Past Perfect

The past perfect is a verb tense which is used to show that an action took place once or many times before another point in the past.

Past Perfect Forms

The past perfect is formed using ***had* + past participle**. Questions are indicated by inverting the subject and *had*. Negatives are made with *not*.

- Statement: You **had studied** English before you moved to New York.
- Question: **Had** you **studied** English before you moved to New York?
- Negative: You **had** not **studied** English before you moved to New York.

Past Perfect Uses

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.

Examples:

- I **had** never **seen** such a beautiful beach before I went to Kauai.
- I did not have any money because I **had lost** my wallet.
- Tony knew Istanbul so well because he **had visited** the city several times.
- **Had** Susan ever **studied** Thai before she moved to Thailand?
- She only understood the movie because she **had read** the book.
- Kristine **had** never **been** to an opera before last night.
- We were not able to get a hotel room because we **had not booked** in advance.
- A: **Had** you ever **visited** the U.S. before your trip in 2006?
  B: Yes, I **had been** to the U.S. once before.

USE 2 Duration Before Something in the Past (Non-Continuous Verbs)



With non-continuous verbs and some non-continuous uses of mixed verbs, we use the past perfect to show that something started in the past and continued up until another action in the past.

Examples:

- We **had had** that car for ten years before it broke down.
- By the time Alex finished his studies, he **had been** in London for over eight years.
- They felt bad about selling the house because they **had owned** it for more than forty years.

Although the above use of past perfect is normally limited to non-continuous verbs and non-continuous uses of mixed verbs, the words "live," "work," "teach," and "study" are sometimes used in this way even though they are NOT non-continuous verbs.

IMPORTANT Specific Times with the Past Perfect



Unlike with the present perfect, it is possible to use specific time words or phrases with the past perfect. Although this is possible, it is usually not necessary.

Example:

- She **had visited** her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.

MOREOVER

If the past perfect action did occur at a specific time, the simple past can be used instead of the past perfect when "before" or "after" is used in the sentence. The words "before" and "after" actually tell you what happens first, so the past perfect is optional. For this reason, both sentences below are correct.

Examples:

- She **had visited** her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.
- She **visited** her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.

HOWEVER



If the past perfect is not referring to an action at a specific time, past perfect is not optional. Compare the examples below. Here past perfect is referring to a lack of experience rather than an action at a specific time. For this reason, simple past cannot be used.

Examples:

- She never **saw** a bear before she moved to Alaska. *Not Correct*

- She **had** never **seen** a bear before she moved to Alaska. *Correct*

ADVERB PLACEMENT

The examples below show the placement for grammar adverbs such as: always, only, never, ever, still, just, etc.

Examples:

- You had **previously** studied English before you moved to New York.
- Had you **previously** studied English before you moved to New York?

ACTIVE / PASSIVE

Examples:

- George **had repaired** many cars before he received his mechanic's license. *Active*
- Many cars **had been repaired** by George before he received his mechanic's license. *Passive*

Practice

Using the words in parentheses, complete the text below with the appropriate tenses,

- I can't believe I (get) _____ that apartment. I (submit) _____ my application last week, but I didn't think I had a chance of actually getting it. When I (show) _____ up to take a look around, there were at least twenty other people who (arrive) _____ before me. Most of them (fill, already) _____ out their applications and were already leaving. The landlord said I could still apply, so I did.

  I (try) _____ to fill out the form, but I couldn't answer half of the questions. They (want) _____ me to include references, but I didn't want to list my previous landlord because I (have) _____ some problems with him in the past and I knew he wouldn't recommend me. I (end) _____ up listing my father as a reference.

  It was total luck that he (decide) _____ to give me the apartment. It turns out that the landlord and my father (go) _____ to high school together. He decided that I could have the apartment before he (look) _____ at my credit report. I really lucked out!