



Lesson 14. Mastering the verbs 9

The past perfect is key to narrating stories in the past and to mastering the past conditional

Past perfect

We use the past perfect when we want to refer to actions that happened in the past BEFORE another action that also took place in the past (this last action usually goes in simple past tense).

Normally the past perfect is used in stories or when narrating a sequence of events that happened and ended in the past simple tense.

For example:

- They **had** already **solved** (past perfect- action that happened before) the problem when the technician arrived (simple past tense- this action). *Ellos ya habían resuelto el problema cuando el técnico llegó.*
- **Had** you **asked** about them before? *¿Habías preguntado acerca de ellos antes?*
- I **had seen** the film. That 's why I wasn't interested in going to the cinema. *Yo había visto la película por eso yo no estaba interesado en ir al cine.*

The past perfect in conditional sentences

The past perfect can appear in conditional sentences.

In this case, it is always preceded by “if” (or, “in case”, “provided that” and “when”) and it refers to an action that could have taken place in the past but didn't, therefore it's called the impossible condition (also “past or third conditional”).

Examples:

- If you had come. *Si tú hubieses venido.*
- If they had done it. *Si ellos lo hubieran hecho.*
- If we had bought it. *Si nosotros lo hubiéramos comprado.*

We will review this structure more closely in lesson 17 as part of the conditional sentences.

Let's review its structure.



Structure:

- **Affirmative:** Subject + had+ p.p of the main verb+ object. Example: I had studied at the library the night before.
- **Negative:** Subject + had + **not** + p.p. of the main verb+ object. Example: They hadn't done anything when he got home.
- **Question:** Had+ subject + p.p. of the main verb+ object? Had you cleaned the kitchen yesterday?
- **Negative question:** Had+ not + subject + p.p. of the main verb+ object? Example: Hadn't you invited her to the party?
- **Answers:** Yes, + subject + had- No, +subject + had + not. Examples: Yes, I had- No, I had not.

Spanish equivalent tense: In Spanish it is the “pluscuamperfecto del indicativo” of the verb “haber”, so we usually translate this as “había” + p.p. of the main verb.

For example: *Yo ya había cenado cuando ellos me llamaron.* I had already had dinner when they called me.

However, as part of the past conditional, it is usually translated as “hubiera/hubiese”.

For example: If I had known- Si yo hubiera/hubiese sabido.

Mastering the past participles

As with the Past Continuous, the Past Perfect is a relative simply tense to learn and reproduce, so we will focus our attention on learning sentences using the past perfect, paying special attention to the past participles of the verbs.

I have listed sentences in this tense below that can be found in the first 10 chapters of the audiobook.

Please, listen to them and repeat them aloud.

Spanish	English	Phonetics	Approximate Pronunciation
Ella había olvidado qué hacía	She had forgotten what he did (Chapter 1)	ʃi həd fə'gɒtn , 'wɒt hi dɪd	Shí hád for'gatn wuat hi did
Ella me dijo que había conocido a un joven	She told me that she had met a marvellous	ʃi təʊld miː ðæt ʃi həd met ə	Shi tóuld mi dat shi had met a márveles ian man

