PAST (NARRATIVE) TENSES – OVERVIEW

I. Identify the highlighted tenses in the following four sentences:

1. I **took** a taxi to work yesterday because my car was at the mechanic's.
2. When I was a child, I **spent** two hours a day walking to school and back.
3. When I first heard of the terrorist attack, I **was making** dinner for my family.
4. I didn't see the film because I **had read** the book already.
5. I **had been working** as a teacher for about two years when I met my present wife.

II. Complete the sentences in the following chart with the verbs suggested:

	Positive Statements	Negative Statements	Questions
Past Simple	I _____ the season finale of *Lost* yesterday. (**watch**) Frankly, I _____ it disappointing. (**find**)	I _____ fish when I was little. (**eat**)	_____ this morning's lecture? (you / **attend**)
Past Continuous	I _____ a shower, that's why I couldn't come to the phone! (**take**) We _____ in the Jacuzzi, so we didn't hear the phone! (**mess about**)	He _____ well in his job, so eventually he was dismissed. (**perform**) They _____ attention, so they missed the vital point. (**pay**)	What _____ when the fire broke out? (you / **do**) What _____ when the fire broke out? Sorry, can't remember. (I / **do**)
Past Perfect Simple	We _____ everything carefully, but it all fell through. (**plan**)	I _____ about it really until you raised the question. (**think**)	_____ all your facts before delivering that presentation? (you / **check**)
Past Perfect Continuous	She _____ for over an hour when he finally turned up. (**wait**)	They _____ for long when they found the treasure. (**work**)	How long _____ before they stopped for a break? (they / **walk**)

Which of the above tense or tenses:

- **may be accompanied by adverbs of frequency such as *never*, *often*, *rarely*/*seldom*, *usually*, *always*, *sometimes*/*occasionally*?**
- **may refer to a single completed event at some past moment?**
- **may signify a past habit / repetitive actions in the past?**
- **may mean the action was ongoing at a specific past moment?**
- **may emphasize the fact that one past event / action took place before another?**
- **may convey action over a period of time up to a certain past moment?**

III. What's the difference (if any) between the sentences in each set?

1. What **did you do** when you saw the accident?
   What **were you doing** when you saw the accident?

2. She **had read** the book when the film came out.
   She **had been reading** the book when the film came out.

3. He **never really considered** that possibility.
   He **had never really considered** that possibility.

4. When Max went missing, they found he **had stolen** the money from the safe.
   When Max went missing, they found he **had been stealing** money from the safe.

5. When I looked out of the window, I saw that my neighbour **was pruning** his roses.
   When I looked out of the window, I saw that my neighbour **had pruned** his roses.

6. She went to the doctor's because she **wasn't sleeping** well.
   She went to the doctor's because she **hadn't been sleeping** well.
   She went to the doctor's because she **hadn't slept** well.

7. When I got to her place, she **made** coffee.
   When I got to her place, she **was making** coffee.
   When I got to her place, she **had made** coffee.

8. He **was driving** to the airport to meet his new boss.
   He **was driven** to the airport to meet his new boss.

IV. Irregular verbs: Complete the sentences with the irregular verb in **bold** in either the Past Simple or the Past Perfect.

FALL

Harry _____ in love with a Greek girl while he was working in Athens.
He _____ in love before, but this was different. He wanted to marry her.

TEAR

She was mad at her son Tom because he _____ his new jeans playing football.
While she was hiking in the Alps, she _____ her trousers on a rock.

COST

It _____ an awful lot to have the car fixed.
Her silicone breasts, which _____ 20,000, started going flat in a month.

FLY

When I went to Australia, I was nervous because I _____ (never) before.
The plane took off and _____ into the clouds.

BE

Talks _____ held in New York last week to discuss global warming.
When the politicians left the talks, no decisions _____ reached.

THINK

Though he loved her passionately, she _____ he was a total jerk.
The party turned out to be much more fun than he _____ it would be.

TEACH

It was my grandmother who _____ me how to count to 10 in Arabic.
She failed the test because no one _____ her how to read and write.

FEEL

She _____ so happy when she heard the news that she burst into song and dance.
She _____ so happy before she heard the news that brought her to tears.

V. Complete the third column with the correct passive forms.

Remember that the passive in English is formed with the help of the auxiliary verb be and the past participle of the full verb. As the past participle cannot change in form, you have to operate with the form of be to produce the different tenses.

	Active	Passive
Past Simple	Someone **stole** my car last night.	My car _____ last night.
Past Continuous	They **were driving** to the shelter when the bomb fell.	They _____ to the shelter when the bomb fell.
Past Perfect Simple	They **had finished** nearly all the food and drink when I arrived.	Nearly all the food and drink _____ when I arrived.
Past Perfect Continuous	They **have been bullying** him for years before anyone found out.	**X**

VI. In the following sentences the subject is either not important or too obvious to be necessary. Put each sentence in the passive, keeping the tense of the original sentence.

