

Everything you
ever wanted to
know about
English tenses...

...but didn't have time to find out for yourself

Pete Stonelake

Everything about English Verbs

Before you begin the verb tense lessons, it is extremely important to understand that NOT all English verbs are the same. English verbs are divided into three groups:

Group I Continuous Verbs

The first group, called "Continuous Verbs", contains most English verbs. These verbs are usually physical actions which you can see somebody doing. These verbs can be used in all tenses.

Continuous Verbs

to run, to walk, to eat, to fly, to go, to say, to touch etc.

Examples:

I eat dinner every day. **Correct**

I am eating dinner now. **Correct**

Group II Non-continuous Verbs

The second group, called "Non-continuous Verbs", is smaller. These verbs are usually things you cannot see somebody doing. These verbs are rarely used in "continuous" tenses. They include:

Abstract Verbs

to be, to want, to cost, to seem, to need, to care, to contain, to owe, to exist...

Possession Verbs

to possess, to own, to belong...

Emotion Verbs

to like, to love, to hate, to dislike, to fear, to envy, to mind...

Examples:

He is here now. **Correct**

He is being here now. **Not Correct**

He wants a drink now. **Correct**

He is wanting a drink now. **Not Correct**

Group III Mixed Verbs

The third group, called "Mixed Verbs", is the smallest group. These verbs have more than one meaning. Some meanings behave like "Non-continuous Verbs", while other meanings behave like "Continuous Verbs."

Mixed Verbs

to have, to appear, to see, to hear, to feel, to weigh, to look ...

List of Mixed Verbs with Examples and Definitions:

to appear:

Donna appears confused. **Non-continuous Verb**

(Donna seems confused.)

My favourite singer is appearing at the jazz club tonight. **Continuous Verb**
(My favourite singer is giving a performance at the jazz club tonight.)

to have:

I have a dollar now. **Non-continuous Verb**
(I possess a dollar.)

I am having fun now. **Continuous Verb**
(I am experiencing fun now.)

to hear:

She hears the music. **Non-continuous Verb**
(She hears the music with her ears.)

She is hearing voices. **Continuous Verb**
(To hear something others cannot hear. She is hearing voices in her mind.)

to miss:

John misses Sally. **Non-continuous Verb**
(He is sad because she is not there.)

Debbie is missing her favourite TV program. **Continuous Verb**
(She is not there to see her favourite program.)

to see:

I see her. **Non-continuous Verb**
(I see her with my eyes.)

I am seeing the doctor. **Continuous Verb**
(To visit or consult with a doctor, dentist, or lawyer.)

I am seeing her. **Continuous Verb**
(I am having a relationship with her.)

He is seeing ghosts at night. **Continuous Verb**
(To see something others cannot see. For example ghosts, aura, a vision of the future etc.)

to smell:

The coffee smells good. **Non-continuous Verb**
(The coffee has a good smell.)

I am smelling the flowers. **Continuous Verb**
(I am sniffing the flowers.)

to taste:

The coffee tastes good. **Non-continuous Verb**
(The coffee has a good taste.)

I am tasting the cake. **Continuous Verb**
(I am trying the cake to see what it tastes like.)

to think:

He thinks the test is easy. **Non-continuous Verb**
(He considers the test to be easy.)

She is thinking about the question. **Continuous Verb**
(She is pondering the question, going over it in her mind.)

to weigh:

The table weighs a lot. **Non-continuous Verb**
(The table has a great weight.)

She is weighing herself. **Continuous Verb**
(She is determining her weight.)

Some Verbs Can Be Especially Confusing:

to have:

I have a dollar now. **Non-continuous Verb**
(I possess a dollar.)

I am having fun now. **Continuous Verb**
(I am experiencing fun now.)

to hear:

She hears the music. **Non-continuous Verb**
(She hears the music with her ears.)

She is hearing voices. **Continuous Verb**
(To hear something others cannot hear. She is hearing voices in her mind.)

to miss:

John misses Sally. **Non-continuous Verb**
(He is sad because she is not there.)

Debbie is missing her favourite TV program. **Continuous Verb**
(She is not there to see her favourite program.)

to see:

I see her. **Non-continuous Verb**
(I see her with my eyes.)

