

Answer Key

Past Perfect Continuous

(I had been doing)

English Grammar in Use — Unit 16

18 Exercises • Complete Solutions with Explanations

Includes Exam Practice: IELTS • Cambridge • TOEFL

January 29, 2026

Scoring Summary

Section	Total Points
EASY (Exercises 1-4)	36 points
MEDIUM (Exercises 5-8)	44 points
HARD (Exercises 9-12)	35 points
REAL-LIFE & EXAM (Exercises 13-18)	55 points
GRAND TOTAL	170 points

— EASY EXERCISES —

1 Exercise 1: Form the Past Perfect Continuous (10 points)

Answers

1. He **had been working** all day.
2. It **had been raining** for hours.
3. They **had been waiting** since 3 o'clock.
4. She **had been studying** English for two years.
5. We **had been living** in London before we moved.
6. I **had been running**, so I was out of breath.
7. He **hadn't been sleeping** well lately.
8. They **had been traveling** for six months.
9. She **had been sitting** in the same position for hours.
10. The cat **had been lying** in the sun all afternoon.

Spelling Notes

- **sit** → **sitting** (double the consonant: CVC pattern)
- **lie** → **lying** (change -ie to -y before -ing)
- **travel** → **traveling/travelling** (both spellings accepted)

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 10 points.

2 Exercise 2: Make Questions (8 points)

Answers

1. **What had she been doing** before you arrived?
2. **How long had they been living** in Paris before they moved to London?
3. **Had it been raining** before you left the house?
4. **Why had he been crying** when you found him?
5. **How long had you been studying** before you passed the exam?
6. **Where had they been staying** before they found an apartment?
7. **Who had she been talking** to on the phone for so long?
8. **Had the children been playing** outside before it started raining?

Question Formation

Structure: (Question word) + **had** + subject + **been** + verb-**ing**?

- Yes/No questions: *Had you been waiting...?*
- Wh- questions: *How long had you been waiting...?*

Scoring: 1 point per correct question. Total: 8 points.

3 Exercise 3: Affirmative, Negative, or Question? (10 points)

Answers

1. (+) It **had been raining**.
2. (-) I **hadn't been working** hard.
3. (?) **Had you been waiting** long when she finally called?
4. (+) He **had been crying**.
5. (-) They **hadn't been paying** attention.
6. (?) How long **had she been learning** Spanish before she moved to Madrid?
7. (+) We **had been hiking** all day.
8. (-) The team **hadn't been practicing** enough.
9. (?) **Had he been drinking** before the accident?
10. (+) She **had been living** there for years.

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 10 points.

4 Exercise 4: Match the Cause and Effect (8 points)

Answers

Effect	Cause	Explanation
1	D	He was out of breath because he had been running .
2	A	Her eyes were red because she had been crying .
3	B	The streets were wet because it had been raining .
4	C	I was very tired because I had been working all night.
5	F	His hands were dirty because he had been working in the garden.
6	G	She spoke perfect French because she had been living in Paris for 10 years.
7	E	They were very hungry because they had been traveling all day without eating.
8	H	The car broke down because it had been making strange noises for weeks.

Key Concept: Cause and Visible Result

The Past Perfect Continuous is often used to explain WHY something was visible or true at a past moment:

- **Visible result:** He was out of breath. (past state)
- **Cause/Activity:** He had been running. (continuous activity before)

Scoring: 1 point per correct match. Total: 8 points.

— MEDIUM EXERCISES —

5 Exercise 5: Past Perfect Continuous or Past Perfect Simple? (10 points)

Answers

1. **had been waiting** — Focus on duration (continuous)
2. **had read** — Focus on completed quantity (simple)
3. **had been swimming** — Focus on activity causing visible result (continuous)
4. **had finished** — Focus on completion (simple)
5. **had been arguing** — Focus on duration (continuous)
6. **had never seen** — Experience, not process (simple)
7. **had been working** — Continuous activity causing tiredness (continuous)
8. **had already eaten** — Completed action (simple)
9. **had been playing** — Activity causing visible result (continuous)
10. **had been studying** — Prolonged activity (continuous)

When to Use Each Tense

Past Perfect Continuous:

- Emphasizes **duration/process**: “for hours”, “all day”, “since morning”
- Explains **visible results**: tired, wet, dirty, out of breath

Past Perfect Simple:

- Emphasizes **completion**: finished, done, completed
- Focuses on **quantity**: read 3 books, eaten 5 apples
- Used with **stative verbs**: know, believe, want, like (NOT continuous)

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 10 points.

