

Verb Tense: Had

LNC Writing Center Review

Using “Had”

Past Time

The verb “had” can be used to describe a time in the past that happened before another time in the past.

In the following sentence, this simple version of past tense doesn’t indicate an additional time in the past. The war simply ended.

The war ended in 1812.

In this sentence, the past event of the war ending happened before the past event of the troops arriving.

By the time the troops arrived, the war had ended.

To assess whether “had” is needed, look for an event that happened before another event. In this sentence, Omar lost his wallet before he found his back pocket empty.

Omar knew that he had lost his wallet when he found his back pocket empty.

Past Possession

The verb “had” can also be used to describe a possession in the past.

In this sentence, the speaker possessed a date in the past—the speaker went on a date.

I had a date.

Using “Had Had”

Sometimes, both forms of “had” are needed to communicate information about both time and possession. In this sentence, she felt great after she possessed a good night’s sleep.

She felt great after she had had a good night’s sleep.

She felt great after she had (time) had (possession) a good night’s sleep.

When “had had” is used, it will always indicate that something was possessed before another past event, even if the later past event goes unsaid. In this sentence, the speaker had the date at one point, but no longer has the date.

I had had a date.

I had (time) had (possession) a date [*until it was cancelled*].