

## Past simple

We use the **past simple** to:

- 1 describe finished actions or situations in the past.
- 2 say that one thing happened after another.

## Past continuous

We use the **past continuous** to:

- 1 talk about activities in progress at a moment in the past.
- 2 describe scenes in a story or description.
- 3 talk about an activity in progress when another, shorter activity happened or interrupted it. It tells us that an action was in progress, but not that it was finished.

## Present perfect simple

We use the **present perfect simple** to talk about:

- 1 an experience in someone's lifetime, without saying the exact time when the event occurred.

*I've seen Coldplay in concert.*

- 2 recent events which have a result in the present.

*She's lost her bag. (= She hasn't got her bag right now.)*

- 3 actions or situations that began in the past but continue in the present.

*Mark's lived here for ten years.*

- 4 actions finished very recently.

*They've just had an accident.*

## Grammar reference

For past simple, past continuous and present perfect simple, see page 166.

### Present perfect continuous

The **present perfect continuous** is used in a similar way to the present perfect simple. However, we use the continuous when we want to emphasise the process and duration of an action.

*I've been studying in this school for more than five months.*

For that reason, if an action is very short, we cannot use the continuous form.

~~*I've been breaking the window.*~~

We also use the continuous to emphasise that an action finished very recently or is incomplete.

*I've been washing the dishes ... and my hands are wet because I only finished a second ago/I still haven't finished.*

If we want to emphasise the completion and result of an action, or how many times an action happens, we must use the **present perfect simple**.

*I've painted my bedroom. (It's finished.)*

*I've seen that film three times.*

~~*I've been seeing that film three times.*~~

### Past perfect simple

We use the **past perfect simple** to talk about actions that happened before another action or actions in the past. It gives importance to the completion of an activity.

*When the interview had finished, I left.*

### Past perfect continuous

We use the **past perfect continuous** to talk about actions that happened before another action in the past. It gives importance to the duration of an activity.

*I was tired because I had been studying all night.*

### Future activities in the past

## Past tenses

/ 8 points

### 1 Choose the correct alternative.

- 1 There you are! At last! I've waited/been waiting for you for hours.
- 2 That's the best festival that I went/have been to so far.
- 3 He couldn't go until he s/'d finished his assignment.
- 4 When I'd read/been reading all my emails, I made myself a snack.
- 5 The plot in last night's film has been/was awful.
- 6 While I was/had been watching the match, I saw Tim in the crowd.
- 7 I opened the door and stepped/had stepped outside.
- 8 When he had/had had his shower, he dried himself.

2 Complete the dialogue with the correct form of the verbs in brackets. Sometimes more than one tense is possible.

A: So, I hear that Jenna (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (finally decide) to take psychology at University? I really thought she (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (opt) for sociology.

B: I know. She (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (hesitate) between the two for a while now. Apparently she (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (change) her mind after she (5) \_\_\_\_\_ (attend) the talk by Professor Martin last week.

A: Oh yes. I wanted to go to that but I (6) \_\_\_\_\_ (already arrange) to go to the Lily Allen gig with Kim. We (7) \_\_\_\_\_ (look forward) to it for ages so there was no way I (8) \_\_\_\_\_ (cancel)!

B: I don't blame you! I (9) \_\_\_\_\_ (think) about going too but they (10) \_\_\_\_\_ (sell out). So I went to the lecture. Not quite as exciting but interesting all the same.

A: Right! Was he as good a lecturer as everyone says?

B: Fantastic. But they (11) \_\_\_\_\_ (have) a few electrical problems during the talk. He (12) \_\_\_\_\_ (show) some footage of an experiment he (13) \_\_\_\_\_ (carry) in the USA, when there was a power cut and everything went dark.

A: So what happened?

B: He's such a professional. While they (14) \_\_\_\_\_ (fix) the electrics he continued talking in the dark. His voice is really hypnotic and it was almost a shame when the lights (15) \_\_\_\_\_ (come) back on! You know I'm tempted to go for psychology too. It's a really interesting subject.

