

Grammar Practice Exercises

Past Perfect Continuous

(I had been doing)

English Grammar in Use — Unit 16

12 Exercises • 100+ Questions • With Portuguese Translations

January 20, 2026

Grammar Summary: Past Perfect Continuous

Form: *had been* + **-ing** form of the verb

Affirmative: I/You/He/She/It/We/They **had been working**

Negative: I/You/He/She/It/We/They **had not (hadn't) been working**

Question: **Had I/you/he/she/it/we/they been working?**

Main Uses:

1. To talk about an activity that **started before a past moment and continued up to that moment**:
"I had been waiting for an hour when the bus finally came."
2. To explain **why something was happening** at a past moment (cause → visible result):
"He was tired because he had been running."
3. Often used with **for** (duration) and **since** (starting point):
"They had been living there for 20 years before they moved."

Tip: Past Perfect Continuous vs. Past Perfect Simple

- **Past Perfect Continuous** = emphasizes the **duration/process** of the activity
"She had been reading for two hours." (focus on duration)
- **Past Perfect Simple** = emphasizes the **completion/result**
"She had read five chapters." (focus on quantity completed)

Difficulty Progression Guide

EASY (Exercises 1-4): Recognition, basic formation, simple completion

MEDIUM (Exercises 5-8): Context application, choosing between tenses

HARD (Exercises 9-12): Production, error correction, translation

— EASY EXERCISES —*Recognition & Basic Formation*

Exercises 1-4 focus on recognizing and forming the Past Perfect Continuous.
Complete these with 90%+ accuracy before moving to Medium exercises.

1 Exercise 1: Form the Past Perfect Continuous

Write the Past Perfect Continuous form of the verbs in parentheses. Pay attention to spelling!

1. (work) → He _____ all day.
2. (rain) → It _____ for hours.
3. (wait) → They _____ since 3 o'clock.
4. (study) → She _____ English for two years.
5. (live) → We _____ in London before we moved.
6. (run) → I _____, so I was out of breath.
7. (not / sleep) → He _____ well lately.
8. (travel) → They _____ for six months.
9. (sit) → She _____ in the same position for hours.
10. (lie) → The cat _____ in the sun all afternoon.

2 Exercise 2: Make Questions

Write questions using the Past Perfect Continuous with the words given.

Example: (how long / you / wait) before the bus came?
How long had you been waiting before the bus came?

1. (what / she / do) before you arrived?

2. (how long / they / live) in Paris before they moved to London?

3. (it / rain) before you left the house?

4. (why / he / cry) when you found him?

5. (how long / you / study) before you passed the exam?

6. (where / they / stay) before they found an apartment?

7. (who / she / talk) to on the phone for so long?

8. (the children / play) outside before it started raining?

3 Exercise 3: Affirmative, Negative, or Question?

Complete each sentence with the Past Perfect Continuous in the form indicated: (+) affirmative, (-) negative, or (?) question.

1. (+) The ground was wet. It _____ (rain).
2. (-) I wasn't tired because I _____ (not / work) hard.
3. (?) _____ (you / wait) long when she finally called?
4. (+) His eyes were red because he _____ (cry).
5. (-) They _____ (not / pay) attention, so they missed the announcement.
6. (?) How long _____ (she / learn) Spanish before she moved to Madrid?
7. (+) We were exhausted because we _____ (hike) all day.
8. (-) The team _____ (not / practice) enough, so they lost the match.
9. (?) _____ (he / drink) before the accident?
10. (+) She knew the city well because she _____ (live) there for years.

4 Exercise 4: Match the Cause and Effect

Match each situation (1-8) with its cause (A-H). The cause should explain WHY using Past Perfect Continuous logic.

Situations (Effects):

1. He was out of breath.
2. Her eyes were red.
3. The streets were wet.
4. I was very tired.
5. His hands were dirty.
6. She spoke perfect French.
7. They were very hungry.
8. The car broke down.