6 Exercise 6: Complete the Story (16 points)

Answers

- (1) **woke up** — Past Simple (main event)
- (2) **realized** — Past Simple (main event)
- (3) **hadn't set** — Past Perfect Simple (completed action before)
- (4) **was** — Past Simple (state)
- (5) **had been trying** — Past Perfect Continuous (repeated action over time)
- (6) **answered** — Past Simple (main event)
- (7) **had been waiting** — Past Perfect Continuous (duration)
- (8) **had** — Past Simple (scheduled event)
- (9) **arrived** — Past Simple (main event)
- (10) **had already started** — Past Perfect Simple (completed before)
- (11) **was presenting** — Past Continuous (action in progress)
- (12) **had been preparing** — Past Perfect Continuous (duration)
- (13) **felt** — Past Simple (emotion)
- (14) **had been working** — Past Perfect Continuous (duration)
- (15) **got** — Past Simple (main event)
- (16) **went** — Past Simple (main event)

Common Mistake: Item 12

Why not "had prepared"?

- ✗ "had prepared" = Past Perfect Simple (focuses on completion)
- ✓ "had been preparing" = Past Perfect Continuous (focuses on duration)

Since the sentence says "for weeks", you need the continuous form to emphasize the extended time spent preparing, not just the fact that preparation was completed.

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 16 points.

7 Exercise 7: Multiple Choice (10 points)

Answers

1. **A) had already escaped** — Completed action (the thief was gone)
2. **B) had been working** — Continuous activity explaining exhaustion
3. **A) had they been discussing** — Duration question
4. **B) had started** — Completed event (NOT *had been starting*)
5. **B) hadn't been sleeping** — Continuous activity causing visible result
6. **C) had been driving** — Duration (“for three hours”)
7. **B) had been raining** — Continuous activity causing visible result
8. **B) had been singing** — Prolonged activity before another past event
9. **A) had drunk** — Focus on quantity (five cups)
10. **B) had been thinking** — Continuous process before that moment

Item 5 Explanation

Why B) “hadn’t been sleeping” is correct, not A) “hadn’t slept”

The sentence: “His eyes were red because he _____.”

- **✗ A) hadn’t slept** = Past Perfect Simple. This just states the fact that sleep didn’t happen, but doesn’t explain the red eyes.
- **✓ B) hadn’t been sleeping** = Past Perfect Continuous. This emphasizes the **duration/lack of sleep** and shows the **visible result** (red eyes). The continuous form connects the ongoing activity (or lack thereof) to the physical consequence.

Key insight: When a past state has a visible physical result in the present, use Past Perfect Continuous to show the duration that caused that result.

Common Trap

Some verbs are NOT normally used in continuous forms:

- ~~had been starting~~ → **had started**
- ~~had been knowing~~ → **had known**
- ~~had been believing~~ → **had believed**

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 10 points.

— HARD EXERCISES —

8 Exercise 8: Error Correction (8 points)

Answers

1. **Error:** “had been work” → missing -ing
Correction: She **had been working** all day, so she was very tired.
2. **Error:** “have been waiting” → wrong auxiliary (should be past)
Correction: They **had been waiting** for three hours when the train finally arrived.
3. **Error:** “had been knowing” → “know” is a stative verb
Correction: I **had known** her for years before we started dating.
4. **Error:** “been wait” → missing -ing
Correction: **Had you been waiting** long when I called?
5. **Error:** “since five years” → “since” needs a point in time, not duration
Correction: He had been living in London **for five years** before he moved.
6. **Error:** “has been raining” → wrong tense (should be past)
Correction: The ground was wet because it **had been raining**.
7. **Error:** “hadn’t been believed” → “believe” is a stative verb
Correction: She **hadn’t believed** in herself until she won the competition.
8. **Error:** “had she been studied” → mixing forms
Correction: How long **had she been studying** before she passed the exam?

Scoring: 1 point per correct correction. Total: 8 points.

