

Past tenses in a narrative

Past continuous

Express something that was happening in a specific moment in the past.

Simple past

We use this tense for things that happened at a definite time in the past, and also for finished actions in the past.

Present Perfect

This tense describes something that happened in the past, but that is related to something in the present.

It is also used to talk about life experiences, recent events or states or things that started in the past and hasn't changed.

Past perfect

Express an action you did or finished in the past, and when you retell actions in the past use past perfect for things you did before another action

Simple past	Past continuous	Present perfect	Past perfect
I lived in Lyon in 1989.	I was living in Lyon while I study at the university	I have lived in Lyon two times when I was 5 and then at 18.	I had lived in Paris, Lyon and Nice then we moved to Paris again.
They ate Thai food last night.	They were eating Thai food when I arrived home	They have eaten Thai food since they visited Thailand.	Before they went out the restaurant, they had eaten Thai food
Where did you see 'Othello'?	Were they seeing Otelo last night?	Have you seen 'Othello'?	I had seen "Othello" in a theater, it was a beautiful play.
When did you go to Ireland?	When were you going to Ireland?	We have been to Ireland.	Had you been in Ireland?

Connectors:

Then, after, before, later, .. finally

In the following sentences, which tense is needed? Simple past, past continuous, past perfect or present perfect?

Ex. When I was a little boy, we _____ in Barranquilla then we _____ to Bogota. was living / lived / have lived / had lived moved / have moved / had moved

1. The bus _____ (just – arrive) to the station when I bought my ticket

have just arrived has just arrived had just arrived just arrived was just arriving

2. My kids _____ (play) video games when I arrived home last night.

played has played had played was playing were playing

3. She _____ (go) to Spain last year to study Spanish.

went has gone had gone was going have gone

4. He _____ (finish) his degree last year before he started a specialization.

finished was finishing has finished had finished finishes

5. Oh no, look! Zoe _____ (eat) all the cake!

was eating ate have eaten has eaten had eaten

6. Max knew Paris pretty well because he _____ (visit) the city several times.

visited has visited have visited was visiting had visited

7. I'm sorry, Emily isn't here. She _____ (go) to the shops.

went has gone was going had gone have gone

8. I went to the shops yesterday and _____ (buy) lots of food for everyone.

was buying has bought had bought bought

9. I think I _____ (read) all the books Jodi Picoult has written so far.

read has read had read have read was reading

10. I really _____ (love) my grandmother. She was an amazing person.

love loved has loved have loved had loved

11. I _____ (try) so many different types of chocolate, so now I think I'm an expert.

was trying tried have tried has tried had tried

12. I _____ (break) my leg last year.

broke has broken have broken was breaking had broken

13. I _____ (be) really good friends with Philippa since I was 14.

was has been had been was being have been

14. I _____ (fall) asleep when the telephone rang.

has fallen fell was falling have fallen had fallen

15. He _____ (never – see) a bear before she moved to Canada.

never has seen never saw has never seen had never seen