

Past perfect and past simple

A

When we give an account of a sequence of past events we usually put these events in chronological order using the past simple. If we want to refer to an event out of order – that is, an event which happened *before* the last event in the sequence we have written or spoken about – we can use the past perfect. Study the use of the past perfect and past simple in the text on the right:

Reminder → A6–A8, A14–A15

Order of events:	1 gave present 2 wrote email 3 made mistake 4 realised mistake
Order events are mentioned:	1 wrote email 2 had given present (<i>out of order</i>) 3 realised mistake 4 had made mistake (<i>out of order</i>)

I **wrote** Clara an email to thank her for the present she **had given** me for my birthday last week. But as soon as I pressed the 'send' button, I **realised** that I **had made** a mistake and sent it to her sister instead.

B

When we understand that we are talking about events before another past event, we don't have to continue using the past perfect:

- We **bought** a new car last month. We'd **driven** my parents' old car for ages, but it **started** (*or had started*) to fall apart. We **put** (*or had put*) a new engine in it, but that **didn't solve** (*or hadn't solved*) the problems we were having.

C

If the order of past events is clear from the context (for example, if time expressions make the order clear) we can often use either the past perfect or the past simple:

- After Ivan **had finished** reading, he put out the light. (*or ... Ivan finished ...*)
- The two leaders agreed to meet, even though *earlier* talks **had failed** to reach an agreement. (*or ... talks failed ...*)

D

The past perfect is often used in reporting what was originally said or thought in the present perfect or past simple (see also Unit 35):

Talking about a past event	Reporting this past event
<input type="checkbox"/> 'I have met him before.'	<input type="checkbox"/> I was sure that I had met him before. (<i>not ... I met him ...</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/> 'The village hasn't changed much.'	<input type="checkbox"/> I found that the village hadn't changed much. (<i>not ... the village didn't change ...</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/> '225 people drowned in the recent floods.'	<input type="checkbox"/> Police said that 225 people had drowned in the recent floods. (<i>or ... drowned ...</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/> 'I stole the watch.'	<input type="checkbox"/> She admitted that she had stolen the watch. (<i>or ... stole ...</i>)

E

We can use either the past perfect or past simple (and often past continuous and past perfect continuous; see Units 4 and 7) when we talk about things that we intended to do, but didn't or won't now do in the future:

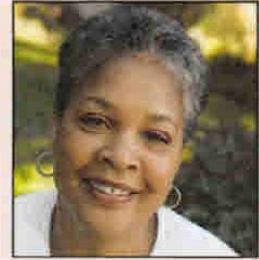
- I **had hoped** to visit the gallery before I left Florence, but it's closed on Mondays. (*or I hoped ..., I was hoping ..., I had been hoping ...*)
- Aron **planned** to retire at 60, but we have persuaded him to stay for a few more years. (*or Aron had planned ..., Aron was planning ..., Aron had been planning ...*)

Exercises

- 5.1 The events mentioned in the magazine article are listed below. Write the order in which the events are mentioned and then the order in which they occurred (or were thought to occur). Compare the two lists and consider why the past perfect (in italics) was used. **A & B**

How I bought my dream house

When I first saw the old house I *had* just moved to the area. It *had* been empty for about a year and was beginning to need some repairs, but the house was exactly what I wanted. But by the time I *had* put together enough money I learnt that a property developer *had* bought it and planned to turn it into a hotel. Six months later I *had* nearly given up hope of finding anywhere to live in the village when I heard that the house was for sale again. The property developer *had* decided to invest his money in a new housing development on the edge of the village. I bought the house immediately and I've lived there happily ever since.



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events	order events are mentioned in text	order of events
I moved ...	2	2
I learnt ...		
The property developer decided ...		
I heard ...		
I first saw the old house		1
A property developer bought it	1	
I nearly gave up...		
I put together enough money...		
It was empty		

- 5.2 Underline the correct options. In some cases only one is correct, and in others both are correct. **C & D**

- As Jonas was introduced to Mrs Lopez, he realised that he *had met* / *met* her before.
- During the previous week, I *had been* / *went* to the gym every evening.
- He denied that he *had taken* / *took* the money from the office.
- I thought it was the best film I *had seen* / *saw* in my life.
- The boy told me that he *had lost* / *lost* his train ticket and didn't know how he would get home.
- At the conference, scientists reported that they *had found* / *found* a cure for malaria.
- The teacher guessed that some of the children *had cheated* / *cheated* in the exam.
- She said that she *had made up* / *made up* her mind who to vote for, and that I couldn't persuade her to change.
- Thomas explained that he *had gone* / *went* home early because he felt ill.
- When I asked Maria about Jakub, she admitted that she *hadn't heard* / *didn't hear* from him for ages.
- The waiter took my plate away before I *had finished* / *finished* eating.
- Julia said she didn't want any dinner. Apparently, she *had eaten* / *ate* already.

- 5.3 Expand these sets of notes using the past perfect to begin each sentence. **E**

I / expect / operation / painful +/- hope / leave / by nine
 He / not mean / insult / her Lara / not intend / become / dentist
 I / not think of / cook rabbit

- I had hoped to leave by nine, but I overslept and missed the train.
-; she always wanted to be a vet.
-, but I didn't feel a thing.
-, until Andrei told me how tasty it was.
-, but Daria was very offended.