

Another sentence based on GMATPrep question (*In 1981 children in the United States spent an average of ...*):

In 2007, a typical web user spent less than 4 hours a month on Facebook; by 2011, that figure went up to 8 hours.

Analysis: There are actually 3 events that this sentence talks about:

(a) The time that a typical web user spent on Facebook in 2007

(b) 4 years passing since then (between 2007 and 2011)

(c) But, *before* those 4 years passed (*within those years*, as indicated by the words *by 2011*), that figure (the *time* that a typical web user spent on Facebook) went up to 8 hours.

However, note that (c) happened *before* (b) and hence, (c) should be in *past perfect* (in this case: *had gone up*). It should also be noted that *in 2007* is a *specific time*, and so, *a typical web user spent less than 4 hours a month on Facebook* is correctly expressed in *simple past* (remember that *simple past* is used to express the situation that an event started and finished *at a specific time* in the past); on the other hand, *by 2011* is an *unspecified time* because this could refer to *any time* in or before 2011), and so, a *perfect tense* (*past perfect* in this case) would correctly depict this situation. So, the correct sentence is:

In 2007, a typical web user spent less than 4 hours a month on Facebook; by 2011, that figure had gone up to 8 hours.