

# Past Perfect

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# Grammar Notes

## PAST PERFECT

### A. Introduction

The past perfect is used for two actions that occurred at different times in the past. In a past perfect sentence, the first past action (further in the past) uses the *past perfect*, and the second past action (more recent) uses the *simple past*.

Past Perfect	
Diagram	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>6:00 pm</p> <p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>X</b></p> <p>She ate dinner.</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>8:00 pm</p> <p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>X</b></p> <p>I called her.</p> </div> </div> <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She <b>had eaten</b> dinner by the time I called her.</li> <li>• By the time I called her, she <b>had eaten</b> dinner.</li> </ul> </div>
Form	had + past participle
Function	one past action happened before another past action
Time Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• by the time</li> <li>• when</li> <li>• before</li> </ul> <p>(Note that other time markers such as <i>yesterday</i>, <i>last</i>, <i>ago</i>, <i>already</i>, <i>just</i>, <i>still</i>, and <i>yet</i> are often additionally used.)</p>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone <b>had left</b> by the time I locked up.</li> <li>• I <b>had</b> already <b>sent</b> email about the missing stop sign before they fixed it.</li> <li>• By the time my girlfriend woke up, the movie <b>had ended</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Had</b> you already <b>heard</b> the news when I texted you?</li> <li>• They couldn't hand in their group project because one member <b>hadn't finished</b> her section yet.</li> </ul>

## Grammar Notes cont.

### B. Notes

#### Note #1

When the dependent (time) clause begins the sentence, we usually use a comma. We don't need a comma when the independent clause begins the sentence. There is no change in meaning.

- **By the time I graduated**, I had made many new business contacts.
- I had made many new business contacts **by the time I graduated**.

#### Note #2

Instead of a dependent clause, we can use an adverb phrase of time (note that a phrase has no subject or past verb). Examples of typical phrases include *by July 2010*, *by 6:00 last night*, *by the weekend*, etc.

- **By August 2017**, they had completed the additions to the building.
- She had already left the office **by 2:00 pm yesterday**.

#### Note #3

The past perfect action can be repeated, or there could be multiple actions before the final one.

- **I had texted my son five times** before he got back to me.
- **He had cleaned his room, made dinner, and done his homework** by the time I got home.

#### Note #4

The past perfect is not as common as the simple past. In fact, we can use the simple past instead of the past perfect, especially in informal situations (mostly when a time marker other than "by the time" is used). There is no change in meaning.

- I **had shut down** my computer before I left the house.
- I **shut down** my computer before I left the house. (*more common*)

#### Bonus:

Can you figure out the meaning of this sentence?

All the faith he had had had had no effect on the outcome of his life.

## Exercise 1

### MATCHING

Match the first part of the sentence on the left with the correct ending on the right.

- |          |  |  |
|----------|--|--|
| <u>g</u> | 1. Her plants died because...                          | a) she had lost her doll.              |
| _____    | 2. He couldn't buy the new computer because...         | b) she had left her purse at home.     |
| _____    | 3. The kids couldn't fall asleep last night because... | c) she had already left the office.    |
| _____    | 4. The little girl was crying because...               | d) he hadn't studied at all.           |
| _____    | 5. I didn't have to buy groceries because...           | e) he had spent all his money.         |
| _____    | 6. He failed his exam because...                       | f) she had forgotten to set the alarm. |
| _____    | 7. The man bought a new camera because...              | g) she hadn't watered them.            |
| _____    | 8. My sister couldn't pay for lunch because...         | h) they had watched a scary movie.     |
| _____    | 9. The woman slept late because...                     | i) I had gone shopping the day before. |
| _____    | 10. I couldn't speak to the boss because...            | j) he had lost his old one.            |

## Exercise 2

### FILL IN THE BLANKS

Write the past perfect tense of the verbs below the blanks.

Ex. The teacher had already corrected all the students' tests.  
(correct)

1. When I got to the house, Mary wasn't there. She \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(leave)
2. I didn't recognize my old classmate because she \_\_\_\_\_ so much.  
(change)
3. We missed the beginning of the movie. When we got to the theater, it \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(start)
4. I was very nervous for my first plane trip because I \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_ before.  
(fly)
5. I couldn't eat much dinner last night because I \_\_\_\_\_ such a big lunch.  
(have)
6. I couldn't make dinner yesterday. When I got to the supermarket, it \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(close)
7. Last week, our teacher gave back the essays we \_\_\_\_\_ the week before.  
(write)
8. The house was quiet when he got home. Everyone \_\_\_\_\_ to bed several hours earlier.  
(go)
9. They got to school late yesterday. The bell \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(ring)
10. Aisha couldn't come to my house last night because she \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ other plans.  
(make)
11. We couldn't find the house. It was clear that he \_\_\_\_\_ us the wrong address.  
(give)
12. Annie didn't want to come to the movie with us because she \_\_\_\_\_ it the week before.  
(see)
13. By the time the police arrived at the bank, the robber \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(escape)
14. I couldn't get into my house last night because I \_\_\_\_\_ my key.  
(forget)
15. They \_\_\_\_\_ just \_\_\_\_\_ at the resort when they heard about the incoming hurricane.  
(arrive)

## Exercise 3

### BY THE TIME

Use the prompts to make a past perfect sentence with “by the time” and “already.”

