

USES OF TENSES

Present Simple Tense

The present simple is used for established facts and things in general.

It is also used for habitual activities or routines.

The simple tenses are generally used with **verbs of perception**: *sound, seem, appear, smell, taste, look and feel* (note that *look* and *feel* can also be used with the continuous tenses).

The present simple is used with *hear*, and with *see* (except when it means 'to meet').

The simple tenses are always used with so called **state (or stative) verbs**, such as *agree, approve of, believe, belong to, consider* (hold an opinion), *consist of, contain, cost, depend, disagree, gather* (understand), *hate, have* (own), *know, like, loathe, love, mean, own, need, possess, prefer, realize, regret, remember, resemble, suppose, think* (hold an opinion), *understand, want, wish*, etc.

The present simple is *usually* used with so called **performative verbs** (i.e. utterances that actually constitute an action), such as *accept, acknowledge, admit, advise, apologize, assume, deny, guarantee, hope, inform, predict, promise, recommend, suggest, warn*, etc.

It is used for schedules drawn up by others.

It is often employed when telling jokes or funny stories.

The present simple is favored by live sports commentators for word economy and to convey a sense of excitement and directness.

The present simple is also preferred in newspaper headlines for succinctness where space is at a premium.

Present Continuous Tense

The present continuous is used for temporary actions or events going on at or around the time of speaking.

It is used for self-made schedules, generally for the not too distant future.

It is also used for longer-term enterprises.

'A banana **is** never quite straight.'
'Malaysia **exports** rubber.'

The President **gets up** at five and **starts** work at seven.

Going to Fiji **sounds** just great because the beaches **appear** less crowded and the prices **seem** reasonable.

This French bread **smells** quite fresh, **tastes** delicious, **feels** very soft and **looks** just great.
COMPARE: 'I **am** not **feeling** very well today' and 'You **are looking** wonderful in that new dress, my dear, but what happened to the curtains?'

'I **hear** footsteps. Quick, someone's coming!'
'I **see** you don't understand what I mean.'
COMPARE: 'She **is seeing** the dentist tomorrow.'

'Some people **believe** in UFOs, but I **think** they're misguided.'

'Henry **regrets** what he did and **wishes** to make amends.'

'Although, of course, I don't normally **approve of** gossip, I do **like** her new autobiography. It **contains** a number of sensational revelations about the world of showbiz!'

'He **admits** he made a big mistake, **acknowledges** full responsibility, **accepts** the consequences, **apologizes** from the bottom of his heart and **promises** not to do it again.'

'His ship **sails** at dawn.'
'The next train **leaves** at half-past six.'

'A man **wanders** into a restaurant and **says** he **can** eat a horse. The waiter **tells** him he's come to the wrong place.'

'Agassi **leads** four games to one in the first set.'
'The crowd **roars** as Tyson **takes** a huge bite out of Holyfield's ear.'

'Iraq **Invades** Kuwait'
'Man **Steals** Clock, **Faces** Time'
'Fake Cardiologist **Breaks** Woman's Heart'

'The electrician **is mending** a fuse.'
'It's **snowing**.'
'In London John **is staying** at the Savoy.'

'Lucia's **leaving** for Milan after lunch.'
'Dan and Crystal **are getting married** in June.'

'He's **studying** hard to become a doctor.'

Used with adverbs of (high) frequency to express disapproval of annoying habits.

The present continuous also used to set the scene for jokes or funny stories told in the present simple.

The present continuous of *to be* is used to react to behavior perceived as uncharacteristic for someone.

The present continuous must be used with *have* when it is an **action verb**.

Remember that so called **state verbs** cannot be used in continuous tense forms.

Present Perfect Tense

The present perfect is used to emphasize the **results** in the present of a recently completed **past activity**.

It is used to emphasize the **results** in the present of a **recent event**.

American English prefers the simple past tense to convey personal news. It thereby loses the subtlety of British English to clearly distinguish between recent and not so recent events.

It is used for breaking news headlines or when wishing to emphasize *that* something has occurred rather than exactly *when* it occurred.

The present perfect is used with *already*, *just* and *yet*.

Note that American English often uses the simple past tense with *already*, *just* and *yet*.

It is used to refer to a person's entire life experience since they were born.

It is used with *ever* to question a person's entire life experience of something in particular.

American English, on the other hand, prefers the simple past tense with *ever*.

The present perfect is also used to **quantify** something done or progress made so far.

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

Used to emphasize **activities** that were in progress right up to or shortly before the time of speaking and so have a direct influence on the current situation.

Used with *for* or *since* to say **how long** an ongoing or continuing

'Joe Lieberman's **running** for President.'

'He **is** always **complaining**.'
'She's forever **losing** her keys.'

'This guy **is sitting** all by himself in a bar **looking** pretty inebriated, so the barman **refuses** to serve him another drink.'

'He really **is being** stupid' (meaning this person is normally more sensible).
COMPARE: 'He really **is** stupid' (meaning he is stupid the whole time).

'She **is having** another baby / filet steak for dinner / a shower / a heart attack / etc.'

