

Past Perfect Tense

What is the past perfect tense?

The past perfect tense relates an earlier, completed action in an event or story. This distinguishes which action happened first and which action(s) followed. Let's look at an example:

Kazu learned English. Kazu found a new job in Canada.

Which event occurred first? Did Kazu study English because of the new job, or did he study in order to find a job abroad? A time expression could provide clarity, although this feels quite unnatural.

He learned English in 2006. He found a new job in Canada in 2007.

Instead, the past perfect tense makes it clear that Kazu studied to someday go abroad for his career. We can say: Kazu *had learned* English before he *found* a new job in Canada.

What is the sentence structure?

The past perfect tense uses the following sentence structure:

subject | had | past participle | object/complement

Kevin | had | spent | a lot of money.

Stephanie | had | followed | the rules all her life.

Albert | had | worked | hard at graduate school.

It's important to note that the past perfect tense is often used in conjunction with the past tense. However, the past perfect doesn't need to precede the past tense. Look at the following examples:

Kevin's new computer *was stolen*. He *felt* disappointed because he *had spent* a lot of money on it.

Albert *had worked* hard at graduate school. As a result, he *found* a high-paying job quite easily.

How is the past perfect tense used?

The past perfect tense is one way to put actions in order. As has been mentioned, it would feel quite unnatural to repeatedly refer to the time something happened. In addition, and especially when speaking, the speaker may forget to tell some information or other information may need clarification. As a result, the past perfect plays an important role. Look at the following:

Dave: Yesterday was an absolutely awful day!

Ken: Really?

Dave: Yeah! I woke up late. By the time I got out of the house, I *had spilled* coffee on my shirt and realized I didn't have any clean ones. So I put on a shirt that I *had worn* a few days before. On

the way to the station, I realized that I *had forgotten* to lock the door, so I ran back home. At work, my boss yelled at me because I *hadn't finished* the report for the 10:00 meeting with the head of marketing. And that was only the morning...

Is there additional information on the present perfect tense?

The first event in a series of events most often uses the past perfect when the order of events isn't clear. Following events use the simple past tense. However, as can be seen in the above dialogue, additional events (events C, D, E, F, etc.) in the story may require the past perfect tense, especially when it's unclear which event occurred first.

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