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How do you choose between the **Present Perfect Continuous** and **Past Perfect Continuous**?

The **Present Perfect Continuous** is used to talk about an action that started before now (or in the past) and has continued up until now (or into the present).

- *I'm really tired. I **have been carrying** those bags for half an hour.*

The **Past Perfect Continuous** corresponds to the Present Perfect Continuous, but with reference to a time earlier than 'before now'. As with the Present Perfect Continuous, we are more interested in the **process**.

- *When it was 3:00 p.m I **had been waiting** for Bob for two hours. (Past action in progress: I had been waiting. Other action in the past: It was 3:00.)*
- *It **had been snowing** for two hours before the roads were closed. (Past action in progress: It had been snowing. Other action in the past: Roads were closed.)*

Both of these tenses are continuous and, thus, denote a **continuing action**. The difference is in the **time**. Here's a depiction of this difference:



via <https://sites.google.com/site/grammarzonegt/past-perfect-continuous-tense/2>

## Present Perfect Continuous or Past Perfect Continuous?

So, how do you choose between the Present Perfect Continuous and Past Perfect Continuous?

## Present Perfect Continuous

The **Present Perfect Continuous** is used to talk about an action in progress that was taking place until the **present moment**. The action may not be finish at that time. This action may still be continuing or may have just finished.

The structure is:

**have / has + been + -ing verb**

- *I'm really tired. I **have been carrying** those bags for half an hour.*

In such sentences, Present Perfect Continuous Tense emphasizes the process or the duration of the event or state. The tense connect the past with the present.

- *She **has been cleaning** the room since morning.*
- *They **have been studying** for the math exam the whole day.*
- *He **has been running** that company for 10 years.*

## Past Perfect Continuous

The **Past Perfect Continuous** is used to talk about an ongoing action that was taking place until another **specified moment in the past**.

The structure is:

**had + been + -ing verb**

- *I **had been carrying** those bags for half an hour when I met Peter and he helped me.*

In such sentences, Past Perfect Continuous tells us 'how long the action had continued' or emphasizes 'the duration of the action'. Namely, Past Perfect Continuous tells us that an event happened and continued for a certain period of time in the past, not in the present.

- *They **had been looking** for the wallet for 2 hours when Susan found it.*
- *She **had been writing** reports since morning when the boss came into the office.*
- *They **had been celebrating** their wedding anniversary for hours when Roy arrived.*

## Comparing

Consider the following examples:

### Present Perfect Continuous

**have / has + been + -ing verb**

*I **m** really thirsty. I **have been cycling** for three hours.*

*They **have been playing** all day long and **now** they are tired.*

*Mary **haven't been doing** well at school last month and the results of her tests **are** poor.*

### Past Perfect Continuous

**had + been + -ing verb**

*I **was** really thirsty. I **had been cycling** for three hours.*

*They **had been playing** all day long **before they got tired and went home.***

*Mary **hadn't been doing** well at school last month, so she **failed** her final tests.*

Check out this video from English Resource Lab to understand the meaning of Past Perfect Continuous:

See more details here:

[Present Perfect Continuous: Statements](#)

[Present Perfect Continuous: Negative & Questions](#)

[Present Perfect or Present Perfect Continuous?](#)

[Past Perfect Continuous: Statements](#)

[Past Perfect Continuous: Negative & Questions](#)