

FCE 5.2

Review of past tenses

In this lesson we will review all of the past tenses—past simple, past continuous, present perfect and past perfect.

Look at examples a-j, which come from the listening in 5.1. Decide which tenses are shown in the **bolded** words.

past simple

past continuous

present perfect tense

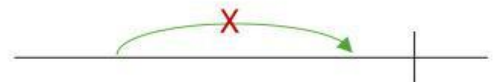
past perfect tense

- a) I'd **had** this interview for a job.
- b) I got in the lift and **pressed** the button.
- c) I've never **been** in one since.
- d) I **was watching** a horror movie.
- e) It was the next-door neighbor's cat I **had heard**.
- f) While I **was putting away** the books, I found something else.
- g) The others were looking at a map on the table, but I **was standing** by the back window.
- h) I knew they **hadn't seen** me.
- i) When I **realised** that they had gone, I ran inside.
- j) You **have** recently **sailed** around the world.

Past simple / Past continuous

The most important difference between these two tenses is the duration of an action. For example, in example (f) above, the past continuous describes an action that happened over a longer time period than the second action, which happened at a specific moment and may have interrupted the longer continuous activity:

"while I **was putting away** the books ... I **found** something else."



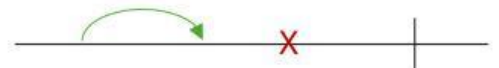
Like the present continuous tense, the past continuous is used to describe temporary situations, as in example (d).

"I **was watching** a movie ... I **turned off** the TV."



Note that this use can be an effective way of setting the scene at the beginning of a story, as in example (g).

"The others **were looking** at a map ... About six of them **burst in**."



Past simple / Past perfect

The **past perfect** is used for actions in the past that occur earlier than the time period that is being described, as in example (i):

"When I realised **they had gone**, I ran inside."



Let's practice. Complete this text on the following page using the verbs in brackets in either the **past simple** or **past continuous tense**.

Quite late one evening I (1) (walk) home alone from college. The wind (2) (blow) hard and it (3) (pour) with rain, so there (4) (be) no one around. Anyway, this big black van (5) (drive) past me and (6) (stop), just where the road (7) (curve) round. I (8) (decide) to go on, though I (9) (feel) increasingly uneasy. However, as soon as I (10) (get) close to the van, it (11) (drive) off. This (12) (happen) twice more, further down the same road. Each time, the van (13) (pull up) about fifty metres ahead of me and then (14) (wait) until I almost (15) (draw) level with it, then (16) (pull away) again. By this stage I (17) (be) absolutely petrified. So I (18) (stand) for a moment under a tree. The rain (19) (come down) in torrents now. I (20) (shake) and (21) (wonder) what to do next, when a policeman (22) (come) past. He (23) (push) his bike because of the heavy rain. I (24) (grab) him by the arm and (25) (make) him stop. Then I completely (26) (go) to pieces. While he (27) (try) to calm me down, I (28) (hear) the van drive off, thankfully for the last time. I've never walked home on my own since.

Complete these sentences with the verbs in brackets in either the past simple or past perfect tense.

- a) We (spend) the last three nights shivering in a tent in the middle of nowhere, so we were really pleased when we (get) to the hotel.
- b) Jenny (tell) us in great detail what (happen) to her and (explain) why she (find) it so scary at the house.
- c) I (keep) still for over half an hour and I (think) it (be) safe at last to come out of my hiding place.



Now look at the set of four pictures from an action story. Describe what happened in each scene, starting with the last one (4), and making reference back to what had happened earlier. This will force you to use the past perfect tense, but try to use a range of past tenses. You can either write your answers in the space below or speak your answers.

For the last exercise read this extract from the thriller *The Big Sleep*. Fill each gap, choosing a suitable word from the box below. There are three words you do not need.

and any at be because it had has
 not of so some the was went when



The gun pointed at my chest. Her hand seemed to (0) BE quite steady. I laughed (1) _____ her. I started to walk towards her. I saw her small finger tighten on (2) trigger and grow white at the tip. I was about six feet away from her (3) she started to shoot. The sound (4) the gun made a sharp slap, a brittle crack in the sunlight. I didn't see any smoke. I stopped again (5) grinned at her. She fired twice more, very quickly. I don't think (6) of the shots would have missed. There were five in the little gun. She (7) fired four. I rushed her. I didn't want the last one in my face, (8) I swerved to one side. She gave it to me quite carefully, (9) worried at all. I straightened up. 'My, but you're cute,' I said. Her hand (10) holding the empty gun and began to shake violently. The gun fell out of (11) Her mouth began to shake. Then her whole face (12) to pieces.