

GRAMMAR · LESSON 06 · B1

The Moment *Before* the Moment

Past Perfect Simple — the past of the past

Every story has a past — and every past has an earlier past. When you need to step even further back and describe what had happened before the main event, English has exactly one tense for the job.

🕒 50 min

📅 Earlier past

📊 CEFR B1

👤 Ages 11-16

What you'll learn

- Form Past Perfect with **had + past participle**.
- Use it to show one past action happened *before* another.
- Know when Past Simple is enough — and not overuse Past Perfect.

1

WARM-UP · 4 MIN

Two pasts, one sentence

Read these four sentences carefully. Each mentions **two things** that happened in the past — but one happened **before** the other. Can you spot which?

- | | |
|----|--|
| Q1 | When I arrived at the station, the train had already left. |
| Q2 | She felt nervous because she had never flown before. |
| Q3 | By the time he woke up, his family had finished breakfast. |
| Q4 | I didn't recognise her. She had cut her hair short. |

2

GRAMMAR FOCUS · 16 MIN

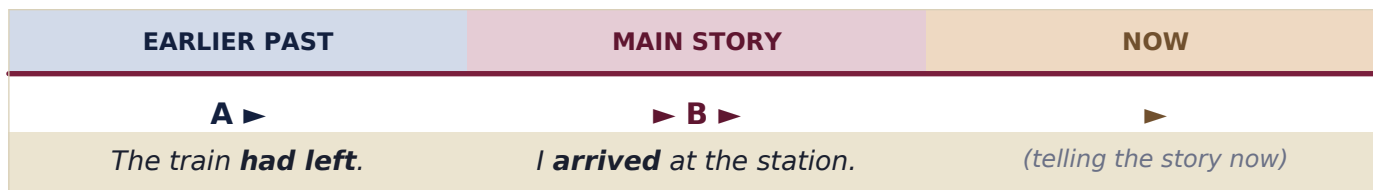
The past of the past

When you tell a story in Past Simple, everything happens on **one timeline**. But sometimes you need to show that **one thing happened before another**. That's when Past Perfect steps in — it lets you jump backwards, even when you're already in the past.

had + past participle

(same for all subjects: I / you / he / she / we / they)

□ Timeline: Past Perfect sits behind Past Simple



The train leaving (A) happened **before** you arrived (B). That's why A uses Past Perfect and B uses Past Simple. Even though both are in the past, English makes the *order* clear.

□ Two main situations

USE 1 · BEFORE A PAST MOMENT	USE 2 · BY THE TIME / BEFORE
<p>An earlier event in the story <i>Something that had already happened when the main action took place.</i></p> <p><i>When we got home, someone had broken the window.</i></p> <p><i>She was exhausted because she hadn't slept for two days.</i></p>	<p>Everything finished by a past point <i>Actions completed before a specific moment in the past.</i></p> <p><i>By the time I was ten, I had lived in four countries.</i></p> <p><i>She had finished her exams before the summer started.</i></p>

□ Key signal words

These words often appear with Past Perfect. When you see them, think "earlier past":

already	just	never	ever	yet
by the time	before	after	when	until

Classic examples: "I had **just** sat down when the phone rang." · "She **had never** been abroad before that trip."
 · "By the time we arrived, everyone had already gone home."

⚠ Two common B1 mistakes

1. Don't use Past Perfect for the main story. It's only for the **earlier** action.

□ ~~Yesterday I had gone to the park and I had played football.~~

□ **Yesterday I went to the park and I played football.** (one timeline, Past Simple)

2. If a sequence is already clear, Past Simple is enough.

□ **I opened the door and walked in.** (clear sequence, Past Simple only)

□ **After I had eaten breakfast, I went for a walk.** (emphasis on "finished before" — Past Perfect adds nuance)

3

KEY VOCABULARY · 6 MIN

Words for narrating events

Word	POS	Meaning	Example
by the time	<i>phrase</i>	at or before a certain past moment	<i>By the time she arrived, we had left.</i>
realise	<i>v</i>	to suddenly understand something	<i>I realised I had forgotten my keys.</i>
audience	<i>n</i>	the group watching an event	<i>The audience had stopped clapping.</i>
rehearse	<i>v</i>	to practise for a performance	<i>She had rehearsed the song a hundred times.</i>
passport	<i>n</i>	an official travel document	<i>He had lost his passport twice before.</i>
disappointed	<i>adj</i>	sad because something didn't meet hopes	<i>I was disappointed — I had expected more.</i>
embarrassed	<i>adj</i>	feeling shy or uncomfortable	<i>She had forgotten his name.</i>
relieved	<i>adj</i>	feeling happy that something bad is over	<i>I had finished the exam.</i>
envelope	<i>n</i>	a flat paper container for a letter	<i>He opened the envelope slowly.</i>
attic	<i>n</i>	the room just under the roof	<i>She found an old box in the attic.</i>

