

The causative

English B2

What this topic teaches

Sometimes you don't do the work – you arrange for someone else to do it. English has a structure for this: the **causative**, *have/get + object + past participle*.

- *I **had** my hair **cut**.* – I didn't cut it. A barber did. My hair, his scissors, my money.
- *She **got** her phone **repaired**.* – a shop repaired it.
- *We **had** the classroom **cleaned**.* – someone cleaned it; we just enjoy it.
- Memory hook: the causative is a **manager**. You don't do the work; you manage it. The object sits between you and the participle, like a worker between a manager and the job.

have it done or get it done

Form	Flavour	Example
have + object + participle	the neutral, everyday choice	I had my hair cut.
get + object + participle	slightly more informal, a sense of achievement	She got her phone repaired.

- Both mean “arranged for it to be done”. *get* sounds a little more active, like you chased the result.
- Tense lives on *have/get*: *I **had** it cut (yesterday).* *I **'m having** it cut (tomorrow).* *I **'ll have** it cut.* *I **'ve had** it cut three times this year.* The participle never changes.
- △ The manager order is fixed: *have + object + participle*. “*I had cut my hair*” – wait, that's just the past perfect, meaning you cut it yourself. The object between is what makes it the causative.

The collision: did it or had it done

I cut my hair.	I had my hair cut.
I did it myself.	Someone else did it for me.
I fixed my bike.	I had my bike fixed.
She painted the wall.	She had the wall painted.

- △ This is a real meaning fork . *I cut my hair* at home with scissors is a tragedy ; *I had my hair cut* at a salon is a Tuesday. Choose the one that matches the truth – and your hair.
- *get* can also mean “persuade someone”: *I got my brother **to help** me.* – different structure: *get + person + to-infinitive*.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **The order is manager-first.** is ambiguous in Chinese; English splits it: *I cut my hair* (myself) vs *I had my hair cut* (a professional, thankfully).
- △ **Don’t drop the object.** “*I had cut my hair*” is the past perfect of doing it yourself. The object sits between: *I had **my hair** cut.*
- △ **The participle, not the base.** “*I had my hair cut*” ✓; “*I had my hair cutted*” × – *cut* is already the participle; rebels stay rebels.
- △ **have someone do is a different structure.** *I had the mechanic **fix** my car* (base verb, the person named) vs *I had my car **fixed*** (the participle, the person unnamed). Both are causatives; pick by whether you name the worker.

Say it aloud

Manage your life like a manager.

- I had my hair cut. I had my bike fixed. I had my essays marked. Management is exhausting .
- She got her phone repaired, got her photos printed, and got her little brother to carry the bag. Full management suite.
- I had my homework eaten by the cat. (The passive-causative of disaster. The cat was not a professional.)

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *I _____ my hair _____ (cut) yesterday.* – **had ... cut.** The manager structure: *have + object + participle*.
2. *She _____ her phone _____ (repair).* – **got ... repaired.** The slightly more active flavour.
3. “*I had cut my hair.*” – means **I cut it myself** (past perfect). The causative needs the object between: *I had my hair cut.*
4. *I got my brother _____ (help) me.* – **to help.** *get + person + to-infinitive* for persuading.
5. *We had the classroom _____ (clean).* – **cleaned.** The participle; someone else did the work.