maravilloso llamado Dorian Gray	young man called Dorian Gray (Chap 1)	'mɑ:vʌs jʌŋ mæn kɔ:ld 'dɔ:iən greɪ	kold dórían grei
¿Cómo un desconocido le había descubierto su propio ser?	How had a stranger discovered his own self? (Chap 2)	'hʌʊ həd ə 'streɪndʒə dɪ 'skʌvəd ɪz əʊn self	Hau had a sstréinyer diskoverd iss oun sélf
Entonces él pensó en lo que había dicho Lord Henry	Then he thought about what Lord Henry had said (Chap 2)	ðə hi 'θɔ:t ə 'baʊt 'wɒt lɔ:d 'henri həd 'sed	Den hí zót ábout wuat lord hénri had sed
¿Qué había pasado?	What had happened? (Chap 2)	'wɒt həd 'hæpənd 	Wuat had hapend?
El criado le dijo que el almuerzo ya había empezado	The servant told him that lunch had already started (Chap 3)	ðə 'sɜ:vənt təʊld ɪm ðət lʌntʃ həd ɔ:l 'redi 'stɑ:tɪd	De sérvant tóuld him dat lanch had ólreadi stártid
Creí que usted le había prometido a Basil que	I thought you had promised Basil that... (Chap 3)	'aɪ 'θɔ:t ju həd 'prɒmɪst 'bæzl, dat...	Ai zot iu had prómist básel dat
Dorian estaba en la pequeña biblioteca de la casa de Lord Henry, que aún no había llegado a casa	Dorian was in the small library of Lord Henry's house, who still hadn't arrived home. (Chap. 4)	'dɔ:iən wəz ɪn ðə smɔ:l 'laɪbrəri əv lɔ:d 'henriz 'həʊs hu: stɪl 'hædnt ə 'raɪvd həʊm	Dórían wuass in de láibrari of lord henriss háus, hu sstil háden't áraívd hom-
Si yo no lo hubiese hecho	If I hadn't done it... (Chap. 4)	ɪf 'aɪ 'hædnt dʌn it	If ai hadnt donet
Ella era la cosa más hermosa que jamás había visto en mi vida	She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life! (Chap. 4)	ʃi wəz ðə məʊst 'bjʊ:təfl, 'θɪŋ 'aɪ həd 'evə 'si:n ɪn maɪ laɪf	Shi wuass de moust bíutiful zing ai had ever sin in máí láif
Él empezó a pensar en qué había ocurrido con Dorian	He started to think about what had happened with Dorian (Chap 4)	hi 'stɑ:tɪd tə 'θɪŋk ə 'baʊt 'wɒt həd 'hæpənd wɪð 'dɔ:iən	Hi sstartid tu zink ábout wuat had hápned wuiz dórían
Una de las criaturas más hermosas que él había visto en su vida.	One of the most beautiful creatures he had ever seen in his life (Chap. 6)	wʌn əv ðə məʊst 'bjʊ:təfl, 'kri:tʃəz hi həd 'evə 'si:n ɪn ɪz laɪf	Wuán of de móust bíutiful crítshers hi had éver sin in his láif
Parecía que la cara había cambiado	It seemed that the face had changed. (Chap. 7)	ɪt si:md ðət ðə feɪs həd tʃeɪndʒd	It símd dat de feis had chéinchd
De repente recordó lo que había dicho en el estudio de Basil Hallward	Suddenly he remembered what he had said in Basil Hallwards's studio (Chap. 7)	sʌdn, li hi rɪ 'membəd 'wɒt hi həd 'sed ɪn 'bæzl, hɔ:l wɔ:dzɪz 'stju:dɪəʊ	Sadenli hi rímembərd wuat hi had sed in básel holwardss studio
Él había deseado poder permanecer joven	He had wished that he could remain young (Chap. 7)	hi həd wɪft ðət hi kəd rɪ 'meɪn jʌŋ	Hi had wíshed dat hi had imein iang