Causes:

- A) She had been crying.
- B) It had been raining.
- C) I had been working all night.
- D) He had been running.
- E) They had been traveling all day without eating.
- F) He had been working in the garden.
- G) She had been living in Paris for 10 years.
- H) It had been making strange noises for weeks.

Answers: 1-___ 2-___ 3-___ 4-___ 5-___ 6-___ 7-___ 8-___

— MEDIUM EXERCISES —*Application & Context*

Exercises 5-8 require applying the Past Perfect Continuous in context.
Focus on choosing between tenses and understanding nuances.

5 Exercise 5: Past Perfect Continuous or Past Perfect Simple?

Complete each sentence with the correct form: Past Perfect Continuous or Past Perfect Simple. Think about whether the focus is on duration/process or completion/result.

1. When I arrived, they _____ (wait) for over an hour.
(Focus: duration of waiting)
2. She _____ (read) three books that week.
(Focus: completed quantity)
3. His clothes were wet because he _____ (swim).
(Focus: activity in progress)
4. By 6 PM, I _____ (finish) all my work.
(Focus: completion)
5. They _____ (argue) for hours before they finally agreed.
(Focus: duration)
6. He _____ (never / see) such a beautiful sunset.
(Focus: experience, not process)
7. She was tired because she _____ (work) since 6 AM.
(Focus: continuous activity)
8. I _____ (already / eat) when she offered me dinner.
(Focus: completed action)
9. The children were covered in mud because they _____ (play) in the garden.
(Focus: visible result of activity)
10. Before the exam, he _____ (study) the same topic for weeks.
(Focus: prolonged activity)

6 Exercise 6: Complete the Story

Complete this story using the Past Perfect Continuous or Past Simple. Use the verbs in parentheses.

A Difficult Day

Yesterday was a terrible day. When I (1) _____ (wake up), I (2) _____ (realize) that I (3) _____ (not / set) my alarm the night before.

I (4) _____ (be) already late for work. My boss (5) _____ (try) to call me for an hour before I finally (6) _____ (answer) the phone. She (7) _____ (wait) for me because we (8) _____ (have) an important meeting.

When I (9) _____ (arrive) at the office, everyone (10) _____ (already / start) the meeting without me. My colleague (11) _____ (present) my project — the one I (12) _____ (prepare) for weeks!

I (13) _____ (feel) so embarrassed. By the end of the day, I (14) _____ (work) for 10 hours to make up for my mistake. When I finally (15) _____ (get) home, I (16) _____ (go) straight to bed!

7 Exercise 7: Multiple Choice — Choose the Best Option

Circle the correct answer (A, B, or C) that best completes each sentence.

1. When the police arrived, the thief _____.
A) had already escaped
B) had been escaping
C) was escaping

2. She was exhausted because she _____ all day without a break.
A) worked
B) had been working
C) has been working

3. How long _____ before they found a solution?
A) had they been discussing
B) did they discuss
C) were they discussing

4. By the time we got to the cinema, the film _____.
A) had been starting
B) had started
C) has started

5. I knew he _____ because his eyes were bloodshot.
A) hadn't slept
B) hadn't been sleeping
C) didn't sleep

6. They _____ for three hours when they finally took a break.
A) drove
B) had driven
C) had been driving

7. The streets were wet. It _____.

- A) rained
- B) had been raining
- C) has rained

8. Before she became famous, she _____ in small cafés for years.

- A) sang
- B) had been singing
- C) was singing

9. He _____ five cups of coffee before noon yesterday.

- A) had drunk
- B) had been drinking
- C) drank

10. When I met her, she told me she _____ about changing jobs.

- A) thought
- B) had been thinking
- C) has been thinking

8 Exercise 8: Time Expressions

Complete each sentence with the correct time expression from the box. Each expression is used only once.

