

Tenses

Introduction to Tenses

Tense indicates the **time of the occurrence of an action or an event**. In any sentence, an action or a state of being is denoted by the verb. Hence, tenses are directly related to verbs.

The different states of time are: **Past, Present** and **Future**. Very simply speaking, past is what happened yesterday; present is what happens today; and future is what will happen tomorrow.



Note how at different moments the same event (the test on English tenses) can be situated in the future (when the teacher informs the students about the test), the present (when the test is being conducted) and the past (when the students are discussing the test).

The Simple Tense

Simple Present

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I do it everyday	We do it everyday
Second Person	You do it everyday	You do it everyday
Third Person	He does it everyday	They do it everyday

Simple Past

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I did that yesterday	We did that yesterday
Second Person	You did that yesterday	You did that yesterday
Third Person	He did that yesterday	They did that yesterday

Simple Future

	Singular	Plural
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First Person	I will do that tomorrow	We will do that tomorrow
Second Person	You will do that tomorrow	You will do that tomorrow
Third Person	He will do that tomorrow	They will do that tomorrow

In simple words:

The simple present tense indicates **an action or event that takes place regularly, without fail.**

The simple past tense indicates **an action or event that took place at some moment in the past.**

The simple future tense indicates **an action or event that will take place at some moment in the future.**



In the simple present and simple future tenses, the root form of a verb is used.

What is the root form of a verb?

The **Root Form or Base Form** is the simplest form of a verb.

For example:

Sing, Dance, Play, Break, Kick, Sleep, Eat

They **sing** on the roof every afternoon. (**Simple Present**)

I **will sleep** early today. (**Simple Future**)

In the simple past tense, the past form of a verb is used.

What is the past form of a verb?

The **Past Form** is the form of a verb in the simple past tense.

For example:

Sang, Danced, Played, Broke, Kicked, Slept, Ate

They **ate** lots of *gulab jamuns* yesterday. (**Simple Past**)

Using the Simple Tense

To describe everyday actions or events/habits

<i>Simple Present</i>	Pritam takes the 6:00 P.M. local train everyday on his way back home.
	Urvashi drinks coffee in the evenings.

To describe facts/general truths

<i>Simple Present</i>	The sun rises in the east.
	I am a total failure.
	The boiling point of water is 100°C.
	The tea leaves from my estate are popular all over the country.

To describe actions or events which follow a routine

<i>Simple Present</i>	The plane takes off at four in the morning.
	When do the winter holidays end?

To describe regular occurrences/habits in the past

(Used to + Base form of verb)	I used to dislike Trigonometry at school.
	She used to stay with her aunt when she was in Mumbai.
	Punnoos used to waste a lot of time in front of the post-office.

To describe regular occurrences/habits in the past

<i>Simple Past</i>	He studied under the great professor Topchi.
	He always skipped his swimming lessons.

To describe actions or events in the past

<i>Simple Past</i>	The organisation went bankrupt.
	I did not see the movie last evening.
	Neil left for London yesterday afternoon.

To describe uncertain/likely future actions or events

<i>Simple Future</i>	I think he will win the game hands down.
	They feel she will confess in court tomorrow.
	I will be eighteen this Friday.

The Continuous Tense

Present Continuous

	Singular	Plural
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First Person	I <i>am doing</i> it right now	We <i>are doing</i> it right now
Second Person	You <i>are doing</i> it right now	You <i>are doing</i> it right now
Third Person	He <i>is doing</i> it right now	They <i>are doing</i> it right now

Past Continuous

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>was doing</i> it at that time	We <i>were doing</i> it at that time
Second Person	You <i>were doing</i> it at that time	You <i>were doing</i> it at that time
Third Person	He <i>was doing</i> it at that time	They <i>were doing</i> it at that time

Future Continuous

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>will be doing</i> it at that time	We <i>will be doing</i> it at that time
Second Person	You <i>will be doing</i> it at that time	You <i>will be doing</i> it at that time

Third Person	He <i>will be doing</i> it at that time	They <i>will be doing</i> it at that time
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So what happens in the continuous form? You can say that:

The present continuous tense indicates **an action or event that is taking place at the moment**.

The past continuous tense indicates **an action or event that was taking place at some moment in the past**.

The future continuous tense indicates **an action or event that will be taking place at some moment in the future**.



In the present continuous, past continuous and future continuous tenses, the present participle form of a verb is used.

What is the present participle form of a verb?

The **Present Participle Form** is the base form of a verb joined with '**-ing**'.

For example:

Singing, Dancing, Playing, Breaking, Kicking, Sleeping, Eating

They **are singing** on the roof. (**Present Continuous**)

He **was dancing** in his room. (**Past Continuous**)

You **will be breaking** the rules by doing this. (**Future Continuous**)

Using the Continuous Tense

To describe everyday actions or events/habits

<i>Present Continuous</i>	The tiger is always growling at the tigress.
	I am always trying to escape the real issue.
	The boys are always getting into one problem or the other.

To describe actions or events going on in the present

<i>Present Continuous</i>	He is reading the autobiography of his grandfather.
	I am trying to open the lock.
	Shhh! Keep quiet! They are sleeping .

To describe certain future actions or events

(Going to + Base form of verb)	It is going to rain in the evening.
	I am going to eat ice-cream after lunch.
	Raj and Tina are going to be absent from the meeting.

To describe actions or events going on in the past

Past Continuous	The girls were laughing all the way back home.
	I was talking to him about the robbery.

To describe actions or events going on in the future

Future Continuous	The maid will be coming tomorrow to collect her wages.
	They will be meeting each other after a gap of ten long years.

Present and Past Perfect Tenses, and Their Uses

Present Perfect Simple

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I have done this recently	We have done this recently
Second Person	You have done this recently	You have done this recently
Third Person	He has done this recently	They have done this recently

Past Perfect Simple

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I had done this before that happened	We had done this before that happened
Second Person	You had done this before that happened	You had done this before that happened
Third Person	He had done this before that happened	They had done this before that happened

The perfect simple form can be summarised as follows:

The present perfect simple tense indicates **an action or event that has taken place in an indefinite or recent past.**

The past perfect simple tense indicates **an action or event that had taken place at some moment in the past, before another action or event.**



In the present and past perfect tenses, the past participle form of a verb is used.

What is the past participle form of a verb?

The **Past Participle Form** usually ends in '-ed', '-d', '-t', '-en' or '-n'. It is the form of a verb in the perfect tense.

For example:

Sung, Danced, Played, Broken, Kicked, Slept, Eaten

They **have eaten** their lunch. (**Present Perfect**)

She **had slept** before she went out to play. (**Past Perfect**)

Using the Perfect Simple Tense

To describe actions or events completed in the recent past

<i>Present Perfect Simple</i>	I have finished the portrait.
	He has made sure that no one would suffer in his absence.
	They have been friends since high school.
	We have gained a moral victory.

To describe an action or an event completed in the past before another action or event in the past

<i>Past Perfect Simple</i>	They had met last on the 2nd of October, 1987.
	The boys had left by the time I reached the playground.