'She ~~is having~~ **has** a lot of money.'
'She ~~is knowing~~ **knows** how to fly a plane'
'He ~~is preferring~~ **prefers** coffee to tea.'

'Someone **has eaten** my sandwiches' (which explains why the plate is empty and I'll have to go hungry).

'I've **lost** my passport' (hence I can't leave the country).

'I lost my passport.' (Today? Last week? Last year?)

'Two lions **have escaped** from Chessington Zoo.'
'Powerful tornadoes **have hit** Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas'

'Samantha **has** already **left**, but Cindy **has** just **arrived**, so I guess the party **hasn't finished** yet.'

'Samantha already left, but Cindy just arrived, so I guess the party didn't finish yet.'

'Dan **has traveled** a great deal, but he **has** never **been** to Greenland.'

'**Have** you ever **seen** a straight banana?'
'**Has** Chuck ever **done** an honest day's work in his life?'

'Did you ever see a straight banana?'
'Did Chuck ever do an honest day's work in his life?'

'Harry **has driven** 200 miles since breakfast.'
'Meg **has saved** \$8,000 toward her new BMW.'

'She **has been using** a computer all day' (so her eyes are now bloodshot).
'Someone **has been eating** my sandwiches' (so half of them are missing).

'Harry **has been driving** for three hours.'

activity has been in progress.

In many other cases the present perfect continuous can be exchanged for the present perfect simple, although when the latter is chosen one tends to feel that change might be in the offing.

Remember that so called **state verbs** cannot be used in continuous tense forms.

Past Simple Tense

The past simple is used for activities or events completed at a specific time in the past (which is either understood or indicated by a time expression).

It is used for two or more completed past activities or events that occurred in sequence rather than in parallel.

The past simple corresponds to the **foreground** in a painting. It is used for the action in a story (the past continuous sets the scene).

It is used with adverbs of frequency to talk about repeated actions or events in the past; *would* and *used to* are also used to talk about past habits and routines.

It is used with verbs of perception: *sound, seem, appear, smell, taste, look* and *feel* (note that *look* and *feel* can also be used with the continuous tenses).

The simple tenses are always used for so called **state verbs** such as *agree, approve of, believe, belong to, consider* (hold an opinion), *consist, contain, cost, depend, disagree, gather* (understand), *hate, have(own), know, like, loathe, love, mean, own, need, possess, prefer, realize, regret, remember, resemble, suppose, think* (hold an opinion), *understand, want, wish*, etc.

Usually preferred with so called **performative verbs** (i.e. utterances which actually constitute an action) such as *accept, acknowledge, admit, advise, apologize, assume, bet, deny, guarantee, hope, inform, predict, promise, recommend, suggest, warn*, etc.

Past Continuous Tense

The past continuous corresponds to the **background** in a painting. It sets the scene for all the action reported in the past simple.

It is used for temporary actions or events that were going on at or around a particular time in the past when something of shorter duration occurred.

'Meg **has been saving** for her BMW for ten months.'

'I **ve been living** here for ten years (in other words, I feel almost like a native).'

'I **have lived here** for ten years (so perhaps it's about time I moved on to pastures greener).'

Manchester United **thrashed** Chelsea 4:1.
The ice sculptures **attracted** many visitors.
Many of the bars **closed** at midnight.

I **went** into town at ten, **booked** my summer holiday at the travel agent's, **ate** lunch at Pizza Hut, **saw** the new Bond film at the Odeon cinema, **did** my shopping for the weekend and **arrived** home in time for tea at four.

The rock group were performing when the earthquake **struck**. Nobody **noticed**.

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher often only **slept** four hours a night. She **would** go to bed at one in the morning and get up at five to read the morning papers. The first thing she **used to** check was what they were saying about her.

The bread **smelt** fresh, **tasted** delicious, **felt** very soft and **looked** just great.
COMPARE: 'Max **wasn't feeling** very well today. He really **was looking** under the weather.'

'The minister ~~was agreeing~~ **agreed** to resign even though he ~~wasn't thinking~~ **didn't think** he ~~was needing~~ **needed** to.'

'Although the rich oil sheik **promised** (was promising) the Hollywood actress a million dollars in cash, a new Mercedes and a house in Palm Beach, her lawyer **advised** her not to marry him.'

'I **was sitting** in my armchair **looking** up at the night sky. The moon **was beaming** brightly. All the stars **were twinkling**. Then it **came** to me: I **had** to get the roof fixed!'

'While I **was waiting** for the ferry I **ate** lunch in a sushi bar.'

'While I **was wolfing** down my sushi a small piece of fish **started** moving.'

It is also used for two activities of similar duration that were going on in parallel.

Remember that so called state verbs cannot be used in continuous tense forms.

Past Perfect Tense

This tense is used to talk about the pre-past, i.e. activities or events **completed before** (but relevant to) subsequent activities or events referred to in the past simple.

If, however, the second action is a direct result of the first, then the past simple is used for both.

The past perfect tense is used to report on past intentions that were sadly never realized.

