**Sequence of Tenses**

In English the tense of the verb in a subordinate clause ( mainly, an object clause) depends on that of the verb in the principal clause.

The Rules of the Sequence of Tenses:

1. **A present or future tense in the principal clause may be followed in the subordinate by any tense that is required by the sense.**
2. **A past tense in the principal clause must be followed by a past tense in the subordinate clause.** The choice of the type of the past tense depends on the time relations between the principal and the subordinate clause:
3. ***If the action of the subordinate clause is simultaneous with the action of the principal clause, the Past Simple or the Past Continuous is used in the subordinate clause:***

* I **didn’t know** you two **were** related to each other.
* For the moment she **didn’t know** where she **was**.
* I **was sure** the children **were sleeping** and **didn’t hear** us.

1. ***If the action of the subordinate clause is prior to the action of the principal clause or lasted a certain time before the action of the principal clause, the Past Perfect or Past Perfect Continuous is used in the subordinate clause:***

* I **knew** she **hadn’t played** the piano for a long time.
* We **were** **aware** that they **had been building** a garage since last summer.

1. ***If the action of the subordinate clause refers to a future moment ( a posterior action), a Future tense-form is replaced by the so-called Future-in-the-Past (when the auxiliary “will” changes to “would”):***

* Susan’s parents **were happy** that their daughter **would marry** into a good family.
* I **knew** they **would still be reading** for the seminar when I came.
* They **were sure** that they **would have sold** the house by the end of the year.
* He **informed** us that by March 2010 he **would have been working** for the company for 10 years.

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| **Present Simple**  They usually decorate the house themselves. | **Past Simple**  We knew they usually decorated the house themselves. |
| **Present Continuous**  They are decorating the house. | **Past Continuous**  We knew they were decorating the house. |
| **Present Perfect**  They have decorated the house themselves. | **Past Perfect**  She was proud they had decorated the house themselves. |
| **Present Perfect Continuous**  They’ve been decorating the house for two weeks. | **Past Perfect Continuous**  We knew they had been decorating the house for two weeks. |
| **Past Simple**  They decorated the house last month. | **Past Perfect**  They were glad that they had decorated the house the previous month. |
| **Past Continuous**  William was whitewashing the ceiling at 5 o’clock. | **Is generally unchanged or is replaced by Past Perfect Continuous**  We explained that he was whitewashing (had been whitewashing) the ceiling at 5 o’clock. |
| **Past Perfect**  He had whitewashed the ceiling by the time I phoned. | **Past Perfect (remains unchanged)**  William explained that he had whitewashed the ceiling by the time I phoned. |
| **Past Perfect Continuous**  He had been whitewashing the ceiling for a couple of hours by the time she phoned. | **Past Perfect Continuous (unchanged)**  He explained that he had been whitewashing the ceiling for a couple of hours by the time she phoned. |
| **Future Simple**  He’ll whitewash the ceiling tomorrow. | **Future Simple-in-the-Past**  He promised he would whitewash the ceiling the following day but he didn’t. |
| **Future Continuous**  They’ll be whitewashing the ceiling at 5 o’clock. | **Future Continuous-in-the-Past**  They were sure that they would be whitewashing the ceiling at 5 o’clock. |
| **Future Perfect**  They’ll have whitewashed the ceiling and papered the walls by 5 o’clock. | **Future Perfect-in-the-Past**  We were sure that they would have whitewashed the ceiling and papered the walls by 5 o’clock. |
| **Future Perfect Continuous**  They’ll have been papering the walls for 3 hours by 5 o’clock. | **Future Perfect Continuous-in-the-Past**  We supposed that they would have been papering the walls for 3 hours by 5 o’clock. |

**Changes of adverbials and demonstrative pronouns:**

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| Today, tonight | That day, that night |
| here | there |
| now | Then / at that time / at the moment |
| This, these | That, those |
| Tonight / this evening | That night / evening |
| yesterday | The day before / the previous day |
| The day before yesterday | 2 days before / previously |
| ago | before |
| 2 years ago | 2 years before/ previously |
| Last night, week, month, etc. | The night, week, etc., before / the previous night, week |
| tomorrow | The following / the next day/ the day after |
| The day after tomorrow | In two days’ time |
| Next week/ year, etc. | The following / the next week/ year, etc. |

\* The Sequence of Tenses may not be observed:

* If the object clause expresses **general truth**:

*The pupil knew that water consists/ consisted of oxygen and hydrogen.*

*The teacher said that the Sun sets/set in the west.*

* If the action in the object clause refers to what is (or was) believed to be **a regular occurrence or existing fact:**

*He asked the clerk what time the earliest train to Manchester starts/started.*

*He explained to us very clearly how the computer works/worked.*

* When the action in the subordinate clause precedes the action in the principal clause but refers to a **definite past moment** or there is a **succession of past events**, the **Past Simple** is used:

*I knew that his youngest son was born in 1960.*

*He told me that they decided to go to the pictures, got a 63 bus, and got off at the Elephant Castle as the Pictures were just next door.*