

Past Perfect Continuous: Narrative Sequence & States

INTERMEDIATE

Focus: Had been + -ing, Contractions (I'd, he'd), Negative forms (hadn't been), Subject-verb agreement, Actions happening before a specific past time, Cause and effect in the past, Duration markers (for, since), Interrupted actions, Non-continuous verbs (know, want, like), Past Perfect Simple vs. Continuous usage

1. The Form: Past Perfect Continuous

We use the **Past Perfect Continuous** to look back at a situation that was in progress *before* another event in the past.

Structure: Subject + had been + verb-ing

- **Positive (+):** She **had been working** all day. / She**'d been working** all day.
- **Negative (-):** They **had not been paying** attention. / They **hadn't been paying** attention.
- **Question (?):** **Had you been waiting** long?

2. When to Use It

A. Duration Before a Past Moment

We use this tense to emphasize the **duration** of an activity up to a specific time in the past. We often use **for** or **since**.

- *Example:* By the time I arrived, Tom **had been waiting** for an hour.

B. Cause and Effect (Physical/Mental States)

We use it to explain *why* something happened or *why* someone felt a certain way in the past. The result was visible in the past.

- *Example:* The road was wet because it **had been raining**.
- *Example:* She was exhausted because she **had been running**.

3. Important Exception: Stative Verbs

Some verbs describe states, not actions (e.g., *know, like, want, believe, understand, own*). These verbs **cannot** generally be used in continuous forms.

If you have a situation that started in the past and continued up to another past moment with a **stative verb**, you must use the **Past Perfect Simple** (*had + past participle*), not the Continuous.

- **Incorrect:** ~~We had been knowing each other for years.~~
- **Correct:** We **had known** each other for years.

Practice: Fill in the Blanks

Instructions: Complete the sentences using the **Past Perfect Continuous** form of the verb in parentheses.

- **Attention:** If the verb is a **Stative Verb** (non-continuous), you must use the **Past Perfect Simple**.
- Pay attention to affirmative (+), negative (-), and question (?) forms.

1. The ground was covered in white because it _____ (snow) all night.
2. _____ (you/wait) long before the bus finally arrived?
3. She was very tired because she _____ (not/sleep) well for three nights.
4. We were good friends; we _____ (know) each other since kindergarten.
5. His eyes were red. _____ (he/cry)?
6. I was annoyed because I _____ (look) for my keys for 20 minutes.
7. They felt sick because they _____ (eat) sweets all afternoon.
8. She _____ (not/feel) very optimistic about the project until she saw the results.
9. We _____ (want) to visit Paris for years before we finally went.
10. How long _____ (they/live) in that house before they decided to sell it?
11. The children _____ (not/pay) attention, so the teacher stopped the lesson.
12. I _____ (believe) his story until I found out he was lying.
13. What _____ (you/do) when the accident happened?
14. The car broke down because the mechanic _____ (not/check) the engine properly.
15. By the time the guests arrived, Sarah _____ (cook) for five hours straight.

Answer Key

1. **had been snowing**
2. **Had you been waiting**
3. **hadn't been sleeping** (or *had not been sleeping*)
4. **had known** (Stative verb)
5. **Had he been crying**
6. **had been looking**
7. **had been eating**
8. **hadn't been feeling** (or *had not been feeling*)
9. **had wanted** (Stative verb)
10. **had they been living**
11. **hadn't been paying** (or *had not been paying*)
12. **had believed** (Stative verb)
13. **had you been doing**
14. **hadn't been checking** (or *had not been checking*)
15. **had been cooking**