

Common errors in the use of tenses - part II

Incorrect: I had been to New York recently.

Correct: I went to New York recently.

Incorrect: I had written to him last week.

Correct: I wrote to him last week.

Incorrect: We had gone to the pictures last night.

Correct: We went to the pictures last night.

Here the error lies in using the past perfect tense instead of the simple past. The past perfect is not used simply to say that something happened sometime ago. This meaning is conveyed by using the simple past.

Incorrect: He said that he was suffering from fever for three days.

Correct: He said that he had been suffering from fever for three days.

Incorrect: The man complained that his watch was stolen.

Correct: The man complained that his watch had been stolen.

Incorrect: The doctor concluded that the man died twelve hours ago.

Correct: The doctor concluded that the man had died twelve hours ago.

Here the error lies in using the simple past instead of the past perfect or the past continuous instead of the past perfect continuous.

The past perfect denotes an action completed at some point in the past before some other past action commenced. When two actions in the past have to be referred to, the past perfect should be used for the earlier action, and the simple past for the later one.