

## Past Time

### **1) The Simple Past Tense**

The simple past tense is used to describe actions or events that happened and were completed at a specific time in the past. Here are some common situations where we use the simple past tense:

- **Completed Actions in the Past:**  
To talk about actions that started and finished in the past.  
Example: *I visited Paris last year.*
- **Series of Completed Actions:**  
To list a series of actions that happened one after the other.  
Example: *She woke up, brushed her teeth, and went to work.*
- **Duration in the Past:**  
To describe something that happened over a period of time in the past.  
Example: *He lived in Japan for five years.*
- **Habits in the Past:**  
To talk about habits or routines that were true in the past but are no longer true.  
Example: *When I was a child, I played soccer every weekend.*
- **Past Facts or Generalizations:**  
To state facts or generalizations about the past.  
Example: *Dinosaurs roamed the Earth millions of years ago.*
- **Specific Time in the Past:**  
When the action happened at a specific time in the past, often indicated by time expressions like “yesterday,” “last week,” “in 2003,” etc.  
Example: *She graduated from university in 2010.*

### **2) The Past Progressive Tense**

The past progressive tense, also known as the past continuous tense, is used to describe actions that were ongoing at a specific time in the past. Here are some common scenarios where you might use it:

- **Interrupted Actions:**  
To describe an action that was happening when another action occurred.  
Example: *I was reading a book when the phone rang.*
- **Parallel Actions:**  
To describe two actions that were happening at the same time.

Example: *While she was cooking, he was setting the table.*

- **Setting the Scene:**

To provide background information or set the scene for another action.

Example: *The sun was setting, and the birds were singing.*

- **Repeated Actions:**

To describe actions that were repeated over a period of time in the past.

Example: *He was always losing his keys.*

### **Sample Questions:**

Here are some multiple-choice questions to help students practice choosing between the simple past and past progressive tenses:

1. While I \_\_\_\_\_ (drive), I \_\_\_\_\_ (see) an old friend walking down the street.

- a) was driving, saw
- b) drove, saw
- c) was driving, was seeing
- d) drove, was seeing

2. They \_\_\_\_\_ (play) soccer when it suddenly \_\_\_\_\_ (start) to rain.

- a) played, started
- b) were playing, started
- c) were playing, was starting
- d) played, was starting

3. She \_\_\_\_\_ (read) a book when I \_\_\_\_\_ (call) her.

- a) read, called
- b) was reading, called
- c) read, was calling
- d) was reading, was calling

4. While we \_\_\_\_\_ (have) dinner, the phone \_\_\_\_\_ (ring).

- a) had, rang
- b) were having, rang
- c) had, was ringing
- d) were having, was ringing

5. He \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) TV when his mother \_\_\_\_\_ (come) home.

- a) watched, came
- b) was watching, came
- c) watched, was coming
- d) was watching, was coming

6. As soon as they \_\_\_\_\_ (arrive), we \_\_\_\_\_ (start) the meeting.

- a) were arriving, started
- b) arrived, started
- c) arrived, were starting
- d) were arriving, were starting

7. I \_\_\_\_\_ (hear) a strange noise while I \_\_\_\_\_ (work) on my computer.

- a) heard, was working
- b) was hearing, worked
- c) heard, worked
- d) was hearing, was working

8. The teacher \_\_\_\_\_ (talk) when the student \_\_\_\_\_ (raise) his hand.

- a) talked, raised
- b) was talking, raised
- c) talked, was raising
- d) was talking, was raising

- 1. a
- 2. b
- 3. b
- 4. b
- 5. b
- 6. b
- 7. a
- 8. b

### 3) The Present Perfect Tense

We can use the present perfect tense to talk about an experience in the past.

Examples:

*I have gone to the zoo twice in my entire life.*

*They have eaten lunch.*

**Point:**

*I have **been to** London.* ⇒ I have visited London as a tourist.

*I have **been in** London.* ⇒ I have lived in London as a citizen.

#### The Difference between the Present Perfect Simple and Progressive:

When we use the present perfect simple to describe an action in the past, we usually imply that the action is finished. But when we use the present perfect progressive to describe an action, we imply the action has not finished yet and it is still in progress.