I am seeing the doctor. **Continuous Verb**
(To visit or consult with a doctor, dentist, or lawyer.)

I am seeing her. **Continuous Verb**
(I am having a relationship with her.)

He is seeing ghosts at night. **Continuous Verb**
(To see something others cannot see. For example ghosts, aura, a vision of the future etc.)

to smell:

The coffee smells good. **Non-continuous Verb**
(The coffee has a good smell.)

I am smelling the flowers. **Continuous Verb**
(I am sniffing the flowers.)

to taste:

The coffee tastes good. **Non-continuous Verb**
(The coffee has a good taste.)

I am tasting the cake. **Continuous Verb**
(I am trying the cake to see what it tastes like.)

to think:

He thinks the test is easy. **Non-continuous Verb**
(He considers the test to be easy.)

She is thinking about the question. **Continuous Verb**
(She is pondering the question, going over it in her mind.)

to weigh:

The table weighs a lot. **Non-continuous Verb**
(The table has a great weight.)

She is weighing herself. **Continuous Verb**
(She is determining her weight.)

Some Verbs Can Be Especially Confusing:

to be:

Joe **is** American. **Non-continuous Verb**
 (Joe is an American citizen.)
 Joe **is being** very American. **Continuous Verb**
 (Joe is behaving like a stereotypical American.)
 Joe **is being** very rude. **Continuous Verb**
 (Joe is behaving very rudely. Usually he is not rude.)
 Joe **is being** very formal. **Continuous Verb**
 (Joe is behaving very formally. Usually he is not formal.)

NOTICE: Only rarely is "to be" used in a continuous form. This is most commonly done when a person is temporarily behaving badly or stereotypically. It can also be used when someone's behaviour is noticeably different.

to feel:

The massage **feels** great. **Non-continuous Verb**
 (The massage has a pleasing feeling.)
 I **don't feel** well today. **Continuous or Non-continuous Verb**
 I **am not feeling** well today.
 (I am a little sick.)

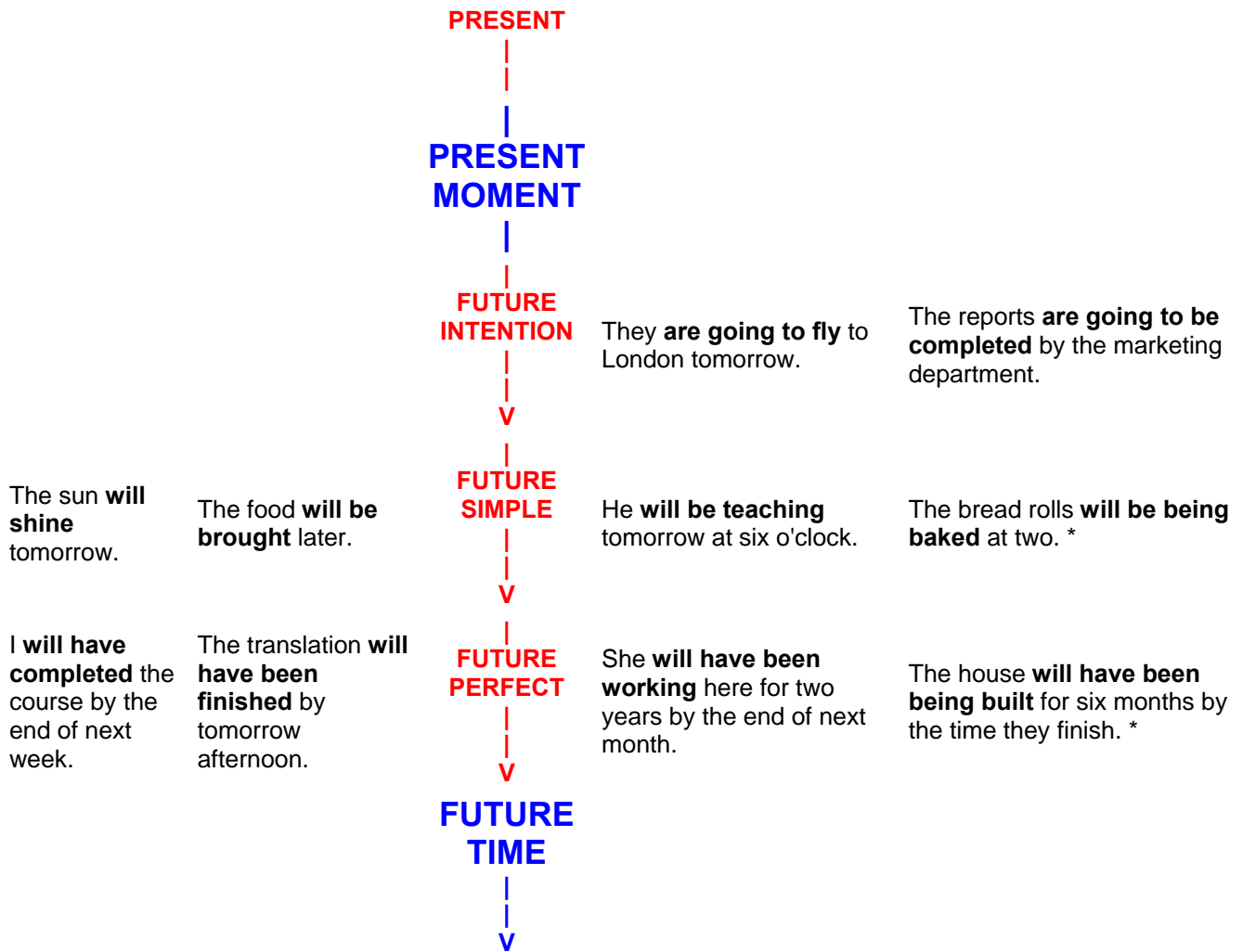
NOTICE: Feel is very flexible and there is no difference in meaning in the two sentences above.)

