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Level : L1

Module :CWE

Lecture 2: Use of past tenses in narrative paragraphs

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Use the simple past for succession of events:

Narrate with the simple past tense when events follow each other. Here are some examples. Notice that each event occurs in succession.

I got up and went to the kitchen. I opened the door and looked into the fridge.

She arrived in Dallas, took a cab, and checked in to her hotel. Next, she had some dinner in a restaurant. Finally, she visited a colleague before she went to bed.

Use the past continuous for interrupted actions:

To express that an action is interrupted, use the past continuous to describe what was happening when there was an interruption. Use the past simple with the action that interrupts what was happening.

Finally, as we were discussing the issue, the teacher walked into the classroom. Obviously, we stopped talking immediately.

Sharon was working in the garden when the telephone rang.

Use the past perfect for previous actions:

• To express something that was finished before another event in the past, use the past perfect. This is especially useful when providing an explanation for what happened.

• We decided to go out and celebrate because we had just finished remodelling our home.

Janet didn't join us for dinner as she had already eaten.

Use the past perfect continuous for the length of actions:

• The past perfect continuous is used to express how long something had been happening up to a point in time in the past.

• We had been hiking for more than ten hours and it was time to call it a day.

She had been nagging him for months to get a better job when he finally was hired.

Tutorial (TD) 2

a) Write out the following sentences on to a piece of paper to form a paragraph. Conjugate each verb in the past and provide the correct prepositions.

• Yesterday evening Jack \_\_\_\_\_ (get) home \_\_\_\_\_ (preposition) half past five.

• He immediately \_\_\_\_\_ (make) himself a cup \_\_\_\_\_ (preposition) coffee and \_\_\_\_\_ (sit down) to read a book.

• He \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) the book \_\_\_\_\_ (preposition) half past seven.

• Then, he \_\_\_\_\_ (make) dinner and \_\_\_\_\_ (get ready) to go out with his friends.

• When his friends \_\_\_\_\_ (arrive), they \_\_\_\_\_ (decide) to go out to see a film.

• He \_\_\_\_\_ (stay out) until midnight with his friends.

• Finally, he \_\_\_\_\_ (fall) asleep \_\_\_\_\_ (preposition) about one o'clock.

b) Complete the story using the past simple, past perfect, or past continuous of the verbs in brackets.

It (be) Tuesday evening and I (get) ready to go to bed when the phone (ring). To my surprise it (be) my friend Peter. He (call) from his mobile and he was very annoyed because he (lose) his keys and he (cannot) get into his flat. He (think) he (leave) them at work but now it was midnight and the office was closed so he (cannot) get in to check. Luckily I had the keys to his flat because a month before he (give) me a spare set so that I could look after his cat while he was on holiday. When he finally (arrive) to pick them up, it was three o'clock in the morning, and I (lie) on the sofa fast asleep.

c) Correct the mistakes with the simple past and past continuous

When I was at university as a student about two years ago, I enrolled in a diving course. My diving teacher was having a big surprise: I wasn’t knowing how to swim. In fact I had a big fear of water. When I was a child, my parents tried to help me, so they make me take many swimming courses. Although I try hard, I did not learning to swim. When I enrolled in the diving course, I was still afraid of water. Every day when I entered the swimming pool, I battle with my fear. Fortunately my courage won every time. Finally one day when I practising my dive, I realized that I was do very well. So finally after six months of hard work, I completed the course. It is true that I was always the worst of the group, but in my own evaluation, I was a champion because I conquer my fear of water. For me, this experience was very important. It was a test of courage and I passed it.