Past Perfect Simple & Continuous

Grammar – past perfect simple (*had + p/p*)

**Affirmative:** I had done / You had done / He/she/it had done / We had done / You had done *(plural)* / They had done

**Negative:** I had not done / You had not done / He/she/it had not done / We had not done / You had not done / They had not done

**Question:** Had I done? / Had you done? / Had he/she/it done? / Had we done? / Had you done? / Had they done?

We use the past perfect simple to talk about what happened before a point in the past. It looks back from a point in the past to further in the past.

- I hadn’t known the bad news when I spoke to him.
- I checked with the supplier and they still hadn’t received the contract.
- She had already told him before I got a chance to give him my version.
- The company has started the year well but was badly hit by the postal strike.

The past perfect simple is often used when we report what people had said/thought/believed.

- He told me they had already paid the bill.
- He said he believed that John had moved to Italy.
- I thought we had already decided on a name for this product.

Grammar – past perfect continuous (*had + been + ing*)

**Affirmative:** I had been doing / You had been doing / He/she/it had been doing / We had been doing / You had been doing *(pl.)* / They had been doing

**Negative:** I had not been doing / You had not been doing / He/she/it had not been doing / We had not been doing / You had not been doing / They had not been doing

**Question:** Had I been doing? / Had you been doing? / Had he/she/it been doing? / Had we been doing? / Had you been doing? / Had they been doing?

We use the past perfect continuous to look back at a situation in progress.

- It was a good time to invest. Inflation had been falling for several months.
- Before I changed jobs, I had been working on a plan to reduce production costs.
- We had been thinking about buying a new house but then we decided to stay here.

We use it to say what had been happening before something else happened.

- It had been snowing for a while before we left.
- We had been playing tennis for only a few minutes when it started raining.
- He was out of breath when he arrived because he had been running.

We use it when reporting things said in the past.

- She said she had been trying to call me all day.
- They said they had been shopping.
- I told you I had been looking for some new clothes.
Past perfect simple & continuous Exercise 1
(Intermediate level)

Put the verbs in brackets into their correct forms.

1. After I _____________________ the letter, I _____________________ that I ________________ the wrong address on it. (post, realise, write)
2. John asked me where I _____________________ the day before. (be)
3. At this time yesterday, we _____________________ for 6 km. (already walk)
4. When I _____________________ through the streets of Madrid, I _____________________ about the magnificent time I _____________________ there as a student. (walk, think, spend)
5. It was the first time that she _____________________ me to dinner. (invite)
6. As soon as the maid _____________________ scrubbing the kitchen floor, she _____________________ working in the garden. (finish, start)
7. We started to worry about Jimmy because we _____________________ him all afternoon. (call)
8. They _____________________ their way out of town before the sun _____________________.
   (already make, rise)
9. We _____________________ for two hours when we finally got to our hotel. (drive)
10. When I _____________________ home, I saw that the children _____________________.
    (arrive, leave)
11. While I _____________________ in the garden it _____________________ me that I _____________________ off the oven. (work, strike, not turn)
12. I _____________________ my best friend to the party, but he couldn't come because he _____________________ other plans. (invite, already make)
13. I _____________________ out of the window because I _____________________ I _____________________ some noises. (look, think, hear)
14. We _____________________ TV when we saw that a devastating earthquake _____________________ California. (watch, hit)
15. The police told me that someone _____________________ into our neighbour's house. (break)
16. When I finally _____________________ at the airport, he told me that he _____________________ for half an hour. (arrive, wait)
Past perfect simple & continuous Exercise 2
(Advanced level)

Put the verbs in brackets into their correct forms.

