The Past Tense

Definition

The Past Tense is used to express actions that have already happened before the time of speaking.

Four Forms of the Past Tense

The past tense is divided into four main forms:

1. Simple Past Tense

2. Past Continuous Tense

3. Past Perfect Tense

4. Past Perfect Continuous Tense

Simple Past Tense

Describes an action that happened and was completed in the past.

Structure:

- **Positive:** Subject + verb (past form)

  E.g.: I played.

- **Negative:** Subject + did not + base verb

  E.g.: I did not play.

- **Question:** Did + subject + base verb?

  E.g.: Did she play?
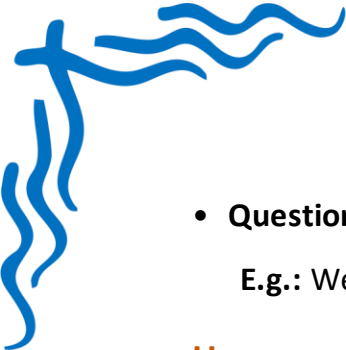
Uses:

- Completed actions in the past

  E.g.: He watched a movie yesterday.

- Past habits

  E.g.: I walked to school every day.

- Actions lasting for a duration in the past

  E.g.: He lived in Mumbai for ten years.

Past Continuous Tense

Describes an action that was ongoing at a specific moment in the past.

Structure:

- **Positive:** Subject + was/were + verb(-ing)

  E.g.: She was singing.

- **Negative:** Subject + was/were not + verb(-ing)

  E.g.: They were not playing.

- **Question:** Was/Were + subject + verb(-ing)?

    E.g.: Were they studying?

Uses:

- An action in progress at a particular time in the past

    E.g.: I was reading at 5 p.m.

- One action in progress when another action occurred

    E.g.: He was cooking when the bell rang.

Past Perfect Tense

Describes an action that was completed before another past action.

Structure:

- **Positive:** Subject + had + past participle

    E.g.: They had left.

- **Negative:** Subject + had not + past participle

    E.g.: I had not seen it.

- **Question:** Had + subject + past participle?

    E.g.: Had she arrived?

Uses:

- To show which of two past actions happened first

    E.g.: The bus had left before I arrived.

- With verbs like hope, think, expect, suppose for unfulfilled past expectations

    E.g.: I had hoped to see her again.

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

Describes an action that started in the past and continued up to another point in the past.
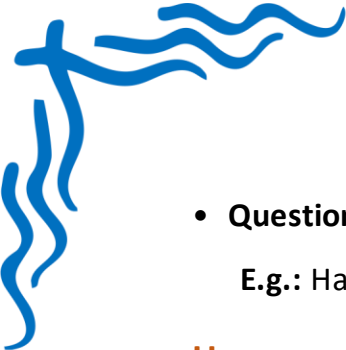
Structure:

- **Positive:** Subject + had been + verb(-ing)

    E.g.: I had been studying.

- **Negative:** Subject + had not been + verb(-ing)

    E.g.: He had not been working.

- **Question:** Had + subject + been + verb(-ing)?

  E.g.: Had she been waiting?

Uses:

- Duration of an action before a specific point in the past

  E.g.: She had been writing for two hours before she stopped.

- Recently finished past actions with a visible effect

  E.g.: The children had been playing in the mud.

Summary Table

Tense Form	Structure	Example	Use
Simple Past	Verb (past form)	She visited.	Finished action
Past Continuous	was/were + verb-ing	She was reading.	Ongoing action at a past time
Past Perfect	had + past participle	She had gone.	Action before another past action
Past Perfect Continuous	had been + verb-ing	She had been waiting.	Action ongoing till a past point