

PAST SIMPLE, PAST SIMPLE CONTINUOUS, PAST PERFECT, PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS

When should we use the **Past Simple**?

We use it whenever we want to talk about the past and we don't have any special situation that means we should use the past perfect, present perfect, past continuous etc.

Finished actions, states or habits in the past:

1: 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 Japan in 2007.

2: 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.

3: 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.

4: 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.

Unreal or imaginary things in the present or future.

5: We use the past simple to talk about things that are not real in the present or future. So we use it with the **second conditional** and after words like '**wish**'.

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

When should we use the Past Continuous?

1: An action in the past which 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.)

2: 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.) This is really a specific example of Use 1.

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

3: 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**.

4: 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**

EXERCISE - Choose the past simple or past continuous:

1. What _____ (you / do) when I _____ (call) you last night?
2. I _____ (sit) in a café when you _____ (call).
3. When you _____ (arrive) at the party, who _____ (be) there?
4. Susie _____ (watch) a film when she _____ (hear) the noise.
5. Yesterday I _____ (go) to the library, next I _____ (have) a swim, later I _____ (meet) Julie for a coffee.
6. We _____ (play) tennis when John _____ (hurt) his ankle.
7. What _____ (they / do) at 10pm last night? It _____ (be) really noisy.
8. He _____ (take) a shower when the telephone _____ (ring).
9. He _____ (be) in the shower when the telephone _____ (ring).
10. When I _____ (walk) into the room, everyone _____ (work).
11. It _____ (be) a day last September. The sun _____ (shine), the birds _____ (sing). I _____ (walk) along the street when I _____ (meet) an old friend.
12. He _____ (live) in Russia when the Revolution _____ (start).
13. When her train _____ (get) to the station, we _____ (wait) on the platform.
14. He _____ (be) so annoying! He _____ (always / leave) his things everywhere.
15. On holiday we _____ (visit) Rome, _____ (see) the Vatican, and _____ (spend) a few days at the beach.
16. Why _____ (you / stand) on a chair when I _____ (come) into the room?
17. They _____ (live) in Germany when they _____ (be) young.
18. At 7pm yesterday, we _____ (listen) to music.
19. When I _____ (leave) the house, it _____ (snow).
20. He _____ (work) in a bank when he _____ (meet) his wife.

Answers:

1. Were you doing / called
2. Was sitting / called
3. Arrived / was
4. Was watching / heard
5. Went / had/ met
6. Were playing / hurt
7. Were they doing / was
8. Was taking / rang
9. Was / rang
10. Walked / was working
11. Was / was shining /were singing /was walking / met
12. Was living /started
13. Got / were waiting
14. Was / was always leaving
15. Visited / saw /spent
16. Were you standing /came
17. Lived / were
18. Were listening
19. Left / was snowing
20. Was working / met

When should I use the Past Perfect Simple?

1: A finished action before a second point in the past.

- When we arrived, the film **had started** (= first the film started, then we arrived).
- I'd **eaten** dinner so I wasn't hungry.
- It **had snowed** in the night, so the bus didn't arrive.

2: 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.

3: To talk about **unreal or imaginary 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!

EXERCISE - Choose the past simple or the past perfect tense

- 1) We had already eaten when John _____(come) home.
- 2) Last year Juan _____(pass) all his exams.
- 3) When I _____(get) to the airport I discovered I had forgotten my passport.
- 4) I went to the library, then I _____(buy) some milk and went home.
- 5) I opened my handbag to find that I _____(forget) my credit card.
- 6) When we _____(arrive) at the station, the train had already left.
- 7) We got home to find that someone _____(break) into the house.
- 8) I opened the fridge to find that someone _____(eat) all my chocolate.
- 9) I had known my husband for three years when we _____(get) married.
- 10) Julie was very pleased to see that John _____(clean) the kitchen.
- 11) It _____(rain) all summer, so the grass was completely dead.
- 12) When he _____(arrive) at the party, Julie had just left.
- 13) After arriving home, I realised I _____(buy) any milk.
- 14) The laundry was wet - it _____(rain) while I was out.
- 15) William felt ill last night because he _____(eat) too many cakes.
- 16) Keiko _____(meet) William last September.
- 17) First I tidied the flat, then I _____(sit) down and had a cup of coffee.
- 18) John _____(play) the piano when he was a child, but he doesn't play now.
- 19) When I opened the curtains the sun was shining and the ground was white. It _____(snow) during the night.
- 20) When Julie got home from her holiday, the flat was a mess. John _____(have) a party.

Answers:

1. Had already eaten / came
2. Passed
3. Got / discovered / had forgotten
4. Went / bought / went
5. Opened / had forgotten
6. Arrived / had already left
7. Got / had broken
8. Opened / had eaten
9. Had known / got married
10. Was / had cleaned
11. Hadn't rained / was
12. Arrived / had just left
13. Realised / hadn't bought
14. Was / had rained / was
15. Felt / had eaten
16. Met
17. Tidied / sat / had
18. Played / was
19. Opened / was shining / had snowed
20. Got / was / had had

When should I use the Past Perfect Continuous?

