

Grammar Practice Exercises

Past Perfect

(I had done)

English Grammar in Use — Unit 15

15 Exercises • 120+ Questions • With Exam Practice

January 29, 2026

[NOTE] Document Navigation

*Quick Reference Pages are located at the **end of this document** (tearable).*

Includes grammar summary card and ruled pages for personal notes.

Grammar Summary: Past Perfect

Form: **had** + **past participle** (had done, had seen, had been, etc.)

Use: To talk about something that happened **before** another past action or time.

Timeline:

(First action: Past Perfect) → (Second action: Past Simple) → NOW

Examples:

- When I arrived at the cinema, the film **had already started**. (The film started first)
- She wasn't hungry because she **had just eaten**. (She ate first, then she wasn't hungry)
- I didn't recognize him. He **had changed** so much. (He changed before I saw him)

Common Time Markers: *already, just, never, before, by the time, after, when, until*

Difficulty Progression Guide

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

MEDIUM (Exercises 5-8): Context application, mixed tenses, dialogues

HARD (Exercises 9-12): Error correction, translation, complex sentences

EXAM (Exercises 13-15): IELTS, Cambridge, TOEFL practice

— EASY EXERCISES —*Recognition & Basic Formation*

Exercises 1-4 focus on recognizing and forming the Past Perfect.

Complete these with 90%+ accuracy before moving to Medium exercises.

1 Exercise 1: Complete with Past Perfect (15 points)

Complete the sentences using the past perfect form of the verb in parentheses.

1. When I arrived at the party, Tom _____ (already / leave).
2. She didn't want to go to the cinema because she _____ (already / see) the film.
3. By the time I got to the station, the train _____ (already / go).
4. I was very tired because I _____ (not / sleep) well the night before.
5. They _____ (never / meet) before the conference.
6. When we arrived at the restaurant, they _____ (give) our table to someone else.
7. I didn't recognize her because she _____ (change) so much.
8. He couldn't pay for the meal because he _____ (forget) his wallet at home.
9. By 10 PM, I _____ (finish) all my homework.
10. She told me she _____ (be) to Paris three times before.
11. The streets were wet because it _____ (rain) all morning.
12. I _____ (just / get) home when the phone rang.
13. They _____ (know) each other for years before they started dating.
14. When I checked my pocket, I realized I _____ (lose) my keys.
15. The movie _____ (already / start) when we entered the cinema.

Tip: Adverb Position

With Past Perfect, adverbs like **already**, **just**, **never** go between **had** and the **past participle**:

- She **had already left**. [OK]
- She **already had left**. [X]
- I **had never seen** it before. [OK]

2 Exercise 2: Past Simple or Past Perfect? (12 points)

Complete the sentences with the correct form: past simple or past perfect.

1. When I _____ (arrive), everybody _____ (already / start) eating.
2. She _____ (be) very hungry because she _____ (not / eat) anything all day.
3. I _____ (not / recognize) him because he _____ (grow) a beard.
4. After he _____ (finish) his work, he _____ (go) home.
5. When we _____ (get) to the airport, we realized we _____ (forget) our passports.
6. She _____ (tell) me she _____ (never / try) sushi before.
7. I _____ (feel) sick because I _____ (eat) too much at dinner.
8. By the time the ambulance _____ (arrive), the man _____ (already / die).
9. He _____ (be) late for work because he _____ (miss) his bus.
10. When I _____ (turn on) the TV, the game _____ (already / finish).
11. She _____ (pass) her exam because she _____ (study) very hard.
12. After they _____ (have) dinner, they _____ (watch) a movie.

Common Pitfall: After/Before

With **after** and **before**, the sequence is already clear, so Past Simple is also acceptable:

- After he **had finished** / **finished** his work, he went home. (Both correct)
- Before she **left** / **had left**, she checked the windows. (Both correct)

However, Past Perfect emphasizes that one action was complete before the other.

3 Exercise 3: Questions with Past Perfect (8 points)

Complete the questions using the past perfect.

1. _____ (you / ever / visit) London before your trip last year?
2. _____ (she / finish) her homework before the teacher arrived?
3. _____ (they / already / eat) when you got to the restaurant?
4. _____ (he / meet) her before the party?

