

Grammar by Learned English Labs

'Have been', 'has been' and 'had been'. These forms cause a lot of confusion for many people. I will clear up that confusion. I'm going to teach you the three main uses of these forms how to use them correctly without making mistakes. Alright, let's get started. Before we talk about the uses, you need to know the basics of where to use have, has and had been: in the present.

If the subject of a sentence is I/You/We/They or a plural noun, then we use 'have been'.

If the subject is He/She/It or a singular noun, then we use 'has been'.

This is when we talk about the present.

When we talk only about the past, it's very easy. For any subject, we use 'had been'

OK, let me test you: what do we use with He/She/It or a singular noun in the present? We use 'has been'.

What about with I/You/We/They or plural nouns? We use 'have been'.

And in the past tense? We use 'had been' for all subjects.

Good, so let's now look at the first use of these forms. This is in the present perfect tense. That is, to talk about actions or situations that started in the past and are still continuing.

Here's an example: "I have been working as a teacher for 7 years." In speech, we usually shorten 'I have' to 'I've' – "I've been working as a teacher for 7 years."

Let's look at a timeline for this. You know that I started working as a teacher seven years ago (or in 2010 because, right now, it's 2017), and I'm still a teacher, so this action – 'working' is continuing.

In this sentence, we can also say: "I have been working as a teacher since 2010." The difference between 'for' and 'since' is that if you want to mention the duration (or amount of time), then you use 'for' (like 'for 7 years').

If you want to mention the starting point of the action or situation, use 'since' (as in 'since 2010').

Here's another example: let's say that this lady wants to see the doctor. Her appointment was at 3 o'clock. She came to the hospital at 3, but the doctor wasn't there. So she started waiting at 3 o'clock and she's still waiting –

let's say it's 5 o'clock now, so two hours have passed.

So what can we say?

We can say: "She has been waiting for two hours." or "She has been waiting since 3 o'clock." In natural speech, we say he's been and she's been: "She's been waiting".

OK have a look at this sentence: "He has been the CEO of the company for four months" or we can say 'since June' because that's when he started.

Here, we don't have an -ing verb like 'working' or 'waiting'. That's because we don't want to focus on any action, we just want to express the situation – that he became the CEO in June and he's still the CEO.

Here's another example: "They've been married for 25 years / since 1992." When did they get married? In 1992. Are they still married now? Yes. So, they've been married for 25 years now.

OK, so what about 'had been'? Well, let's change our sentences a little bit: "I had been working as a teacher for 7 years when I quit my job." Ah, we see a different meaning here. It means that I started working as a teacher at some point in the past, I was a teacher for 7 years, but then I quit. So now, I am no longer a teacher. I want you to notice that there are two past actions here: one continuous action ("I had been working as a teacher") and a single finished action at the end of that ("I quit").

Compare this to the previous sentence – "I have been working as a teacher" – here, there is only one continuous action and it's still continuing, it's not finished.

So, please remember this rule:

-- only use 'had been' if there were two events in the past: a continuing action or a situation and a single, finished action.

So let's go back to the other sentences. With these, we can say: "She had been waiting for two hours when the doctor finally arrived." "He'd been the CEO of the company for only four months when it went bankrupt." 'Went bankrupt' means the

company lost all its money and closed down. "They had been married for 25 years when they divorced." So are they still married? Unfortunately, no.

Just like the sentences with 'have been' and 'has been' are in the present perfect tense, the sentences with 'had been' are in the past perfect tense.—by Learn English Lab