

GRAMMAR FOCUS

Past perfect

Do you know how to use phrases like They'd finished the project by March or Had you finished work when I called? Test what you know with interactive exercises and read the explanation to help you.

Look at these examples to see how the past perfect is used.

He couldn't make a sandwich because he'd forgotten to buy bread.

The hotel was full, so I was glad that we'd booked in advance.

My new job wasn't exactly what I'd expected.

Try this exercise to test your grammar.

Grammar B1-B2: Past perfect: 01

1 Choose the correct option to complete the sentence.

a. When she ___ on the course, she had never studied a foreign language before.

enrolled

'd enrolled

b. When I closed the door, I realised that I ___ my keys inside.

left

'd left

c. She looked really sad but I didn't know what ___.

happened

'd happened

d. ___ when you rang the doorbell?

Did Sai already leave

Had Sai already left

e. This is the oldest building in the town. It ___ over 200 years ago.

was built

'd been built

f. By the time I moved in, they ___ the building work.

finished

'd finished

g. I opened the door, and ___ inside.

went

'd gone

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h. I looked in the letter box yesterday and the letter still ____.

- didn't arrive
- hadn't arrived

Read the explanation to learn more.

Grammar explanation

Time up to a point in the past

We use the **past perfect simple** (**had + past participle**) to talk about time up to a certain point in the past.

She'd published her first poem by the time she was eight.

We'd finished all the water before we were halfway up the mountain.

Had the parcel arrived when you called yesterday?

Past perfect for the earlier of two past actions

We can use the **past perfect** to show the **order of two past events**. The past perfect shows the **earlier action** and the **past simple** shows the **later action**.

*When the police **arrived**, the thief **had escaped**.*

It doesn't matter in which order we say the two events. The following sentence has the same meaning.

*The thief **had escaped** when the police **arrived**.*

Note that **if there's only a single event, we don't use the past perfect**, even if it happened a long time ago.

*The Romans **spoke** Latin. (NOT The Romans **had spoken** Latin.)*

Past perfect after before

We can also use **before + past perfect** to show that an action was not done or was incomplete when the past simple action happened.

*They **left before** I'd **spoken** to them.*

*Sadly, the author **died before** he'd **finished** the series.*

Adverbs

We often use the adverbs **already** (= 'before the specified time'), **still** (= as previously), **just** (= 'a very short time before the specified time'), **ever** (= 'at any time before the specified time') or **never** (= 'at no time before the specified time') with the **past perfect**.

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I called his office but he'd already left.

It still hadn't rained at the beginning of May.

I went to visit her when she'd just moved to Berlin.

It was the most beautiful photo I'd ever seen.

Had you ever visited London when you moved there?

I'd never met anyone from California before I met Jim.

Do this exercise to test your grammar again.

Grammar B1-B2: Past perfect: 02

2 Choose the correct option to complete the sentence.

a. By the time I could talk to her, she ___ to quit her job.

decided

'd decided

b. I looked at the photo and suddenly realised that I ___ that man somewhere before.

saw

'd seen

c. First I ___ the salad, then I toasted the bread.

made

'd made

d. ___ breakfast when you got up?

Did James already cook

Had James already cooked

e. She didn't feel like another coffee as she ___ one.

just had

'd just had

f. We had the French exam this morning. It ___ as hard as I'd expected, though.

wasn't

hadn't been

g. I asked Sara if she wanted to go for a walk, but she still ___ her homework.

didn't finish

hadn't finished

h. Dinosaurs ___ hundreds of millions of years ago.

lived

had lived