1: 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. Usually we use 'for + time'. (We can also use the past perfect simple here, often with stative verbs.)

- 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.

2: Something that finished just before another event in the past. This is usually used to a result at a time in the past. It's very similar to the present 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.

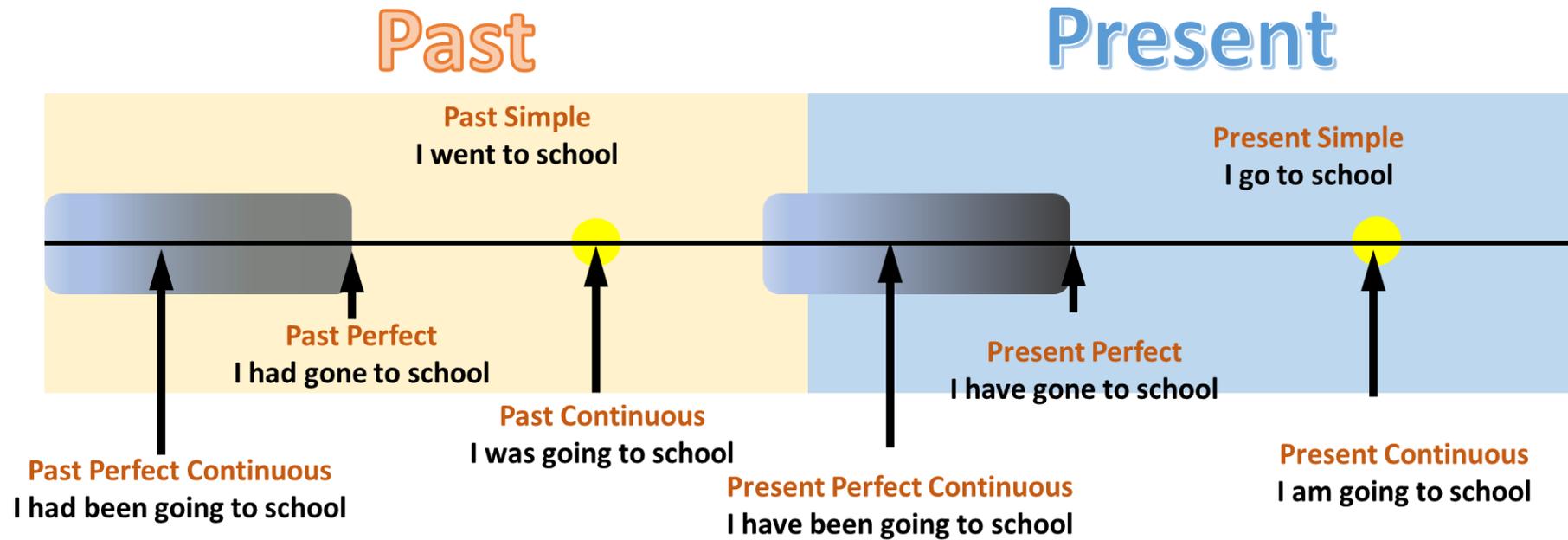
EXERCISE: Past Perfect Continuous or Past Simple

Make the past simple or the past perfect continuous.

- 1) I _____ (wait) for hours so I was really glad when the bus finally _____ (arrive).
- 2) Why _____ (be) the baby's face so dirty? He _____ (eat) chocolate.
- 3) I _____ (see) John yesterday, but he _____ (run) so he was too tired to chat.
- 4) It _____ (rain) and the pavement _____ (be) covered with puddles.
- 5) When I _____ (arrive) it was clear she _____ (work). There were papers all over the floor and books everywhere.
- 6) They _____ (study) all day so when we _____ (meet) they were exhausted.
- 7) The boss _____ (talk) to clients on Skype for hours so she _____ (want) a break.
- 8) I _____ (drink) coffee all morning. By lunchtime, I _____ (feel) really strange!
- 9) Lucy _____ (hope) for a new car, so she was really pleased when she _____ (get) one.
- 10) I _____ (dream) about a holiday in Greece. I couldn't believe it when my husband _____ (book) one as a surprise!

Answers:

1.- had been waiting / was / arrived; 2.- was / had been eating; 3.- saw / had been running; 4.- had been raining / was covered; 5.- arrived / had been working; 6.- had been studying / met; 7.- had been talking / wanted; 8.- had been drinking / felt; 9.- had been hoping / got; 10.- had been dreaming / booked



En inglés, existen cuatro tiempos verbales de pasado. Los empleamos para hablar de acciones que empezaron y terminaron en el pasado, o de acciones iniciadas en el pasado y que continúan en el presente.

- **Simple past** para acciones que empiezan y terminan en el pasado.
- **Past continuous** para acciones iniciadas en el pasado que continúan en el presente.
- **Past perfect** para acciones que empezaron y terminaron en el pasado, con anterioridad a otra acción también ocurrida en el pasado.
- **Past perfect continuous** para acciones que estaban ocurriendo en el pasado hasta que tuvo lugar otra acción.