*They have eaten their lunch.* ⇒ **Finished Action:** They are not eating lunch now.

*They have been eating lunch.* ⇒ **Unfinished Action:** They are still eating lunch.

Here are some multiple-choice questions to help advanced students practice distinguishing between the present perfect simple and the present perfect progressive:

1. She \_\_\_\_\_ (write) that book for years, but she still \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) it.

- a) has been writing, hasn't finished
- b) has written, hasn't finished
- c) has been writing, hasn't been finishing
- d) has written, hasn't been finishing

2. We \_\_\_\_\_ (live) in this neighborhood since we \_\_\_\_\_ (move) here in 2005.

- a) have lived, moved

- b) have been living, moved  
c) have been living, have moved  
d) have lived, have moved
3. They \_\_\_\_\_ (work) on this project for six months and finally \_\_\_\_\_ (complete) it.  
a) have been working, have completed  
b) have worked, have completed  
c) have worked, have been completing  
d) have been working, have been completing
4. I \_\_\_\_\_ (read) this book, and I \_\_\_\_\_ (learn) a lot from it.  
a) have read, have learned  
b) have been reading, have learned  
c) have read, have been learning  
d) have been reading, have been learning
5. He \_\_\_\_\_ (teach) at the university for over ten years.  
a) has taught  
b) has been teaching  
c) has taught and has been teaching  
d) Both a and b could be correct
6. How long \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ (wait) for the bus?  
a) have, waited  
b) have, been waiting  
c) did, wait  
d) have, waited and have been waiting
7. The kids \_\_\_\_\_ (play) outside for hours, and now they \_\_\_\_\_ (come) inside.  
a) have been playing, have come  
b) have played, have come  
c) have been playing, have been coming  
d) have played, have been coming
8. She \_\_\_\_\_ (cook) dinner since 6 PM and still \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) it.  
a) has cooked, hasn't finished  
b) has been cooking, hasn't finished  
c) has cooked, hasn't been finishing  
d) has been cooking, hasn't been finishing

**Answers:**

1. a) has been writing, hasn't finished
2. b) have been living, moved
3. a) have been working, have completed
4. a) have read, have learned
5. d) Both a and b could be correct
6. b) have, been waiting
7. a) have been playing, have come
8. b) has been cooking, hasn't finished

## The Difference between the Present Perfect and the Simple Past:

The simple past is used to describe actions that happened and were completed at a specific time in the past whereas the present perfect is used to describe actions that happened at an unspecified time in the past and have relevance to the present, or actions that started in the past and continue to the present.

### Important Point:

We can't use definite adverbs of time such as "at 10 o'clock," "yesterday," "last night," "two weeks ago," "last year," "in January," "in 2021", etc. with the present perfect tense. We should use the simple past tense instead.

**Don't Say:** *I have bought this vacuum cleaner in September.*  
**Say:** *I bought this vacuum cleaner in September.*

**Don't Say:** *Monica has lived in New York City in 2010.*  
**Say:** *Monica lived in New York City in 2010.*

**Don't Say:** *I have eaten my lunch at 2 o'clock.*  
**Say:** *I ate my lunch at 2 o'clock.*

When we use the present perfect tense to talk about an experience in the past, we normally use **indefinite time expressions**.

Examples:

*They have recently bought a car.*

*I haven't seen them lately.*

*She has helped them a lot so far.*

*We haven't met him until now.*

*He has just come back home.* ⇒ just = not long ago, very recently

### Point:

*I haven't seen Mary this morning.* ⇒ It is still morning.

*I didn't see Mary this morning.* ⇒ Morning is over and we are in the afternoon.