ENGLISH TENSES TIMELINE CHART

This timeline tenses chart provides a handy reference sheet to English tenses and their relationship to one another and the past, present and future. Conjugated verbs are highlighted in bold. Tenses which are rarely used in everyday conversation are marked by an asterisk (*).

TIMELINE

SIMPLE ACTIVE	SIMPLE PASSIVE		(PROGRESSIVE) CONTINUOUS ACTIVE	(PROGRESSIVE) CONTINUOUS PASSIVE
		PAST TIME		
		↑		
		↑		
She had already eaten when I arrived.	The painting had been sold twice before it was destroyed.	PAST PERFECT	I had been waiting for four hours when he finally arrived.	The house had been being painted for over a month before they began to decorate the interior. *
		↑		
I bought a new car last week.	The book was written in 1876 by Mark Garland.	PAST	I was watching TV when she arrived.	The problem was being solved when I arrived late for class.
		↑		
She has lived in Somerset for many years.	The company has been managed by Neil Haines for the last two years.	PRESENT PERFECT	She has been working at Countdown for six months.	The students have been being taught for the last four hours. *
		↑		
He works five days a week.	Those shoes are made in Poland.	↑	I am working at the moment.	The work is being done by Radek.



Simple Present

FORM Simple Present

EXAMPLE: [to run]

I run, you run, he runs, she runs, it runs, we run, they run



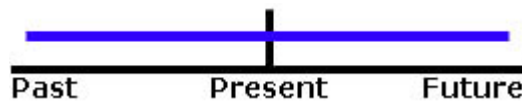
Use the Simple Present to express the idea that an action is repeated or usual. The action can be a habit, a hobby, a daily event, a scheduled event or something that often happens. It can also be something a person often forgets or usually does not do.

EXAMPLES:

- I play tennis.
- She does not play tennis.
- The train leaves every morning at 8 am.
- The train does not leave at 9am.
- She always forgets her purse.
- He never forgets his wallet.

Every twelve months, the Earth circles the sun.
The sun does not circle the Earth.

USE 2 Facts or Generalizations



The Simple Present can also indicate the speaker believes that a fact was true before, is true now, and will be true in the future. It is not important if the speaker is correct about the fact. It is also used to make generalizations about people or things.