4

READING · 12 MIN

The Moment Before the Moment

The Moment *Before* the Moment

THE PULSE · ISSUE 09
TURNING POINTS

Every important moment in our lives has a longer story behind it — all the things we had done, decided, expected, or forgotten before the big event actually happened. We asked five teens to tell us not just what happened, but what had happened just before.

L

Lina, 16

Belgrade · Serbia

"Three seconds of silence I'll never forget"

By the time Lina **walked** onto the stage, she **had rehearsed** her speech forty-seven times. She **had counted**. She **had practised** in front of her mirror, her dog, her little brother, and once, by accident, the postman. Her English teacher **had told** her she was ready. Her best friend **had sent** her a "you've got this" voice note at midnight. Her mother **had ironed** her shirt twice because the first attempt **had not been** good enough.

And yet, the moment Lina **stepped** into the hot white light, every single word **disappeared**. She **looked** at the audience — two hundred people she **had never seen** before — and her mind **went** completely empty. For about three seconds, which **felt** like three hours, she just **stood** there. She **had prepared** for everything except this: the silence.

Then something strange **happened**. She **remembered** a trick her grandmother **had taught** her the summer before. *"If you forget the words, just tell the truth."* So Lina **smiled, said**, "I had written a wonderful speech, but I've forgotten every word of it," and the audience **laughed**. By the time she **had finished** speaking, she **had won** the regional debating championship. She **had not remembered** a single line of the original speech.

... FOUR MORE VOICES ...

P

Pedro, 15 · Lisbon · Portugal

Exam results day

When Pedro **opened** the envelope, he already **knew** he **had failed**. He **had studied** for the exam, but not enough. He **had spent** two weeks playing video games and telling himself he would start the next day. His results **had arrived** in the morning, but he **had waited** until the evening to open them, alone. Everything **went** exactly as he **had feared**.

N Nadia, 16 · Tunis · Tunisia

Finish line

By the time Nadia **reached** the finish line, she **had been** running for four hours. Her legs **had turned** into concrete. She **had stopped** crying at kilometre 35 because she **had run out** of tears. She **had not slept** properly for three nights before the marathon. But she **crossed** the line — and that was all that mattered.

O Otto, 13 · Bergen · Norway

The airport

Otto only **realised** he **had left** his passport at the hotel when the airline woman **asked** to see it. The plane **had already started** boarding. He **had told** his mother three times that morning that he **had packed** everything. He **had been** so sure. His family **took** a taxi without him — a story they still tell at every family dinner.

S Su-jin, 14 · Seoul · South Korea

The old camera

When Su-jin **found** the old camera in her grandmother's attic, she **thought** someone **had forgotten** it there decades ago. She **had been** looking for Christmas decorations. The film inside **had survived**. She **had developed** it herself at school. The photos **showed** her grandmother at twenty, laughing in a red coat, in a country that **had not existed** for fifty years.

Past Perfect (earlier past — *had + past participle*)

Past Simple (main story line)

5

PRACTICE · 8 MIN

8 quick decisions

Choose the correct option for each gap. Answers on the last page.

1	When we got to the cinema, the film ___ already ___.
·	A) had / started B) has / started C) did / start
2	She felt sad because she ___ her dog for three years.
·	A) didn't see B) hasn't seen C) hadn't seen
3	I opened the door and ___ into the room.
·	A) had walked B) walked C) have walked
4	By the time I was 18, I ___ in six different cities.
·	A) lived B) have lived C) had lived
5	He ___ never ___ abroad before that summer.
·	A) had / been B) has / been C) did / go
6	After we ___ lunch, we went for a walk.
·	A) had B) have C) had had
7	Yesterday I ___ to the park and ___ football with my friends.
·	A) had gone / had played B) went / played C) have gone / have played
8	She was relieved because she ___ her wallet.
·	A) found B) had found C) has found

6

SPEAKING · 5 MIN

The moment before your moment

Work with a partner. Pick three topics. Tell the story using **Past Simple** for the main event, and **Past Perfect** for what had happened *before*. Try to include at least one sentence with "by the time" or "before".