Time Expressions

for ages since morning all day for two hours
since January for weeks all night before that

1. I was exhausted because I had been studying _____.
2. When I finally saw her, she told me she had been waiting _____.
3. The baby finally fell asleep. She had been crying _____.
4. He had been learning Japanese _____ before he moved to Tokyo.
5. They were starving because they had been hiking _____ without eating.
6. I couldn't sleep. I had been thinking about the problem _____.
7. She looked terrible. She had been feeling ill _____.
8. He got the job! He had been applying to companies _____.

Remember!

- **FOR** + duration (for two hours, for ages, for weeks)
- **SINCE** + starting point (since morning, since January)
- **ALL** + time period (all day, all night, all morning)

— HARD EXERCISES —*Production & Analysis*

Exercises 9-12 require producing sentences, correcting errors, and translating between Portuguese and English.

9 Exercise 9: Error Correction

Each sentence contains ONE error related to the Past Perfect Continuous. Find the error and write the correct sentence.

1. She had been work all day, so she was very tired.

Correction: _____

2. They have been waiting for three hours when the train finally arrived.

Correction: _____

3. I had been knowing her for years before we started dating.

Correction: _____

4. Had you been wait long when I called?

Correction: _____

5. He had been living in London since five years before he moved.

Correction: _____

6. The ground was wet because it has been raining.

Correction: _____

7. She hadn't been believed in herself until she won the competition.

Correction: _____

8. How long had she been studied before she passed the exam?

Correction: _____

10 Exercise 10: Translation — Portuguese to English

Translate these sentences into English using the Past Perfect Continuous where appropriate.

1. Ele estava cansado porque tinha estado trabalhando a noite toda.
-

2. Há quanto tempo você estava esperando quando ela chegou?
-

3. Eles tinham estado morando em São Paulo por dez anos antes de se mudarem.
-

4. Estava chovendo o dia todo, então as ruas estavam molhadas.
-

5. Ela não tinha estado se sentindo bem ultimamente.
-

6. Nós tínhamos estado estudando por horas quando decidimos fazer uma pausa.
-

7. Os olhos dele estavam vermelhos porque ele tinha estado chorando.
-

8. Você tinha estado praticando antes da competição?
-

11 Exercise 11: Complete the Dialogue

Complete this dialogue using the Past Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect Simple, or Past Simple. Choose the most appropriate tense for each blank.

At the Job Interview

Interviewer: So, tell me about your previous experience.

Candidate: Well, before I (1) _____ (apply) for this job, I (2) _____ (work) at a marketing agency for five years.

Interviewer: Interesting. Why (3) _____ (you / decide) to leave?

Candidate: I (4) _____ (think) about changing careers for a while. I (5) _____ (feel) that I (6) _____ (not / grow) professionally anymore.

Interviewer: I see. What projects (7) _____ (you / work) on before you left?

Candidate: I (8) _____ (manage) several international campaigns. By the time I (9) _____ (leave), I (10) _____ (lead) a team of twelve people for two years.

Interviewer: That's impressive. (11) _____ (you / ever / work) with our type of clients before?

Candidate: Actually, yes. I (12) _____ (collaborate) with similar companies in my previous role. I (13) _____ (handle) accounts like yours for about three years.

12 Exercise 12: Write Your Own Sentences

Write complete sentences using the Past Perfect Continuous based on the prompts below. Be creative but grammatically accurate!

1. Write a sentence explaining why someone was tired. Use: *study / all night*

2. Write a question asking about duration. Use: *how long / wait*

3. Write a sentence about something that happened before you got a job. Use: *look for work / for months*

4. Write a negative sentence about someone who wasn't paying attention. Use: *not / listen*

5. Write a sentence explaining why the streets were wet. Use: *rain / all morning*

6. Write a sentence about learning a skill before achieving something. Use: *practice / for years*

Scoring Summary

Section	Exercises	Total Points
EASY	1-4	36 points
MEDIUM	5-8	44 points
HARD	9-12	35 points
GRAND TOTAL	1-12	115 points

Check your answers with the Answer Key