EXAMPLES:

- Cats like milk.
 - Birds do not like milk.
 - California is in America.
 - California is not in the United Kingdom.
 - Windows are made of glass.
 - Windows are not made of wood.
 - New York is a small city. (It is not important that this fact is untrue.)
-

USE 3 Now (Non-Continuous Verbs)



Sometimes speakers use the Simple Present to express the idea that an action is happening or is not happening now. This can only be done with Non-continuous Verbs and certain Mixed Verbs.

EXAMPLES:

- I am here now.
 - She is not here now.
 - He needs help right now.
 - He does not need help now.
 - He has a car.
-

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Simple Present

EXAMPLES:

- Once a week, Tom cleans the car. **ACTIVE**
 - Once a week, the car is cleaned by Tom. **PASSIVE**
-

Present Continuous

FORM Present Continuous

[AM / IS / ARE] + [VERB+ing]

EXAMPLES:

- I am watching TV.
- He is quickly learning the language.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Present Continuous (is learning), adverbs often come between the first part and the second part (is quickly learning).



Use the Present Continuous with [Continuous Verbs](#) to express the idea that something is happening now, at this very moment. It can also be used to show that something is not happening now.

EXAMPLES:

- You [are learning](#) English now.
- You [are not swimming](#) now.
- I [am sitting](#).
- I [am not standing](#).
- They [are reading](#) their books.
- They [are not watching](#) television.
- What [are you doing](#)?
- Why [aren't you doing](#) your homework?



In English, *now* can mean "this second," "today," "this month," "this year," "this century" and so on. Sometimes we use the Present Continuous to say that we are in the process of doing a longer action which is in progress; however, we might not be doing it at this exact second.

EXAMPLES: (All of these sentences can be said while eating dinner in a restaurant.)

- I [am studying](#) to become a doctor.
- I [am not studying](#) to become a dentist.
- I [am reading](#) the book *Tom Sawyer*.
- I [am not reading](#) any books right now.
- [Are you working](#) on any special projects at work?
- [Aren't you teaching](#) at the University now?



Sometimes, speakers use the Present Continuous to indicate that something will or will not happen in the near future.

EXAMPLES:

- I [am meeting](#) some friends after work.
- I [am not going](#) to the party tonight.
- [Is he visiting](#) his parents next weekend.
- [Isn't he coming](#) with us tonight.



The Present Continuous with words such as "always" or "constantly" expresses the idea that something irritating or shocking often happens. Notice that the meaning is like [Simple Present](#) but with negative emotion. Remember to put the words "always" or "constantly" between "be" and "verb+ing."

EXAMPLES:

She is always coming to class late.
He is constantly talking. I wish he would shut up.
I don't like them because they are always complaining.

IMPORTANT Non-Continuous Verbs/ Mixed Verbs

It is important to remember that [Non-Continuous Verbs](#) cannot be used in any "continuous" tenses. Also, certain "non-continuous" meanings for [Mixed Verbs](#) cannot be used in "continuous" tenses. To express the idea of "happening now", you must use [Simple Present USE 3](#).

EXAMPLES:

She is loving chocolate. **Not Correct**
She loves chocolate. **Correct**

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Present Continuous

EXAMPLES:

Right now, Tom is writing the letter. **ACTIVE**
Right now, the letter is being written by Tom. **PASSIVE**

Simple Past

FORM Simple Past

[VERB+ed]

EXAMPLES:

I visited my friends.
I often visited my friends.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with only one part such as Simple Past (visited), adverbs usually come before the verb (often visited). Please remember this is different from verbs with more than one part such as Present Continuous.

USE 1 Completed Action in the Past



Use the Simple Past to express the idea that an action started and finished at a specific time in the past. Sometimes the speaker may not actually mention the specific time, but they do have one specific time in mind.

EXAMPLES:

I saw a movie yesterday.
 I didn't see a movie yesterday.
 Last year, I travelled to Japan.
 Last year, I didn't travel to Japan.
 She washed her car.
 She didn't wash her car.



USE 2 A Series of Completed Actions

We use the Simple Past to list a series of completed actions in the past. These actions happen 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th...

EXAMPLES:

I finished work, walked to the beach, and found a nice place to swim.
 He arrived from the airport at 8:00, checked into the hotel at 9:00, and met the others at 10:00.



USE 3 Single Duration

The Simple Past can be used with a duration which starts and stops in the past. A duration is a long action often used with expressions like "for two years," "for five minutes," "all day" or "all year."

