

Presentation

We use several different tenses when we narrate a story in the past.

Use the past simple:

- to describe the main events in sequence, i.e. one event after another.
*I **opened** the curtains, **looked** out of the window, and **saw** a crow.*
- to describe a general state in the past. *It **was** one of the coldest winters in memory.*

Use the past perfect:

- to make it clear that one past event happened before another one.
*When I looked again, the bird **had flown** away.*
- to describe something that happened (or a state that was true) before the main event(s) or story. *I'd **often walked** past the old house but I'd **never entered** it.*

Use the **past continuous** to describe an activity in progress in the past. It can be:

- the background to an event within the story. *The sun **was setting**.*
- the background to the main story. *It was late at night and I **was sleeping**.*

Use the **past perfect continuous** to describe a longer activity in progress in the past:

- before a main event: *The sky **had been getting** blacker ...*
- up to a main event: *A black crow **had been sitting** on the tree when suddenly it turned to look at me.*

Exercises

1 Match the two halves of the sentences. Then write the names of the tenses in bold.

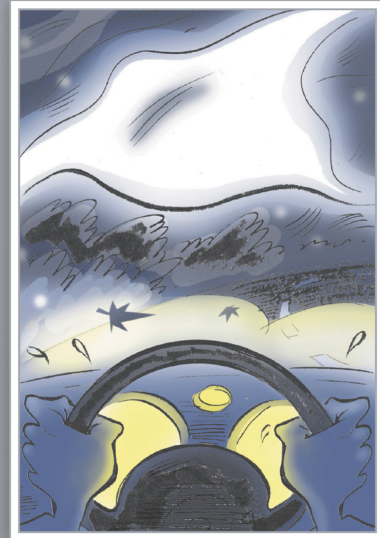
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|---|-----------------------|---|
| 1 He walked into the house | <u>G, past simple</u> | A in living memory. |
| 2 It had been raining for six hours | _____ | B when the phone rang. |
| 3 The party had already ended | _____ | C by the time we arrived. |
| 4 She was falling asleep | _____ | D and the whole of my garden was under water! |
| 5 It was the hottest summer | _____ | E the rain started to fall. |
| 6 I'd always wanted to appear on TV | _____ | F and now was my big chance. |
| 7 The clouds were gathering and | _____ | G and closed the door behind him. |

2 Choose the correct option to complete the text below.

The strange story of a tree in the night...

Do you believe in ghosts? I ¹*thought* / *'ve been thinking* about this question a lot recently. I ²*'d never met* / *'ve never met* a ghost, but a friend of mine has. And her story has made me think again about my answer to the question.

It ³*had been* / *was* a dark, foggy night – as it often is, of course, in all good ghost stories – and my friend ⁴*was driving* / *drove* home along a quiet country road. Suddenly, a large white shadow ⁵*was flying* / *flew* across the road in front of her car. My friend slowed down and ⁶*had been looking* / *looked* behind her in her mirror. But there was nothing there. The strange white shadow ⁷*had disappeared* / *was disappearing*. She drove on a bit further, when the shadow ⁸*was appearing* / *appeared* again. This time it flew straight at her windscreen and blocked her view. She stopped the car. And at that very moment she heard a loud crashing sound just in front of her. She looked up. There, in the middle of the road, ⁹*was being* / *was* a huge tree. It ¹⁰*had been falling* / *had fallen* down into the middle of the road. My friend was shaking with shock. Had the strange white shadow ¹¹*been trying* / *tried* to warn her of the danger? ¹²*It had saved* / *Had it saved* her life?



3 Complete the story using past forms. Sometimes more than one form is possible.

It was 8 o'clock and at last I was ready. I ¹_____ (spend) hours deciding what to wear. This was a special occasion and I ²_____ (want) to look my best. I ³_____ (walk) to the bus stop when a friend ⁴_____ (pass) me in his car. He ⁵_____ (drive) into town. He ⁶_____ (offer) to give me a lift. We ⁷_____ (stop) the car opposite the restaurant. I could see the people inside. They ⁸_____ (already / start) eating. As I waited on the pavement, a huge lorry ⁹_____ (drive) straight through a big puddle of water. My dress was covered in mud. I ¹⁰_____ (look) a real mess. All the customers in the restaurant ¹¹_____ (laugh) at me. I ¹²_____ (never / feel) so embarrassed in my whole life.