9 Exercise 9: Translation — Portuguese to English (8 points)

Answers

1. Ele estava cansado porque tinha estado trabalhando a noite toda.
He was tired because he had been working all night.
2. Há quanto tempo você estava esperando quando ela chegou?
How long had you been waiting when she arrived?
3. Eles tinham estado morando em São Paulo por dez anos antes de se mudarem.
They had been living in São Paulo for ten years before they moved.
4. Estava chovendo o dia todo, então as ruas estavam molhadas.
It had been raining all day, so the streets were wet.
5. Ela não tinha estado se sentindo bem ultimamente.
She hadn't been feeling well lately.
6. Nós tínhamos estado estudando por horas quando decidimos fazer uma pausa.
We had been studying for hours when we decided to take a break.
7. Os olhos dele estavam vermelhos porque ele tinha estado chorando.
His eyes were red because he had been crying.
8. Você tinha estado praticando antes da competição?
Had you been practicing before the competition?

Scoring: 1 point per correct translation. Total: 8 points.

Note: Accept minor variations that are grammatically correct.

10 Exercise 10: Complete the Dialogue (13 points)

Answers

- (1) **applied** — Past Simple (completed action)
- (2) **had been working** — Past Perfect Continuous (duration: “for five years”)
- (3) **did you decide** — Past Simple (question about specific decision)
- (4) **had been thinking** — Past Perfect Continuous (process over time)
- (5) **had been feeling** — Past Perfect Continuous (ongoing state)
- (6) **wasn’t growing / hadn’t been growing** — Past Continuous or Past Perfect Continuous (both acceptable)
- (7) **had you been working** — Past Perfect Continuous (duration question)
- (8) **had been managing / managed** — Past Perfect Continuous or Past Simple (both acceptable)
- (9) **left** — Past Simple (completed action)
- (10) **had been leading** — Past Perfect Continuous (duration: “for two years”)
- (11) **Had you ever worked** — Past Perfect Simple (experience question)
- (12) **had collaborated** — Past Perfect Simple (completed experience)
- (13) **had been handling** — Past Perfect Continuous (duration: “for about three years”)

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 13 points.

11 Exercise 11: Write Your Own Sentences (6 points)

Sample Answers

1. **She was tired because she had been studying all night.**
(Or: "He looked exhausted because he had been studying all night.")
2. **How long had you been waiting when the bus arrived?**
(Or: "How long had they been waiting before she called?")
3. **I had been looking for work for months before I got this job.**
(Or: "She had been looking for work for months before she found a position.")
4. **He hadn't been listening, so he didn't understand the instructions.**
(Or: "They hadn't been listening during the meeting.")
5. **The streets were wet because it had been raining all morning.**
6. **She had been practicing the piano for years before she won the competition.**
(Or: "He had been practicing for years before he became a professional.")

Scoring: 1 point per grammatically correct sentence using Past Perfect Continuous appropriately. Total: 6 points.

Accept any grammatically correct sentence that properly uses the Past Perfect Continuous with the given prompts.

— REAL-LIFE & EXAM PRACTICE —

12 Exercise 12: Micro-Dialogues (8 points)

Answers and Explanations

1. B: “About two hours. I **had been lifting** weights before you arrived, and then I did cardio.”
(Clear PPC: activity before another past event “before you arrived”)
2. B: “Yes, I **have been waiting** for 30 minutes! I almost left.”
(Present Perfect Continuous is more natural. The waiting just ended with present consequences—annoyance visible now. No second past reference point exists.)
3. B: “She **has been working** on that report all week. The deadline is tomorrow.”
(Present Perfect Continuous is more natural. Present-moment question “Why does Sarah look stressed NOW?” indicates the work is still relevant. The future deadline “tomorrow” reinforces present relevance, not a past reference point.)
4. B: “I **had been cooking** all afternoon for the dinner party tonight.”
(PPC is appropriate here because the question is asked at night. The afternoon cooking is now completed past, and night arrival provides a clear time reference separating the activity from the present moment.)
5. B: “I **haven’t been sleeping** well lately. Too much stress at work.”
(Present Perfect Continuous is more natural. The word “lately” signals present relevance, indicating activity continuing up to now. The context “You sound tired. Is everything okay?” asks about the current state, not comparing to another past event.)
6. B: “I **had been studying** for months before I took it. Hard work pays off!”
(Clear PPC: activity before another past event “before I took it”)
7. B: “Well, I **have been exercising** regularly and eating healthier.”
(Present Perfect Continuous is more natural. The observation “You’ve changed so much” is present-moment, and the exercising has caused visible changes visible now. No second past event provides a reference point for PPC.)
8. B: “It started yesterday, but I **had been feeling** tired for weeks before that.”
(Clear PPC: activity before another past event “It started yesterday”)

