**1.4. The Past Perfect Continuous Tense**

The past perfect continuous (also called past perfect progressive) is a [verb tense](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/verbtenseintro.html) which is used to show that an action started in the past and continued up to another point in the past

Past perfect continuous refers to unfinished, recently completed , or continuing actions.

We use the past perfect to talk about:

1. **Uncompleted Action before Something in the Past**

We use the past perfect continuous to show that one action was in progress before a second action started.

* I had been doing the dishes when John arrived. *I was doing the dishes but I stopped doing them when John arrived, and I had not finished doing them yet (that action still incomplete, so when John leaves I’ll probably had to finish doing the dishes.*

1. **Duration Before Something in the Past**

The past perfect continuous is used to express **how long** something had been going on before something important happened in the past.

We use the past perfect continuous to show that something started in the past and continued up until another time in the past. "For five minutes" and "for two weeks" are both durations which can be used with the past perfect continuous. Notice that this is related to the [*present perfect continuous*](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/presentperfectcontinuous.html); however, the duration does not continue until now, it stops before something else in the past.

* Jane **had been studying** for four hours when he came home.
* Jack **had been driving** four over six hours when he finally pulled over to have lunch.
* How long **had** you **been waiting** to get on the bus?

1. **Cause of Something in the Past**

* Sam gained weight because he **had been overeating**.
* Betty failed the final test because she **had not been attending** class.

1. **Past Continuous vs. Past Perfect Continuous**

If you do not include a duration such as "for five minutes," "for two weeks" or "since Friday," many English speakers choose to use the past continuous rather than the past perfect continuous. Be careful because this can change the meaning of the sentence. Past continuous emphasizes **interrupted actions**, whereas past perfect continuous emphasizes a **duration of time before something in the past**. Study the examples below to understand the difference.

* He was tired because he **was exercising** so hard.  
  *This sentence emphasizes that he was tired because he was exercising at that exact moment.*
* He was tired because he **had been exercising** so hard.  
  *This sentence emphasizes that he was tired because he had been exercising over a period of time. It is possible that he was still exercising at that moment OR that he had just finished.*

1. **Stative verbs**

It is important to remember that stative verbs ([*Non-continuous verbs*](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/types.html) ) cannot be used in any continuous tenses. Instead of using the past perfect continuous with these verbs, you must use the [*past perfect*](https://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/pastperfect.html).

* The motorcycle **had been belonging** to George for years before Tina bought it. ***Not Correct***
* The motorcycle **had belonged** to George for years before Tina bought it. ***Correct***

1. **Adverb Placement**

The examples below show the placement for grammar adverbs such as: always, only, never, ever, still, just, etc.

* You had **only** been waiting there for a few minutes when she arrived.
* Had you **only** been waiting there for a few minutes when she arrived?

**Form:**

The past perfect continuous is composed of the past perfect of the verb *to be (=had been)* + the present participle *(base+ing)*.

**Affirmative:** Subject + had + been + verb + ing

* She had been trying

**Negative**: Subject + had + not (hadn't) + been + verb + ing

* She hadn't been sleeping

**Interrogative:**

* Had you been eating?

**Interrogative negative:** Had+ subject+ been+ verb+ ing

* Hadn't they been living?

**Wh questions:** Question word (often 'How long') + had + subject +been + verb + ing

* How long had they been working?

**Signal words:** how long, since, for.