

Forms to express the past

Past simple

Form

	affirmative	negative	question
I/You/ He/She/It/ We/They	<i>installed</i> new solar panels on our roof last year.	<i>did not/didn't install</i> new solar panels on our roof last year.	<i>Did</i> you/they <i>install</i> new solar panels on your/their roof last year?

Usage and examples

- For finished events and actions in the past:

*Europe **decided** to limit the import of solar panels from China last week.*

- For routines and habits in the past:

*In the past people **didn't have** the possibility to harness electricity with solar panel collectors.*

- Used in stories and descriptions to illustrate the sequence of events:

First, they **found** a customer interested in the latest solar technology. Then they **discussed** the specifications of the photovoltaic plant. Finally, they **agreed on** a price and deadline.

Signal words

- *last night, year, week....., yesterday, in 1987, 2012, ..., this morning, ago*

Past continuous

Form

	affirmative	negative	question
I/ He/She/It	was reading the latest issue of SOLAR Today.	was not/wasn't reading the latest issue of SOLAR Today.	Was he/she reading the latest issue of SOLAR Today?
You/We/They	were reading the latest issue of SOLAR Today.	were not/weren't reading the latest issue of SOLAR Today.	Were you/they reading the latest issue of SOLAR Today?

Usage and examples

- For actions in progress in the past (unfinished):

*Because it **was raining**, they couldn't test the new solar water heaters.*

- to describe two actions in progress in the past happening at the same time:

*I **was working** on the calculations while my colleague **was designing** a new photovoltaic system.*

- For continuing actions interrupted by a single past action:

*We **were discussing** the latest sales figures when the CEO **came** in to talk to us about a solar project in Dubai.*

Signal words

- while, when

Past perfect simple

Form

	affirmative	negative	question
I/You/ He/She/It/ We/They	had decided to move the plant to Ingolstadt before we were informed about the changes in company policy.	had not/hadn't decided to move the plant to Ingolstadt before we were informed about the changes in company policy.	Had you decided to move the plant to Ingolstadt before we were informed about the changes in company policy?

Usage and examples

The past perfect simple is mainly used in combination with the simple past to show which event happened first.

- For finished actions:

*By the time we got to the office, the meeting **had started**.*

Signal words

- after, before, when

Past perfect continuous

Form

	affirmative	negative	question
I/You/ He/She/It/ We/They	had been talking on the phone all morning until he finally packed his bags and drove to the airport.	had not/hadn't been talking on the phone all morning until he finally packed his bags and drove to the airport.	Had he/they been talking on the phone all morning?

Usage and examples

The past perfect continuous is used to describe longer actions in the past that happened before another completed past event. The emphasis is typically on the *duration* of the action rather than the *result*.

- For unfinished actions:

*The interest in solar-powered cars **had been growing** steadily, until finally in July a first model was introduced.*

- To emphasize the duration of an action (just finished or unfinished):

*The members of the board **had been discussing** the latest developments all morning.*

Signal words

- All morning/afternoon/day, since, for, how long (for questions)