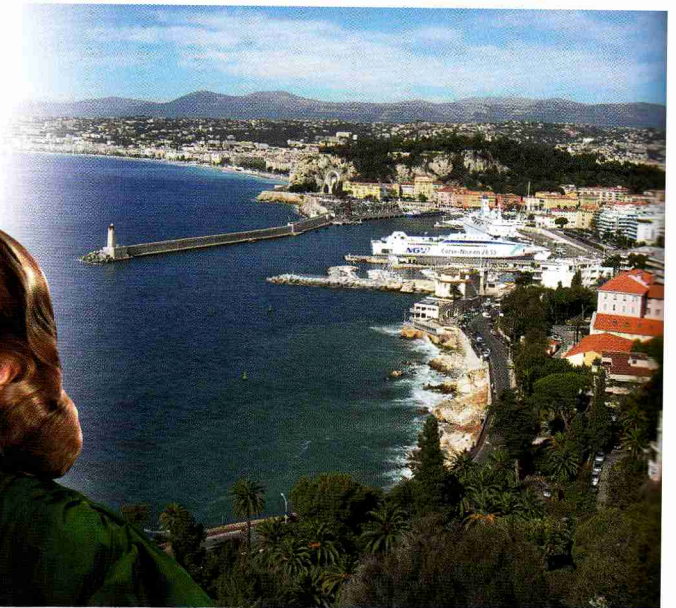
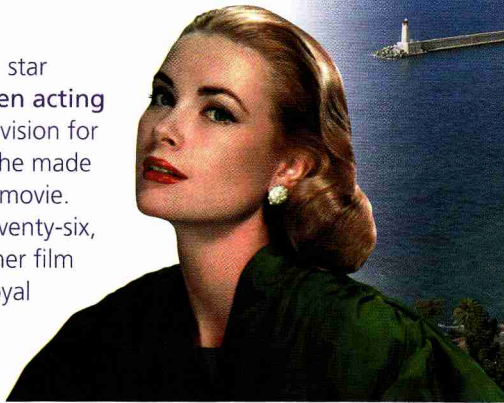


22 Past perfect simple and continuous

Award-winning film star Grace Kelly **had been** acting on stage and in television for three years before she made her first Hollywood movie. But by the age of twenty-six, she **had given up** her film career to live as a royal princess in Monaco.



1 Actions and situations before a time in the past

We use the past perfect simple to describe a single action, or repeated actions, completed before a time in the past:

*The new owners found that the timbers **had been patched up** several times.*

We often include a specific time reference, such as a clause with *when* or *by the time*:

*By the age of twenty-six, Grace Kelly **had given up** her film career.*

We also use this form to describe a situation which existed before a past event:

*At the time of her trial last year, Hinkley **had been** in prison for eight months.*

We use the past perfect continuous to describe an ongoing situation or action which continued up to, or stopped just before, a time in the past, often with *before* or *by the time*:

*Grace Kelly **had been acting** for three years before she made her first movie.*

We often use the continuous with *for* or *since* when we want to focus on the duration of an action:

*Kubrick **had been trying** to get the film made for more than twenty years.*

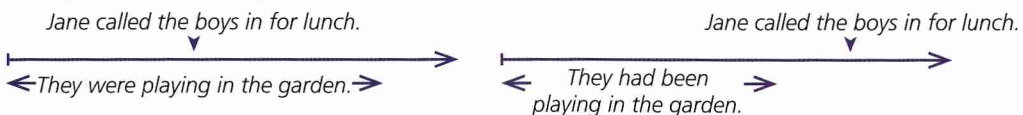
*The eager fans **had been waiting** in line for over six hours/since the early hours of the morning.*

We don't usually use the past perfect continuous for actions and background situations still continuing at the same time as the past simple narrative. We prefer to use the past continuous:

*We **were living** in New York when John was made redundant.*

(an ongoing situation at the time of the redundancy)

Compare these examples:



2 Completed and ongoing actions

The past perfect simple often refers to a completed action, whereas the past perfect continuous may refer to an action that was still ongoing at the time of the statement:

*The leaves **had fallen** from the trees early that year and they were completely bare.*

*The leaves **had been falling** from the trees and the ground underfoot was very slippery.*

We do not mention the number of times that we have done an action when we use the past perfect continuous:

~~✗ Jill **had only been watching** TV twice that week.~~

✓ Jill **had only watched** TV twice that week. (repeated action: past perfect simple)