

Peter Zolczer
J. Selye University
Faculty of Education
Department of Modern Philology
peter.zolczer@hotmail.com

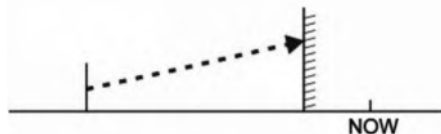
Using Diagrams for Teaching (and Remembering) the Usage of Tenses [Part 3]

OVERVIEW

The main idea of the technique explained in this article series is that the students should memorize the diagrams only, instead of cramming all the rules and situations in which tenses are used. When they need them, they can deduce the rules and situations from the diagrams without using any external source.

DIAGRAMS, TENSE USAGE AND EXPLANATIONS

Past Simple



Understanding the diagram for Past Simple is really easy. There are two barriers (walls) on the timeline, which restrict the event from overlapping onto the present moment (NOW). The barriers (in the same way as in present continuous) can be stretched and narrowed, but the barrier on the right side should never reach the present. Essentially, there are two cases in which we use past simple: a) when we are talking about a series of events which happened in the past in chronological order (e.g. *Yesterday I woke up at 7 am. Then I went to school. At 10 am I had an enjoyable English lesson.* etc.); b) in case of individual sentences we use Past Simple when an adverb of time clearly indicates the time of the event (e.g. *In 1876 Bell invented the telephone.*).

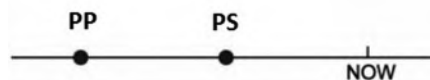
Past Continuous



At this point, it might be beneficial to make the students compare the diagram for Past Continuous with the diagram for Present Continuous. The only difference between the two is that the event (represented with the arrow) locked inside the two vertical lines is slid into the left side (past) of the timeline. Notice that the little vertical line is still present in

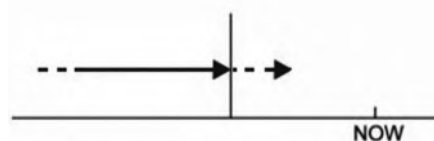
the middle of the vertical borders. That line represents the past time (e.g. *yesterday at 6 pm*) when the other continuous action (e.g. *was studying*) was happening. This event is indicated by the arrow (*Yesterday at 6 pm he was studying physics*). We can indicate the time of the continuous action with not just an adverb of time, but also with another action that is expressed in Past Simple (e.g. *I was doing my homework when my friend texted me*). We can also use past continuous when we want to refer to continuous past events happening parallel to each other. In these cases the time is indicated with one of the continuous actions. Usually we start the sentence with the word 'while' (e.g. *While I was singing, my friends were listening and my grandmother was crying for joy*).

Past Perfect



We use Past Perfect when we want to express that one of the two (or more) actions happened earlier than the other(s). The diagram clearly shows an example for this situation. The dot on the left side of the timeline (PP) is an action which happened before another past action, represented by the dot in the middle of the timeline (PS). E.g. *Before I woke up, my friend had made me breakfast.* First the friend made breakfast and then I woke up. Making the breakfast happened earlier than waking up. The earlier action is always expressed with Past Perfect, the later action (the one closer to the present moment: NOW) is expressed with Past Simple. The Past Perfect does not necessarily need a complex sentence, however, in these cases the context needs to provide the chronology of the events (e.g. *I was very angry. He had broken my precious vase; someone broke the vase and then the owner got very angry*).

Past Perfect Continuous



The same way as in the case of past continuous, the teacher should make the students compare the diagram of Past Perfect Continuous and Present Perfect Continuous. The former can be created by sliding the latter into the past (left side of the timeline). The vertical line on the diagram indicates a past time, usually represented by an action (e.g. *when we arrived*). The arrow shows that another past activity (e.g. *had been studying*) started earlier and continued until the later past time (*When we arrived home, he had been studying for three hours*). We do not necessarily have to know for how long the earlier activity (*studying*) had been going on (*When we arrived home, he had been studying for hours*). This is indicated by the dashed beginning of the arrow on the left side. We also do not have to know whether the studying stopped or continued at the time of the later past event (arriving home). This is represented by the dashed arrow on the right side of vertical line.

The fourth (and last) part of this article series comes in the next issue.