

13 The past perfect simple

English uses the past perfect simple with the past simple to talk about two or more events that happened at different times in the past.

See also:

Past simple **7** Present perfect simple **11**
Past perfect continuous **14** Participles **51**

13.1 THE PAST PERFECT SIMPLE

When talking about two events that happened at different times in the past, the past simple describes the event that is closest to the time of speaking. The past perfect describes an event further back in the past.

PAST PERFECT SIMPLE PAST SIMPLE

The train **had left** before we **arrived** at the station.



8:10PM



8:20PM

NOW

Pablo **had gone** to work when I **knocked** on his door.



7:00AM



7:30AM

NOW

HOW TO FORM

Use "had" followed by the past participle to form the past perfect.

SUBJECT

"HAD"

PAST PARTICIPLE

REST OF SENTENCE

The train

had

left

before we arrived at the station.

"Had" does not change with the subject.

The past participle expresses the action in the past.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

He **had cooked** dinner before Sally **got back** from work.



The traffic **was** bad because a car **had broken down** on the road.



She **had** already **read** the play by the time she **went** to see it.



When we **arrived** at the stadium, the game **had** already **started**.



Even if the past simple action is first in the sentence, it still happened later.

13.2 THE PRESENT PERFECT AND PAST PERFECT

PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE

The present perfect is used to talk about an action that took place in the recent past and is still relevant to the present moment.



ONE HOUR AGO



NOW

I'm so excited.
I have just passed
my driving test.

PAST PERFECT SIMPLE

The past perfect is used to talk about an action that took place before another moment in the past.



ONE HOUR BEFORE



PAST



NOW

I was so excited.
I had just passed
my driving test.