

Past Perfect Progressive

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Grammar Notes

A. The Past Perfect Progressive

The past perfect progressive (also called the *past perfect continuous*) is used for discussing two past actions, where the first action continues to the second action.

The past perfect progressive is not that common in English, but it is needed occasionally in formal speaking and writing.

Tense	Past Perfect Progressive
Diagram	
Form	had + been + -ing verb
Function	Two actions occurred in the past. The first (long) action continued to the second (short) action.
Time Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by the time • when • before <p>(Note that <i>for</i> and <i>since</i> are also commonly used to indicate the duration of the first action.)</p>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had been studying for two hours by the time he called me last night. • We had been waiting for more than three weeks when the package finally arrived. • Before I completed the presentation, I had been talking for over an hour.

Note #1

When forming the past perfect in English, the independent clause uses **had + been + -ing verb** and the dependent clause takes the **simple past**.

Remember that the dependent clause can come before or after the independent clause. When it comes before the independent clause, use a comma.

- She had been talking for two hours **by the time he asked to use the phone.**
- **By the time he asked to use the phone,** she had been talking for two hours.

Grammar Notes cont.

A. The Past Perfect Progressive cont.

Note #2

Sometimes the dependent clause is just an adverb phrase of time and not a complete sentence with a past verb. Examples of typical phrases include *by July 2010*, *by 6:00 last night*, etc.

- **By August 1998**, she had been living in California for eight years.
- They had been preparing for the meeting for 24 hours **by 10:00 am yesterday**.

Note #3

The past perfect progressive is quite formal. Often, in informal speaking and writing, the past progressive can be used instead with the same meaning.

- We **had been waiting** for two hours when he arrived. (*formal*)
- We **were waiting** for two hours when he arrived. (*informal*)

Note #4

This verb tense has three parts to it! Here's how it is formed:

Past Perfect = had + past participle (e.g., *had studied*)

Progressive = be + -ing verb (e.g., *be studying*)

The Past Participle of Be (the first part of the progressive form) = been

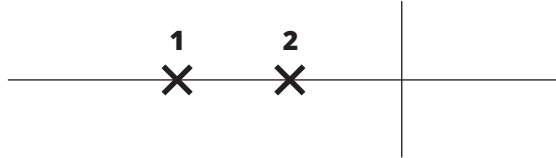
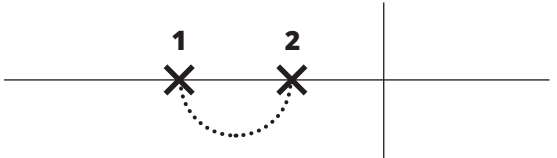
Final Result = had + been + -ing verb

Past Perfect	had +	past participle	
Progressive	↓	be +	-ing verb
Past Perfect Progressive	had +	been +	-ing verb
Example	I had been studying.		

Grammar Notes cont.

B. The Past Perfect Vs. The Past Perfect Progressive

How can we tell when the past perfect tense is needed instead of the past perfect progressive? With the past perfect, two past actions happen at different times. The first action was finished before the second one occurred. Compare these two tenses in the chart below.

Tense	Past Perfect	Past Perfect Progressive
Diagram		
Form	had + past participle	had + been + -ing verb
Function	The first past action finished before the second past action.	The first past action continued until the second past action.
Time Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by the time • when • before • after <p>(Note: The typical past markers <i>last, yesterday, and ago</i> are often additionally used.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by the time • when • before <p>(Note: The typical progressive markers <i>for and since</i> are often additionally used.)</p>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My friend had texted me five times before I answered. • I had finished dinner by the time he called me last night. • By the time she got home, someone had fixed the door. • Had you already made plans when I invited you for coffee yesterday? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My sister had been studying English for 11 years before she entered university. • We had been waiting since 5:00 pm when she finally arrived two hours later. • When he called me at midnight, I hadn't been sleeping for very long. • Had you been traveling all night by the time you got to your hotel?

