

Past Tense

Past Indefinite Tense

The past indefinite tense, also known as simple past tense, is used to indicate a **finished or completed** action/task that occurred/happened at a **specific point in time** in the past. 'A specific time' can be diverse and can cover a long period of time. Unlike the past continuous tense, which is used to talk about past events that happened over a period of time, the simple past tense emphasizes that the action is finished.

Structure:

Subject + verb in the past form +

For example, we use the past simple tense to talk about:

- something that happened **once in the past**:

*I **met** my wife in 1983.*

*We **went** to Spain for our holidays.*

*They **got** home very late last night.*

- something that happened **several times in the past (past habits or routine)**:

*When I was a boy, I **walked** a mile to school every day.*

*We **swam** a lot while we were on holiday.*

*They always **enjoyed** visiting their friends.*

- something that was **true for some time in the past**:

*I **lived** abroad for ten years.*

*He **enjoyed** being a student.*

*She **played** a lot of tennis when she was younger.*

- we often use **expressions with ago** with the past simple:

*I **met** my wife **a long time ago**.*

Past simple to refer to present or future

We can also use the past simple to refer to the **present or future in hypotheses** (when we wish or imagine something).

Wishes

We use the verb **wish** or the phrase **if only** to talk about things which we want but which are not possible:

- **I wish** *I could see you next week.*
- **If only** *we could stop for a drink.*
- **I wish** *we had a bigger house.*
- *They are always busy. **If only** they had more time.*
- *John was very lazy at school. Now **he wishes** he had worked harder.*

We use past tense **modals would** and **could** to talk about **wishes for the future**:

- *I don't like my work. **I wish I could** get a better job.*
- *That's a dreadful noise. **I wish it would** stop.*
- *I always have to get home early. **If only my parents would** let me stay out later.*

After **I/he/she/it**, we can use **were instead of was**:

***I wish I was/were** taller.*

***John wishes he wasn't/weren't** so busy.*

***I'm freezing. If only it wasn't/weren't** so cold.*

Hypotheses (things we imagine)

When we are talking about hypotheses, we use expressions like:

<i>what if ...</i>	<i>?in case</i>	<i>suppose (that)</i>	<i>supposing (that)</i>	<i>imagine (if/that)</i>
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With **past tense forms** to talk about the **present** or **future** to suggest something is **not likely** to be true or to happen:

- **Imagine you won** the lottery. *What would you do with the money?*
 - **What if he lost** his job? *What would happen then?*
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We use modals *would* and *could* for a **hypothesis** about the **present or future**:

- *Drive carefully or you could have an accident.*

To show politeness

In conversation, we often use the simple past tense of the verbs to show **politeness**:

- **Did** you **want** cream with your coffee, sir?
- **Could** you **get** me another glass of water, please?
- **Would** you please **shut** the door?

Present Progressive (Continuous) Tense

The **past progressive tense** is used to demonstrate an action that **was happening** in the past for a period of time in a particular context. The context can be a specific time or another action.

Structures:

Subject + was/were + verb + *ing* + a specific time

Alex was sleeping yesterday at 6.30 AM

I was cleaning the dishes at around 5.30-6.30 yesterday.

When + subject + simple past tense + subject + was/were + verb+*ing*

When I went out, you were shouting from behind.

When Alex came, I was sleeping.

Subject + was/were + verb+*ing* + when + subject + simple past tense

You were shouting from behind when I went outside.

I was sleeping when Alex came home.

While + subject + was/were + verb+*ing* + subject + was/were + verb+*ing*

While I was sleeping, you were making noises.

While Alex was playing, I was sleeping.

Note:

➤ *While* can also be placed between the two clauses, and one of the clauses can be of simple past tense.

- **While she was waiting** for Walter, **Molly noticed** something fishy.

