

# PAST PERFECT

## PAST PERFECT SIMPLE

Mary arrived at the office at 8 o'clock. (simple past – used with a given time period)

If we talk about what had happened – a completed event - before Mary's arrival, we use the past perfect which is formed by **had** + past participle:

- When Mary arrived at the office, Elisabeth **had** already **drunk** her first two coffees.
- Mary didn't want to come round (last night) and watch Skyfall because she **had** already **seen** it three times.
- At first I thought it **had been** a good idea, but I later realised that it **had been** a huge mistake.

Compare:

- I **don't** know who he is. I **haven't seen** him before. (present ... present perfect)
- I **didn't** know who he was. I **hadn't seen** him before. (simple past ... past perfect)
- I'm not thirsty. I've just **had** a cup of tea. (present ... present perfect)
- I **wasn't** thirsty. I'd just **had** a cup of tea. (simple past ... past perfect)

When it is clear that we are talking about events before another past event, it isn't necessary to repeat the use of the past perfect:

- I **bought** a new LG mobile last week. I'd **had** the Samsung for ages, but the screen **began** to crack/**had begun** to crack.
- I **considered/had considered** buying an iPhone, but the price **didn't appeal/hadn't appealed** to me.
- Just after Stuart **started/had started** teaching, the student fell asleep.
- The EU leaders agreed to convene another summit, even though the previous one **failed/had failed** to deliver any results.

The past perfect is used when referring to the number of times something occurred up to a given past period:

- How often **had** you **tested** it before finally getting it to work in 2014?
- I **had tested** it only twice before deciding to launch it in 2014.

The past perfect is regularly used in reporting something that was originally stated in the simple past or present perfect.

A past event:

- “I’ve never **eaten** schnitzel before.”
- “John **lost** his wallet.”

Reporting these above statements:

- I said I **had** never **eaten** schnitzel before.
- He said he **had lost** his wallet.

The past perfect is used to describe states:

- He **had regretted** it all his life, right up until his death.

The past perfect or past simple (and often past continuous or past perfect continuous) can be used when referring to intentions which didn’t or won’t occur:

- I **had intended** to pay the invoice earlier, but I forgot. (or I **intended**..., I **was intending**..., I **had been intending**...)

## PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS

...is used to say how long something had been happening before a second event occurred:

- She’d **been working** on the report for hours when the boss told her it was no longer required.

Sometimes both past perfect and past perfect continuous can be used:

- I’d **been sleeping**/I’d **slept** so long that my back started to hurt.

... is mainly used in written texts:

- Lloyds Banking Group **had been implementing** wholesale reforms since the 2008 crash. A spokesman for the bank said Lloyds **had been restructuring** itself...

... and is used to discuss:

a **first event** or situation which occurred before a specific time and finished just prior to it:

- David **had been working** on his car engine and was covered in oil when I passed by his house yesterday evening. (second event)

a **first event** or situation which occurred before a specific time and finished at that time:

- I'd **been studying** English all evening when the fire alarms suddenly went off. (second event)

a **first event** or situation which occurred before a specific time and continued past it:

- The company presentation was a disaster (second event) because I **had been worrying** about it the whole week.

Certain verbs are not used in the continuous:

like, dislike, love, hate, adore, need, desire, want, wish, prefer, own, refuse, suppose, believe, know, seem, understand, realise, notice, recognize, mean, remember, forget, contain, consist, fit, belong, be, last, refuse, ...

'I'm lovin' it', by McDonald's, is a branding campaign and is intentionally spelt incorrectly.

Nevertheless, you may hear:

- I've been meaning to do this for ages
- He's been refusing to come out of the building for three days now.

Extracts from: **English Grammar in Use**, Raymond Murphy, 2012, Cambridge/Klett, **Eats, shoots & leaves**, Lynne Truss, 2003. Profile books Ltd and **Correct English**, J.E. Metcalfe and C. Astel, Clarion books.