

Grappling Grammar: The present and the past perfect tenses.

The perfect tenses are incredibly useful grammatical tools that can be used in a variety of situations. In this post we will go through the key uses and differences between the present perfect and the past perfect tenses.

Present Perfect Tense

The Present Perfect tense is a versatile tool in the English language, often employed to denote actions or events that have occurred at an unspecified time in the past or have relevance to the present moment. This tense is crafted by combining the auxiliary verb 'have' or 'has' with the past participle form of the main verb.

Consider the following examples:

- "I have visited Paris several times." (He visitado París varias veces.) (The action of visiting Paris occurred at unspecified times in the past, with a connection to the present moment.)
- "She has just finished her homework." (Acaba de terminar sus deberes.) (The completion of homework is recent and has relevance to the present.)

The Present Perfect tense is also employed to express experiences or accomplishments throughout one's life, as in:

"He has seen many famous landmarks around the world."

"They have lived in this neighbourhood for over a decade."

Past Perfect Tense.

The Past Perfect tense, on the other hand, delves further into the realm of temporal relationships, indicating actions or events that took place before another action or point in the past. It is formed by using the auxiliary verb 'had' followed by the past participle of the main verb.

Consider these examples:

- "By the time we arrived, the party had already started." (Cuando llegamos, ya había empezado la fiesta.) (The action of starting the party occurred before the action of arriving.)
- "She had finished her work before the deadline." (Había terminado su tarea antes de la fecha límite.) (The completion of work preceded the deadline.)

Moreover, the Past Perfect tense is adept at conveying hypothetical situations or unrealized possibilities in the past, as illustrated in:

"If I had known about the traffic jam, I would have taken a different route."

"She would have succeeded if she had worked harder."

Conclusion

In summary, while the Present Perfect and Past Perfect tenses may appear similar at first glance, they serve distinct purposes in British English. The Present Perfect encapsulates actions with relevance to the present or unspecified times in the past, while the Past Perfect delves into the sequence of events or unrealized possibilities in the past. Mastery of these tenses empowers one to navigate the nuances of time and language with finesse, enriching communication and understanding in the process.

Now that we have explained how to use each of these tenses, let's complete some exercises related to the use of the present and past perfect tenses.

Complete the sentence with either the present perfect or the past perfect of the verb in brackets:

1. By the time Sarah _____ (finish) her presentation, the audience had already left.
2. I _____ (never / visit) Italy before, but I have always wanted to go there.
3. When I arrived at the party, everyone _____ (eat) all the food.
4. She _____ (live) in London for five years before she moved to Edinburgh.
5. They _____ (just / start) their journey when the rain began to pour.
6. He _____ (lose) his keys again; this is the third time this month!
7. By the age of 30, she _____ (travel) to over 20 different countries.
8. I _____ (not / see) him since we graduated from university.
9. By the time the firemen arrived, the house _____ (burn) down completely.
10. I _____ (already / finish) my homework, so now I can relax and watch TV.

Answer key:

1. had finished
2. had never visited
3. had eaten
4. had lived
5. had just started
6. has lost
7. had travelled
8. had not seen
9. had burned
10. have already finished