1. They built our house in the 1930s.
2. Archaeologists discovered a new Roman temple underneath the new housing estate.
3. While they were building the new kitchen, we ate out every day.
4. We arrived at work to find that someone had burgled our office.
5. Someone took the file from desk between 3.30 and 5.00 pm.
6. The police finally caught the escaped convict late last night.
7. A person or persons unknown ate all the food and drank all the wine for the party at some time in the last two days.
8. Someone sent me ten cards on Valentine's Day!!!
9. They gave me a gold watch for my retirement, but it didn't work long.
10. The postman brought the post later than usual this morning.

VII. Choose the correct option in **bold**:

1. I **drank** / **was drinking** seven beers last night.
2. He was hungover because he **was drinking** / **had drunk** seven beers the night before.
3. When I went to see her, she **was drunk** / **was drinking** a beer, as usual.
4. She **died** / **was dying** of natural causes three years ago.
5. He **waited** / **was waiting** for about a week before he told her the bad news.
6. She had a headache as she **was working**/ **had been working** on her computer for hours.
7. I **watched** / **was watching** my favourite show when I was interrupted by the doorbell.
8. He didn't go to the meeting as he **hadn't been told** / **hadn't been telling** about it.
9. Where **did you go** / **were you going** to school as a child?
10. When I met her for our lunch date, she **was already eating** / **was already eaten**.
11. Our team **played** / **was playing** really well. We **won** / **were winning** at half-time, but in the end we **lost** / **were losing** 3-2.
12. When he **arrived** / **was arriving** home in the dark, he **heard** / **had heard** cries of "Surprise!", and realized a surprise party **had arranged** / **had been arranged** for him.

VIII. Some of the following sentences are grammatically correct, others are not. Correct the ones you think are wrong.

1. I'm really, really sorry – I didn't intended to offend you.
2. His hair was wet because he had been swimming.
3. I am born in the town of Pernik.
4. Did you saw Peter at the party last night?
5. Why you were sleeping during the staff meeting?
6. Last summer, I had gone to Greece for my summer holiday.
7. He couldn't sleep in his flat because it was been redecorated.
8. The fire started because he had smoking in bed.
9. I had never met such a stupid person until I met your ex-boyfriend.
10. They were gone out together for a year before they broke up.

IX. Look at the following sentences: is there a difference in meaning?

Last summer, I **visited** my grandparents' village for the first time since childhood.

When I was a child, I **visited** my grandparents' village every summer.

Now look at these sentences: is there a difference in meaning?

When I was a child, I **visited** my grandparents' village every summer.

When I was a child, I **used to visit** my grandparents' village every summer.

When I was a child, I **would visit** my grandparents' village every summer.

In how many ways can you paraphrase the following sentence? Why?

When I was a child, I **hated** fish.

Decide which of the following sentences can be paraphrased with *used to* and/or *would*.

1. I went to Greece on holiday last year.
2. I went to Greece on holiday every year before I discovered the wonders of Spain.
3. I loved Greece for holidays before discovering Spain.
4. My father made lunch for the whole family every Sunday.
5. I didn't like the meals he made.
6. She smoked two packs a day before she started doing yoga.
7. He thought she was his soulmate until she started doing yoga.
8. She stopped talking to him when he refused to join her yoga classes.
9. She attended yoga classes religiously for fifteen years.
10. Then she died from overstraining herself.

X. Past tenses for unreality: in which sentence/s was there an actual conversation?

I know you **talked** to me about it, but I can't remember all the details.

If you **talked** more openly about things, we wouldn't have this communication problems.

If you **had talked** to me about it, I might have been able to help you.

I wish / If only you **talked** more openly about the things on your mind.

I wish / If only you **had talked** to me before making any decisions.

I'd rather you **talked** things over with me before making decisions.

It's (high) time we **talked** this through.

What is the reality behind these sentences?

If you worked as hard as me, you would know how I feel.

If you had worked harder, you would have passed the test.

I wish you were here to support me in my struggle with life.

I wish you had been here to support me in my fight with Joanna.

If only she didn't talk so much, I would get on better than her.

It's high time you got a haircut.

I'd rather you hadn't told her about our wedding plans.

Look at these sentences, which all present facts. Paraphrase them using conditional sentences (*If…*).

1. You don't spend time with the children. They have a problem with you.
2. You didn't invite me to your birthday party. I didn't give you a present.
3. He loves her, that's why he follows her every whim.
4. They forgot their GPS, so they got lost in the Albanian countryside.
5. I did English at university, so I became a teacher.
6. He is seeing his ex, so his present girlfriend is leaving him.
7. He realized he preferred men, so he left his wife.
8. You don't buy me presents, so I won't let you copy my homework.

XI. Past tenses in reported speech: what were the words actually said?

He said he **was** ill.

He said he **had been** ill.

She told us she **was** in Paris.

She told us she **had been** to Paris many times.

She told us she **had been** to Paris the year before.

He said he **was going to** propose to her on the following day.

He claimed he **had never loved** anyone so much before.

We assured him she **wouldn't reject** him.

We thought she **couldn't possibly miss** a catch like that.

But then she informed him that he **was** a lousy lover.

She added that she **had never been** so bored in a relationship.

To top it all, she vowed she **would never sleep** with him again.

He told her she **was being** a bitch.

Then he said she **had always been** a bitch.

In the end, they decided they **could meet and discuss** things that evening.

Finally, they promised each other they **would be** together until death **did** them part.