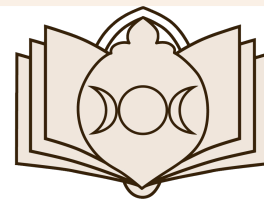


Past Perfect Continuous

01 / Grammar review: uses



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Something had been happening. Then the plot thickened.

An activity leading up to a past moment

We use the **Past Perfect Continuous** to look back from a past moment at an **earlier activity**. We often focus on its duration or its effects at that past moment. It is also called the Past Perfect Progressive.

1. Activity continuing up to a past point

I **had been studying** for two hours when my friend called.

First: I started studying. **Then:** my friend called.

The studying continued up to the call. The sentence does not tell us whether I studied again afterwards.

2. An earlier activity explaining a past result

Her hands were dirty because she **had been gardening**.

He was tired because he **had been working** all night.

The activity may have stopped before the past moment, but its effects were still noticeable then.

Muddy hands: evidence. Witchcraft: unconfirmed.

3. Repeated activity before a past point

Before the concert, we **had been rehearsing** every evening.

She **had been cycling** to work for months when she bought a car.

The activity happened repeatedly during a period leading up to a past point. Nobody was cycling continuously for months. Please hydrate.

Duration, not a completed total

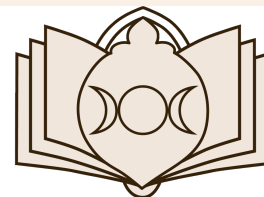
We had been painting for three hours when it started to rain.

The focus is the painting activity and how long it lasted. This does **not** tell us that the painting was finished.



Past Perfect Continuous

02 / Forms review: build the spell



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HAD + BEEN + VERB-ING

I / you / he / she / it / we / they **had been working**.

Had and **been** stay the same for every subject.

Three ingredients. No substitutions from the back of the cupboard.

Form	Pattern	Example
Affirmative	Subject + had + been + verb-ing	She had been studying.
Negative	Subject + hadn't + been + verb-ing	She hadn't been studying.
Question	Had + subject + been + verb-ing?	Had she been studying?
Short answer	Yes, subject + had. No, subject + hadn't.	Yes, she had. No, she hadn't.

Contractions: the familiar 'D

I'd been working = I **had** been working.

They'd been waiting = they **had** been waiting.

Had not = **hadn't**.

In this tense, 'd stands for had. In other patterns it can mean would, as in **I'd go**. Context still earns its keep.

HOW LONG asks about duration

How long had you been waiting when the bus arrived?

I'd been waiting for twenty minutes.

How long had she been working there before she moved?

She'd been working there for three years.

Keep BEEN in the cauldron

He **had been running**. ✓ He **had running**. ✗

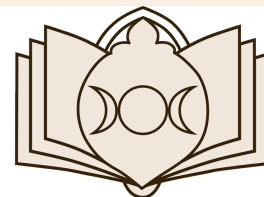
Had you been sleeping? ✓ **Did you had been sleeping?** ✗

Had is the auxiliary. It does not need did as a chaperone.



Past Perfect Continuous

03 / Spelling, time words & state verbs



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The -ING ingredient list

Rule	Examples
Usually add -ing	work → working; study → studying; play → playing
Drop a final silent -e	make → making; write → writing Keep -ee: see → seeing; agree → agreeing
Change final -ie to -y	lie → lying; die → dying
Double the final consonant in some verbs	run → running; sit → sitting; begin → beginning A short vowel + final consonant; the final syllable is stressed. Do not double w, x or y.

FOR, SINCE & past reference points

For + duration: We had been walking for an hour when it rained.

Since + starting point: She had been waiting since eight when I arrived.

All morning: He was hungry because he had been working all morning.

Before / when / by the time can introduce the past reference point:

By the time the shop opened, we had been queuing for thirty minutes.

Time expressions help us understand the timeline. They do not automatically choose the tense. **For** and **since** also work with Past Perfect Simple.

State verbs usually stay simple

Use **Past Perfect Simple** with states such as knowing, believing or owning something:

I had known her for years when we became colleagues. ✓

I had been knowing her for years. ✗

Meaning matters: **She had had the car for years** = possession.

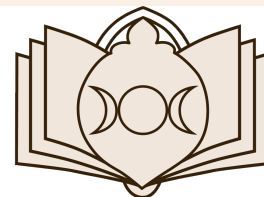
She had been having problems with it = repeated experiences.

Same verb, different job description.



Past Perfect Continuous

04 / Which past tense fits your story?



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Past Perfect Simple	Past Perfect Continuous
Completed result or quantity: I had written four emails before lunch.	Activity or duration: I had been writing emails for an hour when lunch arrived.
Completed earlier action: She had cleaned the kitchen before the guests arrived.	Earlier activity and its effects: She was tired because she had been cleaning the kitchen.
State up to a past point: I had known him for ten years when we started the business.	Activity up to a past point: I had been working with him for ten years when we started the business.

Sometimes both are possible

She had lived there for five years when she moved.

She had been living there for five years when she moved.

Both can describe the same situation. Continuous emphasises its ongoing nature or duration. Simple presents the situation more as a fact.

Past Continuous or Past Perfect Continuous?

I was cooking when she arrived.

Past Continuous: cooking was in progress at that past moment.

I had been cooking for an hour when she arrived.

Past Perfect Continuous: looks back at the cooking leading up to her arrival and emphasises the duration.

Present Perfect Continuous or Past Perfect Continuous?

I have been studying for two hours. → measured up to now.