5. Why ----- (you / not / tell) me about the problem earlier?
6. How long ----- (they / be) married before they had children?
7. What ----- (happen) before the police arrived?
8. Where ----- (she / work) before she joined our company?

4 Exercise 4: Write Sentences Using Past Perfect (6 points)

Combine the two sentences using the past perfect. The action in the first sentence happened first.

Example:

First: I finished my homework.

Then: I went out to play.

Answer: I went out to play after I had finished my homework.

1. First: She studied French for five years.

Then: She moved to Paris.

2. First: The rain stopped.

Then: We went for a walk.

3. First: He saved enough money.

Then: He bought a car.

4. First: They ate all the food.

Then: More guests arrived.

5. First: I read the book.

Then: I watched the movie.

6. First: The concert ended.

Then: We left the venue.

— MEDIUM EXERCISES —

Application & Context

Exercises 5-8 require applying the Past Perfect in context.

Focus on choosing between tenses and understanding nuances.

5 Exercise 5: Complete the Story (18 points)

Complete this short story using the past simple or past perfect form of the verbs in parentheses.

Last Saturday, I _____ (1. decide) to visit my old friend Mark. When I _____ (2. arrive) at his house, I _____ (3. discover) that he _____ (4. move) to a new apartment. A neighbor _____ (5. tell) me that Mark _____ (6. leave) two months earlier.

I _____ (7. be) disappointed because I _____ (8. not / see) him for over a year, and I _____ (9. really / want) to catch up. I _____ (10. try) to call him, but he _____ (11. change) his phone number too.

Later that evening, I _____ (12. check) my email and _____ (13. find) a message from Mark. He _____ (14. send) it two weeks before, but I _____ (15. not / notice) it. In the email, he _____ (16. explain) that he _____ (17. get) a new job in another city and _____ (18. have) to move quickly.

Exam Tip: Narrative Tenses

In storytelling, use Past Perfect to show **background information** or **earlier events**:

- Main narrative: Past Simple
- Background/earlier: Past Perfect

Example: “I was tired because I **had worked** all day.” (The work happened before feeling tired)

6 Exercise 6: Mixed Practice - Dialogues (16 points)

Complete the dialogues using past simple or past perfect.

Dialogue 1

A: Why were you so late to the meeting yesterday?

B: I _____ (miss) my alarm because I _____ (forget) to charge my phone the night before.

A: That's unfortunate. _____ (you / miss) anything important?

B: Yes, by the time I _____ (arrive), they _____ (already / make) all the important decisions.

Dialogue 2

A: How was your trip to Rome?

B: Amazing! I _____ (never / be) there before, so everything _____ (be) new to me.

A: _____ (you / visit) the Colosseum?

B: Of course! I _____ (see) pictures before, but seeing it in person _____ (be) incredible.

Dialogue 3

A: I _____ (hear) you got a new job. Congratulations!

B: Thanks! I _____ (apply) for it months ago and _____ (almost / give up) hope.

A: How long _____ (you / work) at your previous company?

B: I _____ (be) there for five years before I _____ (decide) to look for something new.

7 Exercise 7: Reported Speech with Past Perfect (10 points)

Change the direct speech to reported speech using the past perfect.

Example:

"I have finished my homework," said Tom.

Tom said he had finished his homework.

1. "I have never been to Japan," she said.

2. "We have already eaten dinner," they told me.

3. "I lost my keys yesterday," he admitted.

4. "She hasn't called me back," John complained.

5. "I've been working here for ten years," the manager mentioned.

6. "We saw the movie last week," they said.

7. "I didn't receive your email," she explained.

8. "The train has just left," the officer informed us.

9. "I broke my leg skiing," he told the doctor.

10. "They haven't arrived yet," the host said.

8 Exercise 8: Past Perfect vs Past Perfect Continuous (10 points)

Choose the best form: Past Perfect Simple or Past Perfect Continuous.

1. She was exhausted because she _____ (work) for 12 hours straight.
2. By the time we arrived, they _____ (already / eat) all the pizza.
3. His eyes were red because he _____ (cry).
4. I _____ (read) the book three times before I finally understood it.
5. They were wet because they _____ (swim) in the rain.
6. She _____ (never / taste) sushi before that restaurant.
7. He was out of breath because he _____ (run).
8. I knew the area well because I _____ (live) there for many years.
9. The ground was muddy because it _____ (rain) all night.
10. By 2020, she _____ (visit) every country in Europe.

