

Narrative Tenses – Worksheet 1

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ Score: / 38



Do this worksheet
online and check your
answers instantly

Exercise 1: Complete the sentences

Put the verb in brackets into the correct narrative tense: past simple, past continuous, past perfect or past perfect continuous.

Example: When we got to the stadium, the match ____ (already/start). → had already started

1. When I arrived at the station, the train _____ (already/leave).
2. While Marta _____ (cook) dinner, the lights suddenly went out.
3. Tom was exhausted because he _____ (run) for over an hour.
4. I didn't recognise Leo at first because he _____ (grow) a beard.
5. How long _____ (you/wait) when the bus finally came?
6. The phone rang, so I _____ (answer) it.
7. We _____ (not/eat) anything all day, so we were starving by the evening.
8. What _____ (you/do) when the fire alarm went off?

Exercise 2: Choose the right word

Complete each sentence with one word from the box. There are two extra words you do not need.

WORD BOX

when while by been had never didn't were during ever

9. Kofi was walking home _____ he saw a strange light in the sky.
10. Someone stole my bag _____ I was sleeping on the train.
11. We had finished all the preparations _____ the time the guests arrived.
12. How long had you _____ living in Madrid before you moved to Lisbon?
13. _____ you ever travelled abroad before that trip to Japan?
14. I had _____ seen snow before I moved to Canada.
15. We _____ have time to say goodbye because the taxi was waiting.
16. _____ you sleeping when I called you last night?

Exercise 3: Rewrite the sentences

Rewrite each sentence as instructed in brackets. Keep the same tense unless the instruction tells you to change it.

Example: He was reading the news. (negative) → He wasn't reading the news.

17. She had locked the door before she left. (negative)

18. They were watching TV when the storm started. (question)

19. He had been working there for ten years. (question with How long)

20. The streets were flooded. It had rained for hours. (one sentence with because; use the past perfect continuous)

21. I lost my keys, so I couldn't get into the house. (one sentence with because; use the past perfect)

22. Everyone left the party. Then Jamal arrived. (one sentence with When; use the past perfect)

23. Mia was crying because she had lost her phone. (question with Why)

24. We were expecting so many people. (negative)

Exercise 4: Find and correct the mistake

Each sentence has one mistake. Write the corrected sentence.

Example: I was seeing a great film last night. → I saw a great film last night.

25. When I got home, my parents already had dinner.

26. I was knowing the answer, but I was too shy to say it.

27. We were having a picnic when it was starting to rain.

28. Did you saw the accident yesterday?

29. She had been worked at the bank for years before she retired.

30. They didn't went to the concert because they had lost the tickets.

31. Had you been finish the report when the boss asked for it?

32. By the time the firefighters arrived, the fire has destroyed the building.

Exercise 5: Put the words in order

Put the words in the correct order to make sentences and questions.

Example: was / she / when / I / arrived / sleeping → She was sleeping when I arrived.

33. had / she / before / never / flown / that / day

34. you / what / when / doing / were / I / phoned

35. been / long / how / waiting / had / they / when / the / doors / opened

36. wasn't / because / he / listening / he / missed / the / instructions

37. the / had / film / already / started / we / when / arrived

38. hadn't / she / why / told / anyone

Answer key – Narrative Tenses – Worksheet 1

Exercise 1: Complete the sentences

1. **had already left**

The train left before I arrived, so we use the past perfect for the earlier action.

2. **was cooking**

Use the past continuous for a longer action that was interrupted by a shorter one.

3. **had been running**

The past perfect continuous explains a past result after a long activity that had just stopped.

4. **had grown**

Growing the beard happened before I saw him, so we use the past perfect.

5. **had you been waiting**

How long plus the past perfect continuous asks about the duration of an activity up to a past moment.

6. **answered**

This is a sequence of completed actions in the story, so we use the past simple.

7. **hadn't eaten**

The negative past perfect describes something that had not happened before a past moment.

8. **were you doing**

The past continuous question asks about an activity in progress when something interrupted it.

Exercise 2: Choose the right word

9. **when**

When introduces the short action that interrupted the longer one.

10. **while**

While introduces the longer background action in the past continuous.

11. **by**

By the time means 'before or at that moment' and often goes with the past perfect.

12. **been**

The past perfect continuous is formed with had + been + -ing.

13. **Had**

To make a past perfect question, put had before the subject.

14. **never**

Never goes between had and the past participle to make a negative meaning.

15. **didn't**

The negative past simple uses didn't + the base form.

16. **Were**

A past continuous question with you starts with were.

Exercise 3: Rewrite the sentences

17. **She hadn't locked the door before she left.**

The negative past perfect is had not / hadn't + past participle.

18. **Were they watching TV when the storm started?**

In a past continuous question, were comes before the subject.

19. **How long had he been working there?**

The word order is How long + had + subject + been + -ing.

20. **The streets were flooded because it had been raining for hours.**

The past perfect continuous gives the reason for a past situation after a long activity.

21. **I couldn't get into the house because I had lost my keys.**

Losing the keys happened first, so it takes the past perfect.

22. **When Jamal arrived at the party, everyone had left.**

The past perfect shows that everyone left before Jamal arrived.

23. **Why was Mia crying?**

The word order is Why + was + subject + -ing.

24. **We weren't expecting so many people.**

The negative past continuous is was/were not + -ing.

Exercise 4: Find and correct the mistake

25. **When I got home, my parents had already had dinner.**

The earlier action needs the past perfect: had already had.

26. **I knew the answer, but I was too shy to say it.**

Know is a stative verb, so it is not normally used in the continuous.

27. **We were having a picnic when it started to rain.**

The interrupting action takes the past simple.

28. **Did you see the accident yesterday?**

After did, use the base form of the verb.

29. **She had been working at the bank for years before she retired.**

The reviewer's answer is already accepted because the past perfect continuous is had been + -ing, and removing 'been' to make the past perfect simple is also a valid one-word correction.

30. **They didn't go to the concert because they had lost the tickets.**

After didn't, use the base form go.

31. **Had you finished the report when the boss asked for it?**

A completed earlier action needs the past perfect question: Had you finished.

32. **By the time the firefighters arrived, the fire had destroyed the building.**

In a past narrative, by the time needs the past perfect, not the present perfect.

Exercise 5: Put the words in order

33. **She had never flown before that day.**

Never goes between had and the past participle.

34. **What were you doing when I phoned?**

This is a past continuous question: What + were + you + -ing.

35. **How long had they been waiting when the doors opened?**

The question word order is How long + had + subject + been + -ing.

36. **He missed the instructions because he wasn't listening.**

The reviewer's answer is already accepted, and a version of the fronted clause without the comma has been added because the past continuous negative gives the background reason for the past simple action.

37. **The film had already started when we arrived.**

The reviewer's answer is already accepted, and the other correct orders have been added, all with already between had and the past participle.

38. **Why hadn't she told anyone?**

In a negative past perfect question, hadn't comes before the subject.

Notes for teachers: Start with a short timeline on the board to show which action happened first, which was in progress and which interrupted it. Then let students do Exercises 1 and 2 in pairs. Typical mistakes are using the past simple instead of the past perfect for the earlier action, using stative verbs such as know in the continuous, and putting a past form after did or didn't. As a follow-up, ask students to write a short story beginning 'By the time I got home, ...' that uses all four tenses.