

VERB TENSES: PAST

Past Tense expresses actions that already happened as opposed to actions that are happening now or will happen in the future. The Past Tense appears in four different forms: 1) **Simple Past Tense**, 2) **Past Progressive Tense**, 3) **Past Perfect Tense**, and 4) **Past Perfect Progressive Tense**. This resource will help you understand when to use each form.

SIMPLE PAST TENSE

Simple Past Tense expresses actions that **happened in the past**.

Example: I *walked* to class yesterday.

| Singular | Plural |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| I <i>walked</i> | We <i>walked</i> |
| You <i>walked</i> | You (all) <i>walked</i> |
| He/she/it <i>walked</i> | They <i>walked</i> |

Simple Past Tense = **PAST PARTICIPLE (usually VERB + -ed)**.

EXAMPLES:

1. He *cooked* breakfast this morning.
2. I *drove* to work today.
3. The children *played* soccer yesterday.

PAST PROGRESSIVE TENSE

Past Progressive Tense expresses **actions that were in the process of happening when another action happened**.

Example: I *was walking* to class when suddenly it started to rain.

| Singular | Plural |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| I <i>was walking</i> | We <i>were walking</i> |
| You <i>were walking</i> | You (all) <i>were walking</i> |
| He/she/it <i>was walking</i> | They <i>were walking</i> |

Past Progressive Tense = **was/were + VERB + -ing.**

EXAMPLES:

1. He *was cooking* breakfast when his mother called.
2. I *was talking* when my friend interrupted me.
3. We *were running* along the road when our friend picked us up in his car.

PAST PERFECT TENSE

Past Perfect Tense expresses **actions that happened before another past action.**

Example: I called my friend and offered to drive her to class, but she *had walked* there already.

| Singular | Plural |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I had walked | We had walked |
| You had walked | You (all) had walked |
| He/she/it had walked | They had walked |

Past Perfect Tense = **had + PAST PARTICIPLE (usually VERB + -ed).**

EXAMPLES:

1. When she got home, she saw that her husband *had purchased* a gift for her.
2. I checked the mailbox, but my roommate *had grabbed* the mail earlier.
3. When I arrived at the airport, the plane *had left* already.

PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE TENSE

Past Perfect Progressive Tense expresses **actions that started in the past and continued until another time in the past.**

Example: I *had been walking* for hours, so I was already tired long before I arrived.

| Singular | Plural |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| I had been walking | We had been walking |
| You had been walking | You (all) had been walking |
| He/she/it had been walking | They had been walking |

Past Perfect Progressive Tense = **had been + VERB + -ing.**

EXAMPLES:

1. She *had been studying* for so long that she forgot her appointment.
2. The children *had been playing* outside for an hour when their mothers told them to come inside for dinner.
3. I *had been hiking* for two hours, and I still had a long way to go.

* This information comes from the chapter “Key 3: Verb Tenses, Past,” in *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook*, by Keith S. Folse.

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