When to Use Each Form

Past Perfect Simple: Completed actions, quantities, number of times
I had finished five reports by noon.

Past Perfect Continuous: Duration, ongoing activity, visible result
I was tired because I had been working all day.

— HARD EXERCISES —*Production & Analysis*

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

9 Exercise 9: Correct the Mistakes (10 points)

Each sentence has one mistake with the past perfect or past simple. Find and correct it.

- When I got home, I realized I had forgot my keys at work.

Correction: _____

- She told me she has never been to Japan before.

Correction: _____

- After he had ate dinner, he went to bed.

Correction: _____

- I didn't knew that you had already left.

Correction: _____

- They have finished all the work before the boss arrived.

Correction: _____

- By the time I woke up, the sun had already rose.

Correction: _____

- She was tired because she didn't slept well.

Correction: _____

- When the police arrived, the thief had already escape.

Correction: _____

- I had went to that restaurant many times before it closed.

Correction: _____

- He told me he had see the movie twice.

Correction: _____

Common Irregular Past Participles

Watch out for these commonly confused forms:

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| • forget → forgotten | • go → gone | • escape → escaped |
| • eat → eaten | • see → seen | |
| • rise → risen | • sleep → slept | • know → knew/known |

10 Exercise 10: Translation Practice (8 points)

Translate these sentences into English using the past perfect.

1. Quando cheguei ao aeroporto, o avião já tinha partido.

2. Ela estava cansada porque tinha trabalhado o dia todo.

3. Eu nunca tinha visto um filme tão bom antes.

4. Eles já tinham jantado quando nós chegamos.

5. Você já tinha estudado inglês antes de fazer o curso?

6. Ele não sabia que ela tinha se mudado.

7. Depois que ela tinha terminado o livro, ela assistiu ao filme.

8. A festa já tinha acabado quando eu cheguei.

11 Exercise 11: Complex Sentences (8 points)

Complete these complex sentences with the correct tenses (Past Simple, Past Perfect, or Past Perfect Continuous).

1. By the time the rescue team _____ (arrive), the survivors _____ (wait) for three days and _____ (run out) of food.
2. She _____ (not / realize) how much she _____ (miss) her hometown until she _____ (go back) to visit.
3. The students _____ (study) all night, so they _____ (feel) exhausted when the exam _____ (start).
4. After he _____ (work) at the company for twenty years, he finally _____ (get) the promotion he _____ (dream) about.

12 Exercise 12: Third Conditional with Past Perfect (6 points)

Complete these third conditional sentences using the past perfect.

1. If I _____ (know) about the traffic, I would have left earlier.
2. She wouldn't have failed the exam if she _____ (study) harder.
3. If they _____ (tell) us the truth, we wouldn't have been so angry.
4. I would have called you if I _____ (not / lose) your number.
5. If the weather _____ (be) better, we would have gone to the beach.
6. He wouldn't have missed the flight if he _____ (leave) home earlier.

Exam Tip: Third Conditional

The third conditional uses Past Perfect in the **if** clause:

If + Past Perfect, would have + past participle

Use it to talk about **hypothetical past situations** — things that didn't happen.

— REAL-LIFE & EXAM PRACTICE —*Practical Usage & Proficiency Exam Preparation***Exercises 13-15** focus on real-world communication and exam skills.

Includes IELTS, Cambridge, and TOEFL practice formats.

13 Exercise 13: IELTS Writing Task 2 Practice (5 points)

IELTS Writing: Academic Register

In academic writing, Past Perfect helps establish **clear chronological relationships** between events. It's particularly useful when discussing research findings, historical developments, or cause-and-effect relationships.

Complete these academic-style sentences with the correct form of the verbs.

1. By the end of the 20th century, technology _____ (transform) the workplace in ways that previous generations _____ (never / imagine).
2. The study found that participants who _____ (receive) the treatment _____ (show) significant improvement.
3. Before the new policy _____ (be implemented), the government _____ (consult) with various stakeholders.
4. The researchers _____ (discover) that the phenomenon _____ (occur) much earlier than previously thought.
5. By the time the environmental regulations _____ (come) into effect, significant damage _____ (already / be done).

