

Grammar Practice Exercises

Past Perfect Continuous

(I had been doing)

English Grammar in Use — Unit 16

18 Exercises • 170+ Questions • With Exam Practice

January 20, 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 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

REAL-LIFE & EXAM (Exercises 13-18): Practical usage, IELTS, Cambridge, TOEFL

— 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.

[TIP]

IELTS Tip — Spelling Matters! In IELTS Writing, spelling errors affect your **Lexical Resource** score. Master these -ing spelling rules:

- **CVC verbs** (consonant-vowel-consonant): double the final consonant → *sit* → *sitting*
- **-ie verbs**: change to -y → *lie* → *lying*, *die* → *dying*
- **-e verbs**: drop the -e → *live* → *living*, *make* → *making*

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)

[TIP]

Cambridge Exam Tip — Key Word Transformations] In Cambridge exams (FCE/CAE), you often need to transform sentences keeping the same meaning. Understanding when to use Past Perfect Continuous vs. Simple is crucial:

- **Duration/Process** → Past Perfect Continuous: “for hours”, “all day”, “since morning”
- **Completion/Result** → Past Perfect Simple: “already”, “just”, “never”, “three times”

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?

[TIP

TOEFL Tip — Avoid Direct Translation] When writing in TOEFL, don't translate directly from Portuguese. Notice how Portuguese often uses "tinha estado + gerund" but English structure is different:

- PT: "Ele *tinha estado trabalhando*" → EN: "He *had been working*"
- The structure is: **had been** + **-ing** (not "had been" + past participle)

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*

— REAL-LIFE & EXAM PRACTICE —*Practical Usage & Proficiency Exam Preparation***Exercises 13-18** focus on real-world communication and exam skills.

Includes IELTS, Cambridge, and TOEFL practice formats.

13 Exercise 13: Micro-Dialogues

Complete these short conversations using the Past Perfect Continuous. Focus on natural, everyday English.

1. At the gym:

A: "You look exhausted! How long have you been here?"

B: "About two hours. I _____ (lift) weights before you arrived, and then I did cardio."

2. At a café:

A: "Sorry I'm late! Have you been waiting long?"

B: "Yes, I _____ (wait) for 30 minutes! I almost left."

3. At work:

A: "Why does Sarah look so stressed?"

B: "She _____ (work) on that report all week. The deadline is tomorrow."

4. At home:

A: "Why is the kitchen such a mess?"

B: "I _____ (cook) all afternoon for the dinner party tonight."

5. On the phone:

A: "You sound tired. Is everything okay?"

B: "I _____ (not / sleep) well lately. Too much stress at work."

6. At university:

A: "How did you pass that difficult exam?"

B: "I _____ (study) for months before I took it. Hard work pays off!"

7. At a reunion:

A: "I didn't recognize you! You've changed so much."

B: "Well, I _____ (exercise) regularly and eating healthier."

8. At the doctor's office:

A: "How long have you been experiencing this pain?"

B: "It started yesterday, but I _____ (feel) tired for weeks before that."

14 Exercise 14: Real-Life Context — Professional & Academic

Complete these realistic scenarios using the Past Perfect Continuous where appropriate.

Scenario A: Job Interview Follow-up Email

Complete the email with appropriate verb forms.

Dear Mr. Johnson,
Thank you for the interview yesterday. I wanted to follow up on our conversation about my experience.
As I mentioned, before I (1) _____ (join) my current company, I (2) _____ (work) as a freelance consultant for three years. During that time, I (3) _____ (develop) the skills that I believe would be valuable for this position.
I (4) _____ (think) about transitioning to a corporate role for some time, and your company seems like the perfect fit.
Best regards,
Maria Santos

Scenario B: Academic Report Introduction

Complete the paragraph with appropriate verb forms.

Research Background
Before this study (5) _____ (begin), researchers (6) _____ (investigate) climate patterns in the region for over a decade. Previous studies (7) _____ (show) concerning trends, but no conclusive data (8) _____ (exist) until now. Our team (9) _____ (collect) data for two years before we (10) _____ (publish) these findings.

Scenario C: News Report

Complete the news excerpt with appropriate verb forms.