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The past perfect continuous is used to report on an **activity of interest or direct relevance** that was still in progress up until or immediately prior to a subsequent event in the past.

Remember that so called state verbs cannot be used in continuous tense forms.

Future Simple Tense

WILL: used to express pure futurity (i.e. without any element of willpower).

WILL: used when making predictions based upon one's knowledge of a person's character.

WILL: used for plain, informal requests, as well as orders given to subordinates.

Stressed WILL: used with stress to express irritation over the bad habits of others.

WILL/SHALL: used for spontaneous offers or plans made at the time of speaking, or to agree to something.

WILL/SHALL: used for promises.

SHALL: sometimes used instead of WILL in the first person singular and plural in more formal style to express futurity, especially in cases where the element of willpower is involved.

SHALL: used when seeking others' approval of offers or suggestions.

'I **was washing** the car while my wife **was cleaning** the house.'

'I ~~was knowing~~ **knew** Samantha very well'.

'I **had just prepared** a candlelight dinner for two when the Jehovah's Witnesses **called**.'

'Jacky, who **was** quite breathless, **had climbed** ten flights of stairs.'

'Mandy **had studied** Finnish for 3 years before she **emigrated** to Finland.'

'When the artist ~~had~~ finally **appeared** on stage, everyone **applauded**'.

'The boss **had hoped** to slip off to the golf course for the rest of the afternoon but head office **wanted** to speak to him about disappointing sales figures.'

'When the chemistry teacher **returned** to the lab, he **sniffed** and **stopped** smiling. Someone **had been making** a stink bomb.'

'Police **arrested** the chief executive whose company **had been cooking** the books.'

'In 1994 I **had** already ~~been knowing~~ **known** Samantha for 10 years'.

'The sun **will** rise tomorrow morning.'

'Linda **will** help you, I'm sure.'

'Darling, **will** you post this letter for me?'

'Sally, **will** you show Mr. Anderson to the accounts department, please?'

'My husband **will** always invite his friends round for a drink just as I'm putting the kids to bed!'

'If you do decide to buy this car model, sir, we **ll** include a satellite navigation system.'

'Okay, I **ll** ask my bank manager for a loan.'

'Don't worry, I **won't/shan't** tell a soul!'

'I **shall (will)** be late this evening.'

'We **shan't (won't)** go that nightclub anymore; the prices are exorbitant.'

'We **shall** overcome!'

'I **shall** succeed!'

'**Shall** I buy you a watch for your birthday?'

'**Shall** we all go out to dinner?'

SHALL: used to elicit more information.

GOING TO: used to talk about plans already made before the time of speaking.

GOING TO: used when forecasting what is likely or inevitable because all the signs are there.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS: often used instead of **GOING TO** for self-made plans and voluntary schedules, especially for the not too distant future.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS: *usually* preferred to the **GOING TO** future with **GO** and **COME**.

PRESENT SIMPLE: used for schedules decided by others.

Future Continuous Tense

Used for actions or events forecast to be in progress at or around a particular time in the future.

Used for future events that are the result of previous arrangements or decisions.

The future continuous tense can be used instead of the present continuous with future meaning.

It is also used to make extra polite enquiries about someone's future plans.

Remember that so called state verbs cannot be used in the continuous tense forms.

Future Perfect Tense

Used for activities or events forecast to be **completed** by a particular time in the future.

Used to quantify progress forecast to have been made at a given time in the future.

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

Used for activities forecast still to be **in progress** at some time in the future.

Remember that so called state verbs cannot be used in continuous tense forms.

'Which restaurant **shall** we go to?'

'I'm **going to** buy a new digital camera. My old one doesn't seem to produce sharp enough pictures.'

'Look over there. That crazy driver's lost control. He's **going to** crash!'
'I feel awful after that raw fish. I think I'm **going to** throw up.'

'We're **having** a party on Friday night.'
'She's **leaving** home right after breakfast and **driving** all the way up to Tallahassee in her grandma's old car.'

'He is **going to** ~~go to~~ New York after he leaves Washington.'
'The Smiths are ~~going to come~~ **coming** home from Canada next spring'.

'He **flies** to Cairo on business at noon tomorrow.'

'The kids **will be sleeping** when I get home.'
'Some Japanese schoolboys **will** no doubt still **be donning** 19th century black Prussian military uniforms in a hundred years' time.'

'As you know, I'll **be working** overtime this evening.'
'Nancy **will be staying** at her parents' home over Christmas (she always does).'

'She'll **be leaving** home after breakfast.'

'**Will** you **be needing** your laptop at work today?'
'**Is IBM going to be recruiting** any new personnel in the near future?'

'The museum is well sign-posted, so you **will be** ~~knowing~~ **know** which way to go.'

'No matter what their academic performance, many students at Japan's most prestigious universities **will have found** a job one whole year before they graduate.'

'He smokes 20 a day, so this time next year he **will have** happily **puffed** his way through another 584 meters of cigarette.'

'By the end of 2013 we **will have been flying** in planes for 110 years.'

'Next summer I **will have** ~~been knowing~~ **known** Samantha for 20 years.'