Understanding Items 2-5 and 7: When to Choose Each Tense

Items 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 test your ability to distinguish between tenses in real-world contexts:

Present Perfect Continuous (Items 2, 3, 5, 7): Use when the activity is relevant to NOW—either just finished with visible consequences, or continuing. Temporal markers: "lately," "just," "recently." Question context: present moment ("Why...now?" or "You've changed...").

Past Perfect Continuous (Item 4): Use when comparing two past events. The activity happened before another past reference point. This item specifies the question is asked at night, providing a clear temporal boundary.

Key insight: Grammar depends on context. The same verb phrase can use different tenses depending on when the conversation occurs and what's being compared.

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 8 points.

13 Exercise 13: Real-Life Context (15 points)

Scenario A: Job Interview Email

- (1) before I **joined** my current company — (*Past Simple: completed action*)
- (2) I **had been working** as a freelance consultant — (*PPC: ongoing before*)
- (3) I **had been developing** the skills — (*PPC: process over time*)
- (4) I **had been thinking** about transitioning — (*PPC: mental process*)

Scenario B: Academic Report

- (1) Before this study **began** — (*Past Simple: point in time*)
- (2) researchers **had been investigating** — (*PPC: ongoing research*)
- (3) Previous studies **had shown** — (*PP Simple: completed findings*)
- (4) no conclusive data **had existed** — (*PP Simple: state, not process*)
- (5) Our team **had been collecting** data — (*PPC: ongoing process*)
- (6) before we **published** these findings — (*Past Simple: completed*)

Scenario C: News Report

- (1) The company **had been planning** this expansion — (*PPC: ongoing*)
- (2) “We **had been looking** at several locations” — (*PPC: process*)
- (3) before we **chose** São Paulo — (*Past Simple: decision point*)
- (4) The company **has been growing** — (*Present Perf. Cont.: up to now*)
- (5) and **has hired** over 200 employees — (*Present Perf.: result*)

Professional Writing Tips

In formal writing:

- Use PPC to describe **background context**
- Combine with Past Simple for **specific events**
- In news: switch to Present Perfect for **recent/ongoing news**

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Total: 15 points.

14 Exercise 14: Common Pitfalls for Brazilians (8 points)

Corrections

1. **had been working** (not “have been working”)
Why? The reference point (“when you called”) is in the past.
2. **for** three hours (not “since”)
Why? “Three hours” is a duration, not a starting point.
3. **had known** him (not “had been knowing”)
Why? “Know” is a stative verb — no continuous form.
4. **How long had you been waiting?**
Why? “Had” must come before the subject in questions.
5. **He had been working** all day.
Why? Don’t add “was being” — it’s redundant.
6. **They had been waiting** for hours.
Why? “Been” is essential to the structure.
7. **By 6 PM, I had finished** my homework.
Why? Completed actions use Past Perfect Simple.
8. **She had been working** hard all week.
Why? Always use verb-ing after “had been.”

Common Portuguese Interference

Watch out for these patterns:

- PT: “Eu estava trabalhando...” ≠ EN: “I was being working”
- PT: “Desde 3 horas” → EN: “**For** 3 hours” (duration)
- PT: “Como você tem estado?” → Context matters for tense choice!

Scoring: 1 point per correct correction. Total: 8 points.

15 Exercise 15: IELTS Practice (Sample Answers)

Assessment Criteria

IELTS evaluates: Grammatical Range & Accuracy, Lexical Resource, Coherence & Cohesion.

Using Past Perfect Continuous correctly demonstrates **grammatical range**.

Part A: Speaking Part 2 — Sample Response

“I’d like to talk about passing my driving test, which I finally achieved last year. I **had been working** towards this goal for almost two years. Before I passed, I **had been taking** lessons every week and practicing with my father on weekends. The main difficulty was that I **had been struggling** with parallel parking for months. I **had been failing** the practical test twice before, which was very frustrating.

