**Past Tenses in English – contrasted**

**1. Use**

| **Simple Past** | **Past Progressive** | **Past Perfect** | **Past Perfect Progressive** | **Present Perfect\*\*** | **Present Perfect Progressive\*\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| action finished in the past | action was in progress at special time in the past | the past equivalent of Present Perfect | how long something had been happening before something else happened | * result of an action in the past is important in the present * recently completed action * state beginning in the past and still continuing | action beginning in the past and still continuing (focus is on the action) |

**2. Signal words**

| **Simple Past** | **Past Progressive** | **Past Perfect** | **Past Perfect Progressive** | **Present Perfect\*\*** | **Present Perfect Progressive\*\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| * last ... * ... ago * in 2010 * yesterday | while | no unambiguous ones | | * just * yet * never * ever * already * so far * up to now * since * for * recently | * all day * the whole day * how long * since * for |

**3. Form**

| **Simple Past** | **Past Progressive** | **Past Perfect** | **Past Perfect Progressive** | **Present Perfect\*\*** | **Present Perfect Progressive\*\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *regular:* **infinitive** + **ed** *irregular:* **2nd column** of the irregular verbs | **was**, **were** + **infinitive** + **-ing** | **had** + **past participle**\* | **had** + **been** + **infinitive** + **ing** | **have/has** + **past participle**\* | **have/has** + **been** + **infinitive** + **-ing** |

\* **past participle**:

* regular verbs → **infinitive** + **-ed**
* irregular verbs → **3rd column** of the table of the [irregular verbs](https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/grammar/unreg_verben1.htm)

**4. Examples**

**4.1. Affirmative sentences**

| **Simple Past** | **Past Progressive** | **Past Perfect** | **Past Perfect Progressive** | **Present Perfect\*\*** | **Present Perfect Progressive\*\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| We **were** in the USA and **visited** Alaska last year. | Joe **was** **writing** an e-mail at 5 o'clock yesterday evening. | She **had** **read** a comic before she went to bed. | She **had** **been** **waiting** for Jack for 30 minutes when he arrived. | He **has** **lived** in Melbourne since 2010. | They **have** **been** **waiting** for him for two hours. |

**4.2. Negative sentences**

| **Simple Past** | **Past Progressive** | **Past Perfect** | **Past Perfect Progressive** | **Present Perfect\*\*** | **Present Perfect Progressive\*\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| We **were** **not** in the USA and **did** **not** **visit** Alaska last year. | Joe **was** **not** **writing** an e-mail at 5 o'clock yesterday evening. | She **had** **not** read a comic before she went to bed. | She **had** **not** **been** **waiting** for Jack for 30 minutes when he arrived. | He **has** **not** **lived** in Melbourne since 2010. | They **have** **not** **been** **waiting** for him for two hours. |

**4.3. Questions**

| **Simple Past** | **Past Progressive** | **Past Perfect** | **Past Perfect Progressive** | **Present Perfect\*\*** | **Present Perfect Progressive\*\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Were** you in the USA and **did** you **visit** Alaska last year? | **Was** Joe **writing** an e-mail at 5 o'clock yesterday evening? | **Had** she **read** a comic before she went to bed? | **Had** she **been** **waiting** for Jack for 30 minutes when he arrived? | **Has** he **lived** in Melbourne since 2010? | **Have** they **been** **waiting** for him for two hours? |

\*\* Both the [Present Perfect](https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/grammar/pres_perf.htm) and the [Present Perfect Progressive](https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/grammar/pres_perf_pro.htm) are Present Tenses. But they also refer to the Past. That is the reason why they are listed here.