Verb Tense

Simple Past

The simple past indicates that an activity or situation began and ended at a particular time in the past.

Regular Verbs add *ed* in the past tense, e.g. walk → walked & live → lived.

Irregular verbs are formed differently, e.g. buy → bought; go → went; hide → hid

a) John lived in Paris for ten years, but now he lives in Rome. (live)

b) I bought a new bicycle three days ago. (buy)

If a sentence contains *when* and has the simple past in both clauses, the action in the when clause happens first.

In (c) below: 1st: The rain began. 2nd: She stood under a tree.

c) Rita stood under a tree when it began to rain.

d) When Mrs. Chi heard a strange noise, she got up to investigate.

e) When I dropped my bag, the contents spilled on the street.

Past Progressive (*be* + verb + *ing*)

In (g) below: 1st: I was walking down the street. 2nd: It began to rain.

Both actions occurred at the same time, but one action began earlier and was in progress when the other action occurred.

In (i) below: My studying began before 8:00, was in progress at that time, and probably continued.

f) I was walking down the street when it began to rain.

h) Rita was standing under a tree when it began to rain.

i) At eight o’clock last night, I was studying.

j) Last year at this time, I was attending school.

Sometimes the past progressive is used in both parts of a sentence when two actions are in progress at the same time.

k) While I was studying, my roommate was cooking dinner.
Past Tense (have + past principle)

Perfect tenses all give the idea that one thing happens before another time or event. Whatever happens first is in the perfect tense.

Regular Verbs add ed for the past participle, e.g. play → played.

Irregular verbs form differently, e.g. eat → ate → eaten; go → went → gone

Present Perfect: Tom has already eaten.
   Tom finished eating sometime before now (the present). The exact time is not important.

Past Perfect: Tom had already eaten when his friend arrived
   First, Tom finished eating. Later, his friend arrived. Tom’s eating was completely finished before another time in the past.

Future Perfect: Tom will have eaten when his friend arrives
   First, Tom will finish eating. Later, his friend will arrive. Tom’s eating will be completely finished before another time in the future.

Perfect Progressive Tenses

The perfect progressive tenses give the idea that one event is in progress immediately before / up to another time or event.

The tenses are used to express the duration of the first event. The verb “have” indicates the tense i.e. past / present / future.

Present Perfect Progressive: Tom has been studying for two hours.
   Event in progress: studying when? Before now, up to now (the present)
   How long? For two hours.

Past Perfect Progressive: Tom had been studying for two hours before his friend came.

Future Perfect Progressive: Tom will have been studying for two hours by the time his friend arrives.
Practice Exercise

Exercise 1
Use the **simple past** or the **past progressive** of verbs in parentheses.

1) I am sitting in class right now. I (sit) ______________ in class at this exact same time yesterday.

2) I don’t want to go to the zoo today because it is raining. The same thing happened yesterday. I (want, not) ______________ to go to the zoo because it (rain) ______________.

3) I (call) ______________ Roger at nine last night, but he (be, not) ______________ at home. He (study) ______________ at the library.

4) I (hear, not) ______________ the thunder during the storm last night because I (sleep) ______________ deeply.

Exercise 2
Use the **simple past** or **present perfect** of the verbs in parentheses.

5) The company and the union finally ________ on salary raises two days ago. Since then, they ________ on everything, and the rest of the negotiations have gone smoothly. (agree)

6) This university _____ 120 students to study in other countries last year. In total, we ________ 875 students abroad over the past 10 years. (send)

7) Monica is a pilot for a major airline company. She ________ nearly 10 million kilometers during her career. Last year, she ________ 150,000 kilometers. (fly)

8) Frank ________ the violin with an amateur orchestra since 2005. Last year, he ________ Beethoven’s violin concerto at one of the concerts. (play)

Answers

1) Sat
2) did not want: was raining
3) called; was not; was studying
4) did not hear; was sleeping
5) agreed; have agreed
6) sent; have sent
7) has flown; flew
8) has played; played