

HEROES AND VILLAINS: past time clauses

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- The main grammar focus is on past time clauses: deciding whether to use the past simple, the past progressive or the past perfect after conjunctions such as *when*, *while*, *after* and *before*.
- There should be no problems with the concept of an interrupted action in progress since Spanish follows stricter rules than the English regarding the tenses to be used with *while*, etc.
- The Spanish equivalents of *before* and *after* usually function as prepositions followed by the infinitive so this can lead to confusions with the English verb forms, causing errors such as *After leave / to leave / he leave, John went home.* ✗

ANSWERS

EXERCISE 1

- 1 The lecturer *had* already started the lecture *when* we arrived. (*started* happened before the second action, *arrived*)
- 2 Andy met his future wife *while* he *was living* in Paris. (the second action *living* was ongoing when the first happened)
- 3 ✓
- 4 The workers *organized* a strike *after* negotiations *had* broken down. (*organized* comes after the first action—*broken down*)
- 5 ✓
- 6 We were marching downtown *when* the president *resigned* unexpectedly. (*resigned* is a short action that took place during the first action—*were marching*)

EXERCISE 2

Note: More than one answer is possible in most cases here. The choice of conjunction will slightly change the relationship between the actions. If your students find this exercise difficult, give them the conjunctions from the answers below to help them.

- 1 Alan became active in student politics *while* he was studying law in college. / Alan was studying law in college *when* he became active in student politics.

- 2 Alan *had* become active in student politics *before* he graduated from college. (Although *became active* would be possible here, *had become* emphasises that it had already happened before he graduated.)
- 3 *After* Alan had gotten his law degree, he joined a law practice. (It would also be possible to use *got* since this focuses on the sequence of the actions.)
- 4 Alan was working as a junior lawyer *when* he met his wife. / Alan met his wife *while* he was working as a junior lawyer.
- 5 Alan *had* worked as a junior lawyer for four years *before* he became a partner. / Alan became a partner *after* he had worked as a junior lawyer for four years.
- 6 Alan *had* been involved in local politics for eight years *before* he became a politician. / Alan became a politician *after* he had been involved in local politics for eight years.

EXERCISE 3

Note: In one or two cases more than one answer is possible.

- 1 traveled 2 had been 3 had spent 4 came across 5 died / was dying (both are possible—the first focuses on the complete action) 6 founded 7 had expanded 8 started 9 improved 10 had / had had (it is possible to link two past simples with *after*) 11 died

PERSONALIZE IT!

- The students can write a few biographical notes like the ones in exercise 2. In pairs, the students can hand the notes to their partners, who then write three or four sentences based on the notes, using the time conjunctions. Each student then reads their sentences to their partner (the student whose life they are describing), who checks whether the times expressed in the sentences are correct or not.

HEROES AND VILLAINS

EXERCISE 1

Four of these sentences contain mistakes with the past simple, past progressive or past perfect. Check (✓) the two correct sentences and correct the mistakes in the others.

- 1 The lecturer already started the lecture when we arrived.
- 2 Andy met his future wife while he lived in Paris.
- 3 We waited until all our guests had arrived before we told them the news.
- 4 The workers had organized a strike after the negotiations had broken down.
- 5 We went on several demonstrations when we were living in Cambridge.
- 6 We were marching downtown when the president was resigning unexpectedly.

EXERCISE 2

Look at the biographical details. Make sentences about Alan from the prompts, using the past progressive or past perfect.

Alan Stebbings

- 1985 joined the Democratic Party
- 1986–91 studied law in college
- 1988 became very active in student politics
- 1991 graduated with a law degree
- 1992 joined a law practice, working as a junior lawyer
- 1994 met and married Angela
- 1995 started getting involved in local politics
- 1996 became a partner in the law practice
- 2003 gave up law and became a professional politician

join Democratic Party / go to college
Alan had joined the Democratic Party before he went to college.

- 1 become active in student politics / study law in college
- 2 become active in student politics / graduate from college

- 3 get his law degree / join a law practice
- 4 work as a junior lawyer / meet his wife
- 5 work as a junior lawyer for four years / become a partner
- 6 be involved in local politics for eight years / become a politician

EXERCISE 3

Complete the text by writing the verbs in parentheses in the correct tense. Use the past simple, past progressive or past perfect.



Mother Teresa was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Macedonia in 1910. Her family was very religious and Agnes went to church almost every day while she **was growing up** (grow up). In 1928 she left Macedonia and (1)

(travel) to Dublin, in Ireland, to join the Sisters of Loretto, where she took the name Teresa.

Mother Teresa then spent many years as a nun and a teacher, but in 1948 her life changed completely. By this time she (2) (be) in India for nearly twenty years, and (3) (spend) much of that time as a teacher and Principal in St. Mary's High School, Calcutta. Then, one day, she (4) (come across) a poor, dying woman in the street. Mother Teresa stayed with the woman as she (5) (die), and decided to dedicate her life to the poorest people. She then (6) (found) the Missionaries of Charity, which, by the end of the 20th century, (7) (expand) to about 550 missions worldwide.

In 1979 Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but she (8) (start) to suffer from heart problems in the early 1980s. Although her health (9) (improve) a little after she (10) (have) a pacemaker fitted in 1989, she was then weakened by infections and diseases. She finally (11) (die) in Calcutta on September 5th, 1997.