

English B1 · Past perfect

Intermediate English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

The flashback tense

The story is in the past; the past perfect jumps one step further back.

had for everyone

	Form	Example
statement	had + participle	She had finished.
negative	hadn't + participle	I hadn't seen it.
question	Had + subject + participle?	Had you eaten?

Use the evidence

I'd never seen snow before that day. — 'd is short for had here.

Your turn: build the flashback

Your turn

Had you ____ (eat) before the meeting?

- A. ate
- B. eaten
- C. eat
- D. eated

The timeline: earlier and later

Earlier event — had + participle	Later event — past simple
The train had left	when I arrived.
I had never tried hotpot	before I went to Chengdu.
After she had finished the test	she smiled.
When we arrived,	the film had started.

Use the evidence

Signal words: when, before, after, by the time, already, never...before.

Your turn: which happened first

Your turn

When we arrived, the film _____.

- ☐ A. started
- ☐ B. had started
- ☐ C. has started
- ☐ D. had start

When the sentence order already tells the story

order matches events — simple is enough

I finished the test and left.

First this, then that, in order.

flashback jumps backwards — had is needed

I left the room. The test? I had finished it an hour earlier.

The story jumps back, so had sets the clock.

Your turn: one flashback only

Your turn

Which is correct?

- ☐ A. When I had arrived, the train had left.
- ☐ B. When I arrived, the train had left.
- ☐ C. When I arrived, the train has left.
- ☐ D. When I had arrived, the train left.

The flashback to nowhere

is not a flashback

— I have eaten. / I ate.

I had eaten needs a second past event to flash back from.

Say it aloud

Open the disaster: When I got to the station, the train had left.

Deepen it: It had left two minutes earlier. The timetable had warned me.

Confess: I had not listened.

Reflect: I had never failed a test before that Monday. The Monday had other plans.

Check yourself

- When I arrived, the film had started. — the earlier event takes had.
- I had never tried hotpot before Chengdu. — the flashback marks the earlier state.
- When I arrived, the train had left. — one flashback only.
- Had you eaten? — had plus the participle; eat rebels to eaten.