

# 19 Review of the Past Simple, Continuous and Perfect

## 1 Introduction

Read this true story. It happened some years ago.

*A young man **walked** into a supermarket in Southampton and **put** a few items of food in a basket. He **had chosen** a time when not many people **were shopping** in the store. He **found** a checkout where no one else **was waiting**. When the cashier **had checked** the goods, the man **gave** her a £10 note. When she **opened** the till, the man quickly **snatched** all the money from it and **ran** out of the store before she **realized** what **was happening**. At the time the security guard **was standing** at the other end of the store. When staff **checked** the records in the till, they **found** that the thief **had taken** only £4.37. As he **had left** the £10 note behind, the operation **had cost** him £5.63.*

## 2 Comparison of tenses

We use the Past Simple to talk about the past (see Unit 8).

*He **snatched** the money and **ran** away.*

The Past Simple is used for the actions in the story, to tell us what happened next.

We use the Past Continuous (see Unit 9) for something around a past time or a past action.

*At the time of the incident, not many people **were shopping** in the store.*

The few customers were in the middle of doing their shopping.

We use the Past Perfect (see Unit 18) for things before a past situation.

*Staff found that the thief **had taken** only £4.37.*

The theft of the money happened before they found out how much.

## 3 Past Simple and Past Continuous

We often use these two forms together when a shorter action comes in the middle of a longer one (see Unit 10.2).

*I **was waiting** at the checkout when I **noticed** a strange-looking man.*

Seeing the man came in the middle of the wait.

## 4 Past Simple and Past Perfect

When we use these two forms together, we use the Past Perfect for what happened earlier.

*A man **walked** into a supermarket. He **had chosen** a quiet time.*

The choice of the time came before the arrival in the supermarket.

In this example, one past action followed another.

*He **filled** the basket and **went** to the checkout.*

We can also use either **when ... had done**, or **after ... did/had done**.

***When** he **had filled** the basket, he **went** to the checkout.*

***After** he **had filled** (OR **After** he **filled**) the basket, he **went** to the checkout.*

But when one short action comes straight after another, we use the Past Simple for both.

*When she **opened** the till, he **snatched** all the money out of it.*

Note the different meanings.

*When I switched the TV on, the programme **started**. I was just in time.*

*When I switched the TV on, the programme **had started**. I missed the beginning.*

We can use the Past Perfect or the Past Simple with **before** or **until**. There is no difference in meaning.

*The man arrived at the store before it **had opened**/before it **opened**.*

*The chairman didn't speak until he **had heard**/until he **heard** all the arguments.*