Local Company Announces Expansion
TechStart Inc. announced yesterday that they will open a new office in São Paulo. The company (11) _____ (plan) this expansion for over a year. “We (12) _____ (look) at several locations before we (13) _____ (choose) São Paulo,” said CEO Ana Ferreira. The company (14) _____ (grow) steadily since 2020 and (15) _____ (hire) over 200 employees in the past year alone.

15 Exercise 15: Common Pitfalls for Brazilian Learners



Watch Out! Common Mistakes] Brazilian Portuguese speakers often make these errors with Past Perfect Continuous. Test yourself!

Each sentence contains a common error made by Portuguese speakers. Identify and correct the mistake.

1. Using Present Perfect instead of Past Perfect Continuous:

“When you called, I have been working for two hours.”

Correction: _____

2. Confusing “for” and “since”:

“She had been studying since three hours when I arrived.”

Correction: _____

3. Using continuous with stative verbs:

“I had been knowing him for years before we worked together.”

Correction: _____

4. Wrong word order in questions:

“How long you had been waiting?”

Correction: _____

5. Translating “estava + gerund” literally:

“He was being working all day.” (Ele estava trabalhando o dia todo.)

Correction: _____

6. Forgetting “been” in the structure:

“They had waiting for hours.”

Correction: _____

7. Using Past Perfect Continuous when Simple is needed:

“By 6 PM, I had been finishing my homework.” (completed action)

Correction: _____

8. Mixing Portuguese and English structures:

“She had been work hard all week.” (faltou o -ing)

Correction: _____

16 Exercise 16: IELTS Practice

[TARGET

IELTS — Speaking & Writing Practice] These exercises mirror real IELTS formats. Practice for Band 7+ performance!

Part A: IELTS Speaking Part 2 — Cue Card

Describe a goal you achieved that took a long time.

You should say:

- what the goal was
- how long you had been working towards it
- what difficulties you had been facing
- and explain how you felt when you achieved it

Preparation time: 1 minute — Speaking time: 1-2 minutes

Write your response outline below (use Past Perfect Continuous where appropriate):

Part B: IELTS Speaking Part 3 — Discussion Questions

Answer these follow-up questions using Past Perfect Continuous where appropriate.

1. “How long had people in your country been discussing environmental issues before the government took action?”

2. “What changes had been happening in education before online learning became common?”

3. “Had people been expecting these technological changes, or were they surprised?”

Part C: IELTS Writing Task 2 — Essay Planning

IELTS Writing Task 2

Some people believe that technological progress has made our lives more complicated. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Task: Plan your essay. Write 2-3 sentences for the introduction using Past Perfect Continuous to describe the situation BEFORE recent changes.

Introduction (use PPC to set context):

[TIP]

IELTS Band 7+ Strategy] Using Past Perfect Continuous in essays shows **grammatical range**:

- Use it to describe **trends before a change**: “People had been relying on...”
- Combine with other tenses to show **time relationships**
- Don’t overuse — 2-3 instances in an essay is enough

17 Exercise 17: Cambridge Exam Practice

[BOOK]

Cambridge FCE/CAE — Use of English] Practice Key Word Transformations and Open Cloze — common formats in Cambridge exams.

Part A: Key Word Transformations

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

1. She started studying at 6 AM. At 10 AM, she was still studying.
At 10 AM, she _____ for four hours. (**BEEN**)
2. The rain started in the morning. The streets were wet when I left at noon.
It _____ all morning, so the streets were wet. (**RAINING**)

3. They negotiated for three months. Then they reached an agreement.
They _____ for three months before they agreed. (**HAD**)
4. He practiced piano daily since childhood. He won the competition at 18.
He _____ for years before he won at 18. (**PRACTICING**)
5. My wait started at 3 PM. She arrived at 5 PM.
I _____ for two hours when she arrived. (**WAITING**)

Part B: Open Cloze

Complete the text with *ONE* word in each gap.

The Marathon Runner

By the time Maria crossed the finish line, she (1) _____ been running for over four hours. She (2) _____ been training for this moment for two years. Before she started running marathons, she (3) _____ never imagined she would complete such a challenge.

