

Past perfect  
Past perfect continuous

Jetmen flying over the city of Dubai, United Arab Emirates

# Past perfect: Talking about the first of two actions in the past

We use the **past perfect** (subject + *had/hadn't* + past participle):

- to refer to an action completed in the past before another action, event or moment in the past.

*Pterosaurs **had already disappeared** by the time modern birds evolved.*

*By the time humans tried to fly, the capability of flight **had developed** in four groups of animals.*

- in reported speech, when the speech being reported is in the present perfect.

*'I have flown in from New York,' she said. —————> She said she **had flown** in from New York.*

- to express an imaginary situation in an *if*-clause.

*If I **had grown** wings, I would not have got stuck in traffic!*

Note: *if*-clauses will be covered in Unit 6 and reported speech in Unit 7.

➔ See grammar box on page 52.

## 1 Circle the correct option.

Example: My mum (had gone) / went to work by the time I got up.

1. We **hadn't seen** / **haven't seen** the news but we heard it on the radio.
2. She **designs** / **had designed** the poster before she read the email.
3. I **had fell** / **had fallen** asleep before the programme finished.
4. They'd **never seen** / **'ve never seen** a space capsule before they visited the museum.
5. I **wanted** / **had wanted** to help on the project, but they finished it before I arrived.
6. Our teacher wanted to know if we **have studied** / **had studied** for the exam.
7. My friend asked me if I **have borrowed** / **had borrowed** her dictionary.
8. He said he **had found** / **did find** my necklace.

## 2 Write five sentences. Use the past perfect forms of the verbs from the box.

eat   visit   leave   go   fly   design

Example: *I was invited for lunch but I said I **had** already **eaten**.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## 3 Complete the sentences with the past perfect of the verb in brackets.

Example: *The plane **had left** by the time we reached the airport. (leave)*

1. Humans \_\_\_\_\_ to fly long before the Wright brothers' successful flight in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (try)
2. They \_\_\_\_\_ many different devices before they found a stable design. (built)
3. The Chinese \_\_\_\_\_ kites long before Marco Polo wrote about them. (invent)
4. Leonardo da Vinci \_\_\_\_\_ a long time studying flying objects before he designed his own machine. (spend)
5. He \_\_\_\_\_ his flying machine carefully but it still didn't fly. (design)
6. The Wright brothers \_\_\_\_\_ about flying since early childhood. (dream)
7. Pilots \_\_\_\_\_ to continue flying Concorde but it proved to be too expensive. (want)
8. It \_\_\_\_\_ possible for planes to fly faster than the speed of sound before jet engines. (not be)

## 4 Change the statements from direct speech to reported speech.

Example: *'I tried to call you,' said Sally.*

**Sally said she had tried to call you.**

1. 'I've invented a flying machine,' said Leonardo da Vinci.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. 'We've built a hot-air balloon,' said the Montgolfier brothers.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. 'I've seen kites carrying men in China,' said Marco Polo.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. 'We've flown a plane!' exclaimed the Wright Brothers.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. 'We haven't flown very far,' they added.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. 'I've flown faster than the speed of sound!' said Chuck Yeager.  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. 'I've designed a parachute,' said Fausto Veranzio.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. 'We've landed on the moon,' said the astronauts.  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Past perfect continuous: Talking about the first of two actions in the past

We use the **past perfect continuous** (subject + *had/hadn't* + *been* + present participle):

- to show that one action had been happening before another action in the past.

*Before Louis Bleriot first crossed the English Channel in an aeroplane in 1909, pilots **had been using** hot-air balloons.*

- to emphasise the length of time an action lasted for.

*The Wright brothers **had been working on** powered flight for several years before Wilbur Wright flew for 2 hours and 19 minutes in 1908.*

- to refer to an action in the past that was in progress but was interrupted by another action.

*I **had been watching** television for hours when suddenly I heard the telephone.*

➔ See grammar box on page 52.

## REMEMBER

We often use *when*, *before*, *for* and *since* with the present perfect continuous.

*They'd been watching the news **when** the TV exploded.*

*Had they been waiting long **before** the plane took off?*

*I'd been trying to log on **for** hours.*

*The villagers had been asking for broadband **since** 2013.*

## 1 Change the verbs to the past perfect continuous.

Example: *I thought. I **had been thinking**.*

1. We went. \_\_\_\_\_
2. They played. \_\_\_\_\_
3. You worried. \_\_\_\_\_
4. She laughed. \_\_\_\_\_
5. He cried. \_\_\_\_\_
6. You worked. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I watched. \_\_\_\_\_
8. It developed. \_\_\_\_\_

## 2 Write sentences using the verbs from Activity 1.

Example: *I had been thinking **about him when he suddenly arrived!***

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

## 3 Complete the sentences using the past perfect continuous of the verb in brackets.

Example: *Chuck Yeager **had been working** as a test pilot for eight years when he flew at Mach 2 in 1953. (work)*

1. Yeager \_\_\_\_\_ fighter planes for three years before he became a test pilot. (fly)
2. Two days before he broke the sound barrier, Yeager \_\_\_\_\_ a horse when he fell and broke two ribs. (ride)
3. Da Vinci \_\_\_\_\_ about flight for years before he built a flying machine. (think)
4. He \_\_\_\_\_ his machine for years before he showed it to anyone. (build)
5. He \_\_\_\_\_ engineering before he became a fighter pilot. (study)
6. They \_\_\_\_\_ to visit the exhibition before they read the good reviews. (not plan)

## WRITING

Write sentences about the progress made by pioneers in flight over the centuries.

Use the past perfect and past perfect continuous.

Example: *Leonardo da Vinci **had been thinking** about flying since he **was** a child.*