

Past Tense Verb Forms

Simple Past [VERB+ed] or irregular verbs (watched, studied, ate)

USE 1 Completed Action in the Past

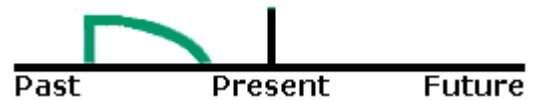
- I saw a movie yesterday.
- Last year, I traveled to Japan.



USE 2 Duration in Past

Simple Past can be used with a duration which starts and stops in the past. A duration is a longer action indicated by phrases such as: for two years, for five minutes, all day, etc.

- I lived in Brazil for two years.
- They sat at the beach all day.



USE 3 Past Facts or Generalizations

The Simple Past can also be used to describe past facts or generalizations which are no longer true. This use of the Simple Past is quite similar to the expression "used to."

- She was shy as a child, but now she is very outgoing.
- Did you live in Texas when you were a kid?



Used to - [used to + VERB]

USE Habit in the Past, "Used to" expresses the idea that something was an old habit that stopped in the past. It indicates that something was often repeated in the past, but it is not usually done now.:

- I used to start work at 9 o'clock.
- Christine used to eat meat, but now she is a vegetarian.



USE 2 Past Facts and Generalizations

"Used to" can also be used to talk about past facts or generalizations which are no longer true.

- I used to live in Paris.
- George used to be the best student in class, but now Lena is the best.



"Used to" vs. Simple Past

Both Simple Past and "Used to" can be used to describe past habits, past facts and past generalizations; however, "used to" is preferred when emphasizing these forms of past repetition in positive sentences. On the other hand, when asking questions or making negative sentences, Simple Past is preferred.

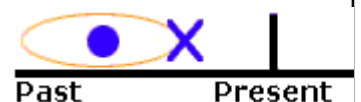
- You **used to play** the piano.
- **Did you play** the piano when you were young?
- You **did not play** the piano when you were young.

Past Perfect [had + past participle]

USE 1 Completed Action Before Something in the Past

The Past Perfect expresses the idea that something occurred before another action in the past. It can also show that something happened before a specific time in the past.

- I did not have any money because I **had lost** my wallet.
- **Had** Susan ever **studied** Thai before she moved to Thailand?



USE 2 Duration Before Something in the Past

With Non-Continuous Verbs we use the Past Perfect to show that something started in the past and continued up until another action in the past.

- We **had had** that car for ten years before it broke down.
- They felt bad about selling the house because they **had owned** it for more than forty years



Past Continuous [was/were + present participle]

USE 1 Interrupted Action in the Past

Use the Past Continuous to indicate that a longer action in the past was interrupted. The interruption is usually a shorter action in the Simple Past. Remember this can be a real interruption or just an interruption in time.

- I was watching TV when she called.
- When the phone rang, she was writing a letter.
- While we were having the picnic, it started to rain.



USE 2 Parallel Actions

When you use the Past Continuous with two actions in the same sentence, it expresses the idea that both actions were happening at the same time. The actions are parallel.

- I was studying while he was making dinner.
- While Ellen was reading, Tim was watching television.
- I wasn't paying attention while I was writing the letter, so I made several mistakes.

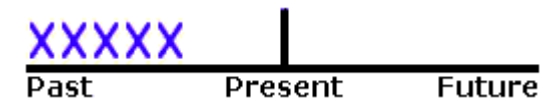


USE 3 Repetition and Irritation with "Always"

The Past Continuous with words such as "always" or "constantly" expresses the idea that something irritating or shocking often happened in the past. The concept is very similar to the expression "used to" but with negative emotion.

Remember to put the words "always" or "constantly" between "be" and "verb+ing."

- She was always coming to class late.
- He was constantly talking. He annoyed everyone.
- I didn't like them because they were always complaining.

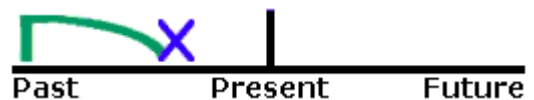


Past Perfect Continuous [had been + present participle]

USE 1 Duration Before Something in the Past

We use the Past Perfect Continuous to show that something started in the past and continued up until another time in the past. "For five minutes" and "for two weeks" are both durations which can be used with the Past Perfect Continuous.

- They had been talking for over an hour before Tony arrived.
- She had been working at that company for three years when it went out of business.
- How long had you been waiting to get on the bus?



USE 2 Cause of Something in the Past

Using the Past Perfect Continuous before another action in the past is a good way to show cause and effect.

- Jason was tired because he had been jogging.
- Sam gained weight because he had been overeating.
- Betty failed the final test because she had not been attending class.



Past Continuous vs. Past Perfect Continuous

If you do not include a duration such as "for five minutes," "for two weeks" or "since Friday," many English speakers choose to use the Past Continuous rather than the Past Perfect Continuous. Be careful because this can change the meaning of the sentence. Past Continuous emphasizes interrupted actions, whereas Past Perfect Continuous emphasizes a duration of time before something in the past.

- He was tired because he was exercising so hard.
This sentence emphasizes that he was tired because he was exercising at that exact moment.
- He was tired because he had been exercising so hard.
This sentence emphasizes that he was tired because he had been exercising over a period of time. It is possible that he was still exercising at that moment OR that he had just finished.

