ENGLISH GRAMMAR · DEEP DIVE

Past Perfect: Putting Events in Order

The tense for the past of the past: how 'had done' lets you tell a story out of order, and the cases where English does not need it at all.

B1 · past perfect · sequence · by the time

had + participle

The earlier of two past events.

the film had started

When I arrived, the film had started.

had been + -ing

Duration up to a past moment.

had been waiting

I had been waiting an hour when she arrived.

not needed

Events told in order; before / after already show it.

I got up, had breakfast…

I finished my work before I went out.

WHERE	FORM	EXAMPLE
by the time	had + participle	By the time we arrived, they had eaten.
reported speech	have done / did → had done	He said he had finished.
third conditional	If + had done, would have done	If I had known, I would have told you.
wish / if only	regret about the past	I wish I had studied harder.

1 Past simple or past perfect?

Put the verb in brackets in the past simple or the past perfect.

1. When I arrived, the film _____ (start), so I missed the beginning.
2. She was furious: someone _____ (take) her seat.
3. By the time we got there, they _____ (eat).
4. I _____ (be) born in 1990 in Manchester.
5. I got up, _____ (have) breakfast and left the house.
6. He said he _____ (finish) the report.
7. If I _____ (know), I would have told you.
8. I wish I _____ (study) harder at school.
9. When I got home, my brother _____ (already / cook) dinner.
10. I _____ (never / see) the sea before that holiday.

2 Simple or continuous?

Write had + participle or had been + -ing.

1 I _____ (wait) an hour when she finally arrived.

2 His eyes were red because he _____ (cry).

3 I _____ (know) her for years before that.

4 The ground was wet; it _____ (rain) all night.

5 She _____ (write) three letters by lunchtime.

6 They were tired because they _____ (work) in the garden.

7 We _____ (live) there for ten years when we moved.

8 I _____ (lose) my keys, so I couldn't get in.

3 Spot the mistake

Each sentence has one mistake. Write the correct sentence on the line.

1 I had been born in 1990.

2 When I arrived, the film started, so I missed the beginning.

3 I had been knowing her for years.

4 If I would have known, I would have told you.

5 I wish I studied harder at school.

6 I got up, had had breakfast and left.

Remember The past perfect means 'before another past moment', not 'long ago': I was born in 1990, not I had been born.

4 A bad start

Put the verbs in brackets in the past simple, past perfect or past perfect continuous.

When I [1] _____ (get) to the station, the train [2] _____ (already / leave). I [3] _____ (run) all the way, so I was out of breath. I [4] _____ (forget) my phone at home, so I couldn't call anyone. By the time the next train [5] _____ (come), I [6] _____ (wait) for forty minutes. When I finally [7] _____ (arrive) at the office, the meeting [8] _____ (finish).

5 Which happened first?

In each sentence pair, sort the action into the box: earlier (past perfect) or later (past simple).

the film started | they ate | she left | I lost my keys | I arrived | we got there | I phoned her | I couldn't get in

earlier: had + participle	later: past simple

Where are the answers?

The answers, with an explanation for each one, are in the LinguaBite app. Open this Deep Dive and scroll to Downloads at the bottom of the article: once you have downloaded this worksheet, its answers appear there after a couple of days, so you do the exercises first. You can choose 1, 2 or 3 days in the app's Settings.

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