¿Se había cumplido su deseo (de él)?	Had his wish come true? (Chap 7)	həd ɪz wɪʃ kʌm truː	Had hiss wuɪʃ kam tru?
¿Había sido él cruel?	Had he been cruel?	həd hi biːn kruːl	Had hi bin krul?
Él se había enamorado de ella	He had fallen in love with her (Chap 7)	hi həd ˈfɔːlən ɪn lʌv wɪð hə	Hi had folen in lov wuiz her
Ella le había decepcionado (a él)	She had disappointed him (Chap 7)	ʃi həd ɪ dɪsəˈpɔɪntɪd ɪm	Shi had disápointid him
¿Había cambiado realmente el retrato?	Had the portrait really changed? (Chap 8)	həd ðə ˈpɔːtrɪt ˈrɪəli tʃeɪndʒd	Had de portreit rili cheinchd?
La crueldad alrededor de su boca había aparecido en el mismo momento en que ella murió.	The cruelty around the mouth had appeared at the same moment that she died (Chap 8)	ðə ˈkruːəlti ə ˈraʊnd ðə maʊθ həd ə ˈpɪəd ət ðə seɪm ˈməʊmənt ðət ʃi daɪd	De kruelti a ˈraund de máuz had ápird at de séim móument dat shi daid
Él sintió que la elección de su vida ya había sido hecha	He felt that his life choice had already been made (Chap 8)	hi felt ðət ɪz laɪf tʃɔɪs həd ɔːl ˈredi biːn ˈmeɪd	Hi felt da his láif chóis had ólredi biin
Entonces, Dorian Gray recordó que Lord Henry le había dicho que le preguntase por qué él no quería exponer el cuadro.	Then Dorian Gray remembered that Lord Henry had told him to ask him why he didn't want to exhibit the picture (Chap 9)	ðen ˈdɔːiən greɪ rɪ ˈmembəd ðət lɔːd ˈhenri həd təʊld ɪm tu ɑːsk ɪm waɪ hi ˈdɪdnt wɒnt tu ɪɡˈzɪbɪt ðə ˈpɪktʃə	Den dórían grei rímemberd dat lord hénri had tóuld him tu ask him wuao hi didnt wuant to ekssibit de piksher
Porque él había empezado a envejecer	Because he had started to grow old (Chap 10)	bɪ ˈkɔz hi həd ˈstɑːtɪd tə grəʊ əʊld	Bíkoss hi had sstartid tu grou ould
Donde él había encerrado el retrato	Where he had locked away the portrait (Chap. 10)	weə hi həd lɒkt ə ˈweɪ ðə ˈpɔːtrɪt	Wuer hi had lɒkt o ˈwei de portreit
Él se situaba delante del cuadro que había pintado Basil Hallward	He would place himself in the front of the painting that Basil Hallward had painted (Chap 10)	hi wʊd ˈpleɪs hɪm ˈself ɪn ðə frʌnt əv ðə ˈpeɪntɪŋ ðət ˈbæzl ˈhɒlwərd həd ˈpeɪntɪd	He wud pleis hímself in de front of the peinting dat básel holwərd had peintid

To sum up:

-The “past perfect” is usually used to speak about an action that happened in the past before another action that also happened in the past. Example: I had already read the newspaper (action that happened before) when he called me (this action).

Please note that the translation into Spanish is: “había”.

-The past perfect is also used in the third conditional (also called the past or impossible conditional). In this case it is always preceded by “if”. Example:

-If I **had known** I would have called you. *Si lo hubiera sabido te habría llamado.*

Notice that the translation in this case is “Hubiera/Hubiese”.
We’ll talk about this type of conditional in lesson 17.

- As the past perfect is a relatively easy tense to learn and reproduce, use it to practise the past participles.

Homework

Continue looking for the past perfect from chapters 11 to 19.

Try to ask and answer questions aloud using the sentences that you find in the past perfect, for example:

- She had disappointed him.
- Had she disappointed him?
- Yes, she had.
- No, she hadn’t.

Translate the following sentences.

The answers are found at the end. Once you have corrected any mistakes, say the sentences aloud. If you have doubts on how to pronounce these sentences, please, use Google translator or similar software.

1. ¿Habían ellos ya visto la película?
2. No sé si ellos habían venido antes a este tipo de eventos
3. Nosotros habíamos alquilado una barca para (poder) ir al río
4. Ella había hecho la compra cuando yo llegué
5. Él no le había perdonado su error (de ella)
6. Ellos me habían dado ya las entradas
7. Yo no había dicho eso
8. ¿De verdad habías conseguido entrar antes que nosotros?
9. Ellos se habían comido todo cuando yo les llamé
10. ¿Quién había visto esto antes?



Answers

1. Had they already seen the film (movie)?
2. I don't know if they had come to this type (kind) of event before.
3. We had rented a boat to go to the river – to be able to go to the river.
4. She had done the shopping when I arrived.
5. He hadn't forgiven her mistake
6. They had already given me the tickets
7. I hadn't said that
8. Had you really been able to get in ahead of (before) us?
9. They had eaten everything when I called them.
10. Who had seen this before?