

The Pluperfect Tense

The pluperfect tense is used to express an action in the past that happened before another action in the past. In English, this is called the past perfect tense. For example 'By the time I got to the station, the train had already left'. In this case 'the train had already left' took place before the speaker 'got to the station'.

I. Formation

This tense is formed using 'avoir' or 'etre' in the imperfect tense, followed by a past participle.

How do we choose when to use 'avoir' and 'etre'? The respective verbs correspond to their usage in the perfect tense. The 'avoir' verbs of the perfect tense remain 'avoir' verbs in the pluperfect tense. Therefore, 'J'ai lu' (I read) would become 'J'avais lu' (I had read). The same is true of 'etre' verbs – they also remain 'etre' verbs in the pluperfect tense. 'Je suis arrivé' (I arrived) would become 'J'étais arrivé' (I had arrived).

1. Avoir

The table below shows an example of the pluperfect tense using 'avoir':

<u>Subject Pronoun</u>	<u>'Avoir' in the Imperfect Tense</u>	<u>Past Participle</u>	<u>English Translation</u>
J'	Avais	Mangé	I had eaten
Tu	Avais	Mangé	You had eaten
Il	Avait	Mangé	He had eaten
Elle	Avait	Mangé	She had eaten
On	Avait	Mangé	One/We (general)/It had eaten
Nous	Avions	Mangé	We had eaten

Vous	Aviez	Mangé	You (plural or formal) had eaten
Ils	Avaient	Mangé	They (m) had eaten
Elles	Avaient	Mangé	They (f) had eaten

NOTE: The past participles that take 'avoir' do NOT change according to the gender or number of the subject pronoun.

2. Etre

This table shows an example of the pluperfect tense with 'etre':

<u>Subject Pronoun</u>	<u>'Etre' in the Imperfect Tense</u>	<u>Past Participle</u>	<u>English Translation</u>
J'	Etais	Allé(e)	I had gone
Tu	Etais	Allé(e)	You had gone
Il	Etait	Allé	He had gone
Elle	Etait	Allée	She had gone
On	Etait	Allé(e)(s)	One/We/It had gone
Nous	Etions	Allé(e)(s)	We had gone
Vous	Etiez	Allé(e)(s)	You (plural or formal) had gone
Ils	Etaient	Allés	They (m) had gone
Elles	Etaient	Allées	They (f) had gone

NOTE: The past participles that are used with 'etre' verbs DO change according to the gender and number of the subject pronoun. Reflexive verbs that take 'etre' are also modified according the subject's gender/number.

Example Sentences

- Si j'avais su que c'était ton anniversaire, j'aurais organisé une grande fête.
If I had known that it was your birthday, I would have organised a big party.
- Le train était déjà parti quand je suis arrivé à la gare.
The train had already left when I arrived at the station.
- Avant la semaine dernière, je n'avais jamais pensé que la Terre était si petite.
Before last week, I had never thought that the Earth was so small.
- Il n'avait jamais vu un crocodile avant d'aller au zoo.
He had never seen a crocodile before going to the zoo.
- Nous avons du mal à la tête parce que nous avons trop regardé la télévision.
We had a headache because we had watched too much television.

'Parle-moi d'un voyage difficile' 'Tell me about a difficult journey'

Ma famille et moi avons eu beaucoup de difficultés à l'aéroport pendant les dernières vacances scolaires. L'aéroport est toujours plein de voyageurs, et surtout pendant les semaines de vacances de l'été. Nous avons décidé d'aller en Espagne pour une semaine, mais malheureusement nous avons oublié nos passeports. Nous avons déjà raté le vol quand nous avons trouvé les documents dans la voiture. C'était un vrai cauchemar !

My family and I had many difficulties at the airport during the last school holidays. The airport is always full of travellers, and above all during the weeks of the summer holidays. We decided to go to Spain for a week, but unfortunately we had forgotten our passports. We had already missed the flight when we found the documents in the car. It was a real nightmare!

Multiple Choice

Questions

1. What is the pluperfect tense?
 - a) The same as the perfect tense.
 - b) The same as the imperfect tense.
 - c) Referring to an action that happened after another action in the past.
 - d) Referring to an action that happened before another action in the past.

2. Which of the following sentences is an English example of the pluperfect tense?
 - a) I went to the shop.
 - b) I have been to the shop.
 - c) I had been to the shop.
 - d) I was in the shop.

3. Which verb is used to form the pluperfect tense in French?
 - a) Etre
 - b) Avoir
 - c) Both of the above
 - d) Sentir

4. Which tense is used to form the pluperfect tense in French?
 - a) The imperfect tense and a past participle
 - b) The perfect tense and a past participle
 - c) The present tense and a past participle
 - d) The conditional tense and a past participle

5. When do we use 'etre' to form the pluperfect tense?

- a) We don't.
- b) We use 'etre' with the same verbs that take 'etre' in the perfect tense.
- c) We use 'etre' with the same verbs that take 'etre' in the future tense.
- d) We use 'etre' only when we want to talk about the verb 'to be'.

6. Which of the below is in the pluperfect tense?

- a) Vous aviez déjà mangé du pain.
- b) Vous avez du pain.
- c) Vous avez mangé du pain.
- d) Vous auriez mangé du pain.

7. Which of the below is incorrect?

- a) J'avais mal à l'estomac car j'avais trop mangé.
- b) Nous n'avions pas d'amis parce que nous avons intimidé les autres étudiants.
- c) Est-ce que tu avais déjà perdu tes clés avant de venir ici ?
- d) All of the above are correct.

8. How would this sentence be translated? : 'Avant 2001, je n'avais jamais écouté aux adultes'.

- a) Before 2001, I would never listen to adults.
- b) After 2001, I never listened to adults.
- c) Before 2001, I had never listened to adults.
- d) After 2011, I had never listened to adults.

9. How can we translate 'He wasn't hungry because he had eaten a pizza' into French?

- a) Il n'avait pas faim parce qu'il avait mangé une pizza.
- b) Il n'a pas eu faim parce qu'il a mangé une pizza.
- c) Il n'avait pas faim parce qu'il mangeait une pizza.

d) Il n'a pas faim parce qu'il a mangé une pizza.

10. Do the past participles ever correspond to the gender/number of the subject pronoun in the pluperfect tense?

- a) No.
- b) Always.
- c) Only with 'etre' verbs or reflexive verbs.
- d) Only with 'avoir' verbs.

Answers:

- 1. D
- 2. C
- 3. C
- 4. A
- 5. B
- 6. A
- 7. D
- 8. C
- 9. A
- 10. C