A: Yeah. But I don't think you need to be a psychologist to explain why I think my evening was better than yours!

## Past tenses

1a Name the tenses of the verbs in sentences 1–6.

- 1 He **resolved** the mystery that **had been bugging** him since his meeting with the graphologist.
- 2 In the late 1940s, he **was devising** novel ways of measuring personality.
- 3 Their research **has shown** that people behave in unusual ways.
- 4 The experimenters **had found out** their date of birth beforehand.
- 5 He **has been investigating** unusual human behaviour for the last twenty years.
- 6 The test **was about to/was going to** start.

1b Which tense or verb form in sentences 1–6 do we use for these situations?

- a for finished actions or situations at specific times in the past
- b for activities in progress at a moment in the past
- c to talk about the future in the past
- d for actions that happened at an unspecified moment in the past
- e for actions that happened in the past before another moment or action in the past
- f for actions that started in the past and are either incomplete or finished very recently, especially when the duration of the action is important
- g to talk about actions that happened before another action in the past when the duration of the action is important

Complete the sentences with the correct past form of the verbs given. Sometimes more than one form is possible.

- My friend ..... (call) me at eleven o'clock last night, just when I ..... (go) to bed.
- I ..... (have) a terrible headache all day - I ..... (take) three headache tablets but it won't go away.
- When I ..... (look) out of my window this morning, everything ..... (be) white because it ..... (snow) all night.
- I ..... (wait) to speak to the professor for over two hours but she still hasn't arrived.
- When I ..... (receive) your letter yesterday, I ..... (open) it and ..... (read) it straight away.
- I find university life difficult. I ..... (study) here for nine months but I still ..... (not make) any close friends.
- I couldn't open the door because I ..... (forget) to bring my key.
- That dog is driving me mad. It ..... (bark) all morning!

Decide if the verbs in **bold** are in the correct form. Rewrite the incorrect forms.

Psychologists **(a) had been** interested in discovering the key to successful lying for a long time, but it still doesn't seem very easy to work out what makes a good liar. Once, Professor Richard Wiseman **(b) has done** an interesting experiment using television. He **(c) interviewed** a famous person called Robin Day about his favourite film. In the first interview, Day **(d) told** Wiseman the truth. He **(e) described** how he loved the film *Some Like It Hot*. In the second interview, he **(f) lied**, telling the interviewer how much he liked *Gone With The Wind*, even though really he hated it. When they **(g) had been finishing** the interviews, they **(h) asked** viewers to watch the two interviews and to decide in which interview Day **(i) had been lying**. Almost 30,000 people phoned in to vote but the votes were completely divided between the two interviews. It became clear that viewers **(j) were** simply **guessing**. Then a surprising thing **(k) was happening**. On the same day, the two interviews **(l) appeared** on the radio and in a newspaper. Seventy-three per cent of the radio listeners correctly **(m) guessed** when Day **(n) was lying**, and so did 64 per cent of the newspaper readers. Other recent tests **(o) have suggested** the same conclusion, that body language and facial expressions give little indication of people's sincerity. It seems to be more a question of the words we use.

## 2 Choose the correct alternative.

- On our holiday last summer we made/have made friends with two Swiss students.
- I ve/d been doing this psychology test for the last hour and it's really difficult.
- On the way to the lecture we passed/were passing the noticeboard.
- I know quite a bit about graphology because I've read/been reading five or six books about analysing handwriting.
- My mum has been/was interested in astrology but then she realized it was a waste of time.
- She couldn't write her answers down because she'd forgotten/been forgetting to bring a pen.
- I had had/been having problems with my computer for ages so I finally decided to call somebody to fix it.
- They left/were leaving the room when the teacher called them and so they turned/were turning round and headed back.
- She's my best friend. We have always seen/always saw eye to eye.
- It's dark. Someone has switched/been switching the light off.