When I finally passed, I felt incredibly relieved. I **had been dreaming** about this moment for so long that I almost cried with happiness.”

Part B: Speaking Part 3 — Sample Answers

1. “In Brazil, environmental activists and scientists **had been discussing** issues like deforestation and pollution for decades before the government introduced significant policies. NGOs **had been campaigning** for years before real changes happened.”
2. “Before online learning became mainstream, educational institutions **had been experimenting** with digital tools. Some universities **had been offering** distance learning programs, but they weren’t widely accepted.”
3. “I think some people **had been expecting** technological changes, especially those who work in tech. However, most people **hadn’t been anticipating** how quickly everything would transform.”

Part C: Writing Task 2 — Sample Introduction

“Before the digital revolution transformed our daily lives, humans **had been living** relatively simply for generations. People **had been communicating** through letters and landline phones, and they **had been managing** their work without constant connectivity. This essay will argue that while technology has added certain complexities, it has ultimately improved our quality of life.”

Scoring: Self-assessment based on correct PPC usage. Award up to 8 points.

16 Exercise 16: Cambridge Exam Practice (12 points)

Part A: Key Word Transformations

1. At 10 AM, she **had been studying for** four hours.
2. It **had been raining** all morning, so the streets were wet.
3. They **had been negotiating** for three months before they agreed.
4. He **had been practicing** for years before he won at 18.
5. I **had been waiting** for two hours when she arrived.

Cambridge Key Word Transformations

Tips for success:

- Count words carefully (contractions = 2 words)
- Don't change the key word
- Keep the **exact meaning** — don't add or lose information

Part B: Open Cloze

- (1) **had**
- (2) **had**
- (3) **had**
- (4) **had**
- (5) **had**
- (6) **have** (or "had")
- (7) **had**

Scoring: Key Word Transformations: 1 point each (5 points). Open Cloze: 1 point each (7 points). Total: 12 points.

17 Exercise 18: TOEFL Practice (Sample Answers)

Part A: Speaking Task — Sample Response

“The student supports the library’s decision to extend its hours for two main reasons.

First, she explains that she **had been struggling** to find quiet study spaces before this change. The library closes early, so she **had been having** difficulty finding a peaceful place to study at night.

Second, she mentions that she **had been going** to coffee shops to study late, which was both expensive and distracting. With longer library hours, she won’t need to spend money or deal with noise anymore.”

TOEFL Speaking Tips

Integrated Tasks:

- Clearly state the student’s opinion/preference
- Use PPC to describe **previous situations**
- Connect reasons logically with transition words

Part B: Integrated Writing — Sample Response

“The reading and lecture present contrasting perspectives on remote work. While the reading states that remote work has become common with stable productivity, the lecture provides historical context.

According to the professor, before the pandemic only 5% of workers **had been working** remotely. Furthermore, many companies **had been resisting** flexible arrangements for years. This context suggests that the recent shift to remote work represents a dramatic departure from previous workplace norms, rather than a gradual evolution.”

Scoring: Self-assessment based on correct PPC usage and coherent argument. Award up to 4 points.

Total Score Summary

Exercise	Points	Your Score
EASY SECTION		
1. Form the Past Perfect Continuous	10	
2. Make Questions	8	
3. Affirmative, Negative, or Question	10	
4. Match Cause and Effect	8	
<i>Easy Subtotal</i>	<i>36</i>	
MEDIUM SECTION		
5. Past Perfect Continuous or Simple?	10	
6. Complete the Story	16	
7. Multiple Choice	10	
8. Time Expressions	8	
<i>Medium Subtotal</i>	<i>44</i>	
HARD SECTION		
9. Error Correction	8	
10. Translation (PT → EN)	8	
11. Complete the Dialogue	13	
12. Write Your Own Sentences	6	
<i>Hard Subtotal</i>	<i>35</i>	
REAL-LIFE & EXAM		
13. Micro-Dialogues	8	
14. Real-Life Context	15	
15. Common Pitfalls	8	
16. IELTS Practice	8	
17. Cambridge Practice	12	
18. TOEFL Practice	4	
<i>Exam Subtotal</i>	<i>55</i>	
GRAND TOTAL	170	