

## The past perfect

### Study this example

Sarah went to a party last week. Paul went to the party too but they didn't see each other. Paul went home at 10.30 and Sarah arrived at 11 o'clock. So: *When Sarah arrived at the party, Paul wasn't there. He **had gone** home.*

**Had gone** is the *past perfect (simple)*

### A / Form

The past perfect is formed with the auxiliary “**had**” and the past participle.

In speech and informal writing “had” is contracted to “'d”.

Negatives are formed with “not” and contractions are used (hadn't).

Questions are formed by inverting the subject and “had”.

#### Affirmative

I / you / we / they / he / she / it had ('d) left, worked, played, etc. (past participle)

#### Negative

I / you / we / they / he / she / it had not (hadn't) left, worked, played, etc. (past participle)

#### Questions

	Had	I / you / we / they / he / she / it	worked, played, etc. (past participle)?
What	had	I / you / we / they / he / she / it	found?

#### Short answers

Yes	I / you / we / they / he / she / it	had.
No	I / you / we / they / he / she / it	hadn't.

#### Negative interrogative

Had	I / you / we / they / he / she / it	not	left, worked, played, etc. (past participle)?
Hadn't	I / you / we / they / he / she / it		left, worked, played, etc. (past participle)?

### B / Use

**1/ We use the past perfect when we are already talking about the past, and we want to go back to an earlier past time (to refer to events in the past which happened before other events in the past, usually when there is no time expression to make this clear).**

In other words: **sometimes we talk about something that happened in the past (for example: Sarah arrived at the party). This is the starting point of the story. Then, if we want to talk about things that happened before this time, we use the past perfect.**

Examples: When Sarah arrived at the party, Paul had already gone home.

Karen didn't want to come to the cinema with us because she had already seen the film.

The man sitting next to me on the plane was very nervous. He hadn't flown before/ he had never flown before.

**2/ the past perfect is used (when absolutely necessary) to show clearly that one event in the past happened before another. We use the past perfect to describe the first of two or more events in the past (the earlier event).**

Examples: I had spoken to Mr. Johnson before the meeting began.

I realized that we had met before. By the time I got to the station, the train had left.

**Note:** it may not be necessary to use the past perfect if we use time conjunctions such as “before” or “after” to make the time clear. We can use the past simple for both actions.

Examples: Sue left / had left her office before we arrived. ( both forms possible)  
We arrived at Sue’s office after she left/ had left. ( both forms possible)  
**After** he (had) finished his exams he went to Paris for a month.  
She didn’t feel the same **after** her dog (had) died.  
**As soon as** I (had) put the phone down it rang again.

**Note:** we often introduce the past perfect with **time expressions** like: **when, once, meanwhile, after, as soon as, by the time that, the moment, already, ever, never, before,** etc.

### 3/With verbs of thinking

With **forgot, remembered, realized, knew, understood, was/were sure** we use the past perfect simple to describe the past events that happened before the moment we forgot, remembered or realized something.

Examples: David knew he’d seen her somewhere before, but he couldn’t remember where.  
When I got on the bus, I realized that I had left my wallet at home.  
Ellen was sure they hadn’t received the invoice, but she checked one more time.  
I thought we had already chosen the name for the new product!

### 4/ The past perfect is used as the equivalent of the present perfect.

Examples: Ann and Michael have just got married.  
It was June 1991. Ann and Michael had just got married.  
Jeremy’s 21 now and he’s been in a wheelchair since he was 10.  
Jeremy was 21 and he had been in a wheelchair since he was 10.

- Unlike the present perfect, the past perfect can be used with a specific time reference.

Example: He had left his case on the 4.40 train.

- **The past perfect can be used -similarly – with “since, for, always, etc.” for an action which began before the past time we are talking about and:**

- **Was still continuing at that time:**

Example : Bill was in uniform when I met him. He had been a soldier for ten years/since he was 17, and planned to stay in the army till he was thirty.

- **Stopped at that time or just before it:**

Example: Peter who had waited for an hour/ since ten o’clock was very angry with his sister when she eventually turned up.

### 5/ Unrealized hopes and wishes; things that did not happen

The past perfect can be used to express an unrealized hope, wish, etc.

Examples: I had hoped we would be able to leave tomorrow, but it’s beginning to look difficult.  
He had intended to make a cake, but he ran out of time.

- After “if, if only, wish, would rather” the past perfect can be used to talk about past events that did not happen.

Examples: If I had known you were at home, I would have called you.  
I wish you had told me the truth.  
If only they had stayed at home.  
I’d rather she had asked me before borrowing the car.

### 6/ In reported speech

- A. Present perfect tenses in direct speech become past perfect tenses in indirect speech provided the introductory verb is in the past tense.

Examples: He said: “I have been in England for ten years”.  
He said that he had been in England for ten years.

- B. Simple past tenses in direct speech usually change similarly.

Examples: He said: “I knew her well” He said that he had known her well.