

Tenses

Introduction to Tenses

The word 'tense' is derived from the Latin word '*tempus*'. It 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 Twelve Tenses

In English grammar, past, present and future have been further divided as follows:

PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE
Simple	Simple	Simple
Continuous/Progressive	Continuous/Progressive	Continuous/Progressive
Perfect Simple	Perfect Simple	Perfect Simple
Perfect Continuous/Perfect Progressive	Perfect Continuous/Perfect Progressive	Perfect Continuous/Perfect Progressive

As mentioned before, tenses are directly related to verbs. In each of the above tabulated tense forms, a verb is used in its base form, past form, present participle form or past participle form. The following table lists the different forms of a verb according to the twelve tenses. The verb 'do' has been used for this purpose.

	PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE
Simple	<i>do / does</i> (Base form)	<i>did</i> (Past form)	<i>will do</i> (Base form)
Continuous/ Progressive	<i>am doing / is doing / are doing</i> (Present participle)	<i>was doing / were doing</i> (Present participle)	<i>will be doing</i> (Present participle)

Perfect Simple	<i>have done / has done</i> (Past participle)	<i>had done</i> (Past participle)	<i>will have done</i> (Past participle)
Perfect Continuous/ Perfect Progressive	<i>have been doing/has been doing</i> (Present participle)	<i>had been doing</i> (Present participle)	<i>will have been doing</i> (Present participle)

Conjugation of the verb 'DO' in the Simple Tense

Simple Present

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>do</i> it everyday	We <i>do</i> it everyday
Second Person	You <i>do</i> it everyday	You <i>do</i> it everyday
Third Person	He <i>does</i> it everyday	They <i>do</i> it everyday

Simple Past

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>did</i> that yesterday	We <i>did</i> that yesterday

Second Person	You <i>did</i> that yesterday	You <i>did</i> that yesterday
Third Person	He <i>did</i> that yesterday	They <i>did</i> that yesterday

Simple Future

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>will do</i> that tomorrow	We <i>will do</i> that tomorrow
Second Person	You <i>will do</i> that tomorrow	You <i>will do</i> that tomorrow
Third Person	He <i>will do</i> that tomorrow	They <i>will do</i> 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**.



Usage of 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

Simple Present	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

Simple Past	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.

Conjugation of the verb 'DO' in the Continuous Tense

Present Continuous

	Singular	Plural
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

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**.



Usage of 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.
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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

<i>Past Continuous</i>	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

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

Conjugation of the verb 'DO' in the Perfect Tense

Present Perfect Simple

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

Past Perfect Simple

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>had done</i> this before that happened	We <i>had done</i> this before that happened

Second Person	You <i>had done</i> this before that happened	You <i>had done</i> this before that happened
Third Person	He <i>had done</i> this before that happened	They <i>had done</i> this before that happened

Future Perfect Simple

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>will have done</i> this before that happens	We <i>will have done</i> this before that happens
Second Person	You <i>will have done</i> this before that happens	You <i>will have done</i> this before that happens
Third Person	He <i>will have done</i> this before that happens	They <i>will have done</i> this before that happens

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.**

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



Usage of the Perfect 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 2 nd of October, 1987.
	The boys had left by the time I reached the playground.

To describe an action or an event in the future preceding another action or event in the future

<i>Future Perfect Simple</i>	I will have left for the airport by the time you come from the meeting.
	They will have completed twenty-five years of their married life by the sixth of this month.

Conjugation of the verb 'DO' in the Perfect Continuous Tense

Present Perfect Continuous

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>have been doing</i> it for a long while	We <i>have been doing</i> it for a long while
Second Person	You <i>have been doing</i> it for a long while	You <i>have been doing</i> it for a long while
Third Person	He <i>has been doing</i> it for a long while	They <i>have been doing</i> it for a long while

Past Perfect Continuous

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>had been doing</i> it till that time	We <i>had been doing</i> it till that time
Second Person	You <i>had been doing</i> it till that time	You <i>had been doing</i> it till that time
Third Person	He <i>had been doing</i> it till that time	They <i>had been doing</i> it till that time

Future Perfect Continuous

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I <i>will have been doing</i> it by that time	We <i>will have been doing</i> it by that time
Second Person	You <i>will have been doing</i> it by that time	You <i>will have been doing</i> it by that time
Third Person	He <i>will have been doing</i> it by that time	They <i>will have been doing</i> it by that time

The perfect continuous form can be summarised as follows:

The present perfect continuous tense indicates **an action or event that began at a certain moment in the past and is still continuing into the present.**

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

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



Usage of the Perfect Continuous Tense

To describe past actions or events continuing into the present

<i>Present Perfect Continuous</i>	They have been looking for him all over the place.
	She has been living with the Gandhis for over four months.

To describe an action or an event going on in the past until another action or event in the past

	When the police came, he had been hiding in the closet.
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<i>Past Perfect Continuous</i>	They had been looking for a house when the news came of a recently vacated apartment.
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To describe an action or an event going on in the future until another action or event in the future

<i>Future Perfect Continuous</i>	I will have been working at this place for ten years by the end of this year.
(**Rarely used**)	She will have been dancing non-stop for more than six hours by the time the show gets over.