Exercise 1

FILL IN THE BLANKS

Write the past perfect progressive form of the verbs in parentheses.

Ex. By the time she called me, I had been doing my homework for three hours.
(do)

1. She _____ university for six years before she graduated.
(attend)

2. He _____ for nine hours by 8:00 am.
(sleep)

3. By the time she got to my house, I _____ for ages.
(clean)

4. We _____ for 45 minutes before you joined us.
(hang out)

5. I _____ here long before I moved to a new apartment.
(live, not)

6. My friend _____ at our company for eight years before he quit.
(work)

7. The security guard _____ the building all night by the time I got to the office.
(patrol)

8. By 11:00 pm last night, we _____ for only an hour.
(sleep)

9. _____ he _____ long when she finally arrived?
(wait)

10. _____ the children _____ quietly before their mother got home?
(play)

Exercise 2

FIND THE ERROR

Find one error in each sentence and correct it on the line below.

Ex. By the time my friend arrive, I had been watching TV for two and a half hours.

By the time my friend arrived, I had been watching TV for two and a half hours.

1. My parents had traveling for six months when their motor home broke down.

2. By the time John had been getting home, his roommates had been watching the game for an hour.

3. She had been studied English for ten years when she graduated.

4. You have been playing the drums for eight years by the time you turned 18.

5. Jacob had been living in China for five months before he returns home.

6. I had been reading for half an hour by time she came over.

7. By the time my daughter turned 19, I had been teaching her to drive since three years.

8. The staff members have been working for nine hours straight by the time their manager got back to the office.

Exercise 3

PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE SENTENCES

Write sentences using the past perfect progressive tense. The first sentence should start with a dependent clause, and the second should start with an independent clause. Watch your punctuation.

Ex. We / go / on vacation / it / rain / two weeks

By the time we went on vacation, it had been raining for two weeks.

It had been raining for two weeks by the time we went on vacation.

1. They / ask / directions / they / drive around / hours

2. This time last week / Lisa / lie / in bed with the flu / six days

3. She / 25 / she / speak / three languages / for a decade

4. He / get hired / my brother / look for a job / seven months

5. They / reach / an agreement / the rival companies / negotiate / 72 hours

6. She / get / black belt / my daughter / take / karate lessons / 2011

Exercise 4

PAST PERFECT VS. PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

Write the verbs in parentheses in the past perfect or past perfect progressive tense.

- Ex. By the time my coworker bought a new car, she had been taking the bus for 11 years.
 (take)
1. My friends _____ to the party by the time I got home.
 (go)
 2. They _____ for months when their moving day finally arrived.
 (pack)
 3. Everyone _____ the office by the time I finished work.
 (leave)
 4. My son _____ at home for 18 years by the time he left for university.
 (live)
 5. When the doctor finally saw me, I _____ for an hour and a half.
 (wait)
 6. By this time last month, she _____ at this company for 12 years.
 (work)
 7. My neighbor _____ his deck for a week before I complained about the noise.
 (renovate)
 8. _____ you _____ eating before they came over?
 (finish)
 9. By the time the ceremony was over, we _____ that we wouldn't go again next year.
 (decide)
 10. _____ you _____ here long before the meeting started?
 (sit)

Exercise 6

QUIZ

Circle the correct verb tense for each sentence.

