

Narrative Tenses Practice Worksheet

British English • B2–C1 • Includes answer key

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: ____ / 42

Quick guide

Tense	Main use in a narrative
Past Simple	the main completed actions that move the story forward
Past Continuous	background actions, scene-setting, or actions in progress
Past Perfect Simple	an action that happened before another past action
Past Perfect Continuous	a longer earlier activity that was ongoing before a later past event

Exercise 1 – Match the tense to the use

Write the correct tense next to each description.

___ shows the main events in a story

___ describes the background or a scene in progress

___ shows that one action happened before another past action

___ shows duration or an ongoing earlier activity before another event

Exercise 2 – Complete the sentences

Use the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

- I _____ (walk) through the park when I _____ (see) an owl in the tree.
- By the time we got to the cinema, the film _____ already _____ (start).
- She _____ (feel) tired because she _____ (study) all evening.
- The children _____ (play) in the garden while their parents _____ (prepare) dinner.
- I _____ (not recognise) Tom because he _____ (grow) a beard.
- The lights _____ (go) out while we _____ (have) dinner.
- They _____ (wait) for over an hour before the train finally _____ (arrive).
- He _____ (drop) the glass just after he _____ (wash) it.

9. While I _____ (look) for my keys, I _____ (remember) I had left them at work.
 10. The ground _____ (be) wet because it _____ (rain) all night.

Exercise 3 – Complete the story

Use the correct narrative tense of the verbs in brackets.

Last Friday, I _____ (cycle) home from work when I _____ (notice) that several people in my street _____ (stand) outside their houses. At first, I thought something terrible _____ (happen), but then I _____ (hear) music coming from the Evanses' garden. My neighbours _____ (plan) a surprise celebration for Mr Evans, who had just retired. They _____ (organise) everything for weeks, and by the time he _____ (come) outside, everyone _____ already _____ (hide) behind the cars and the garden gate.

Exercise 4 – Find and correct the mistakes

Each sentence contains one mistake with a narrative tense. Rewrite it correctly.

1. I was hearing a strange noise when I opened the window.
2. By the time we arrived, the concert already started.
3. She had worked for three hours before she finally took a break, and that is why she was exhausted.
4. While I looked through the old box, I found my grandfather's watch.
5. We were knowing something was wrong because the house was completely silent.
6. He didn't pass the exam because he didn't study enough and had forgot half the material.
7. The children had been played in the garden before it started to rain.
8. I had been seeing the same man several times before I realised he was following me.

Exercise 5 – Build the sentences

Use the prompts to write full sentences with the correct narrative tense.

1. rain / heavily / while / we / drive / home
2. she / be / upset / because / she / lose / her phone
3. they / work / on the project / for months / before / it / fail
4. I / wait / at the station / when / the announcement / come
5. by the time / the teacher / arrive / the students / already / sit down
6. he / not answer / because / he / sleep
7. we / not recognise / the village / because / it / change / so much
8. the baby / cry / for twenty minutes / before / she / finally / fall asleep

Exercise 6 – Short writing task

Write 120–150 words. Use at least three different narrative tenses.

Choose one opening:

A. It was supposed to be an ordinary journey home, but everything changed when I opened the train door...

B. I had never felt so relieved in my life, but only a few minutes earlier everything had been going wrong...

Checklist:

- set the scene clearly
- include at least one earlier past event
- use one longer background action
- show the main events in a clear sequence

Answer Key

Exercise 1

1. Past Simple
2. Past Continuous
3. Past Perfect Simple
4. Past Perfect Continuous

Exercise 2

1. was walking; saw
2. had already started
3. felt; had been studying
4. were playing; were preparing
5. didn't recognise; had grown
6. went; were having
7. had been waiting; arrived
8. dropped; had washed
9. was looking; remembered
10. was; had been raining

Exercise 3

was cycling; noticed; were standing; had happened; heard; had planned; had been organising; came; had already hidden

Exercise 4

1. I heard a strange noise when I opened the window.
2. By the time we arrived, the concert had already started.
3. She had been working for three hours before she finally took a break, and that is why she was exhausted.
4. While I was looking through the old box, I found my grandfather's watch.
5. We knew something was wrong because the house was completely silent.
6. He didn't pass the exam because he hadn't studied enough and had forgotten half the material.
7. The children had been playing in the garden before it started to rain.
8. I had seen the same man several times before I realised he was following me.

Exercise 5 – Suggested answers

1. It was raining heavily while we were driving home.
2. She was upset because she had lost her phone.
3. They had been working on the project for months before it failed.
4. I was waiting at the station when the announcement came.
5. By the time the teacher arrived, the students had already sat down.
6. He didn't answer because he was sleeping. / He didn't answer because he had fallen asleep.
7. We didn't recognise the village because it had changed so much.
8. The baby had been crying for twenty minutes before she finally fell asleep.

Exercise 6 – Teacher guidance

Accept any well-structured response that uses at least three narrative tenses accurately and naturally. A strong answer should set the scene with the Past Continuous, move the story forward with the Past Simple, and include at least one earlier past event using the Past Perfect or Past Perfect Continuous.