

The Use of the Past Tenses

The Past Continuous Tense

is used:

-to denote an *action in progress at a certain moment in the past*; the moment can be indicated by a time marker or another action "crossing" the action in progress

e.g. –What were you doing yesterday between 7 and 8 am? – I was working in the garden.

-I was writing a letter to Jack when the door bell rang. I rushed to the door to open it and saw Jack!
He was carrying a huge bunch of flowers in his hands.

-2012? At that time I was earning quite a lot.

-to describe *a picture or a scene* and also in an opening phrase to a story

e.g. –It was a gloomy day. It was pouring with rain and rare passers-by were hurrying home.

-Once the King was giving a ball and –The shark started to knock the boat and the next moment
the boat was rocking from side to side

-to denote somebody's *annoying behaviour*

e.g. –We couldn't talk. She was always interrupting us!

-to *report a future plan* (to observe the rules of the Sequence of Tenses)

e.g. –The telegram read that his mother was coming the following day.

-She said that they were discussing that last item of the agenda and asked us to wait a little.

NB Two sentences hardly ever take Continuous forms, unless they are equal in duration; in other cases we use the Present Continuous for an action we can control, and the Past Simple for one we can't control or which is definitely shorter.

Compare: -We made the sandwiches quickly: as I was slicing tomatoes, Mary was grating cheese.

-As he was telling his story, his face grew red.

Exercises

1. Open the brackets using the Past Simple or the Past Continuous Tenses.

-So, Ms Denver, when you (graduate) from University?

-In 2003. After the graduation, I (look) for a job with a small advertising agency because I (have) very little experience, although I (work) part-time during my course.

-But then you (start) working for a big company, right? How long you (work) for them?

-Actually I've worked for two big companies. From 2005 to 2010 I (work) as a project manager for Nestle and from 2010 to 2013 I (work) for Pepsi.

-For Pepsi?! Why you (quit)? You (hope) to find a better job? A better salary?

-The salary (be) very good – in 2013 I (earn) about \$ 180 000 a year, but the job (appear) to be rather boring. In big companies you hardly ever work independently. I like to be enterprising and efficient.

-I see. From June 2013 to March 2014 you (not work) anywhere. What you (do)?

-I'd saved up enough to make my life-time dream come true – I (take) a round-the-world trip. It (turn) out to be a great experience as I had seen lots of people and lots of goods to buy. I also (be) keen to know how the advertising industry works in other countries.

-And when you (return)....

-I (see) recession. It (seem) really hard to find a good job. One of my friends who (know) that I (look) for a job (offer) me a position of an office manager in his company, I (take) it, although I (realise) it (not be) what I (be) worth of. That's what I'm currently doing.

2. Open the brackets, using the Past Simple or Past Continuous Tenses.

1)-I (break) my arm yesterday. – Poor thing! How it (happen)? – I (ride) a bicycle and suddenly (see) a cat. It (run) across the path. I (not want) to come over it. So I (turn) left and (hit) a stone I (fall) off the

bike heavily on my left arm. I (not feel) any strong pain in the beginning, but as I (ride) further it (begin) to hurt badly. As soon as I (reach) town I (come) to the ambulance. The arm (swell) before my eyes! The doctor (have) it X-rayed and said it (be) simple fracture. He (put) my arm in plaster and (say) that I (have to) stay off work for two weeks.

2) I (see) him when I (stand) at the platform waiting for the 21.25 train. As I (get) on the train he just (look) at me, but when the train (start) he (jump) on it. He (sit) opposite me and (pretend) to be reading a newspaper. At every call he (look) at me over the paper to see if I (get) off. After he'd done that several times, I (feel) that I (begin) to get tired of being watched. I (come) over to him and (ask) why he (chase) me. He (say) he (not chase) me at all. I (think) I (look) at him very angrily. But he (give) me an arch look and the next moment he (smile) broadly. "Jack," he (say), "you (not recognise) me?"

3) Once, Mr and Mrs Harris (travel) in Holland. They (rent) a tandem and (go) out for a ride. The weather (be) great: the sun (shine), the birds (sing) and they both (feel) really good. But as they (cycle) uphill, Mrs Harris (fall) off the bike. Mr Harris (not notice) it and (continue) his ride. Only half an hour later did he discover that his wife (miss)! He (turn) to ask her something but there (be) nobody behind his back! He (come) back straightaway but she (not be) there. At that very time Mrs Harris (sit) in a local police station trying to explain what had happened to her and asking them to take her to the hotel where she and her husband (stay). She (try) hard to speak good German but the police officer (not understand) her. He (try) to speak English but she (not understand) him. Finally, she (manage) to draw a picture of a hotel and (write) the address. The police officer (take) her to the hotel in a patrol car. Mr Harris (come) to a police station in the neighbouring village and (try) to explain that he had lost his wife. The police officer (speak) English quite well, so Mr Harris (not have) to draw pictures, but he (be) asked to describe his wife and say what she (wear). But he never (can) remember what his wife (wear). As he (try) to describe her looks the police officer (get) more and more suspicious. When three hours later, Mr Harris (arrive) at their hotel he (find) his wife really irritated. She (not speak) to him for the whole evening. The next day he (send) a telegram to her mother saying that they (return) to London.

