

Past simple vs. past perfect

Form

Simple Past

Subject + verb in the past form + complement

Example:

The dentist talked to the patient

Past Perfect Simple

Subject + verb in the past participle form + complement

Example:

The dentist had talked to the patient

Use

We use Simple Past if we give past events in the order in which they occurred. However, when we look back from a certain time in the past to tell what had happened before, we use Past Perfect.

Do you just want to tell what happened sometime in the past or do you want to tell what had happened before/up to a certain time in the past?

Simple Past

sometime in the past

Example:

*The dentist visited the zoo.
The dentist checked the elephant and then leopard.*

Simple Past

- ° first
- ° then

Past Perfect Simple

before/up to a certain time in the past

Example:

Before that day, the dentist had never examined a leopard.

Past Perfect Simple

- ° already
- ° up to then
- ° before that day
- ° after*

***Note:** "After" is only used as a signal word for Past Perfect if it is followed by a subject + verb, meaning that one action had been completed before another action began (the new action is in Simple Past).

Example:

After the dentist had had breakfast, He went to the zoo.

However, if "after" is followed by object + subject + verb, the verb belongs to the new action and is therefore in Simple Past.

Example:

After he visited to the zoo, the dentist was exhausted.