

## Lesson Plan: Past perfect vs. past perfect continuous

**Level:** Intermediate/Advanced (B2–C1)

**Time:** 75–90 minutes

**Grammar Focus:**

- **Past Perfect** (*had + past participle*)
- **Past Perfect Continuous** (*had been + verb-ing*)

### 1. Objectives (5 minutes)

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Distinguish clearly between **completed results** and **ongoing duration**
- Choose the correct tense based on **focus (result vs. process)**
- Use both tenses accurately in narratives and explanations

### 2. Lead-in / contextualization (5–7 minutes)

**Situation on the board:**

*When I arrived, she was exhausted.*

Ask: *Why was she exhausted?*

Elicit two versions:

- She **had worked** all day.
- She **had been working** all day.

Ask students: *What is the difference in focus?*

### 3. Presentation: meaning & use (20 minutes)

#### A. Core contrast (meaning first)

Write:

1. She **had written** three emails before the meeting.
2. She **had been writing** emails before the meeting.

Elicit:

| <b>Tense</b>            | <b>Focus</b>               | <b>Typical Meaning</b>    |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Past Perfect            | <b>Result / completion</b> | What was finished         |
| Past Perfect Continuous | <b>Duration / process</b>  | How long / effort / cause |

Key concept:

**PAST PERFECT = what was done**

**PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS = how it was happening**

#### B. Typical uses

##### Past perfect

- Completed action before another past moment
- Emphasis on **result or number**

Examples:

*They had finished the test before the bell rang.*

*I had read five chapters by midnight.*

##### Past perfect continuous

- Ongoing activity before another past moment
- Emphasis on **duration, repetition, or visible effect**

Examples:

*They had been studying for hours before the exam.*

*He was out of breath because he had been running.*

## C. Timeline comparison

Past Perfect: [ action ✓ ] → past moment

Past Perf. Cont.: [ ===== ] → past moment

## 5. Controlled practice (10–15 minutes)

### Activity 1: Choose the best tense

Students choose and justify.

1. She was tired because she \_\_\_\_\_ (work) all night.
2. By the time we arrived, they \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) dinner.
3. He failed the test because he \_\_\_\_\_ (not / study) enough.
4. Her hands were dirty because she \_\_\_\_\_ (paint).

Pair check → teacher feedback focusing on **why**, not just **what**.

## 6. Meaning-change analysis (10 minutes)

### Activity 2: What's the difference?

Students discuss how meaning changes:

1. *I had lived there for ten years.*
2. *I had been living there for ten years.*

Guided questions:

- Is the action complete?
- Do we feel the **experience** or the **time spent** more?

## 7. Semi-controlled practice (15 minutes)

### Activity 3: Cause & effect chains

Students complete prompts:

*He looked stressed because he had...*

*By the time the police arrived, the thief had...*

*She felt confident because she had been...*

Encourage **both tenses**.

## 8. Communicative production (20 minutes)

### Activity 4: Explain the situation

Students work in pairs.

Prompt:

*You arrived late to an important event. Explain what happened.*

Requirements:

- One **past perfect** for result
- One **past perfect continuous** for background/cause

Students retell to another pair.

## 9. Error correction & refinement (5–10 minutes)

Board typical errors:

✗ *I had been finished my work.*

✓ *I had finished my work.*

✗ *I was tired because I had worked all day.* (possible but...)

✓ *I was tired because I had been working all day.* (more natural focus)

Discuss **nuance**, not "right vs wrong".

## 10. Homework/extension

Choose one:

1. Write a **200–250 word explanation** of a difficult situation using both tenses.
2. Rewrite a short story by changing **past perfect** to **past perfect continuous** where appropriate and explain why.