4) What you (do) yesterday between 7 and 8 am? Anybody (come) to see you last night?

5) When I (call) Ann she (not want) to talk, she (explain) she (read) for her exam.

6) We (know) that Nick (look) for a job and that he (want) a very good job. He (say) he (not enjoy) his work and (got) more and more displeased with his colleagues. One of them, who actually (share) the room with him, always (leave) half-empty cups of coffee on Nick's desk and always (lose) documents.

7) While I (clean) my son's room, I (find) this box in his wardrobe. I (ask) him about it but he (reply) it (be) not his. I (feel) he (lie) to me: he (not look) me in the eye and his voice (tremble) as he (talk) to me.

8) In the evening, I (get) a telegram from my friend, she (write) that she (come) on Saturday and (ask) if I (can) meet her at the station.

The Past Perfect Tense

Is used:

-to denote an *action* which *finished before a specific moment or another action in the past*

e.g. -By 10 o'clock all the guests had already left. -When I arrived at the station, the train had just left.

-to denote a *prior action* which had a *visible result in the past*

e.g.- She was happy because she had found a new job. -The room was a complete mess: it hadn't been cleaned for weeks.

-with the following *time expressions*: *before; after; by that time; until*. **NB** With '*before*' and '*after*' we can use the Past Simple Tense without any difference in meaning, when we *needn't stress the sequence* of actions

e.g. -Nothing in the room had been touched before the police arrived. -I couldn't recognise my aunt: we hadn't met until that day. -After her husband (had) left, she called her mother.

-as an equivalent of the Present Perfect in the past and an equivalent of the Present Perfect and Past Simple in the Reported Speech

e.g. -No one knew why she had gone away so swiftly. -He asked me if I had heard from Martin and I said that I had seen him a few days before.

-in *emphatic constructions* with: *no sooner than; hardly when; nowhere else; not until; only after; never before*; etc; followed by *Inversion*

e.g. -Hardly had he gone a few yards when she called him. -Only after she had told him the truth, did he wake up to the gravity of the situation. -Not until all the students had finished doing the test, were we allowed to leave the room. -Then I understood: nowhere else had I been so happy. -No sooner had she walked in the door than the telephone rang.

Exercises:

1. Open the brackets, using the Past Simple or the Past Perfect Tenses.

- 1) When I asked Mary if she (see) Roger before, she (answer) that she (not be sure), but then she (say) that she (meet) his elder brother.
- 2) After she (graduate) from university she (find) an interesting job on television, then she (work) for the BBC and (have) a very good salary. Some years later, she (go) to work in Australia: she (try) herself as a TV presenter and a TV host. When she (come) back to England, she (offer) a post on Channel 4. Although the salary was good, she (not like) the job – she (say) it (be) boring.
- 3) He (wonder) why Mary (not answer) his letter. He had been writing to her every day for nearly six months but she never (answer). He (ask) himself whether he (do) something wrong on the first encounter.
- 4) By the 1st of September they (finish) the repair works.
- 5) When his book (screen) in 1995, he already (become) famous for his plays, which (stage) in the best theatres of the world.
- 6) –Why you (not buy) any food for dinner? – Because when I (finish) work the shops already (close).
- 7) He (not phone) because his boss (delay) him at work and (ask) to do something promptly.
- 8) The more I (look) at the painting the more I (feel) that I never (see) anything more beautiful.
- 9) He (arrive) at the same results long before you (come up) with your concept.

2. Open the brackets, using the Past Simple or Past Perfect Tenses. Mind the Inversion.

- 1) Only after he (finish) the translation, he (let) himself go online to chat with friends.
- 2) He (break) the law and was to be punished. Not once I (warn) him against Patrick who (lure) him into stealing cars.
- 3) She hardly (get) dressed when the police (arrive).
- 4) Not until all the exam papers (check) we (tell) the results.
- 5) He (cannot) take his eyes off her: never before he (see) her be so beautiful and so alienated.
- 6) She (feel) insecure in her new job because she never (work) in the advertising industry before.
- 7) No sooner we (arrive) at the station than the train (pull) in.
- 8) My parents finally (get) divorced after they (live) together for more than 15 years.
- 9) She (not agree) to marry him until he (propose) to her for the third time.

That Past Perfect Continuous Tense

is used to denote an *action* which was *in progress for some time before a certain moment* or another *action in the past* and often explains the result

e.g. She had been waiting for us for an hour before she left. His hands were dirty because he had been mending his car.

