



Tenses challenge day 27 explanation: Past perfect continuous

Just like with the other perfect tenses, the past perfect continuous is talking about something that happened 'before another time'. In this case, like with the past perfect simple, the 'second point' is a time in the past. We usually say what the second point is in the rest of the sentence, text or conversation.

1: How long to another point in the past

We use the past perfect continuous, like the present perfect continuous, to say 'how long' with an action that started before a 'second point' and continues up to it. In the case of the past perfect continuous, this 'second point' is in the past.

- I had been sleeping for three hours when Julie arrived.
- He had been working here for ten years when he became the boss.

How is this different from using the past perfect to say 'how long' for something that started before and continued up to a second point in the past? It's very similar to the other perfect tenses.

We use the past perfect simple for stative verbs.

- I had been in Buenos Aires for two months when I met you.

We can use either the past perfect simple or the past perfect continuous for continuous or repeated actions.

- I had worked here for three years when I was promoted.
- I had been working here for three years when I was promoted.

We need to use the past perfect continuous for actions that have endings and that are not finished.

- She had been writing the book for three months when she decided to hire someone to help her. (NOT: she had written the book for three months...)

In the same way as with the present perfect and the present perfect continuous, we often use the past perfect simple when we are using a negative.

- It had been raining for months BUT it hadn't rained for months.
- She had been working on the book for weeks BUT she hadn't worked on the book for weeks.

2: An action that stopped just before another point in the past

We use the past perfect continuous for something that stopped just before the 'second point'. It's often used to explain something that's still true or still happening at the second point.

- I had been running when I saw you. That's why I was wearing my running clothes.
- It had been snowing, so there was snow on the road.

Again, we tend to use the past perfect continuous when the action is not complete (even though it has stopped) and we tend to use the past perfect simple when the action is complete.

- I had been making a cake (that's why the kitchen was messy / I was late).
- I had made a cake (and everyone ate it).

3: Overlapping actions

We can use the past perfect continuous in a similar way to the past continuous, to show that a longer action overlapped a shorter action or a time. However, the past perfect continuous shows that the longer action definitely stopped when the shorter action happened.

- I had been working, but then Lucy called me, so I stopped.