EXAMPLES:

I lived in Brazil for two years.
 Shauna studied Japanese for five years.
 They sat at the beach all day.
 We talked on the phone for thirty minutes.
 How long did you wait for them?
 We waited for one hour.



USE 4 Habit in the Past

The Simple Past can also be used to describe a habit which stopped in the past. It can have the same meaning as "used to". To make it clear that we are talking about a habit we often use expressions such as "always," "often," "usually," "never," "...when I was a child" or "...when I was younger" in the sentence.

EXAMPLES:

I studied French when I was a child.
 He played the violin.
 She worked at the movie theatre after school.
 They never went to school, they always skipped.

IMPORTANT "When clauses" happen first

Clauses are groups of words which have meaning but are not complete sentences. Some clauses begin with the word *when* such as "When I dropped my pen..." or "When class began..." These clauses are called "when clauses" and they are very important. The examples below contain "when clauses."

EXAMPLES:

When I paid her one dollar, she answered my question.
She answered my question, when I paid her one dollar.

"When clauses" are important because they always happen first when both clauses are in the Simple Past. Both of the examples above mean the same thing. First, I paid her one dollar, and then, she answered my question. However, the example below has a different meaning. First, she answered my question, and then, I paid her a dollar.

EXAMPLE:

I paid her a dollar, when she answered my question.

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Simple Past

EXAMPLES:

Tom repaired the car. **ACTIVE**
The car was repaired by Tom. **PASSIVE**

Past Continuous

FORM Past Continuous

[WAS / WERE] + [VERB+ing]

EXAMPLES:

I was studying when she called.
I was carefully picking up the snake when it bit me.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Past Continuous (was picking), adverbs often come between the first part and the second part (was carefully picking).

IMPORTANT

Clauses are groups of words which have meaning but are not complete sentences. Some clauses begin with the word *when* such as "...when she called" or "...when it bit me." Clauses with the Past Continuous usually start with *while*. *While* expresses the idea "during the time." Study the examples below. They have the same meaning.

EXAMPLES:

I was studying when she called.
While I was studying, she called.

USE 1 Interrupted Action in the Past



Use the Past Continuous to indicate that a longer action in the past was interrupted. The interruption is usually an action in the Simple Past. Remember this can be a real interruption or just an interruption in time.

EXAMPLES:

I was watching TV when she called.
When the phone rang, she was writing a letter.
While we were having a picnic, it started to rain.
Sally was working when Joe had the car accident.
While John was sleeping last night, someone stole his car.



In USE 1, described above, the Past Continuous is interrupted by an action in the Simple Past. However, you can also use a specific time as an interruption.

EXAMPLES:

Last night at 6 p.m., I was eating dinner.
At midnight, we were still driving through the desert.

IMPORTANT

In the Simple Past a specific time is used to show when an action began or finished. In the Past Continuous a specific time only interrupts the action.

EXAMPLES:

Last night at 6 p.m., I ate dinner.
(I started eating at 6 p.m.)

Last night at 6 p.m., I was eating dinner.
(I started earlier and at 6 p.m. I was in the process of eating dinner.)



When you use the Past Continuous with two actions in the same sentence, it expresses the idea that both actions were happening at the same time. The actions are parallel.

EXAMPLES:

I was studying while he was making dinner.
While Ellen was reading, Tim was watching television.
They were eating dinner, discussing their plans and having a good time.

USE 4 Atmosphere

In English we often use a series of Parallel Actions to describe atmosphere in the past.

EXAMPLE:

When I walked into the office, several people were busily typing, some were talking on the phones, the boss was yelling directions, and customers were waiting to be helped. One customer was yelling at a secretary and waving his hands. Others were complaining to each other about the bad service.

XXXXXX

USE 5 Repetition and Irritation with "Always"



The Past Continuous with words such as *always* or *constantly* expresses the idea that something irritating or shocking often happened in the past. The concept is very similar to the expression *used to* but with negative emotion. Remember to put the words *always* or *constantly* between "be" and "verb+ing."

EXAMPLES:

She was always coming to class late.
He was constantly talking. He annoyed everyone.
I didn't like them because they were always complaining.

