

ADVANCED NARRATIVE TENSES

B2 | Teens / Adults | Grammar Practice | 35-45 minutes

Learn and practise | Manage background, event sequence and earlier causes in a story.

1. READ: A presentation that went wrong

Read the conversation. Notice the bold grammar and how the speakers use it.

Fran: How did your presentation go?

Dev: It started badly. Everyone **was waiting** when my laptop **froze**.

Fran: Oh no. Did you lose your slides?

Dev: I thought so. I **'d been preparing** them for days, so I panicked.

Fran: What did you do?

Dev: Then I remembered I **'d saved** a copy online. I **borrowed** a laptop and **carried on**.

2. GRAMMAR: Control the timeline

Choose tenses by the timeline: ongoing background, main events, earlier results or earlier activity.

Use / form	Pattern	Example
Background / events	was/were + -ing / past simple	People were waiting. It froze.
Earlier completed result	had + past participle	I'd saved a copy.
Earlier activity	had been + verb-ing	I'd been preparing for days.

Main sequence: I borrowed a laptop, opened the file and continued.

Use past perfect to establish an earlier event; do not use it for every later action.

The same event can be presented differently: focus on completion, duration or background.

A. CHOOSE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. I presented / was presenting when the screen went black.

3. I was upset: I'd prepared / been preparing for weeks.

5. I borrowed / had borrowed a laptop next and continued.

7. I recognised Jo because we'd met / were meeting before.

2. I checked / was checking the cable and restarted the laptop.

4. Luckily, I had saved / was saving a backup earlier.

6. By then, I'd answered / been answering all ten questions.

8. While I spoke / was speaking, Jo was taking notes.

Read each answer aloud. Explain which meaning or time clue helped you.

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Use it | Complete a context, write sentences and speak with a partner.

B. COMPLETE: Recovering from a technical problem

Choose past simple, past continuous, past perfect simple or past perfect continuous.

1. I _____ (give) a presentation when my laptop froze.
2. I _____ (check) the cable, but that didn't solve the problem.
3. I was anxious because I _____ (prepare) for this talk for weeks.
4. Fortunately, I _____ (save) a backup before leaving home.
5. I _____ (borrow) a laptop and opened the backup file.
6. While I _____ (finish) the talk, my colleague checked the old laptop.

C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1-2: Join the ideas to show background and an event.

Example: I was speaking. The bell rang. **I was speaking when the bell rang.**

1. We were eating. The alarm rang.
2. I was driving. The engine stopped.

3-4: Rewrite the earlier cause using the word given. Example: I lost the key, so I was locked out. (because) **I was locked out because I'd lost the key.**

3. I ran for an hour, so I was tired. (been)
4. I saved a copy, so I could continue. (had)

D. WRITE ABOUT YOU

Write a three-sentence story. Include a main event, background and an earlier cause; use four past forms.

Example: **I was cooking when Jo called. I'd been working all day. I'd forgotten our dinner plans.**

E. SPEAK WITH A PARTNER

Tell your story, then answer questions about the order of events.

Your partner retells it, distinguishing **what happened** from **what had happened earlier**.

Discuss how a different tense would change the emphasis.

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Answer key | Keep this page separate during student practice.

1. READ: A presentation that went wrong

Sample target language from the conversation:

Dev: It started badly. Everyone **was waiting** when my laptop **froze**.

Dev: I thought so. I **'d been preparing** them for days, so I panicked.

Dev: Then I remembered I **'d saved** a copy online. I **borrowed** a laptop and **carried on**.

A. CHOOSE

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. was presenting | 2. checked |
| 3. been preparing (activity focus; prepared is possible) | 4. had saved |
| 5. borrowed | 6. answered |
| 7. met | 8. spoke / was speaking |

B. COMPLETE: Recovering from a technical problem

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. was giving | 2. checked |
| 3. had been preparing / had prepared | 4. had saved |
| 5. borrowed | 6. was finishing |

C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1. We were eating when the alarm rang.
2. I was driving when the engine stopped.
3. I was tired because I'd been running for an hour.
4. I could continue because I had saved a copy.

D. WRITE ABOUT YOU / E. SPEAK

Personal answers will vary. Check the target grammar.

Sample: I was leaving when the alarm rang. I'd been working late, so I was tired. Luckily, I'd packed my bag before the meeting.

Teacher note: A3/A8 and B3 allow both aspects with different emphasis. Accept sensible alternatives when the timeline stays clear; when/while do not automatically require a continuous form.