1. We were all happy because we __________________ in our homework in time. (HAND)
2. Mrs Shilton __________________ a primary school teacher for twenty years before she became headmaster of the school. (BE)
3. When we got there, we saw that they __________________ for over 20 minutes. (REST)
4. We __________________ dance moves for over two hours, so you can imagine we were very tired. (PRACTICE)
5. The film __________________ when we finally got to the cinema. (ALREADY START)
6. By the time I ______________ to school the lesson had already started. (GET)
7. I __________________ up for a few minutes when the doorbell rang and our friends arrived. (ONLY WASH)
8. He __________________ about the accident before he saw it on TV. (HEAR)
9. I ______________ the office after I had finished writing my last email. (LEAVE)
10. The car ______________ down shortly after we had got on the motorway. (BREAK)
11. We __________________ for an hour when we finally arrived at the remote village. (WALK)
12. I saw the film after I ______________ the book. (READ)
13. I had already thought of that before you ______________ it up. (BRING)
14. She was so tired because she __________________ football the whole afternoon. (PLAY)
15. As soon as the girls had cleaned the house the visitors ______________. (ARRIVE)
16. By the time I was 16 I ______________ to become a scientist. (ALREADY DECIDE)
17. Suddenly I realised that I ______________ at the wrong person. He was absolutely innocent. (SHOUT)
18. I ______________ from my job because I had received an offer from another company. (RESIGN)
19. The teacher gave us a break because we ______________ on the project for several hours. (WORK)
20. After dad had finished mowing the lawn, he ______________ repairing the car. (START)

Adapted from: www.english-grammar.at
Answers Exercise 1

1. After I had posted the letter, I realised that I had written the wrong address on it.
2. John asked me where I had been the day before.
3. At this time yesterday, we had already been walking for 6 km.
4. When I was walking through the streets of Madrid, I thought about the magnificent time I had spent there as a student.
5. It was the first time that she had invited me to dinner.
6. As soon as the maid had finished scrubbing the kitchen floor, she started working in the garden.
7. We started to worry about Jimmy because we had been calling him all afternoon.
8. They had already made their way out of town before the sun rose.
9. We had been driving for two hours when we finally got to our hotel.
10. When I arrived home, I saw that the children had already left.
11. While I was working in the garden it struck me that I hadn't turned off the oven.
12. I invited my best friend to the party, but he couldn't come because he had already made other plans.
13. I looked out of the window because I thought I had heard some noises.
14. We were watching TV when we saw that a devastating earthquake had hit California.
15. The police told me that someone had broken into our neighbour's house.
16. When I finally arrived at the airport, he told me that he had been waiting for half an hour.
Answer Key Exercise 2

1. We were all happy because we had handed in our homework in time. (HAND)
2. Mrs Shilton had been a primary school teacher for twenty years before she became headmaster of the school. (BE)
3. When we got there, we saw that they had been resting for over 20 minutes. (REST)
4. We had been practicing dance moves for over two hours, so you can imagine we were very tired. (PRACTICE)
5. The film had already started when we finally got to the cinema. (ALREADY START)
6. By the time I got to school the lesson had already started. (GET)
7. I had only been washing up for a few minutes when the doorbell rang and our friends arrived. (ONLY WASH)
8. He had heard about the accident before he saw it on TV. (HEAR)
9. I left the office after I had finished writing my last email. (LEAVE)
10. The car broke down shortly after we had got on the motorway. (BREAK)
11. We had been walking for an hour when we finally arrived at the remote village. (WALK)
12. I saw the film after I had read the book. (READ)
13. I had already thought of that before you brought it up. (BRING)
14. She was so tired because she had been playing football the whole afternoon. (PLAY)
15. As soon as the girls had cleaned the house the visitors arrived. (ARRIVE)
16. By the time I was 16 I had already decided to become a scientist. (ALREADY DECIDE)
17. Suddenly I realised that I had been shouting at the wrong person. He was absolutely innocent. (SHOUT)
18. I resigned from my job because I had received an offer from another company. (RESIGN)
19. The teacher gave us a break because we had been working on the project for several hours. (WORK)
20. After dad had finished mowing the lawn, he started repairing the car. (START)