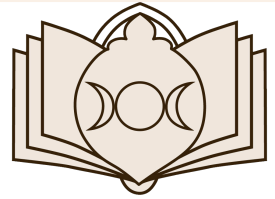
I had been studying for two hours when you called. → measured up to a past moment.

Find your reference point. Even a time-travelling witch needs an address.



Past Perfect Continuous

05 / Practice: form & duration



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1. Complete with Past Perfect Continuous

1. I _____ (study) for an hour when the phone rang.
2. Ella _____ (work) there for years before she moved.
3. We _____ (not / sleep) well before the holiday.
4. _____ you _____ (wait) long when the bus came?
5. It _____ (rain) all night, so the ground was wet.
6. The actors _____ (rehearse) for weeks before the show.
7. _____ Sam _____ (run)? He was out of breath.
8. He _____ (not / practise) much before the concert.

2. Complete with FOR or SINCE

1. We had been waiting _____ twenty minutes when she arrived.
2. She had been studying _____ nine when we called.
3. I had been working there _____ I left school.
4. They had been travelling _____ six weeks when they returned.

3. Questions & negatives

1. She had been reading. → Write a question.

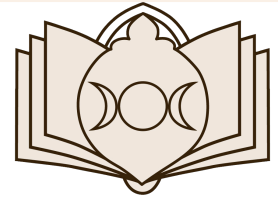
2. They had been arguing. → Write a negative.

3. Had you been studying? → Give a short positive answer.



Past Perfect Continuous

06 / Practice: context & grammar gremlins



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4. Simple or Continuous?

Use Past Perfect Simple or Past Perfect Continuous. Follow the meaning in brackets.

1. I _____ (answer) six emails before the meeting. (Completed total.)
2. She _____ (write) emails for an hour when I called. (Ongoing activity.)
3. We _____ (know) Ben for years when he moved away. (State.)
4. You looked hot. _____ you _____ (exercise)? (Earlier activity.)
5. The train _____ (leave) before we reached the station. (Completed event.)

5. Behind the curtain

Use Past Perfect Continuous in all five gaps.

When the show began, we were exhausted. We (1) _____ (prepare) for it for weeks. I (2) _____ (make) costumes, and Mia (3) _____ (paint) the scenery. We (4) _____ (not / get) enough sleep. My hair was full of glitter because I (5) _____ (decorate) a witch's hat. The audience loved it. My shampoo had concerns.

6. Fix the grammar gremlins

1. She had working all day before I arrived.

2. I had been knowing him for years when we met again.

3. We had been waiting since two hours when the doors opened.

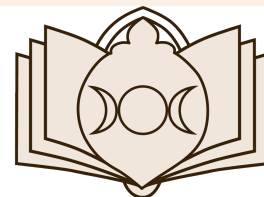
7. Your turn: give the past a backstory

Write four sentences about a tiring day, an exam or an event. Include two earlier activities using Past Perfect Continuous, one with for or since. Use Past Simple for the main events. Your story needs a clear past reference point; a haunted theatre is optional.



Past Perfect Continuous

07 / Answer key: the spell check



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1. Correct forms

1. had been studying 2. had been working
3. hadn't been sleeping 4. Had / been waiting
5. had been raining 6. had been rehearsing
7. Had / been running 8. hadn't been practising

2. FOR or SINCE

1. for 2. since 3. since 4. for

3. Questions & negatives

1. Had she been reading?
2. They hadn't been arguing.
3. Yes, I had.

4. Choose your focus

1. had answered 2. had been writing 3. had known
4. Had / been exercising 5. had left

A completed total and a completed departure use Simple. Writing and exercising focus on activities. Knowing someone describes a state, so use Simple.

5. Behind the curtain

1. had been preparing 2. had been making
3. had been painting 4. hadn't been getting
5. had been decorating

6. Grammar gremlins, defeated

1. She **had been working** all day before I arrived.
2. I **had known** him for years when we met again.
3. We had been waiting **for** two hours when the doors opened.

7. One possible story

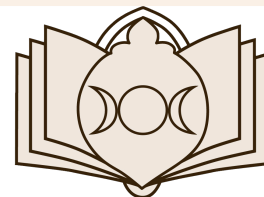
I arrived at the theatre at six. The actors had been rehearsing for three hours. My friend was tired because she had been moving scenery all afternoon. We bought coffee before the show started.

Your story will be different. The earlier activities still need a later past reference point.



Past Perfect Continuous

Spelling reference & final check



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The full -ING spelling table

Rule	Examples
Usually add -ing	work → working; read → reading
Drop final silent -e	make → making; write → writing
Keep -ee, -ye and -oe	see → seeing; dye → dyeing; canoe → canoeing
Final -ie becomes -y	lie → lying; tie → tying; die → dying
Keep final -y	study → studying; play → playing
One syllable: double a final consonant after one vowel letter	run → running; sit → sitting; swim → swimming
More syllables: double if the final syllable is stressed and ends in one vowel letter + one consonant	begin → beginning; prefer → preferring But open → opening; visit → visiting
No doubling of w, x or y; usually no doubling after two vowel letters or two consonants	snow → snowing; fix → fixing; cook → cooking; help → helping
British final -l often doubles after one vowel letter even without final stress	travel → travelling; cancel → cancelling American: traveling; canceling

Notice be → being and panic → panicking. These are the main rules; check unfamiliar exceptions in a dictionary.

A little spell check

Write -ing forms: 1. lie _____ 2. swim _____ 3. open _____
4. make _____ 5. travel _____ 6. fix _____

Answers: lying; swimming; opening; making; travelling (also traveling); fixing.

