X

The past perfect

The past perfect tense is a verb tense used to indicate an action that was completed before another past action or point in time. It is formed by using the **past participle** of the main verb and the auxiliary verb **"had.“**

Forming the Past Perfect: The basic structure of the past perfect tense is as follows:
Affirmative: Subject + had + past participle of the main verb (e.g., She had finished).
Negative: Subject + had + not (hadn't) + past participle (e.g., They hadn't eaten).
Question: Had + subject + past participle (e.g., Had you seen it?).

Past Participle: The past participle of regular verbs is formed by adding **"ed"** to the infinitive form (e.g., **work → worked**, **play → played**). Irregular verbs have their own unique past participles (e.g., **go → gone, see → seen**).

Using the Past Perfect:
Actions Completed Before a Specific Past Point: The past perfect is used to describe an action that occurred and was completed before a specific point in the past. In this example below, it helps establish the chronological order of events.

- By the time I arrived, **they had already eaten** most of the pizza.



Narrating Past Events out of Sequence: When telling a story or describing events in the past, the past perfect can be used to show that a specific event happened before others, even if the events are not presented in chronological order.
Example:
- **She had never been** to New York before she visited last summer.

Hypothetical Situations in the Past: The past perfect can be used to talk about hypothetical situations that didn't actually happen in the past. It often appears in "if" clauses.
Example: If **I had known** you were coming, I would have baked a cake (3rd conditional).

Emphasizing the Duration of an Action: Sometimes, the past perfect is used to emphasise the duration of an action that happened before another past event.
Example:
- **He had lived** in Paris for five years before he moved to London.

Time Expressions with Past Perfect:
Before, after, by the time, already, just, never, by then, until, as soon as, once, etc., are commonly used with the past perfect to indicate the sequence of events.

Contrasting Past Perfect and Simple Past: It's important to distinguish between the past perfect and simple past. The simple past is used for actions that happened at a specific time in the past, while the past perfect is used to indicate an action completed before another past action or point in time.

Examples contrasting simple past and past perfect:
Simple Past: She finished her work and then went to bed.
Past Perfect: She had finished her work before she went to bed.

The past perfect exercise 1:

Choose the correct answer

1. By the time I arrived, they _____ **(finish)** all the cake.
a) finished
b) has finished
c) had finished

2. When we got to the movie theater, the film _____ **(already start)**.
a) had already starts
b) had already started
c) already started

3. Before she moved to London, she _____ **(live)** in Berlin for five years.
a) had live
b) has lived
c) had lived

4. When he checked his email, he saw that he _____ **(receive)** a job offer.
a) receives
b) had received
c) is receiving

5. Before he met his wife, he _____ **(never travel)** outside the country.
a) never travels
b) has never travelled
c) had never travelled

6. By the time the party ended, most of the guests _____ **(leave)**.
a) had leaved
b) have left
c) had left

7. She realised she _____ **(forget)** her phone at home when she got to the office.
a) had forgotten
b) has forgotten
c) forgets

8. Before they got married, they _____ **(date)** for five years.
a) dates
b) have dated
c) had dated

9. They didn't recognise her because she _____ **(change)** her hairstyle.
a) had changed
b) had change
c) has changed

10. They realised they _____ the wrong bus after it had already left.
a) had taken
b) taking
c) had took

The past perfect exercise 2:

Complete the sentences with the past perfet form of the verb in brackets.

1. She was exhausted because she _____ **(work)** for 12 hours straight.

2. When he woke up, he realised he _____ **(forget)** to set his alarm.

3. After the storm passed, we saw that the tree _____ **(fall)** on the road.

4. By the time he reached the summit, he _____ **(climb)** several peaks.

5. She was relieved because she _____ **(find)** her lost phone.

6. Before he started the job, he _____ **(gain)** a lot of experience in the field.

7. He was upset because someone _____ **(steal)** his bicycle.

8. She didn't know the answer because she _____ (**not understand)** the question.

9. By the time we arrived at the beach, the sun _____ **(set)**.

10. By the time he got to the airport, the flight _____ **(already leave)**.



The past perfect: answer key

Grammar practice · B1 Intermediate

Where two or more answers are given, any of them is correct.

Exercise 1

1. c) had finished
2. b) had already started
3. c) had lived
4. b) had received
5. c) had never travelled
6. c) had left
7. a) had forgotten
8. c) had dated
9. a) had changed
10. a) had taken

Exercise 2

1. had worked
2. had forgotten
3. had fallen
4. had climbed
5. had found
6. had gained
7. had stolen
8. had not understood / hadn't understood
9. had set
10. had already left