

2.2 Past Perfect Simple and Continuous

Past Perfect Simple

We use the Past Perfect Simple:

- to talk about actions that happened before a particular time or event in the past (for which we usually use the Past Simple):

When I arrived at the wedding reception, the bride's father **had** already **made** his speech.

By the age of sixteen, he **had learnt** to speak three foreign languages.

- to talk about states that were true or happening before a particular time in the past:

When my parents got married, they **had known** each other for fifteen years.

Past Perfect Continuous

We use the Past Perfect Continuous to talk about actions that were in progress up to a particular time in the past (or finished shortly before it):

The guests **had been waiting** in front of the church for forty minutes before the bus picked them up.

We **hadn't been thinking** about selling the house, but then we got this great offer.

How long **had you been watching** me before I woke up?

Affirmative	Negative
I/You/He/She/It/We/They had been sleeping.	I/You/He/She/It/We/They hadn't been sleeping.
Yes/No questions	Short answers
Had I/you/he/she/it/we/they been sleeping?	Yes, I/you/he/she/it/we/they had. No, I/you/he/she/it/we/they hadn't.
Wh- questions	Subject questions
How long had I/you/he/she/it/we/they been sleeping?	Who had been sleeping?

Past Perfect Simple vs Past Perfect Continuous

- We use the Past Perfect Simple:
 - to talk about finished actions:

My father **had visited** his Scottish relatives twice before he finally went to live with them.
 - to talk about states using stative verbs, e.g. be, have, know, see, believe:

I **had never seen** such a magnificent church before I visited St Paul's Cathedral.

- We use the Past Perfect Continuous to talk about actions but not states. We stress the duration of the action rather than the result:

We **had been waiting** for three hours when they finally arrived.