1. Open the brackets, using the Past Perfect or the Past Perfect Continuous Tense.

- 1) He was really tired because he (run) 15 kilometres.
- 2) –Why was he so tired in the morning? – Because he (run).
- 3) She couldn't go out with us because she (not finish) her report.
- 4) She couldn't go out with us: she was very tired because she (write) a report for eight hours.
- 5) Everything in the room was upside down because the children (play) with the dog.
- 6) "The Boat", a famous picture by Henri Matisse, (hung) upside down in New York's Museum of Modern Art for more than 40 days before someone noticed.

7) He didn't know much about his colleagues although they (work) together for ten years.

2. Open the brackets, using the proper Past Tenses.

- 1) I (look) back and saw a strange man who (run) after me and (shout) something.
- 2) Some time later, the thieves (realize) that the police (chase) them.
- 3) She said she (learn) German because she was going to travel in Germany.
- 4) She (speak) German very well: she (learn) it for two years in Germany.
- 5) When I (see) her she (look) really tired: she (do) some translation on the computer, and I (notice) that she constantly (make) mistakes.
- 6) She (look) really tired because she (translate) the contracts all morning.
- 7) Mark (start) his career working for a famous IT company. From 2003 to 2009 he (work) for IBM. Soon he (feel) that he (get) more and more dissatisfied with what he (do). In 2010 he (take) a year off and (go) travelling. In 2011 he (start) a business – selling used cars. In 2013 he (earn) £ 85 000 a year.
- 8) By the 1st of November we already (launch) our new product line. We (develop) it since 2013.
- 9) I asked if anybody (buy) bread for dinner. I couldn't buy it, because I (work) until late in the evening.
- 10) Her dress (tear) because the children (play) Indian and (crawl) on the ground.
- 11) Alice (not know) what to say. She (try) hard to find some words but nothing (come out).
- 12) We (pass) several houses but (cannot) find the one we (need). Then we (realize) that we (turn) left instead of right. We (take) another direction but it (not help). After we (look) for the accused house for two hours we (decide) to take a taxi.
- 13) The figures (look) really strange. We (wonder) who (create) them.
- 14) I (cannot) open the file because somebody (mess) up everything on my desktop. When I (ask) my colleagues if anybody (work) on my computer that day, they (look) embarrassed but nobody (confess).
- 15) Your telegram (deliver) too late; she already (set off).

3. Open the brackets. *The Altamira Cave: the Sistine Chapel of the Stone Age*

In the late 1800s, there (live) a Spanish nobleman called Don Marcelino de Sautuola. His hobby (be) searching for clues to the lives of prehistoric people. He (know) that their homes (find) in caves nearby, and one cave called Altamira (be) close to his farm. He (begin) to visit the cave and dig through the deep soil on the cave floor. Over the centuries, this soil (pile) up, raising the floor and making the cave dark and narrow. He carefully (search) every shovelful as he (not want) to overlook even the smallest scrap of bone. Once, when he (show) his findings to the family his daughter Maria (ask) him to take her to the cave. At first, Don Marcelino (shake) his head: he (feel) sure that Maria quickly (get) bored. She (nag) him for several weeks before he finally (agree) to take her to the cave if she (promise) not to disturb him at work.

Maria (be) just as disappointed as her father (expect): she (cannot)(find) anything interesting to do. After a time, with a candle in her hand, she (creep) into the low passage. The corridor (get) wider and suddenly she (look) up at the ceiling. She (stop) still, the candle (waver) in her hand, and all around, in the flickering yellow light, she (see) animals!

"Father!" Maria cried, "Bulls! Bulls!"

Don Marcelino (drop) his tools and (crawl) into the little passage. He (have) to be careful not to bump his head on the rough ceiling as he (move) along. At first, he (see) only black lines and some splotches of red and yellow. Then slowly, the lines and splotches (take) on shape. Don Marcelino (understand) why Maria (shout) out the word "Bulls". The more he (look) the more real the animals (seem). He (realise) that he (look) at paintings so skillfully done that they (seem) to be alive.

Don Marcelino (amaze). How these paintings (make) on the ceiling? Who (make) them? As he (study) the animals he (begin) to understand that they (not be) bulls. They (be) actually bison, horned and humped creatures that (disappear) from Europe thousands of years ago.

That very evening, Don Marcelino (write) a letter to scientists in Madrid telling them about the discovery his daughter (make). A lot of scientists, artists and general public (visit) the cave since then. The cave (be) 296 metres long and the paintings (make) about 15 000 years ago! They (be) so impressive that they (call) "the Sistine Chapel of the Stone Age". When Pablo Picasso (visit) the Altamira Cave, he (exclaim), "After Altamira, all's decadence!"