

Past Perfect Continuous - Use

When do we use the past perfect continuous tense in English?

Note: This is also called the **past perfect progressive** tense.

! We do not usually use stative verbs (*know, like, own, etc.*) in the past perfect continuous.

For example:

- I'd **known** Anna for ten years. (Not: ~~I'd been knowing~~)
- He'd **liked** ballet since he was a kid. (Not: ~~He'd been liking~~)

Two main exceptions: *mean, want*

- I'd **been meaning** to call you.
- She'd **been wanting** to play that game.

We use the past perfect continuous for:

1. Unfinished actions in the past

The action started in the past and continued up to another past event or moment. It possibly stopped then or continued afterwards. (It is usually clear from the context.) The focus is often on the duration of the action.

Note: We can often use the past perfect simple here as well.

For example:

- I'd **been waiting** for the bus since 7 am when it finally arrived.
- When our friends joined us for cards, we'd already **been playing** for two hours.
- They'd **been living** in Melbourne before they moved to Sydney.
- I'd **been thinking** about quitting my job, and then a friend offered me a management position in her company.

- How long **had** you **been studying** when she messaged you?
- Where **had** they **been staying** before June?

2. Actions that finished shortly before another past action

The action stopped not long before another past event. Here we are often showing a result.

For example:

- I was sweating because I'd **been running**.
- The computer wasn't working because the kids **had been playing** with it.
- It **had been raining**, so the ground was wet.
- She was tired because she **hadn't been sleeping** well.
- Why did you get annoyed? What **had** they **been doing**?

3. Narration (stories) to provide background

Writers often use the past perfect continuous to describe things that had been happening before the main events.

For example:

- Tony **had been looking** for a job for months when he finally got an interview invitation. A week later, they offered him the position.
- We'd **been hiking** through the mountains since sunrise and then the weather suddenly changed. Dark clouds formed in the sky and it started to rain.

4. The third conditional (imagining a different past)

We can use the past perfect continuous in third conditional sentences instead of the past perfect simple if we are talking about a continuous action.

For example:

- If Frank **had been paying** attention, he wouldn't have made that mistake.
- I would have finished the race if I'd **been exercising** more regularly.