

# 10 Past perfect

The dollar climbed to a seven-month high against the euro on Thursday because of news that the economy **had grown** faster than predicted.

CNN website

French bank BNP Paribas reported a net profit in the first quarter of 1.7 billion euros. The figures **surprised** analysts. They **had expected** a range of 1.1 billion to 1.5 billion euros.

The Tocqueville Connection website

## A Form

- We form the past perfect with the auxiliary *had* + the past participle of the verb.

Affirmative	Negative	Question
<i>I had ('d) worked</i>	<i>I had not (hadn't) worked</i>	<i>Had I worked?</i>
<i>You had ('d) worked</i>	<i>You had not (hadn't) worked</i>	<i>Had you worked?</i>
<i>He/she/it had ('d) worked</i>	<i>He/she/it had not (hadn't) worked</i>	<i>Had he/she/it worked?</i>
<i>We had ('d) worked</i>	<i>We had not (hadn't) worked</i>	<i>Had we worked?</i>
<i>They had ('d) worked</i>	<i>They had not (hadn't) worked</i>	<i>Had they worked?</i>

- We use contractions (in brackets) in speech and informal writing.

## B Uses

- Compare these two situations:

1 We arrived at their offices at 9.00. The meeting started at 9.02.

We say: *When we arrived at their offices, the meeting started.* (both verbs in past simple)

2 We arrived at their offices at 9.00. The meeting started at 8.55.

We say: *When we arrived at their offices, the meeting had started.* (second verb in past perfect)

- So the past perfect is used to emphasize that one past event happens before another. We use the past perfect for the earlier event.

- The past perfect is often used after verbs of thinking such as: *think, know, be sure, realize, remember, understand*, etc.

*I thought I'd seen him somewhere before, but I was wrong.*

*He knew he'd made a mistake.*

*When I got to the airport, I remembered I hadn't closed the kitchen window.*

## C Time adverbs

- With the past perfect we often use *already, never* and *by*.

*When I arrived at the conference centre, her presentation had already started.*

*You won't believe it – I forgot my passport! I'd never done that before.*

*By the end of the day I had interviewed six candidates for the job.*

- It is not necessary to use the past perfect if we use *before* or *after* to make the time sequence clear.

*The meeting (had) started before we arrived.* (*had* is optional here)

*We arrived after the meeting (had) started.* (*had* is optional here)



## 4 Past time 2

*By 1997 the national debt had doubled and the British economy was once again at risk of repeating the pattern of inflation followed by recession.  
(The Times website)*

### A Past perfect: form

See appendix 2 for the past participles of irregular verbs

- The past perfect is formed with the auxiliary *had* and the past participle. In speech and informal writing *had* is contracted to 'd.  
*I had (I'd) already decided what to do before he called me.*
- Negatives are formed with *not* and contractions are used (*hadn't*). Questions are formed by inverting the subject and *had*.  
*At that time I still hadn't decided what to do.*  
*Had you already decided what to do before he called you?*

### B Past perfect: uses

- The past perfect is used to show clearly that one past event happened before another past event. We use the past perfect for the earlier event:  
*On the New York Stock Exchange the Nasdaq Index had opened higher, but fell back to 1,578 in morning trading. (Yahoo News Service website)*  
Compare these examples which describe exactly the same situation:  
1 *Sue left at 2 pm. We arrived at her office at 2.30.* (both verbs in past simple)  
2 *When we arrived at Sue's office, she had left.* (earlier action in past perfect)  
In example 1 the two actions are separate in the mind of the speaker. In example 2 there is a stronger connection between the two actions and the past perfect emphasises which happened first.
- It may not be necessary to use the past perfect if we use *before* or *after* to make the time clear. We can use the past simple for both actions.  
*Sue left/had left her office before we arrived.* (both forms possible)  
*We arrived at Sue's office after she left/had left.* (both forms possible)  
Many speakers still prefer to use the past perfect in this case, to show a strong connection between the two events.
- The past perfect is often used with verbs of thinking like *know*, *realise*, *remember*, *be sure*, *think*.  
*David knew he'd seen her somewhere before, but he couldn't remember where.*  
*When I got to the office I realised I'd left all my papers behind.*  
*Ellen was sure they hadn't received the invoice, but she checked one more time.*  
*I thought we'd already chosen the name for the new product!*

### C Past perfect: time expressions

- The time expressions *after*, *once*, *by*, *already*, *just*, *never*, *meanwhile* are often used with the past perfect. The word *still* is often used with negative forms.  
*Around 1993 Korean corporations started turning to Park to acquire companies in the US or Europe. By this time, he had built up sufficient contacts to help them. (Asia Inc website)*