1. Mark _____ sick for an hour before his boss sent him home.
 - a) had been feeling
 - b) had been feel
 - c) had being feeling
 - d) had be feel
2. By the time our kids finished their homework, the sun _____.
 - a) had been setting
 - b) setting
 - c) set
 - d) had set
3. By the time she _____, he had already left.
 - a) calls
 - b) called
 - c) had called
 - d) had been calling
4. They _____ shopping by the time the mall closed.
 - a) hadn't finished
 - b) hadn't been finishing
 - c) are not finished
 - d) are not finishing
5. My friend had been helping me with my homework all night before she _____ asleep.
 - a) felt
 - b) falling
 - c) fell
 - d) fall
6. By the time you _____ me up, I had been sleeping for nine hours.
 - a) wake
 - b) woken
 - c) had woken
 - d) woke
7. Before I finished my report, I _____ it for over a week.
 - a) wrote
 - b) had written
 - c) am writing
 - d) had been writing
8. She _____ to get an appointment for days by the time a spot opened up.
 - a) had been trying
 - b) had tried
 - c) had trying
 - d) tried
9. They were happy that they _____ their house before the end of the year.
 - a) had selling
 - b) had sold
 - c) were sold
 - d) had been selling
10. Her dog _____ for two days by the time she took it to the vet.
 - a) hadn't be eating
 - b) had been eating
 - c) hadn't been eating
 - d) had be eating

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students learn how and when to use the past perfect progressive tense in English. It also includes exercises that combine the past perfect and past perfect progressive tenses.

LEVEL: Adv

TIME: 2 hours

TAGS: past perfect, past perfect progressive, simple past, verbs, verb tenses, mixed tenses, grammar, grammar exercises

Exercise 1

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. had been attending | 6. had been working |
| 2. had been sleeping | 7. had been patrolling |
| 3. had been cleaning | 8. had been sleeping |
| 4. had been hanging out | 9. Had, been waiting |
| 5. hadn't been living | 10. Had, been playing |

Exercise 2

1. My parents had **been** traveling for six months when their motor home broke down.
2. By the time John **got** home, his roommates had been watching the game for an hour.
3. She had been **studying** English for ten years when she graduated.
4. You **had** been playing the drums for eight years by the time you turned 18.
5. Jacob had been living in China for five months before he **returned** home.
6. I had been reading for half an hour by **the** time she came over.
7. By the time my daughter turned 19, I had been teaching her to drive **for** three years.
8. The staff members **had** been working for nine hours straight by the time their manager got back to the office.

Exercise 3

Time markers may vary.

1. By the time they asked for directions, they had been driving around for hours. / They had been driving around for hours by the time they asked for directions.
2. By this time last week, Lisa had been lying in bed with the flu for six days. / Lisa had been lying in bed with the flu for six days by this time last week.
3. By the time she was 25, she had been speaking three languages for a decade. / She had been speaking three languages for a decade by the time she was 25.
4. By the time he got hired, my brother had been looking for a job for seven months. / My brother had been looking for a job for seven months by the time he got hired.
5. By the time they reached an agreement, the rival companies had been negotiating for 72 hours. / The rival companies had been negotiating for 72 hours by the time they reached an agreement.
6. By the time she got her black belt, my daughter had been taking karate lessons since 2011. / My daughter had been taking karate lessons since 2011 by the time she got her black belt.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Exercise 4

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1. had gone | 6. had been working |
| 2. had been packing | 7. had been renovating |
| 3. had left | 8. Had, finished |
| 4. had been living | 9. had decided |
| 5. had been waiting | 10. Had, been sitting |

Exercise 5

Answers will vary.

Exercise 6

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. a) had been feeling | 6. d) woke |
| 2. d) had set | 7. d) had been writing |
| 3. b) called | 8. a) had been trying |
| 4. a) hadn't finished | 9. b) had sold |
| 5. c) fell | 10. c) hadn't been eating |

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Traveled*, *Traveling*, and *Neighbor*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Travelled*, *Travelling*, and *Neighbour*. Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spellings.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

If your students need more practice, try our Grammar Practice Worksheets lesson on the Past Perfect: <https://www.esllibrary.com/courses/88/lessons/1599>

You may also want to point out that the simple past is often substituted for (and is much more common than) the past perfect. The past progressive can replace the past perfect progressive as well. Advanced students should be able to recognize and understand these advanced verb tenses, and they may use them occasionally in formal writing, but they should probably use the simpler verb tenses in most other cases.

- I had finished eating before you came over.
- I finished eating before you came over.
- I had been studying for two hours when you called me.
- I was studying for two hours when you called me.