

Lesson 8.Narrative Tenses

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

Learning

Objectives At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify what the narrative tenses are.
- Review forms and functions of each narrative tense.
- Compare the functions of narrative tenses against each other.
- Familiarize one's self with conjunction, time markers and linking devices commonly used in narrating stories.
- Narrate stories based on different topics using the proper forms of narrative tenses, conjunctions, time markers and linking devices.

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

We use narrative tenses to talk about the past. We can use them to tell a story or to describe past events, including **personal anecdotes**.

Examples:

- ➡ *When I **lived** on the island, I **enjoyed** walking on the beach in the early morning with Bonnie - my best friend and my dog.*
- ➡ *Britain **declared** war on Germany on 3 September 1939 after Germany **had attacked** Poland two days earlier. Britain **had been trying** to negotiate a peaceful settlement.*

The four narrative tenses are the **past simple**, **past continuous**, **past perfect** and **past perfect continuous** and one or more of these can be used in a sentence.

Example:

- ➡ *We **were walking** as usual one day, when all of a sudden, Bonnie **shot off**. She **started** to bark furiously. I **saw** a man sleeping face down on the sand. **Bonnie continued** to bark, but the man **didn't wake up**. He **wasn't sleeping**; he **was** dead. It **was** clear that the storm **had washed up** the body.*

When narrating past events, **DO NOT** mix past and present tenses (avoid using the present perfect and present simple), as these will confuse the reader/listener about when things really happened.

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

* * CONJUNCTIONS (After, As soon as, Before, By the time, Once, till, When, Unless, Until)

With these conjunctions of time, the past perfect shows that the **first action MUST BE COMPLETED before the second action begins**, otherwise the past simple is used.

- ➡ **After**....*she finished, they left / she had finished, they left. (She had to finish first)*
- ➡ **As soon as**...we arrived she said “hello”. / I had done it, I sent it to her. (I had to do it first)
- ➡ She wouldn’t sign the contract **before**.... seeing it / she had seen it. (She had to see it first)
- ➡ They wouldn’t go **unless**....she came with them / they had seen it was safe.
- ➡ (It was important to finish checking that it was safe before going)

**** More examples of Past Perfect Tense**

- ➡ *We were shocked to discover that someone **had graffitied** “Tootles was here” on our front door.*
*We were relieved that Tootles **had used** washable paint.*
- ➡ I turned back to the house and saw that some someone named Tootles **had defaced** my front door!

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* * **Would (+ adverb of frequency)** + verb can be used to express past habits which do not happen now.

➡ *My grandfather **would always read** the newspaper at breakfast time. (He doesn't do it now)*

Using 'would' instead of 'used to' often gives an idea of nostalgia. However, if the adverb of frequency is stressed, it can give the idea that the habit was annoying.

➡ *My mother **would never let** me do what I wanted to do.*

NOTE: "WOULD" can not be used in past states.

➡ *I would live in Canada. ❌*

3. is often used in stories and dialogue, too.

*When Bobby **went down** for breakfast, Matt **looked up**.*

*"**Did you hear** the storm last night?"*

*Bobby **didn't answer**.*

*"Your brother **went out** last night. He **didn't come back**. Do you know where **he went**?"*

*Bobby's heart **sank**. She knew exactly where **Dan had gone**...*

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

The **Past Continuous** Tense. As with all continuous tenses, the past continuous gives the idea of activity and duration. The past continuous is used:

1. to describe the situation in which the events of the narrative occurred.

➡ *When I woke up at 8am (1) the sun **was shining** (2) and the birds **were singing** (2). I had a shower (3), ate some breakfast (4) and left for work at 9am. (5)*

2. to express an activity in progress at a time in the past.

➡ *What **were you doing** (1) when I **called** (2) you?*

3. the past continuous also expresses the idea of:

➤ **An interrupted activity**

*She **was reading** a book when the door bell rang. (She read a book = she finished it)*

➤ **An unfinished activity**

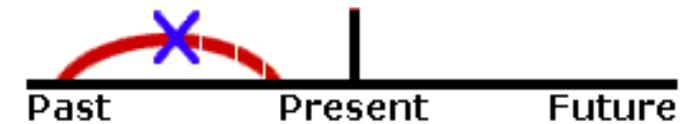
*I **was reading** the book you lent me. (I read the book... = I finished reading the whole book)*

➤ **A repeated action**

*They **were shooting** at the enemy. (They shot.... = They fired the gun one time only)*

➤ **A temporary situation**

*She **was standing** on the corner waiting for a bus. (She stood on the corner. = Permanent situation)*



Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

| | Simple Past | Past Continuous |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Forms | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Regular verbs: V + -e/d2. Irregular verbs: Forms vary | Was/were + -ing verb (Use a simple past verb in the dependent clause) |
| Use | To show a finished action | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To show that a long past action was interrupted by a short past action2. To show two long past actions occurring at the same time (less common) |
| Time Markers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Yesterday➤ The day before yesterday➤ Last (last week, last month, last year... etc)➤ Ago (two days ago, three weeks ago...etc)➤ When (when two past sentences are joined together) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ When (for Use 1 and 2)➤ While (for Use 2) |

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

Complete the sentences, Put the verb into the correct form, positive or negative. (simple past tense)

- 1. It was warm, so I _____ off my coat. (take)
- 2. The film wasn't very good. I _____ it very much. (enjoy)
- 3. I knew Sarah was very busy, so I _____ her. (disturb)
- 4. I was very tired, so I _____ to bed early. (go)
- 5. The bed was very uncomfortable. I _____ very well. (sleep)
- 6. Sue wasn't hungry, so she _____ anything. (eat)
- 7. We went to Kate's house but she _____ at home. (be)
- 8. It was a funny situation but nobody _____. (laugh)
- 9. The window was open and a bird _____ into the room. (fly)
- 10. The hotel wasn't very expensive. It _____ very much. (cost)
- 11. I was in a hurry, so I _____ time to phone you. (have)
- 12. It was hard work carrying the bags. They _____ very heavy. (be)

Complete the exercise with the verbs inside the box.

| | | | |
|-------|-------|------|-------|
| buy | catch | cost | drink |
| fall | hurt | sell | spend |
| teach | throw | win | write |

- 1. Mozart _____ more than 600 pieces of music.
- 2. 'How did you learn to drive?' 'My father _____ me.'
- 3. We couldn't afford to keep our car, so we _____ it.
- 4. I was very thirsty. I _____ the water very quickly.
- 5. Paul and I played tennis yesterday. He's much better than me, so he _____ easily.
- 6. Don _____ down the stairs this morning and hurt his leg.
- 7. Jim _____ the ball to Sue, who caught it.
- 8. Ann _____ a lot of money yesterday. She bought a dress. It cost 100.

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WHEN OR WHILE? CHOOSE THE CORRECT ANSWER.



1. I saw him while I was on my way home
2. When he was young, he used to smoke a lot
3. George had a terrible accident when he was a child
4. While Jane was taking a bath, the phone rang three times
5. When we lived in London, we met many interesting people
6. Where are my friends when I most need them?
7. While I was driving, I listened to a very interesting radio program
8. Who did you meet when you arrived to the party?
9. While I was speaking, they were thinking of something else!
10. I had many problems when I was a teenager
11. While he was watching TV, I was studying.
12. When he got off the train, he went to work.

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

Put the verbs in parenthesis into the gaps in the correct tense – *Simple Past or Past Continuous*.

1. He _____ (sleep) when the doorbell _____ (ring).
2. We _____ (eat) dinner at 8pm last night (we started eating at 7:30).
3. Yesterday I _____ (go) to the post office, _____ (buy) some fruit at the supermarket and _____ (read) a book in the park in the afternoon.
4. We _____ (watch) TV when we _____ (hear) a loud noise.
5. Julie _____ (be) in the garden when Laurence _____ (arrive).
6. A: What _____ (you / do) at 3pm yesterday?
B: I _____ (clean) my house.
7. Last year I _____ (visit) Paris and Rome.
8. They _____ (have) dinner when the police _____ (come) to the door.
9. He _____ (work) in the garden when he _____ (find) the money.
10. Laura _____ (study) at 11pm last night.
11. I _____ (walk) along the road when I _____ (meet) an old friend.
12. It _____ (be) a day in December. Snow _____ (fall), children _____ (sing) carols and people _____ (do) their Christmas shopping.
13. My ex-boyfriend _____ (be) so annoying! He _____ (always / miss) the bus and _____ (arrive) late.
14. When I _____ (call) Julie, she _____ (work).
15. Why _____ (you / cry) when I _____ (arrive)?
16. When he _____ (get) home, we started to eat dinner.
17. At 10am yesterday I _____ (sit) on a bus.
18. I _____ (enjoy) my book so much that I _____ (not / notice) the train had stopped.
19. David _____ (not / sleep) when I _____ (arrive), he _____ (study)!
20. Mr Black _____ (not / work) in the garden at 10pm last night

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

The **past perfect simple** is used

1. to show that an action or situation happened **BEFORE** the events in the narrative described in the simple past.