Her coach, who (4) _____ been working with her since 2022, was waiting at the finish line. He knew how hard she (5) _____ been pushing herself in recent months. “I’m so proud,” he said. “You (6) _____ been preparing for this day for so long.”

Maria smiled. She (7) _____ been dreaming of this moment, and now it was finally real.

18 Exercise 18: TOEFL Practice

[GRAD

TOEFL iBT — Integrated Skills Practice] Practice speaking and writing responses using Past Perfect Continuous.

Part A: TOEFL Speaking Task — Campus Situation

Reading: The university library will extend its hours starting next month.

Listening (summary): A student says she is happy about this change because she had been struggling to find quiet study spaces. She had been going to coffee shops to study late at night, which was expensive and distracting.

Task: Explain why the student supports the change. (Preparation: 30 seconds — Speaking: 60 seconds)

Write your response notes:

Part B: TOEFL Writing — Integrated Task Style

Read the passage and lecture notes, then write a response.

Reading Passage:

“Remote work has become increasingly common in recent years. Companies report that productivity has remained stable or even improved.”

Lecture Notes:

Professor says: Before the pandemic, only 5% of workers had been working remotely. Many companies had been resisting flexible work arrangements. Now, attitudes have changed dramatically.

Write 2-3 sentences summarizing the relationship between the reading and lecture. Use Past Perfect Continuous:

[!] COMMON EXAM MISTAKES

Avoid These Errors in IELTS, Cambridge & TOEFL

#	[X] Common Mistake	[OK] Correct Form
1	<i>I had been work hard.</i>	<i>I had been working hard.</i>
2	<i>She had been knowing him for years.</i>	<i>She had known him for years.</i>
3	<i>They have been waiting when I arrived.</i>	<i>They had been waiting when I arrived.</i>
4	<i>I had been living there since 5 years.</i>	<i>I had been living there for 5 years.</i>
5	<i>How long you had been studying?</i>	<i>How long had you been studying?</i>
6	<i>The team had been finished the project.</i>	<i>The team had finished the project.</i>
7	<i>He had been believing in himself.</i>	<i>He had believed in himself.</i>
8	<i>We had waiting for hours.</i>	<i>We had been waiting for hours.</i>

[MEMO

Remember for Exams] **Stative verbs** that should NOT be used in continuous form:

- know
- like/love/hate
- belong
- believe
- understand
- own
- want
- remember
- seem

Exception: Some verbs change meaning in continuous → “*I had been thinking about it*” (process) is correct!

Scoring Summary

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

Check your answers with the Answer Key

Quick Reference

Past Perfect Continuous

FORM

had + been + verb-ing

- (+) I/You/He/She/It/We/They **had been working**
- (-) I/You/He/She/It/We/They **hadn't been working**
- (?) **Had** I/you/he/she/it/we/they **been working**?

MAIN USES

1. **Duration before a past moment:**
"I had been waiting for an hour when the bus came."
2. **Cause → Visible result:**
"He was tired because he had been running."
3. **Repeated actions before a past event:**
"She had been applying to jobs for months before she got hired."

TIME EXPRESSIONS

FOR + duration	for hours, for weeks, for ages, for a long time
SINCE + starting point	since morning, since 2020, since January
ALL + time period	all day, all night, all morning, all week
HOW LONG questions	How long had you been waiting...?

[!] COMMON MISTAKES

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| [X] <i>had been work</i> | [OK] <i>had been working</i> |
| [X] <i>had been knowing</i> | [OK] <i>had known (stative verb!)</i> |
| [X] <i>since 3 hours</i> | [OK] <i>for 3 hours</i> |
| [X] <i>have been waiting (past)</i> | [OK] <i>had been waiting</i> |

PPC vs. PP Simple

Past Perfect Continuous	Past Perfect Simple
Focus on duration/process <i>"She had been reading for hours."</i>	Focus on completion/result <i>"She had read 3 books."</i>

[CUT] TEAR HERE — Personal Notes Page 1

[illegible]

My Mistakes & Learning Points

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 170

Mistakes I made:

Rules I need to remember:

Review date: _____

Second attempt score: _____ / 170

Additional notes:
