

Narrative Tenses Exercises

Level: B1

Put story events in order

Use the past simple for the main events of a story, the past continuous for an action in progress or background scene, and the past perfect for something that happened before another past event.

Main events: Past simple moves the story forward: *I opened the door and went inside.*

Background: Past continuous describes an action already in progress: *It was raining when I left.*

Earlier event: Past perfect marks an event before the story's past reference point: *The bus had left before I reached the stop.*

Interruption: A short past simple event can interrupt a longer past continuous action: *I was cooking when the phone rang.*

Keep time clear: Choose a tense from the order of events, not from a single time word. A story can move between all three tenses.

Exercise 1: Choose the story tense

Choose the form that fits the sequence of events.

1. I ___ home when I saw the accident.
a) was walk b) was walking c) were walking
2. When we reached the cinema, the film ___. We missed the beginning.
a) started b) was starting c) had started
3. The doorbell rang. Sam ___ the door and greeted his friend.
a) opened b) was opening c) had opened
4. The street was wet, and it ___ heavily as the taxi arrived.
a) were raining b) was raining c) had raining
5. I knew her name because we ___ before.
a) had meet b) were meet c) had met
6. I turned off the light and ___ to bed.
a) went b) was going c) had gone

Exercise 2: Complete the story

Write the correct past simple, past continuous or past perfect form of the verb in brackets.

7. I ___ dinner when the lights went out. It was only half cooked. (cook — action in progress)
8. By the time she called, I ___ the message. (read)
9. Tom picked up his bag and ___ the room. (leave)

10. The children ___ outside when it began to rain. They kept playing for a while. (play — action in progress)
11. She couldn't get in because she ___ her key at work. (leave — earlier event; use the past perfect)
12. We finished breakfast and ___ for the station. (leave)

Exercise 3: Fix the story tense

Replace the incorrect verb phrase with the correct past form. Keep the rest of the sentence.

13. I was cook dinner when the lights went out.

14. By the time we arrived, the show had start.

15. The phone rang, so I was answering it.

16. She was knowing the address because she had been there before.

17. I couldn't pay because I was leaving my wallet at home.

18. The wind was blow when we left the house, and it was still blowing an hour later.

Answer key

Exercise 1: Choose the story tense

1. b) was walking
2. c) had started
3. a) opened
4. b) was raining
5. c) had met
6. a) went

Exercise 2: Complete the story

7. was cooking
8. had read
9. left
10. were playing
11. had left
12. left

Exercise 3: Fix the story tense

13. I was cooking dinner when the lights went out.
14. By the time we arrived, the show had started.
15. The phone rang, so I answered it.
16. She knew the address because she had been there before.
17. I couldn't pay because I had left my wallet at home.
18. The wind was blowing when we left the house, and it was still blowing an hour later.