14 Exercise 14: Cambridge Use of English (8 points)

Cambridge: Key Word Transformation

In this type of exercise, you must rewrite a sentence using a given word, keeping the meaning the same. Past Perfect is often tested in sentences about sequence of events.

Complete the second sentence using the word given, so that it has a similar meaning to the first. Use between 2-5 words including the word given.

1. I hadn't seen John for five years, so I was surprised to meet him.

FOR

I was surprised to meet John because I _____ five years.

2. The film started before we arrived at the cinema.

ALREADY

When we arrived at the cinema, the film _____.

3. She got the job because of her previous experience.

WORKED

She got the job because she _____ in the field before.

4. Tom left just before I arrived.

JUST

When I arrived, Tom _____.

5. I realized I didn't have my wallet only when I tried to pay.

FORGOTTEN

When I tried to pay, I realized I _____ my wallet.

6. It was the first time I had eaten Thai food.

NEVER

I _____ Thai food before.

7. First he finished work, then he went to the gym.

AFTER

He went to the gym _____ work.

8. We didn't realize the restaurant was closed until we got there.

ALREADY

When we got there, we realized the restaurant _____.

15 Exercise 15: TOEFL Integrated Skills (8 points)

TOEFL: Reading & Listening Integration

In TOEFL, you may need to understand Past Perfect in academic lectures and reading passages. It signals important time relationships in historical accounts and scientific explanations.

Read the passage and answer the questions using Past Perfect where appropriate.

The Discovery of Penicillin

Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928. Before this discovery, scientists knew that certain molds could kill bacteria, but no one successfully isolated the active compound. Fleming noticed that a mold contaminated one of his bacterial cultures and killed the bacteria around it. Earlier researchers observed similar phenomena but did not investigate further. Fleming's discovery changed medicine, but it took another decade before other scientists developed penicillin into a usable drug.

Questions:

1. What did scientists know before Fleming's discovery?

2. What happened before Fleming noticed the contaminated culture?

3. What had earlier researchers failed to do?

4. Rewrite this sentence using Past Perfect: "Fleming discovered penicillin. Before this, no one isolated the compound."

Speaking Task: Describe a significant discovery or invention. Explain what the situation was like before the discovery and how it changed things. Use Past Perfect to show the sequence of events.

Example beginning: "Before the internet was invented, people had communicated mainly through letters and telephone calls. They had never imagined being able to video call someone on the other side of the world..."

Quick Reference

Past Perfect

FORM

Positive	had + past participle
Negative	had not (hadn't) + PP
Question	Had + subject + PP?

Examples:

- I **had finished** work.
- She **hadn't eaten** yet.
- **Had they arrived?**

MAIN USES

1. Action before another past action:
*When I arrived, the film **had started**.*
2. Explaining past situations:
*I was tired because I **hadn't slept**.*
3. Reported speech:
*She said she **had seen** the movie.*
4. Third conditional:
*If I **had known**, I would have helped.*

ADVERB POSITION

already / just / never / ever
go **between** had and PP:

- had **already** left [OK]
- had **never** seen [OK]
- had **just** arrived [OK]

TIME EXPRESSIONS

- by the time
- before / after
- when / until
- already / just / never
- for / since (with duration)

PAST PERFECT vs PAST SIMPLE

Past Simple	Past Perfect
Single past event or chronological sequence <i>I arrived. I ate. I left.</i>	Earlier of two past events <i>When I arrived, they had already eaten.</i>

PP SIMPLE vs PP CONTINUOUS

Past Perfect Simple	Past Perfect Continuous
Completed action, result, quantity <i>I had written 5 emails.</i>	Duration, activity, visible result <i>I was tired because I had been writing all day.</i>

[!] COMMON MISTAKES

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| [X] <i>had forgot</i> | [OK] <i>had forgotten</i> |
| [X] <i>had ate</i> | [OK] <i>had eaten</i> |
| [X] <i>had went</i> | [OK] <i>had gone</i> |
| [X] <i>have finished (past context)</i> | [OK] had <i>finished</i> |

Personal Notes