IMPORTANT Non-Continuous Verbs/ Mixed Verbs

It is important to remember that Non-Continuous Verbs cannot be used in any "continuous" tenses. Also, certain "non-continuous" meanings for Mixed Verbs cannot be used in "continuous" tenses. To express the idea of Past Continuous with these verbs, you must use Simple Past.

EXAMPLES:

Jane was being at my house when you arrived. **Not Correct**
Jane was at my house when you arrived. **Correct**

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Past Continuous

EXAMPLES:

The salesman was helping the customer when the thief came into the store. **ACTIVE**
The customer was being helped by the salesman when the thief came into the store. **PASSIVE**

Used to

FORM Used to

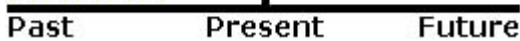
[USED TO] + [verb]

EXAMPLES:

I used to go to the beach everyday.

XXXXXX

USE 1 Habit in the Past



"Used to" expresses the idea that something was an old habit that stopped in the past. It says that something was often repeated in the past, but it is not usually done now.

EXAMPLES:

Jerry used to study English.
Sam and Mary used to go to Mexico in the summer.
I used to start work at 9 o'clock.
Christine used to eat meat, but now she is a vegetarian.

USE 2 Past Fact



"Used to" can also be used to talk about past facts or generalizations which are no longer true.

EXAMPLES:

I used to live in Paris.

Sarah used to be fat, but now she is thin.

George used to be the best student in class, but now Leena is the best.

Oranges used to cost very little in Florida, but now they are quite expensive.

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Used to

EXAMPLES:

Jerry used to pay the bills. **ACTIVE**

The bills used to be paid by Jerry. **PASSIVE**

Would Always

FORM Would Always

[WOULD ALWAYS] + [verb]

EXAMPLE:

I would always take my surf board to the beach with me.

USE 1 Habit in the Past



Like "Used to" and Simple Past, "Would Always" expresses the idea that something was an old habit which stopped in the past. It says that something was often repeated in the past, but it is not usually done now. This form suggests that someone willingly acted that way and often expresses annoyance or amusement at the habit. It can also suggest the habit was extreme.

EXAMPLES:

She would always send me strange birthday gifts.

Sam and Mary would always choose the most exotic vacation destinations.

Sally would always arrive early.

Christine would always come late to the meetings

IMPORTANT "Would Always" is Different

"Would Always" is not exactly the same as "Used to" or the Simple Past. "Would Always" cannot be used to talk about past facts or generalizations. It can only be used for repeated actions.

EXAMPLES:

Sarah was shy, but now she is very outgoing. **CORRECT**
Sarah used to be shy, but now she is very outgoing. **CORRECT**
Sarah would always be shy, but now she is very outgoing. **NOT CORRECT**

IMPORTANT Other Forms Are Possible

This type of repetition in the past is usually expressed by "Would Always"; however, other forms are also possible. English speakers often use "would constantly," "would forever" or simply "would." Although the last form "would" is correct, it is not suggested because it can easily be confused with other verb forms such as the Conditional or [Future in the Past](#). "Would never" can also be used to express the concept that someone always refused to do something in the past.

EXAMPLES:

Jerry would always bring his younger brother to the parties. **CORRECT**
Jerry would constantly bring his younger brother to the parties. **CORRECT**
Jerry would bring his younger brother to the parties. **CORRECT**
Jerry would never bring his younger brother to the parties. **CORRECT**
(Opposite meaning = Jerry refused to bring his younger brother with him to the parties.)

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Would Always

EXAMPLES:

Jerry would always pay the bills. **ACTIVE**
The bills would always be paid by Jerry. **PASSIVE**

Present Perfect

FORM Present Perfect

[HAS / HAVE] + [past participle]

EXAMPLES:

I have seen that movie many times.
I have never seen that movie.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Present Perfect (have seen), adverbs usually come between the first part and the second part (have never seen).

USE 1 Unspecified Time Before Now



We use the Present Perfect to say that an action happened at an unspecified time before now. The exact time is not important. You CANNOT use the Present Perfect with time expressions such as "yesterday," "one year ago," "last week," "when I was a child," "when I lived in Japan," "at that moment," "that day" or "one day." We CAN use the Present Perfect with expressions like "ever," "never," "once," "many times," "several times," "before," "so far," "already" and "yet."

