

Unit 3 – On Duty: Past Tenses Grammar & Practice

Past Simple

Form: verb + -ed (regular) / irregular verbs (go → went, see → saw)

Use:

- Completed actions in the past (definite time)
- Past habits or facts

Examples:

- I visited London last year.
- People worked very hard in those days.

Signal words: yesterday, last night/week/year, in 2010, ago, then.

Past Continuous

Form: was/were + verb-ing

Use:

- Ongoing action at a specific time in the past
- Two actions happening at the same time
- Interrupted action

Examples:

- At 8 p.m., I was watching TV.
- She was cooking while he was cleaning.
- I was reading when the phone rang.

Signal words: while, when, as, at that moment.

Past Perfect Simple

Form: had + past participle

Use:

- Action completed before another past action or time
- Cause of something in the past

Examples:

- She had finished her homework before dinner.
- He was tired because he had worked all day.

Signal words: before, after, by the time, already, just, never.

Past Perfect Continuous

Form: had been + verb-ing

Use:

- Duration of an action up to a point in the past
- To show cause or background

Examples:

- They had been studying for hours before the exam started.
- He was exhausted because he had been running.

Signal words: for, since, before, until, how long.

Comparison Table

Tense	Example	Key Use
Past Simple	I watched a film yesterday.	Completed action
Past Continuous	I was watching a film when he called.	Interrupted action
Past Perfect	I had watched the film before I read the book.	Action before another past action
Past Perfect Continuous	I had been watching TV for an hour before dinner.	Duration up to another past event

Practice Activity

A. Fill in the blanks with the correct past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

1. When the fire alarm ____ (go) off, the students ____ (have) lunch.
2. She ____ (not finish) her report when the manager asked for it.
3. The police officer ____ (stand) on duty when he ____ (see) the accident.
4. By the time the ambulance ____ (arrive), the injured man ____ (lose) a lot of blood.
5. It ____ (rain) for hours before the rescue team finally reached the village.

B. Writing prompt:

Describe a moment when you were **on duty** or helping someone. Use **at least three different past tenses**.