

Past tenses

Past simple:

- The past simple is used for past events or actions

*He **closed** the front door, **locked** it and **set off** to work*

- The past simple is often used with a specific time

*The previous director **retired** in November*

Past continuous:

- The past continuous is used for a continued action which happened when another action took place

*We **arrived** at the theatre just as the show **was starting***

- In many cases the continued action is interrupted

*When he **called** I **was watching** TV*

- The past continuous is also used to set the scene at the beginning of a story

***It was raining** hard and an icy wind **was blowing**. At that moment, Carlos **knew** the trip would be impossible.*

- The past continuous cannot normally be used with stative verbs

My parents rarely disagreed with each other

~~My parents were rarely disagreeing with each other X~~

Past perfect:

- The past perfect is used to show that an action happened earlier than another past action:

The police were unaware that the attacker **had** already **escaped**. (The attacker escaped before the police realised.)

- Sometimes it is not necessary to use the past perfect if it is very clear which action happened first:

After we **finished** eating, we played cards.

Past perfect continuous:

- The past perfect continuous is used for a continued action which happened before another past action:

We'd **been working** so hard that we decided to take a break. (We took a break after a continued period of work.)

- The past perfect continuous can be used to show how long an action continued up to a certain point in the past:

When the search began, the girl **had** already **been missing** for two days. (She was missing for two days before the search began.)

Used to / didn't use to:

- The structure used to + infinitive is used for repeated actions, habits or states in the past:

Before the Internet, people **used to write** letters a lot more.

- The negative form of this structure is didn't use to:

We **didn't use to have** a dishwasher in our old house.

- Used to is not normally used with time expressions which specify the duration of the action:

I **smoked** for ten years, but then I gave up.

I **used to smoke** for ten years, but then I gave up. **X**

- Would + infinitive can also be used for actions and habits in the past:

When I was a child, my dad **would** always **tell** me a story at bedtime.

- However, would cannot be used to talk about past states:

This collection of paintings **used to belong** to a rich family.

This collection of paintings **would belong** to a rich family. (Belong is a stative verb.) **X**