habits or states which are now finished. In such cases we can also use the expression *used to*.



Kitchens **were/used to be** very different a hundred years ago.

The past simple is used with the following time expressions: *yesterday, then, when, How long ago ...?, last night/week/month/year/Tuesday, etc., three days/weeks, etc. ago, in 1997, etc.*

Past Continuous

We use the past continuous:

- a) for an action which was in progress at a stated time in the past. We do not mention when the action started or finished.

At seven o'clock yesterday evening they **were having** dinner. (We do not know when they started or finished their dinner.)



- b) for an action which was in progress when another action interrupted it. We use the past continuous for the action in progress (longer action) and the past simple for the action which interrupted it (shorter action).

He **was walking** down the street when he **ran into** an old friend.



- c) for two or more simultaneous past actions.

She **was talking** on her mobile phone while she **was driving** to work.



- d) to describe the atmosphere, setting, etc. in the introduction to a story before we describe the main events.

One beautiful autumn afternoon, Ben **was strolling** down a quiet country lane. The birds **were singing** and the leaves **were rustling** in the breeze.



The past continuous is used with the following time expressions: *while, when, as, all morning/evening/day/night, etc.*

Past Perfect

We use the past perfect:

- a) for an action which happened before another past action or before a stated time in the past.



She **had finished** work when she met her friends for coffee. (She finished work first and then she met her friends.)

- b) for an action which finished in the past and whose result was visible in the past.



He was happy. He **had signed** an important contract. (The action finished in the past and its result was visible in the past, too.)

Note: The past perfect is the past equivalent of the present perfect.

e.g. a) He **had fixed** the old armchair. It **looked** brand new. (The action –had fixed– happened in the past. The result –looked brand new– was also visible in the past.)

b) He **has fixed** the old armchair. It **looks** brand new. (The action –has fixed– happened in the past. The result –looks brand new– is still visible in the present.)

The past perfect is used with the following time expressions: *before, after, already, just, for, since, till/ until, when, by, by the time, never, etc.*

Note: We can use the past perfect or the past simple with *before* or *after* without any difference in meaning.

e.g. They went out *after it had stopped / stopped* raining.

Past Perfect Continuous

We use the past perfect continuous:

- a) to put emphasis on the duration of an action which started and finished in the past before another past action or a stated time in the past, usually with *since* or *for*.



They **had been looking for** a house **for** six months before they found one they liked.

- b) for an action which lasted for some time in the past and whose result was visible in the past.



Last Friday Ron had to fly to New York. His flight was delayed. He was annoyed. He **had been waiting** at the airport for three hours. (He waited at the airport for three hours and the result of the action was visible in the past, too.)

Note: The past perfect continuous is the past equivalent of the present perfect continuous.

e.g. a) I **had been driving** for ten hours, so I **felt** exhausted. (The action –had been driving– lasted for some time in the past. The result –felt exhausted– was also visible in the past.)

b) I **have been driving** for ten hours, so I **feel** exhausted. (The action –have been driving– started in the past. The result –feel exhausted– is still visible in the present.)

The past perfect continuous is used with the following time expressions: *for, since, how long, before, until, etc.*