➤

We do **not** normally use the past continuous with **stative verbs**. We use the **past simple** instead:

- *When I got home, I really **needed** (NOT ~~was needing~~) a shower.*

Past continuous to refer to present or future

We can also use the past continuous to refer to the **present or future in hypotheses** (when we imagine something).

- **I wish I were travelling** with you tomorrow.
- *Excuse me, I was wondering if this was the train for York.*

Past Perfect Tense

The past perfect is made from the verb **had** and the **past participle** of a verb. The past perfect is used to demonstrate an action that occurred before another action in the past. There are usually two completed actions in the sentence; one happens before the other.

Structures:

Subject + had + past participle form of the main verb + before + subject + simple past tense

Alex had completed the task before the teacher asked.
I had bought a phone before you came here.

Before + subject + simple past tense + subject + had + past participle form of the verb + . . .

Before I went to the office, I had finished some business with her.
Before she went home, she had taken a test.

Subject + simple past tense + after + subject + had + past participle

Mark ate after I had bought him a hat.
I went to the office after I had finished some business with her.

After + subject + had + past participle + subject + simple past tense

After I had bought a phone, she came to the shop.
After she had gone, I came in.

Note: **When** can be used in place of **before** or **after** in any of the above structures.

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We also use the past perfect:

- for something that **started in the past** and **continued up to a given time in the past**:
 - *When George died, he and Anne **had been married** for nearly fifty years.*
 - *She didn't want to move. She **had lived** in Liverpool all her life.*
- when we are **reporting our experience up to a point in the past**:
 - *My eighteenth birthday was the worst day I **had ever had**.*
 - *I was pleased to meet George. I **hadn't met** him before, even though I **had met** his wife several times.*

- for something that **happened in the past and is important at a later time in the past**:
 - *I couldn't get into the house. I **had lost** my keys.*
 - *Teresa wasn't at home. She **had gone** shopping.*
- We often use **expressions with for and since** with the past perfect:
 - *I was sorry when the factory closed. I **had worked** there **for ten years**.*
 - *I **had been watching** that programme every week **since it started**, but I missed the last episode.*

Note: We use **For** when we measure the duration – when we say how long something lasts. For example, five minutes, two weeks, six years, ages etc. On the other hand, **Since** gives the starting point of actions, events or states. It refers to when things began. For example, 9 o'clock, 1st January, Monday, last night etc.

Past perfect and hypotheses

We can also use the past perfect to make **hypotheses about the past** (when we imagine something).

- We use the **past perfect** to talk about **wishes for the past**:

*I wish I **had worked** harder when I was at school.*

*Mary wishes she **had listened** to what her mother told her.*

*I wish I **hadn't spent** so much money last month.*

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Past Perfect Progressive (Continuous)

The **past perfect progressive tense** is an extension to the past perfect tense and its structures. Past perfect progressive is used to demonstrate an action which continued for a specific period of time but stopped before another action.

Structure:

Subject + had + been + verb+ing + + for/since +

Alan had been playing cricket for 18 years before he retired.

Jack had been living in Sydney since 2010.

We often use the past perfect continuous:

- for something that **started in the past and continued up to a given time in the past**:

*She didn't want to move. She **had been living** in Liverpool all her life.
Everything was wet. It **had been raining** for hours.*

- for something that **happened several times before a point in the past and continued after that point:**

*He was a wonderful guitarist. He **had been playing** ever since he was a teenager.
He **had written** three books and he was working on another one.*

- when we are **reporting our experience up to a point in the past:**

*My eighteenth birthday was the worst day I **had ever had**.
I was pleased to meet George. I **hadn't met** him before, even though I **had met** his
wife several times.*

- for something that **happened in the past and is important at a later time in the past:**

*I couldn't get into the house. I **had lost** my keys.
Teresa wasn't at home. She **had gone** shopping.*

Note: We do **not** normally use the past perfect continuous with **stative verbs**. We use the **past perfect simple** instead:

*Up until that moment, I'd never **believed** (NOT ~~been believing~~) in astrology.*