➡ *When I woke up at 8am (1), the sun was shining and the birds were singing. I **had slept** (2) really well the night before. I had a shower (3), ate some breakfast (4) and left for work at 9am.*

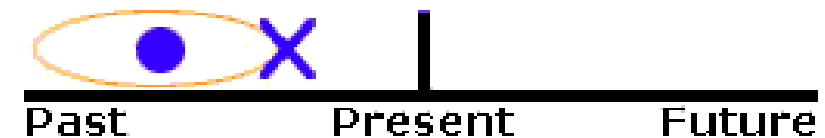
****** If the subject of two verbs is the same, you don't have to repeat the **had** auxiliary.

➡ *When I arrived, he **had finished** his lunch and left the room.*

2. Making a narrative more interesting to read.

It is generally seen as bad literary style to have too many verbs in the same tense. In English it is always best to **AVOID REPETITION** where possible. This same sentence could be improved for dramatic effect by using the past perfect simple

➡ *I woke up at 8am and left for work after **I'd had** a shower and **eaten** some breakfast.*



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Provide your own examples using the proper form of Past Perfect tense and each conjunction listed above.

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The **Past Perfect Continuous** The past perfect continuous is used for longer activities that were happening continuously up until a specified time in the past.

➡ *He looked very tired (1), he **had been working** very hard (2) over the past three weeks.1*

As with the past continuous, the past perfect continuous can show the following:

1. Unfinished activity

➡ *He **hadn't heard** the telephone ring because **he'd been** reading.*

2. Repeated activity

➡ *I was tired. **I'd been cleaning** the house all day.*

**** With the past perfect simple, the focus is on the completed activity.**

➡ He **had written** three letters that morning.

➡ He **had delivered** twelve parcels today.



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Put the verbs in parenthesis into the gaps in the correct tense – *Past Perfect or Past Perfect Continuous*.

1. I had to have a break. I _____ so long. (drive)
2. Before we parked our car we _____ the ticket. (collect)
3. I arrived on Sunday. I _____ at home for two days. (be)
4. The roads were blocked in the morning. It _____ all night. (snow)
5. They got to the beach after they _____ for hours. (walk)
6. She called the police when she _____ the light in the hall. (see)
7. His English was perfect. He _____ it since he started school. (study)
8. I was really hungry. I _____ anything since the morning. (eat)
9. She didn't go to work because she _____ her leg. (break)
10. As soon as _____ the door, the burglar alarm went off. (open)
11. They finished the house after they _____ it for a year. (build)
12. She didn't eat anything because she _____ lunch. (have)
13. He told her that he _____ her before. (see)
14. He was so exhausted because he _____ the grass all day. (cut)
15. They landed when the storm _____. (end)
16. He was so dirty because he _____ the hole in the rain. (dig)
17. They accepted my offer after they _____ it for a month. (refuse)
18. I forgot that I _____ to buy some bread. (want)
19. She knew that because someone _____ her before. (tell)
20. It was so hot in the kitchen because Sue _____ cakes. (bake)

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

* * The Future in the Past

The future in the past is used to look into the future from a point of time in the past. However, this “future” event still occurred at a time before the present time.

➡ *I woke up (1) at 8am yesterday. I **was meeting** my boss (2) at ten o’clock that morning, so I wouldn’t be able to have lunch (3) with Susan. I **wasn’t going** to get home (4) again until late that night.*

NOTE: Depending on the situation, the following tenses are used in the future in the past:

| The past simple (a timetabled event) | The past continuous (an arrangement) |
|--|---|
| (a prediction) | was going to (a plan) |
| would be doing (an action at a specific time) | would have done (action completed before a specified time) |

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

When we tell a story in the past, we often use linking words or phrases to join two or more sentences or clauses. This helps the narrative to flow in a more interesting and natural way. Some linking phrases and words show a sequence of events or actions.

➡ *Nelson Mandela never gave up on his struggle against apartheid. **As the years went by**, his fame spread to every corner of the world. **In the end**, under enormous global pressure, the government had no option but to release him.*

Other linking words and phrases that signal order of events are: *First of all ...*, *Then ...*, *Next ...*, *Finally ...*, *After that ...*, *After several months/days/hours/weeks ...*, *By the time ...*, *All of a sudden ...*

We also use linking words and phrases in dialogue to indicate interest in what is being said and to keep the conversation flowing.

So how did you meet your wife?

*Well, it's a strange story: **what happened was** I was training as a paramedic and one day we got a call to a house in East Street.*

Oh, my cousin lives there! ...

***Really?** ... **So, anyway**, when we arrived in East Street, another ambulance was already there!*

So what happened?

Sylvie and I treated the patient together. The rest is history!

Lesson 8. Narrative Tenses

Narrate stories about the topics below. Make sure to use proper narrative tenses, conjunctions and linking devices.



favorite childhood memory



memory of a strict classroom teacher



a conversation with a foreign individual



first ever online class experience



your strangest dream



remarkable moment with your circle friends



instance when you laughed hard you



instance when you received a shocking news

The End