



The Narrative Tenses

Aims and Objectives

Aim –

- To enable students to use narrative tenses more effectively.

Objectives –

- Recognise the relationship between verb tenses and their uses in the narrative tenses.
- Use the narrative tenses correctly.

A narrative is a story.

As we can't predict the future, and it is very difficult to be sure of the relevance (importance) of current events to a story, we generally tell stories using past tenses sometimes called narrative tenses.

Past Simple

This is used in narrative to talk about actions that come one after another. This is usually the main narrative tense because it describes the main events in a story.

I/you/he/she/it/we/they/you **did**

The past simple indicates an action that was **completed in the past**.

Harry went home.

They opened the box.

We tried to help.

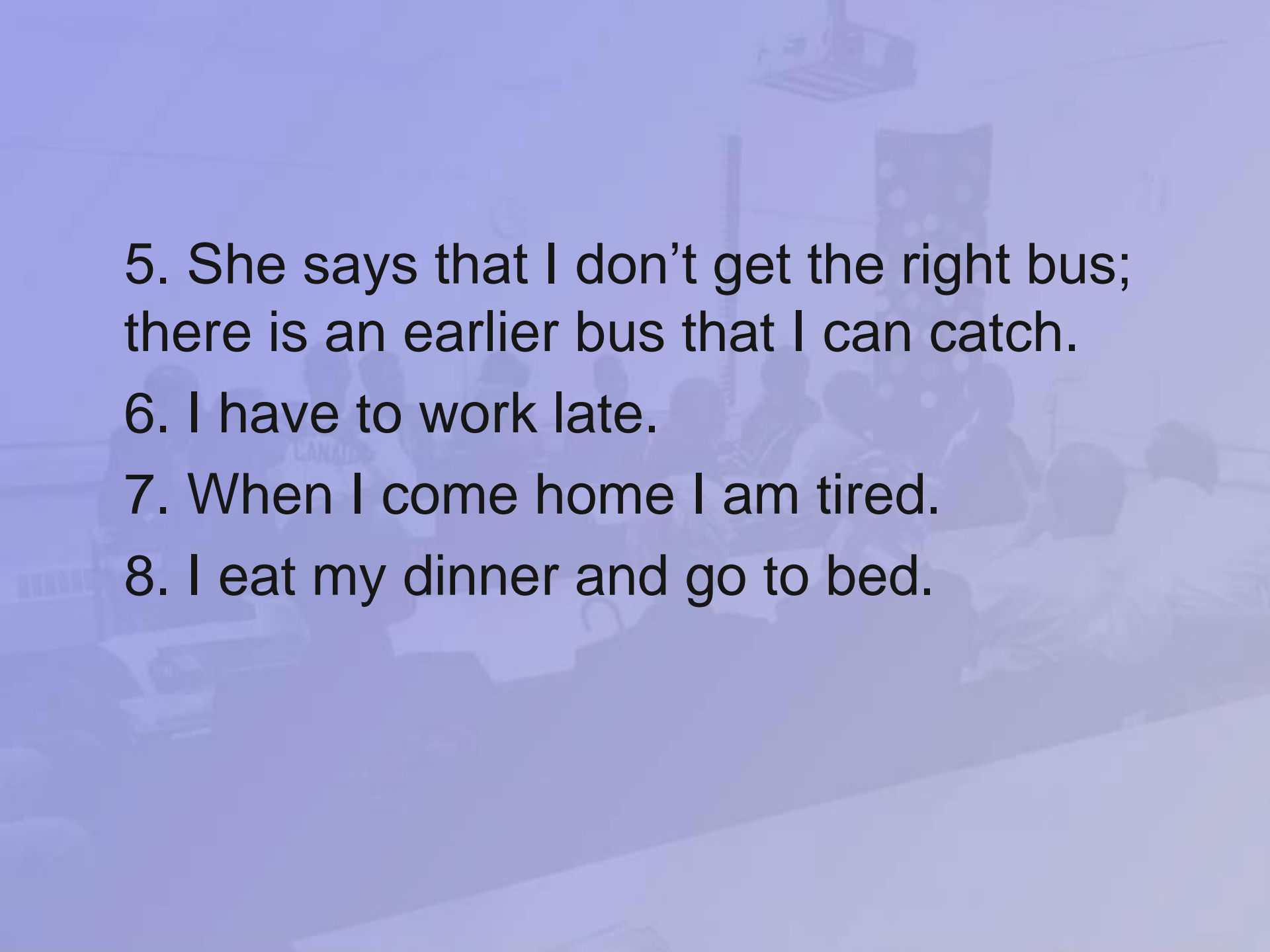
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← Past-----Now-----Future →

Task 1

Put these sentences into the past simple

1. I wake up in the morning.
2. I wash and brush my teeth.
3. I catch the bus but it is late.
4. When I arrive to work I speak to my manager.



5. She says that I don't get the right bus; there is an earlier bus that I can catch.

6. I have to work late.

7. When I come home I am tired.

8. I eat my dinner and go to bed.

Past Continuous

This is used to describe a longer, continuous past action. It is usually used in narrative to describe a longer action, which was happening when a shorter action happened.