Ex. I missed my plane. (airport / plane take off)

*By the time I got to the airport, the plane had already taken off.*

---

1. I missed the show. (theater / movie start)

---

2. I couldn't get my prescription. (drugstore / close)

---

3. I couldn't say goodbye to my friends. (call their house / they leave)

---

4. I didn't get the job. (I apply / they hire someone else)

---

5. We couldn't buy the house. (we see / someone else make an offer)

---

6. The house was destroyed. (the firemen arrive / house burn down)

---

7. I didn't get to taste her chocolate cake. (I arrive / her children eat whole cake)

---

8. I didn't see her when she was sick. (I go hospital / she go home)

---

9. I didn't see the game. (I turn on TV / game finish)

---

10. I missed my daughter's performance. (I arrive concert / my daughter finish her song)

---



## Exercise 5

### PAIR WORK

#### A. Speaking

Fill in the schedule with things you did yesterday. Then, with a partner, take turns asking and answering past perfect questions with *already* and *yet*.

**Example:**

- A:** What had you already done by 3:00 pm yesterday?  
**B:** I had already gone for a jog by 3:00 pm yesterday. By 7:00 pm yesterday, what hadn't you done yet?  
**A:** By 7:00 pm yesterday, I hadn't finished my homework yet.

<b>Schedule</b>	
7:00 am	
9:00 am	
11:00 am	
12:00 pm	
1:00 pm	
3:00 pm	
5:00 pm	
7:00 pm	
9:00 pm	
11:00 pm	



## Exercise 5 cont.

### B. Writing

Write your partner's answers in the spaces below using the past perfect tense.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Exercise 7

### QUIZ

Complete the following sentences using the correct form and tense of the verb provided. Use the past perfect, present perfect, or simple past tense.

Ex. Vicky didn't get to class on time yesterday.  
(get)

By the time she arrived, the class had started.  
(arrive) (start)

1. I was disappointed when I \_\_\_\_\_ at the party last night,  
(arrive)  
because most of my friends \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ home.  
(go)
2. I \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_ to France, but I would love to go.  
(be)
3. I \_\_\_\_\_ some friends to come for dinner last night,  
(invite)  
but they couldn't come because they \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ other plans.  
(make)
4. It is still snowing. It \_\_\_\_\_ to snow last night and it \_\_\_\_\_ yet.  
(start) (not, stop)
5. I \_\_\_\_\_ to a concert last night.  
(go)  
I \_\_\_\_\_ it so much because \_\_\_\_\_ to a concert for several years.  
(enjoy) (not, go)
6. I \_\_\_\_\_ home quite late last night. My children \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ asleep.  
(get) (fall)
7. I know the new neighbors. I \_\_\_\_\_ them last week.  
(meet)
8. Last night, I \_\_\_\_\_ the evening with my friends.  
(spend)  
I wanted to go bowling because I \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_ bowling before.  
(go)
9. Dalia is still sick. She \_\_\_\_\_ a bad cold for over a week.  
(have)
10. Eduardo wants to buy a new car. He \_\_\_\_\_ this one for 12 years.  
(own)

# Answer Key

## LESSON DESCRIPTION:

Students learn how and when to use the past perfect tense in English. This lesson includes an exercise that combines the past perfect, simple past, and present perfect tenses.

**LEVEL:** High Int – Adv

**TIME:** 2 hours

**TAGS:** past perfect, simple past, present perfect, verbs, verb tenses, grammar, grammar exercises

## Grammar Notes

### B. NOTES

#### Bonus answer:

See if your students can figure out this sentence that went viral on the Internet a while back. If they can't, try explaining it to them this way:

*Think of the first part of the sentence like this: He had had a lot of faith by the time he was an old man. Think of the second part of the sentence like this: His faith had had no effect on the outcome of his life by the time he was an old man. If you join them together, and the context of age is implied, then you can get this result: All the faith he had had [subject] had had [main verb] no effect [object] on the outcome of his life.*

### Exercise 1

- |      |      |      |      |       |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. g | 3. h | 5. i | 7. j | 9. f  |
| 2. e | 4. a | 6. d | 8. b | 10. c |

### Exercise 2

- |                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. had already left    | 9. had already rung  |
| 2. had changed         | 10. had already made |
| 3. had already started | 11. had given        |
| 4. had never flown     | 12. had seen         |
| 5. had had             | 13. had escaped      |
| 6. had already closed  | 14. had forgotten    |
| 7. had written         | 15. had just arrived |
| 8. had gone            |                      |

## Exercise 3

- By the time I got to the theater, the movie had already started.
- By the time I got to the drugstore, it had already closed.
- By the time I called their house, they had already left.
- By the time I applied, they had already hired someone else.
- By the time we saw the house, someone had already made an offer.
- By the time the firemen arrived, the house had already burned down.
- By the time I arrived, her children had already eaten the whole cake.
- By the time I got to the hospital, she had already gone home.
- By the time I turned on the TV, the game had already finished.
- By the time I arrived at the concert, my daughter had already finished her song.

## Exercise 4

- ...he hadn't done well the week before.
- ...she hadn't been late before.
- ...she hadn't skied before.
- ...I hadn't seen her for years.
- ...he hadn't left the house on time.
- ...he hadn't eaten all day.
- ...it hadn't rained for weeks.
- ...she hadn't combed it all day.
- ...she hadn't slept well for several days.
- ...the movie hadn't started yet.

*(continued on the next page...)*

## Answer Key cont.

### Exercise 5

Answers will vary.

### Exercise 6

Answers will vary.

### Exercise 7

1. arrived, had already gone
2. have never been
3. invited, had already made
4. started, hasn't stopped
5. went, enjoyed, had not gone
6. got, had already fallen
7. met
8. spent, had never gone
9. has had
10. has owned

#### SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Theater* and *Neighbors*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Theatre* and *Neighbours*. 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:

For practice comparing the past perfect with the past perfect progressive tense, please see our past perfect progressive lesson: <https://esllibrary.com/courses/88/lessons/1993>