

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The structure of the past perfect continuous tense

subject	+	auxiliary verb HAVE	+	auxiliary verb BE	+	main verb
		conjugated in simple past tense		past participle		present participle
		had		been		base + ing

example sentences with the past perfect continuous tense

	subject	auxiliary verb		auxiliary verb	main verb	
+	I	had		been	working.	
+	You	had		been	playing	tennis.
-	It	had	not	been	working	well.
-	We	had	not	been	expecting	her.
?	Had	you		been	drinking?	
?	Had	they		been	waiting	long?

contract the subject and first auxiliary verb

I had been

I'd been

you had been

you'd been

he had

he'd been

she had been

she'd been

it had been

it'd been

we had been

we'd been

they had been

they'd been

USE 1 : Duration Before Something in the Past

We use the Past Perfect Continuous to show that something started in the past and continued up until another time in the past.

"For five minutes" and "for two weeks" are both durations which can be used with the Past Perfect Continuous.

Notice that this is related to **the Present Perfect Continuous**; however, the duration does not continue until now, it stops before something else in the past.

Examples:

- They **had been talking** for over an hour before Tony arrived.
- She **had been working** at that company for three years when it went out of business.
- How long **had you been waiting** to get on the bus?
- Mike wanted to sit down because he **had been standing** all day at work.
- James **had been teaching** at the university for more than a year before he left for Asia.
- A: How long **had you been studying** Turkish before you moved to Ankara?
B: I **had not been studying** Turkish very long.

USE 2 Cause of Something in the Past

Using the Past Perfect Continuous before another action in the past is a good way to show cause and effect.

Examples:

- Jason was tired because he **had been jogging**.
- Sam gained weight because he **had been overeating**.
- Betty failed the final test because she **had not been attending class**

Past Continuous vs. Past Perfect Continuous

If you do not include a duration such as "for five minutes," "for two weeks" or "since Friday," many English speakers choose to use ***the Past Continuous*** rather than the ***Past Perfect Continuous***. Be careful because this can change the meaning of the sentence.

Past Continuous emphasizes interrupted actions, whereas ***Past Perfect Continuous*** emphasizes a duration of time before something in the past.

Study the examples below to understand the difference.

- He was tired because he **was exercising** so hard.

(This sentence emphasizes that he was tired because he was exercising at that exact moment.)

- He was tired because he **had been exercising** so hard.

(This sentence emphasizes that he was tired because he had been exercising over a period of time. It is possible that he was still exercising at that moment OR that he had just finished.)

REMEMBER Non-Continuous Verbs / Mixed Verbs

- It is important to remember that **Non-Continuous Verbs** cannot be used in any continuous tenses.
- Also, certain non-continuous meanings for **Mixed Verbs** cannot be used in continuous tenses. Instead of using Past Perfect Continuous with these verbs, you must use Past Perfect.

Examples:

- The motorcycle **had been belonging** to George for years before Tina bought it.

(Not Correct)

- The motorcycle **had belonged** to George for years before Tina bought it.

(Correct)

ADVERB PLACEMENT

The examples below show the placement for grammar adverbs such as: always, only, never, ever, still, just, etc.

Examples:

- You had **only** been waiting there for a few minutes when she arrived.
- Had you **only** been waiting there for a few minutes when she arrived?