Here are some multiple-choice questions to help advanced students practice the difference between the present perfect and simple past tenses:

1. She \_\_\_\_\_ (visit) Paris three times.  
a) has visited  
b) visited  
c) was visiting
2. When \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ (move) to this city?  
a) have, moved  
b) did, move  
c) were, moving
3. They \_\_\_\_\_ (live) in that house for five years before they \_\_\_\_\_ (sell) it.  
a) have lived, sold  
b) lived, have sold

- c) had lived, sold
- d) lived, sold

4. I \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) my homework, so now I can watch TV.

- a) finished
- b) have finished
- c) finish

5. We \_\_\_\_\_ (not see) him since last summer.

- a) didn't see
- b) haven't seen
- c) hadn't seen

6. \_\_\_\_\_ you ever \_\_\_\_\_ (try) sushi?

- a) Did, try
- b) Have, tried
- c) Were, trying

7. He \_\_\_\_\_ (arrive) late to the meeting yesterday.

- a) has arrived
- b) arrived
- c) was arriving

8. They \_\_\_\_\_ (start) their own business last year.

- a) have started
- b) started
- c) were starting

9. I \_\_\_\_\_ (know) her for many years.

- a) knew
- b) have known
- c) know

10. She \_\_\_\_\_ (go) to the store and \_\_\_\_\_ (buy) some groceries.

- a) has gone, bought
- b) went, has bought
- c) went, bought

**Answers:**

- 1. a) has visited
- 2. b) did, move
- 3. d) lived, sold
- 4. b) have finished
- 5. b) haven't seen
- 6. b) Have, tried
- 7. b) arrived
- 8. b) started
- 9. b) have known
- 10. c) went, bought

#### 4) The Past Perfect Tense

**Subject + had(n't) + Past Participle + .....**

We use the past perfect tense to talk about an action which happened before another action or a particular time in the past.

Examples:

*I had brushed my teeth before I went to bed.*  
*After I had brushed my teeth, I went to bed.*  
*She had typed the letter by 9:30. ⇒ by = before*

#### 5) The Past Perfect Progressive Tense

**Subject + had(n't) + been + Verb+ing + .....**

Example:

*They had been learning English for 5 years before they immigrated to Canada.*

#### Differences between Past Perfect Simple & Progressive:

##### 1. Completion vs. Duration:

- **Past Perfect Simple:** Focuses on the fact that an action was completed.
  - Example: “They had built the house by the time we moved in.”
- **Past Perfect Progressive:** Focuses on the ongoing nature or duration of an action.
  - Example: “They had been building the house for a year before we moved in.”

##### 2. Temporary vs. Permanent:

- **Past Perfect Simple:** Often suggests a more permanent situation.
  - Example: “She had lived there all her life.”
- **Past Perfect Progressive:** Often suggests a temporary situation.
  - Example: “She had been living there for a few months.”

#### 6) Future in the Past

“Future in the past” is a grammatical concept used to describe an action that was expected to happen in the future from a past perspective. Essentially, it deals with the future from a point in the past.

Here are some examples:

##### 1. **Would:**

- “She said she **would** call me later.”

##### 2. **Was/Were going to:**

- “They **were going to** travel to Paris, but they changed their plans.”

##### 3. **Was/Were about to:**

- “I **was about to** leave when the phone rang.”

These structures help convey that the action was anticipated or planned at a past time but was still in the future relative to that past moment.

## **7) Habits in the Past**

We can use "used to" and "would" to talk about a habit in the past in addition to the simple past tense. "Used to" implies that the habit happened only in the past and now it does not exist. But "would" can also be used for the habits which have persisted until the present time.

Examples:

*Michael used to smoke cigarettes.* ⇒ He smoked in the past, but now he doesn't.

*Sally would study hard when she was my classmate.* ⇒ She studied hard at that time. She may still study hard.

### **Important Point:**

We can't use "would" when we talk about one of the following:

- **Location**

**Don't Say:** There **would** be a restaurant across the street 20 years ago.

**Say:** There **used to** be a restaurant across the street 20 years ago.

- **Possession**

**Don't Say:** I **would** have a bicycle when I was a child.

**Say:** I **used to** have a bicycle when I was a child.

- **State**

**Don't Say:** Sally **would** feel depressed all the time when she was a teenager.

**Say:** Sally **used to** feel depressed all the time when she was a teenager.

**Source:**

**[High Intermediate 1 \(anglophone.ir\)](http://anglophone.ir)**