EXAMPLES:

I have seen that movie twenty times.

I think I have met him once before.
There have been many earthquakes in California.
Has there ever been a war in the United States?
Yes, there has been a war in the United States.
People have travelled to the moon.

IMPORTANT How do you actually use the Present Perfect?

The concept of "unspecified time" can be very confusing to English learners. It is best to associate Present Perfect with the following topics:

TOPIC 1 Experience

You can use the Present Perfect to describe your experience. It is like saying, "I have the experience of..." You can also use this tense to say that you have never had a certain experience. The Present Perfect is NOT used to describe a specific event.

EXAMPLES:

I have been to France.

(This sentence means that you have the experience of being to France. Maybe you have been once, or several times.)

I have been to France three times.

(You can add the number of times at the end of the sentence.)

I have never been to France.

(This sentence means that you have not had the experience of going to France.)

I think I have seen that movie before.

He has never travelled by train.

Joan has studied two foreign languages.

Have you ever met him?

No, I have not met him.

TOPIC 2 Change Over Time

We often use the Present Perfect to talk about change that has happened over a period of time.

EXAMPLES:

You have grown since the last time I saw you.

The government has become more interested in arts education.

Japanese has become one of the most popular courses at the university since the Asian studies program was established.

My English has really improved since I moved to Australia.

TOPIC 3 Accomplishments

We often use the Present Perfect to list the accomplishments of individuals and humanity. You cannot mention a specific time.

EXAMPLES:

Man has walked on the moon.

Our son has learned how to read.

Doctors have cured many deadly diseases.

Scientists have split the atom.

TOPIC 4 An Uncompleted Action You Are Expecting

We often use the Present Perfect to say that an action which we expected has not happened. Using the Present Perfect suggests that we are still waiting for the action.

EXAMPLES:

James has not finished his homework yet.
Susan hasn't mastered Japanese, but she can communicate.
Bill has still not arrived.
The rain hasn't stopped.

TOPIC 5 Multiple Actions at Different Times

We also use the Present Perfect to talk about several different actions which occurred in the past at different times. Present Perfect suggests the process is not complete and more actions are possible.

EXAMPLES:

The army has attacked that city five times.
I have had four quizzes and five tests so far this semester.
We have had many major problems while working on this project.
She has talked to several specialists about her problem, but nobody knows why she is sick.

IMPORTANT

When we use the Present Perfect it means that something happened at some point in our lives before now. Remember, the exact time the action happened is not important.



Sometimes we want to limit the time we are looking in for an experience. Expressions such as "in the last week," "in the last year," "this week," "this month," "so far" and "up to now" can be used to narrow the time we are looking in for an experience.



EXAMPLES:

Have you been to Mexico *in the last year*.
I have seen that movie six times *in the last month*.
They have had three tests *in the last week*.
She graduated from university less three years ago. She has worked for three different companies *so far*.
This week my car has broken down three times.

NOTICE

"Last year" and "in the last year" are very different in meaning. "Last year" means the year before now. "In the last year" means from 365 days ago until now.

EXAMPLES:

I went to Mexico *last year*.
(I went to Mexico in 1998.)
I *have been to Mexico in the last year*.
(I have been to Mexico at least once at some point between 365 days ago and now. We do not know exactly when.)

USE 2 Duration From Past Until Now (Non-continuous Verbs)



With Non-continuous Verbs and some non-continuous uses of Mixed Verbs, we use the Present Perfect to show that something started in the past and has continued up until now. "For five minutes," "for two weeks" and "since Tuesday" are all durations which can be used with the Present Perfect.

EXAMPLES:

- I have had a cold for two weeks.
- She has been in England for six months.
- Mary has loved chocolate since she was a little girl.

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Present Perfect

EXAMPLES:

- Many tourists have visited that castle. **ACTIVE**
- That castle has been visited by many tourists. **PASSIVE**

Past Perfect

FORM Past Perfect

[HAD] + [PAST PARTICIPLE]

Examples:

- I had studied a little English when I came to the U.S.
- They had never met an American until they met John.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Past Perfect (had met), adverbs often come between the first part and the second part (had never met).

