

Grammar Notes

PAST PERFECT

A. Introduction

The past perfect is used for two actions that occurred at different times in the past. In a past perfect sentence, the first past action (further in the past) uses the *past perfect*, and the second past action (more recent) uses the *simple past*.

Past Perfect	
Diagram	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>6:00 pm</p> <p>1</p> <p>X</p> <p>She ate dinner.</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>8:00 pm</p> <p>2</p> <p>X</p> <p>I called her.</p> </div> </div> <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She had eaten dinner by the time I called her. • By the time I called her, she had eaten dinner. </div>
Form	had + past participle
Function	one past action happened before another past action
Time Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by the time • when • before <p>(Note that other time markers such as <i>yesterday</i>, <i>last</i>, <i>ago</i>, <i>already</i>, <i>just</i>, <i>still</i>, and <i>yet</i> are often additionally used.)</p>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone had left by the time I locked up. • I had already sent email about the missing stop sign before they fixed it. • By the time my girlfriend woke up, the movie had ended. • Had you already heard the news when I texted you? • They couldn't hand in their group project because one member hadn't finished her section yet.

Grammar Notes cont.

B. Notes

Note #1

When the dependent (time) clause begins the sentence, we usually use a comma. We don't need a comma when the independent clause begins the sentence. There is no change in meaning.

- **By the time I graduated**, I had made many new business contacts.
- I had made many new business contacts **by the time I graduated**.

Note #2

Instead of a dependent clause, we can use an adverb phrase of time (note that a phrase has no subject or past verb). Examples of typical phrases include *by July 2010*, *by 6:00 last night*, *by the weekend*, etc.

- **By August 2017**, they had completed the additions to the building.
- She had already left the office **by 2:00 pm yesterday**.

Note #3

The past perfect action can be repeated, or there could be multiple actions before the final one.

- **I had texted my son five times** before he got back to me.
- **He had cleaned his room, made dinner, and done his homework** by the time I got home.

Note #4

The past perfect is not as common as the simple past. In fact, we can use the simple past instead of the past perfect, especially in informal situations (mostly when a time marker other than "by the time" is used). There is no change in meaning.

- I **had shut down** my computer before I left the house.
- I **shut down** my computer before I left the house. (*more common*)

Bonus:

Can you figure out the meaning of this sentence?

All the faith he had had had had no effect on the outcome of his life.