

Unit 26: PAST PERFECT

This formation means ‘double past — a time before another time in the past’. We use the past tense of the auxiliary verb **have** (Unit 17) before the past participle (Unit 14). Don’t forget that many participles are irregular (Appendix 10).

1 Formation (*had + past participle*)

a STATEMENTS

EXAMPLES: They **had** all **worked** very hard that day.
She **had gone** by air to save time.
I **hadn’t put** the address at the top.

b QUESTIONS

EXAMPLES: **Had** you **seen** the man before?
How much **had** he **taken**?

NOTICE: There is also a continuous formation. The past participle is **been** and the **–ing** form follows:

EXAMPLES: The weather **had been getting** worse all day.
He **had not been** expecting me.
Had they **been fighting**?

NOTICE: **Had** can be an **AUXILIARY** and a **LEXICAL** verb (Unit 3).

EXAMPLE: For three days, the men **had not had** any food.

2 Use

To give the situation or the background to a story that began in the past:

EXAMPLES: When we got to the job site, the all cried out in surprise. It was the first time they **had** ever **seen** an oil rig.
We did not think we could finish the pipeline on schedule. Our survey crew **had lost** their equipment in some muskeg two days before.
The crews **had been looking** for the equipment for hours when the rain began.

NOTICE: We can use the past perfect to show which happened first:

EXAMPLES: I tried to open the door but somebody **had locked** it from the other side.
[First somebody locked it, then I tried to open it.]
I tried to open the door but somebody **locked** it from the other side.
[These two things happened at the same time.]