



Narrative Tenses

College of Agriculture
Department of Agricultural Machines
English_4
Lecture #5

Past Simple and Present Perfect:

The Past Simple differs from all three uses of the Present Perfect.

1 The Past Simple refers to **finished past**.

Shakespeare wrote plays. (He's dead.)

I've written short stories. (I'm alive.)

2 There is **no present result**.

I hurt my back. (But it's better now.)

I've hurt my back. (And it hurts now.)

3 It refers to **definite past**.

<i>I saw him</i>	<i>last night.</i>
	<i>two weeks ago.</i>
	<i>on Monday.</i>
	<i>at 8.00.</i>

Compare this with the indefinite adverbials found with the Present Perfect.

I've seen him | *recently.*
before.

I haven't seen him | *since January.*
yet.
for months.

I've | *never* | *seen him.*
just

Note

Even when there is no past time adverbial, we can 'build' a past time in our head.

Did you have a good journey? (The journey's over. You're here now.)

*Thank you for supper. It **was** lovely.* (The meal is finished.)

*Where **did you buy** that shirt?* (when you were out shopping the other day.)

Past Simple

The Past Simple is used:

- 1 to express a finished action in the past.

*Columbus **discovered** America in 1492.*

- 2 to express actions which follow each other in a story.

*I **heard** voices coming from downstairs, so I **put on** my dressing-gown and **went** to investigate.*

- 3 to express a past state or habit.

*When I **was** a child, we **lived** in a small house by the sea. Every day I **walked** for miles on the beach with my dog.*

This use is often expressed with *used to*.

*We **used to** live ...*

*I **used to** walk ...*

Past Continuous

See the introduction to the continuous aspect on p141.

The Past Continuous is used:

- 1 to express an activity in progress before and probably after a time in the past.

*I phoned at 4.00, but there was no reply. What **were you doing**?*

- 2 to describe a past situation or activity.

*The cottage **was looking** so cosy. A fire **was burning** in the grate, music **was playing**, and from the kitchen **were coming** the most delicious smells.*

- 3 to express an interrupted past activity.

*I **was having** a bath when the phone rang.*

- 4 to express an incomplete activity in the past.

*I **was reading** a book during the flight. (But I didn't finish it.)*

*I **watched** a film during the flight. (the whole film)*

- 5 to express an activity that was in progress at every moment during a period of time.

*I **was working** all day yesterday.*

*They **were fighting** for the whole of the holiday.*

Notes

- The Past Simple expresses past actions as simple, complete facts. The Past Continuous gives past activities time and duration.

'What did you do last night?'

*'I **stayed** at home and **watched** the football.'*

'I phoned you last night, but there was no reply.'

*'Oh, I **was watching** the football and I didn't hear the phone. Sorry.'*

- Notice how the questions in the Past Continuous and Past Simple refer to different times.

When we arrived, Jan was ironing. She stopped ironing and made some coffee.

*What **was** she **doing** when we arrived? She was ironing.*

*What **did** she **do** when we arrived? She made some coffee.*

Past Perfect

The Past Perfect is used to look back to a time in the past and refer to an action that happened before then.

*She was crying because her dog **had died**.*

*I arrived to pick up Dave, but he **had already left**.*

*Keith was fed up. He'd **been looking** for a job for months, but he'd **found** nothing.*

Notes

- The continuous refers to longer actions or repeated activities. The simple refers to shorter, complete facts.

*He'd lost his job and his wife **had left** him. Since then he'd **been sleeping** rough, and he **hadn't been eating** properly.*

- The Past Perfect can refer to definite as well as indefinite time.
*I knew his face immediately. I'd first met him **in October 1993**. (= definite)*
*I recognized her face. I'd seen her somewhere **before**. (= indefinite)*

Past Perfect and Past Simple

- 1 Verbs in the Past Simple tell a story in chronological order.

*John **worked** hard all day to prepare for the party. Everyone **had** a good time. Even the food **was** all right. Unfortunately, Andy **upset** Peter, so Peter **left** early. Pat **came** looking for Peter, but he **wasn't** there.*

*It **was** a great party. John **sat** and **looked** at all the mess. He **felt** tired. It **was** time for bed.*

- 2 By using the Past Perfect, the speaker or writer can tell a story in a different order.

*John sat and looked at all the mess. It **had been** a great party, and everyone **had had** a good time. Even the food **had been** all right. Unfortunately, Andy upset Peter, so Peter left early. Pat came looking for Peter, but he'd already **gone**.*

*John felt tired. He'd **been working** all day to prepare for the party. It was time for bed.*

Note

For reasons of style, it is not necessary to have every verb in the Past Perfect.

... Andy upset Peter ... Peter left ...

Once the time of 'past in the past' has been established, the Past Simple can be used as long as there is no ambiguity.

Time clauses

- 1 We can use time conjunctions to talk about two actions that happen one after the other. Usually the Past Perfect is not necessary in these cases, although it can be used.

After I'd had/had a bath, I went to bed.

As soon as the guests left/had left, I started tidying up.

I sat outside until the sun had gone/went down.

- 2 The Past Perfect can help to make the first action seem separate, independent of the second, or completed before the second action started.

When I had read the paper, I threw it away.

We stayed up until all the beer had gone.

- 3 Two verbs in the Past Simple can suggest that the first action led into the other, or that one caused the other to happen.

*When I **heard** the news, I **burst** out crying.*

*As soon as the alarm **went off**, I **got up**.*

- 4 The Past Perfect is more common with *when* because it is ambiguous. The other conjunctions are more specific, so the Past Perfect is not so essential.

*As soon as all the guests **left**, I tidied the house.*

*Before I **met** you, I didn't know the meaning of happiness.*

*When I **opened** the door, the cat jumped out.*

*When I'd **opened** the mail, I made another cup of tea.*

See Unit 11 for information on the Past Perfect used for hypothesis.

Thank you

