

- 2 to express actions which follow each other in a story.

*I **heard** voices coming from downstairs, so I **put on** my dressing gown and **went** to investigate.*

- 3 to express a past state or habit.

*When I was a child, we **lived** in a small house by the sea. Every day, I **walked** for miles on the beach with my dog.*

Past Continuous

The Past Continuous is used:

- 1 to express an activity in progress before and probably after a time in the past.

*I **phoned** at 4.00, but you **didn't** answer. What **were** you **doing**?*

- 2 to set the scene of a past situation or activity.

*The cottage **was looking** so cosy. A fire **was burning** in the grate, music **was playing**, and from the kitchen **were coming** the most delicious smells.*

- 3 to express an interrupted past activity.

*I **was having** a bath when the phone rang.*

- 4 to express an incomplete activity in the past.

*I **was reading** a book during the flight. (But I didn't finish it.)
Compare: I **watched** a film during the flight. (the whole film)*

- 5 to express an activity that was in progress at every moment during a period of time.

*I **was working** all day yesterday.
They **were fighting** for the whole of the holiday.*

Notes

- The Past Simple expresses past actions as simple, complete facts. The Past Continuous gives past activities' time and duration.

*'What did you do last night?'
'I **stayed** at home and **watched** the football.'
'I **phoned** you last night, but there was no reply.'
'Oh, I **was watching** the football and my phone was off. Sorry.'*

- Notice how these questions and answers in the Past Continuous and Past Simple refer to different times.

*When we arrived, Jan was ironing. She stopped ironing and made some coffee.
What **was** she **doing** when we arrived? She **was ironing**.
What **did** she **do** when we arrived? She **made** some coffee.*

Past Perfect

The Past Perfect is used when we look back to a time in the past and refer to an action that happened before then.

*Keith was fed up. He'd **been looking** for a job for months, but he'd **found** nothing.*

Notes

- The continuous refers to longer actions or repeated activities. The simple refers to shorter, complete facts.

*He'd **lost** his job and his wife **had left** him. Since then he'd **been sleeping** rough, and he **hadn't been eating** properly.*

- The Past Perfect can refer to definite as well as indefinite time.

*I knew his face immediately. I'd first met him **in October 1993**. (= definite)
I recognized her face. I'd seen her somewhere **before**. (= indefinite)*

Past Perfect and Past Simple

- 1 Verbs in the Past Simple tell a story in chronological order.

*John **worked** hard all day to prepare for the party. Everyone **had** a good time. Even the food **was** all right. Unfortunately, Andy **upset** Peter, so Peter **left** early. Pat **came** looking for Peter, but he **wasn't** there.
It **was** a great party. John **sat** and **looked** at all the mess. He **felt** tired. It **was** time for bed.*

- 2 By using the Past Perfect, the speaker or writer can tell a story in a different order.

*John sat and looked at all the mess. It **had been** a great party, and everyone **had had** a good time. Even the food **had been** all right. Unfortunately, Nick upset Pete, so Pete left early. Dave came looking for Peter, but he'd already **gone**.
John felt tired. He'd **been working** all day to prepare for the party. It was time for bed.*

Note

For reasons of style, it is not necessary to have every verb in the Past Perfect.

*... Nick **upset** Pete ... Pete **left** ...*

Once the time of 'past in the past' has been established, the Past Simple can be used as long as there is no ambiguity.

3.2 Time clauses

- 1 We can use time conjunctions to show that two actions happened one after the other. Usually the Past Perfect is not necessary in these cases, although it can be used.

*After I'd **had/had** a bath, I went to bed.
As soon as the guests **left/had left**, I started tidying up. I sat outside until the sun **had gone/went** down.*

- 2 The Past Perfect can emphasize that the first action was completed before the second action started.

*When I **had read** the paper, I threw it away.
We stayed up until all the beer **had gone**.*

- 3 Two verbs in the Past Simple can suggest that the first action led into the other, or that one caused the other to happen.

*When I **heard** the news, I **burst** out crying.
As soon as the alarm **went off**, I **got up**.*

- 4 The Past Perfect is more common with *when* because it is ambiguous. The other conjunctions are more specific, so the Past Perfect is not so essential.

*As soon as all the guests **left**, I tidied the house.
Before I **met** you, I **didn't** know the meaning of happiness.
When I **opened** the door, the cat jumped out.
When I'd **opened** the mail, I made another cup of tea.*

See Unit 11 for information on the Past Perfect used for hypothesis.

Unit 4

4.1 Questions

Question forms

Notice these question forms.

- Subject questions with no auxiliary verb

*Who **broke** the window?
What **happens** at the end of the book?*