Narrative Tenses Worksheet: Telling Stories in the Past

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NAME

DATE

Remember

Form	Example
Past continuous: background, actions in progress	It was raining and people were hurrying home.
Past simple: main events, in order	Suddenly, the lights went out.
Past perfect: earlier events (before the story)	I realised I had left my keys at work.
Linkers: when, while, as soon as, by the time, after	By the time we arrived, the film had started.

Typical mistakes

× Learners often say	✓ Say instead
When I arrived, the film already started.	When I arrived, the film had already started.
While I walked home, I saw an accident.	While I was walking home, I saw an accident.
I was knowing the answer.	I knew the answer.

1. Complete

Complete with the past simple, past continuous or past perfect of the verb in brackets.

1. The sun _____ (shine) when we left the hotel.
2. She _____ (never / fly) before, so she was nervous.
3. While we _____ (have) dinner, the doorbell rang.
4. As soon as I saw him, I _____ (know) something was wrong.
5. By the time the police came, the thief _____ (escape).
6. I _____ (walk) to the station when I met an old friend.
7. He couldn't pay because he _____ (lose) his wallet.
8. We _____ (get) into the car and drove away.

2. Choose

Circle the best option.

1. When I got to the airport, my plane (left / had left).
2. I (was reading / read) a book when the phone rang.
3. She (opened / was opening) the door, took off her coat and sat down.
4. We were tired because we (had walked / were walking) all day.
5. It was a cold night. Snow (fell / was falling) softly.
6. He (didn't recognise / hadn't been recognising) me at first.
7. After she (had finished / was finishing) her work, she went home.
8. While they (were sleeping / slept), someone broke in.

3. Correct the mistakes

Each sentence has one mistake. Write it correctly.

1. When we arrived, everybody went home. (they left before)

2. I was cooking when the fire was starting.

3. She was tired because she was working since 6 a.m.

4. While I watched TV, I heard a noise.

5. He had went to bed early.

6. By the time I called, she left.

Writing

Write a short story (8 sentences) that begins: 'It was a quiet evening and I was alone at home...' Use all three narrative tenses.

Speaking

- Tell me about a time when something went wrong on a trip.
- What were you doing when you heard some important news?
- Describe a moment when you realised you had forgotten something important.
- Tell me the story of how you met a close friend.

Answer key

1. Complete: 1 was shining · 2 had never flown · 3 were having · 4 knew · 5 had escaped · 6 was walking · 7 had lost · 8 got

2. Choose: 1 had left · 2 was reading · 3 opened · 4 had walked · 5 was falling · 6 didn't recognise · 7 had finished · 8 were sleeping

3. Correct the mistakes: 1 When we arrived, everybody had gone home. · 2 I was cooking when the fire started. · 3 She was tired because she had been working / had worked since 6 a.m. · 4 While I was watching TV, I heard a noise. · 5 He had gone to bed early. · 6 By the time I called, she had left.

Writing, model answer: It was a quiet evening and I was alone at home. I was reading on the sofa and the rain was hitting the window. Suddenly, I heard a noise in the kitchen. I went in slowly, but nobody was there. Then I saw that the back door was open. I was sure I had locked it earlier. As I was closing it, a wet cat ran past my feet. It had come in to escape the rain.