Past Perfect

Positive	Negative	Question
• I had finished. • You had finished. • He had finished. • She had finished. • It had finished. • We had finished. • You had finished. • They had finished.	• I had not finished. • You had not finished. • He had not finished. • She had not finished. • It had not finished. • We had not finished. • You had not finished. • They had not finished.	• Had I finished? • Had you finished? • Had he finished? • Had she finished? • Had it finished? • Had we finished? • Had you finished? • Had they finished?

Note: when speaking we use the contractions (or short forms)

I had = I'd // you had = you'd // he had = he'd // she had = she'd
it had = it'd // we had = we'd // you had = you'd // they had = they'd

(Be careful not to confuse the short form of 'had' with the short form of 'would'. They look the same but 'would' is always followed by the V1 form (the infinitive), e.g. 'I'd go' (= I would go), whereas 'had' is always followed by the V3 form (the past participle), e.g. 'I'd gone' (= I had gone).

had not = hadn't // had not = hadn't

We also use contractions for informal writing like emails to friends and colleagues. When you write a formal text, like a job application letter, you MUST use full forms.

When speaking we also say things like:

Our cat'd been acting strangely.
John'd been looking for a job for months.
The house'd been falling down for years.

But you should not write these as contractions.

USE 1 Completed Action Before Something Else in the Past

We use the Past Perfect to talk about two actions in the past. First action one happens (past perfect) and then action two happens (simple past). So the first action happened BEFORE the second action.

Below is an explanation along with examples and a timeline diagram to help illustrate this concept. (Ignore the 8.4.3 numbers).
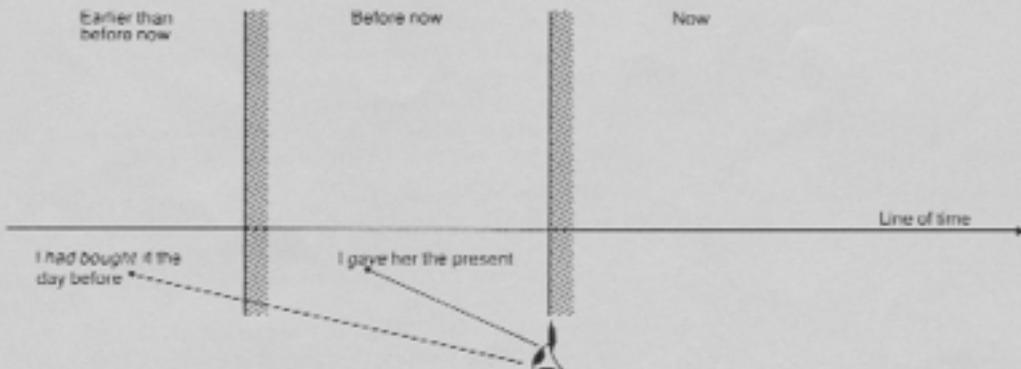

- I'd never seen such a beautiful beach before I went to Kauai.
- Had Susan ever studied Thai before she moved to Thailand?
- Kristine had never been to an opera before last night.
- A: Had you ever visited the U.S. before your trip in 2006?
- B: Yes, I had been to the U.S. once before.

USE 2 To explain or give a reason for something in the past.

Past   Present   Future

We use the Past Perfect to talk about two actions in the past when the first action is a reason for the second.

- I'd eaten dinner so I wasn't hungry.
- I didn't have any money because I'd lost my wallet.
- Tony knew Istanbul so well because he'd visited the city several times.
- She only understood the movie because she'd read the book.
- We were not able to get a hotel room because we had not booked in advance.
- It had snowed in the night, so the bus didn't arrive.

USE 3 Past Perfect within a chain

We usually use the Past Simple to talk about a sequence of actions in the past. But we include the Past Perfect when necessary, as in the example below.

Or think of each past action as a man taking a step forward. When he wants to refer to an action which happened earlier, he looks back over his shoulder.

I got up → I looked out of the window → My car wasn't there (← Someone had stolen it) → I phoned the police (← They had already found it) → They told me to go to the police station

The actions in the story are *got up → looked out → phoned → told*. The actions in brackets ( ) took place *before* the actions of the story, so we refer back to them by 'looking over our shoulder' to an earlier time:
(← had stolen)   (← had already found)

USE 4 Duration Before Something in the Past (Non-Continuous Verbs)

With Non-Continuous Verbs (also known as 'stative' or 'state' verbs) and some non-continuous uses of Mixed Verbs, we use the Past Perfect to show that something started in the past and continued up until another action in the past.

• We'd had that car for ten years before it broke down.

• By the time Alex finished his studies, he'd been in London for over eight years.

• They felt bad about selling the house because they'd owned it for more than forty years.

Although the above use of Past Perfect is normally limited to Non-Continuous Verbs and non-continuous uses of Mixed Verbs, the words 'live', 'work', 'teach', and 'study' are sometimes used in this way even though they are NOT Non-Continuous Verbs.

USE 5 Specific Times with the Past Perfect

It is possible to use specific time words or phrases with the Past Perfect. Although this is possible, it is usually not necessary.

• She had visited her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.

If the Past Perfect action did occur at a specific time, the Past Simple can be used instead of the Past Perfect when "before" or "after" is used in the sentence. The words "before" and "after" actually tell you what happens first, so the Past Perfect is optional. For this reason, both sentences below are correct.

• She had visited her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.

• She visited her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.

HOWEVER AND ESSENTIAL!!!

If the Past Perfect is not referring to an action at a specific time, Past Perfect is **NOT** optional. Compare the examples below. Here Past Perfect is referring to a lack of experience rather than an action at a specific time. For this reason, Past Simple cannot be used.

• She never saw a bear before she moved to Alaska. *Not Correct*

• She had never seen a bear before she moved to Alaska. *Correct*

USE 6 As part of the third conditional.

If I'd known you were ill, I would've visited you.

ADVERB PLACEMENT

The examples below show the placement for grammar adverbs such as: always, only, never, ever, still, just, etc.

• You had previously studied English before you moved to New York.

• Had you previously studied English before you moved to New York?

ACTIVE / PASSIVE

• George had repaired many cars before he received his mechanic's license. *Active*

• Many cars had been repaired by George before he received his mechanic's license. *Passive*

MORE INFO AND EXAMPLES

Look at these two sentences.

• John left the house at 7:30 yesterday morning.

• Mary rang John's doorbell at 8:15 yesterday.

Both actions happened in the past so we use the Past Simple.

But now look at how we can combine the sentences.

• Mary rang John's doorbell at 8:15 yesterday but John had already left the house.

We use the Past Perfect (*had left*) because the action happened *before* another action in the past (*Mary rang the doorbell.*)

Look at these 2 sentences.

• James had cooked breakfast when we got up.

• James cooked breakfast when we got up.

In the first sentence, the Past Perfect tells us that James cooked breakfast *before* we got up. In the second sentence, first we got up and then James cooked breakfast.

'Just' is used with the past perfect to refer to an event that was only a short time earlier than before now, e.g.

• The train had just left when I arrived at the station.

• She'd just left the room when the police arrived.

• I'd just put the washing out when it started to rain.

NOTE

The most common mistake with the Past Perfect is to use it simply because we are talking about a time in the distant past.

- The Romans had spoken Latin

Go here http://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/pastperfect.html & here http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/grammar-exercises.html to do more exercises.