- Q 1 | A time you arrived somewhere too late. What had happened before you arrived?
- Q 2 | A moment when you were embarrassed. What had you done — or forgotten — just before?
- Q 3 | A surprise that happened to you. What had you expected that didn't happen?
- Q 4 | A time you realised you had lost something important. What had led up to it?
- Q 5 | A performance, test, or competition that went well or badly. What had you done to prepare?

Model dialogue

Ari:	What was your most embarrassing moment, Mei?
Mei:	Last year I <i>went</i> to a wedding. Everyone <i>had dressed</i> beautifully, but I <i>hadn't read</i> the invitation properly. I <i>was wearing</i> jeans.
Ari:	No! What did you do?
Mei:	By the time I <i>realised</i> , the ceremony <i>had already started</i> . I <i>sat</i> in the back row and <i>hid</i> behind a tall uncle for two hours.

7 WRITING · 10 MIN

Write your own "moment before"

Think of a real or imagined moment that mattered to you. Write about it in two parts (**80 to 100 words** total). Part 1 (main event): describe what **happened** using Past Simple. Part 2 (earlier past): describe two or three things that **had happened** before, using Past Perfect.

Include: 3+ Past Perfect verbs Past Simple main event by the time / before / already 80-100 words

Word count: _____ / 80-100

8

COMPREHENSION QUIZ · 6 MIN

10 questions — let's see what stuck

Circle the best option (A, B, C or D) for each question.

1	When the concert started, we ___ to our seats. · A) already found B) have already found C) had already found D) were already finding
2	Yesterday morning I ___ early and ___ breakfast with my family. · A) had woken up / had eaten B) woke up / ate C) had woken up / ate D) woke up / had eaten
3	By the time the teacher arrived, the students ___ the classroom. · A) left B) have left C) had left D) were leaving
4	She ___ her phone in the café, so she went back to look for it. · A) has left B) had left C) left D) was leaving
5	I couldn't enter the club because I ___ my ID. · A) didn't bring B) hadn't brought C) haven't brought D) didn't bringing
6	After she ___ her homework, she watched a film. · A) had finished B) finished C) has finished D) was finishing
7	He told me he ___ never ___ snow before. · A) did / see B) has / seen C) had / seen D) was / seeing
8	When the guests arrived, Mum ___ the cake. · A) just had baked B) had just baked C) just baked D) has just baked
9	The children were crying because their balloon ____. · A) had burst B) has burst C) burst D) was bursting
10	I ___ to Rome three times before I moved there last year. · A) went B) had been C) have been D) was going



ANSWER KEYS

Check your answers

Practice · Part 5

1	A — had / started	<i>Two past events; film started first → Past Perfect.</i>
2	C — hadn't seen	<i>Main emotion in Past Simple; reason is earlier → Past Perfect.</i>
3	B — walked	<i>Two actions in clear sequence → Past Simple for both.</i>
4	C — had lived	<i>'By the time' + completed actions before past point → Past Perfect.</i>
5	A — had / been	<i>'Before that summer' + 'never' → Past Perfect.</i>
6	C — had had	<i>'After' with two past events — earlier one → Past Perfect.</i>
7	B — went / played	<i>One timeline → Past Simple only.</i>
8	B — had found	<i>Relief came after finding (earlier past) → Past Perfect.</i>

Quiz · Part 8

1	C — had already found	<i>Finding seats happened before concert started → Past Perfect.</i>
2	B — woke up / ate	<i>Simple sequence on one timeline → Past Simple for both.</i>
3	C — had left	<i>'By the time' + earlier completed action → Past Perfect.</i>
4	B — had left	<i>Earlier event (caused the later 'went back') → Past Perfect.</i>
5	B — hadn't brought	<i>Reason happened before main event → Past Perfect.</i>
6	A — had finished	<i>'After' + earlier completed action → Past Perfect.</i>
7	C — had / seen	<i>Reported past experience earlier than 'told' → Past Perfect.</i>
8	B — had just baked	<i>Adverbs like 'just' go between 'had' and past participle.</i>
9	A — had burst	<i>Bursting happened before the crying → Past Perfect.</i>
10	B — had been	<i>'Before' + past reference (last year) → Past Perfect.</i>

Great work finishing Lesson 06! You can now tell stories with two timelines — main events and the "before" that shaped them. In **Lesson 07**, we turn to the *future*: the difference between **will** and **going to**.