

Unit 4: PAST TENSES

PAST SIMPLE FORM:

We make the past simple just like the *Present Simple* except we use *did* instead of *do / does*. It's really easy because *did* doesn't change, even with *he / she / it*.

The positive:

We usually make the positive by adding *-ed* to the infinitive. For example, *play* becomes *played*. However, there are some irregular verbs, for example *go* becomes *went* and *run* becomes *ran*.

- I **walked** to school.
- We **ate** dinner.
- He **was** in the garden.

The negative:

In the negative there aren't any irregular verbs. All verbs use *did not (didn't) + infinitive*.

- I **didn't walk** to school.
- We **didn't eat** dinner.
- He **wasn't** in the garden.

Questions:

Questions are also very easy. Just put *did* before the subject, and the infinitive after it.

- **Did I walk** to school?
- **Did we eat** dinner?
- **Wasn't** he in the garden.

PAST SIMPLE USE

We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past when we have a finished time word (*yesterday, last week, at 2 o'clock, in 2003*).

- I went to the cinema yesterday.
- We spent a lot of time in Japan in 2007.

We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past when we know from general knowledge that the time period has finished. This includes when the person we are talking about is dead.

- Leonardo painted the Mona Lisa.
- The Vikings invaded Britain.

We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past that we have introduced with the Present Perfect or another tense. This is sometimes called *details of news*.

- I've hurt my leg. I fell off a ladder when I was painting my bedroom.
- I've been on holiday. I went to Spain and Portugal.

For stories or lists of events, we often use the *Past Simple* for the actions in the story and the *Past Continuous* for the background.

- He went to a café. People were chatting and music was playing. He sat down and ordered a coffee.

We use the *Past Simple* to talk about things that are not real in the present or future, so we use it with the 2nd conditional and after words like *wish*.

- If I won the lottery, I would buy a house.
- I wish I had more time!

PAST CONTINUOUS FORM

You make the *Past Continuous* (also called *Past Progressive*) with the verb **be** and the **present participle** (the -ing ending).

Positive:

- I **was reading** a book.
- You **were reading** a book.

Negative:

- I **wasn't reading** a book.
- You **weren't reading** a book.

Question:

- **Was I reading** a book?
- **Were you reading** a book?

PAST CONTINUOUS USE

We use the *Past Continuous* when an action in the past overlaps another action or a time. The action in the *Past Continuous* starts before and often continues after the other shorter action or time.

- I was walking to the station when I met John.
(I started walking before I met John, and maybe I continued afterwards.)
- At three o'clock, I was working.
(I started before three o'clock and finished after three o'clock.)

In the same way, we can use the *Past Continuous* for the background of a story. (We often use the past simple for the actions.)

- The birds were singing, the sun was shining and in the cafés people were laughing and chatting. Amy sat down and took out her phone.

Past Continuous is used for temporary habits or habits that happen more often than we expect in the past. We often use *always*, *constantly* or *forever* here. This is the same as the way we use the *Present Continuous* for habits, but the habit started and finished in the past. This thing doesn't happen now.

- He was always leaving the tap running.
- She was constantly singing.

Past Continuous is used to emphasise that something lasted for a while. This use is often optional and we usually use it with time expressions like *all day* or *all evening* or *for hours*.

- I was working in the garden all day.
- He was reading all evening.

Remember you can't use this tense or any continuous tense with stative verbs.

Exercises:

- [Past Simple Exercise 1](#)
- [Past Simple Exercise 2](#)
- [Past Simple Exercise 3](#)
- [Past Simple Exercise 4](#)
- [Past Continuous Exercise 1](#)
- [Past Continuous Exercise 2](#)
- [Past Simple or Continuous Exercise 1](#)
- [Past Simple or Continuous Exercise 2](#)

PAST PERFECT FORM

Past Perfect Simple is made with *had* + the *past participle* (usually made by adding *ed* to the infinitive, but a few verbs have irregular past participles). For *Past Perfect Continuous* it's *had* + *been* (the past participle of *be*) + the *present participle* (verb-ing).

Positive:

- I **had been** (I'd been) to England.
- We **had bought** groceries.
- I **had been living** in England for three years.
- She **had been sleeping** in the living room.

(Be careful not to confuse it with *would*. *Would* is followed by the infinitive - *I'd go*, whereas *had* is followed by the past participle - *I'd gone*).

Negative:

- I **hadn't been** to England.
- We **hadn't bought** groceries.
- I **hadn't been living** in England for three years.
- She **hadn't been sleeping** in the living room.

Questions:

- When **had** you **been** to England?
- Where **had** you **bought** groceries?
- **Had** you **been living** in England for three years?
- Where **had** she **been sleeping**?

PAST PERFECT USE

Past Perfect Simple

We use *Past Perfect Simple* tense to express a finished action before a second point in the past.

- When we arrived, the film **had started** (= first the film started, then we arrived).

We usually use the *Past Perfect* to make it clear which action happened first. Maybe we are already talking about something in the past and we want to mention something else that is further back in time. It's is often used to explain or give a reason for something in the past.

- I'd eaten dinner so I wasn't hungry.
- It **had snowed** in the night, so the bus didn't arrive.

If it's clear which action happened first (if we use the words *before* or *after*, for example), the *Past Perfect* is optional.

- The film **(had) started** before we arrived.

We can also use the tense for something that started in the past and continued up to another action or time in the past. The *Past Perfect* tells us *how long*, just like the *Present Perfect*, but this time the action continues up to a point in the past rather than the present. Usually we use *for* + time. We can also use the *Past Perfect Continuous* here, so we most often use the *Past Perfect Simple* with stative verbs.

- When he graduated, he **had been** in London for six years. (= He arrived in London six years before he graduated and lived there until he graduated, or even longer.)
- On the 20th of July, I'd worked here for three months.

We use *Past Perfect* to talk about unreal or imaginary things in the past. In the same way that we use the past simple to talk about unreal or imaginary things in the present, we use the past perfect (one step back in time) to talk about unreal things in the past. This is common in the third conditional and after 'wish'.

- If I **had known** you were ill, I would have visited you.
- She would have passed the exam if she **had studied** harder.
- I wish I **hadn't gone** to bed so late!

Past Perfect Continuous

Past Perfect Continuous is used to express something that started in the past and continued up to another action or time in the past. The *Past Perfect Continuous* tells us *how long*, just like the *Present Perfect Continuous*, but this time the action continues up to a point in the past rather than the present.

- She had been working at that company for a year when she met James.
- I'd been walking for hours when I finally found the house.
- We'd been living in Berlin for three months when we had to leave.

It is also used for something that finished just before another event in the past. This is usually used to show a result at a time in the past. It's very similar to the *Past Perfect Continuous*, but the action finishes before another time in the past, rather than finishing before the present.

- The pavement was wet, it **had been raining**. (The rain had finished before the time I'm describing in the past. We could see the result of the rain.)
- The children **had been playing** and so the room was a mess!
- I'd **been working** before I saw you and that's why I was really tired.

Exercises

- [Past Perfect Exercise 1](#)
- [Past Perfect Exercise 2](#)
- [Past Perfect or Past Simple](#)
- [Past Perfect Continuous Exercise 1](#)
- [Past Perfect Continuous Exercise 2](#)
- [Past Perfect Continuous Exercise 3](#)
- [Past Perfect Continuous or Past Simple](#)