I/he/she/it	+	was	+	doing
you/we/they/you		were		

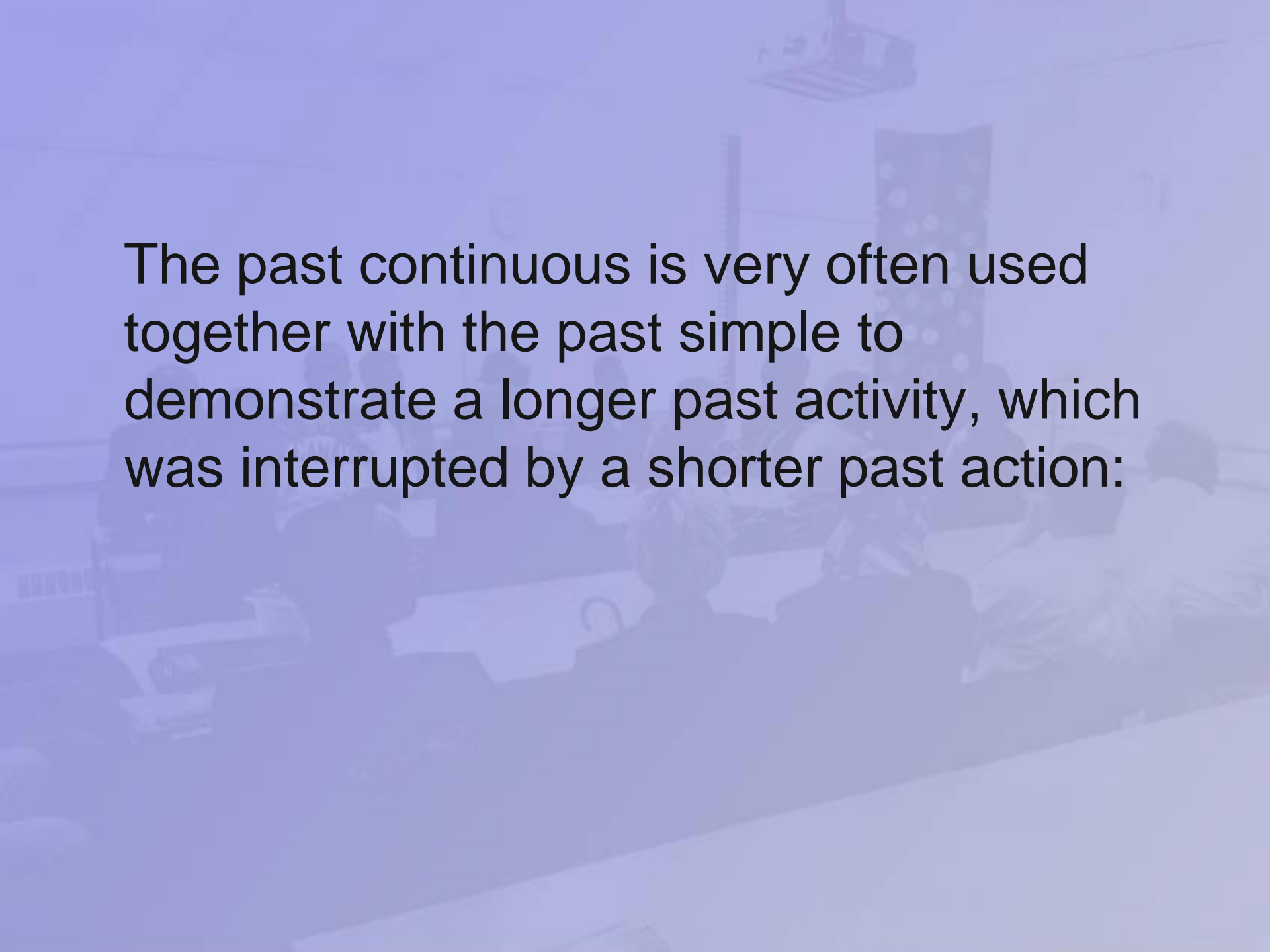
This tense focuses on the **duration** of a past action.

I was looking away.

You were driving home.

He was meeting his manager.

←Past-----Now-----Future→



The past continuous is very often used together with the past simple to demonstrate a longer past activity, which was interrupted by a shorter past action:

I was looking away *when the boy fell down.*

You were driving home *when I saw you.*

He was meeting his manager *when I spoke to him.*

past action

*****|

← Past-----Now-----Future →

Task 2

Decide which the longer action is and write a sentence using both verbs, the longer in the past continuous and the shorter in the past simple.

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. wake up | sleep |
| 2. watch television | knock the door |
| 3. eat lunch | see a friend |
| 4. get hurt | play football |
| 5. think of you | write a letter |
| 6. crash | not driving the bus |

Past Perfect

This is used to describe an action which happened **before** the main events in a story.

I/you/he/she/it/we/they/you + **had + done.**

This tense is often the cause of unnecessary confusion. If you consider it as being the **present perfect** tense set in the past you will find it easier to understand.

It is used to describe an action that had an outcome in the past and is connected with another action *further back* in the past.

Paul had left when I arrived.

I had visited London before we went on holiday there last year.

They had met before Kerry introduced them.

action main events

← Past-----Now-----Future →

Task 3

Write/change sentences using the past perfect.

1. *I knew how to get to Liverpool. I visited Liverpool before.*
2. *Melanie arranged the meeting last month, she told her staff last week.*
3. *Last week Betsy saw an elephant at the zoo, before then she never saw an elephant.*

4. *I never broke a bone before I broke my arm in 1999.*

5. *Did you meet David before you met him last night?*

6. *France and England had political differences before World War I.*

Task 5

Find narrative tenses in the text and decide which tense they are and why it is used.

I was waiting for my mother to come home from work; I loved it when she arrived because my brothers and I got so excited. It was about 5.30 and it was getting dark, we had been waiting since our grandmother had picked us up from school at 3.15. When she arrived she said that she'd had a hard day and was feeling tired. It was time to wait for Dad...

Task 6

Describe the difference in meaning between these sentences

1. *When Mum arrived home Dad prepared some food.*
2. *When Mum arrived home Dad was preparing some food.*
3. *When Mum arrived home Dad had prepared some food.*