USE 1 Completed Action Before Something in Past



The Past Perfect expresses the idea that something occurred before another action in the past. It can also show that something happened before a specific time in the past.

EXAMPLES:

- I had never seen such a beautiful beach before I went to Kauai.
- Had you ever visited the U.S. before your trip in 1992?
- Yes, I had been to the U.S. once before in 1988.

USE 2 Duration Before Something in the Past (Non-continuous Verbs)



With Non-progressive Verbs and some non-progressive uses of Mixed Verbs, we use the Past Perfect to show that something started in the past and continued up until another action in the past.

EXAMPLES:

We had had that car for ten years before it broke down.
By the time Alex finished his studies, he had been in London for over eight years.

IMPORTANT Specific Times with the Past Perfect

Unlike the Present Perfect, it is possible to use specific time words or phrases with the Past Perfect. Although this is possible, it is usually not necessary.



EXAMPLE:

She had visited her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.

If the Past Perfect action did occur at a specific time, the Simple Past can be used instead of the Past Perfect when *before* or *after* is used in the sentence. The words *before* and *after* actually tell you what happens first so the Past Perfect is optional. Both sentences below are correct.

EXAMPLE:

She had visited her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.
She visited her Japanese relatives once in 1993 before she moved in with them in 1996.

HOWEVER

If the Past Perfect action did not happen at a specific time, Past Perfect **MUST** be used at all times. Compare the two sentences below.



EXAMPLE:

She had never seen a bear before she moved to Alaska. **Correct**
She never saw a bear before she moved to Alaska. **Not Correct**

ACTIVE / PASSIVE FORMS Past Perfect

EXAMPLES

George had repaired many cars before he received his mechanics license. **ACTIVE**
Many cars had been repaired by George before he received his mechanics license. **PASSIVE**

Past Perfect Continuous

FORM Past Perfect Continuous

[HAD BEEN] + [VERB+ing]

EXAMPLES:

I had been waiting there for two hours before she finally arrived.
She had only been studying English for two years before she got the job.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Past Perfect Continuous (had been studying), adverbs often come between the first part and the second part (had only been studying).

USE 1 Duration Before Something in the Past



We use the Past Perfect Continuous to show that something started in the past and continued up until another time in the past. "For five minutes" and "for two weeks" are both durations which can be used with the Past Perfect Continuous. Notice that this is related to the Present Perfect Continuous; however, the duration does not continue until now.

EXAMPLES:

They had been talking for over an hour before Tony arrived.
She had been working at that company for three years when it went out of business.
James had been teaching at the University for more than a year before he left for Asia.

USE 2 Cause of Something in the Past

Using the Past Perfect Continuous before another action in the past is a good way to show cause and effect.

EXAMPLES:

Jason was tired because he had been jogging.
Sam gained weight because he had been overeating.

IMPORTANT

If you do not include a duration such as "for five minutes," "for two weeks" or "since Friday", many English speakers choose to use the Past Continuous. There is also a difference in meaning. Compare the examples below.

EXAMPLES:

I was reading when my roommate returned.
The reading will be interrupted.

I had been reading for an hour when my roommate returned.
The reading stopped just before my roommate returned.

ACTIVE / PASSIVE FORMS Past Perfect Continuous

EXAMPLES:

Chef Jones had been preparing the restaurant's fantastic dinners for two years, before he moved to Paris.

ACTIVE

The restaurant's fantastic dinners had been being prepared by Chef Jones for two years before he moved to Paris. **PASSIVE**

NOTE: Passive forms of the Past Perfect Continuous are not common.

Simple Future

The Simple Future has two different forms in English, "will" and "be going to." Although the two forms can sometimes be used interchangeably, they often express two very different meanings. These different meanings might seem too abstract at first, but with time and practice the differences will become clear. Both "will" and "be going to" refer to a specific time in the future.



FORM Will

[WILL] + [VERB]

EXAMPLES:

I will help him later.
I will never help him.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Simple Future (will help), adverbs usually come between the first part and the second part (will never help).

FORM Be Going To

[AM / IS / ARE] + [GOING TO] + [VERB]

EXAMPLES:

He is going to meet Jane tonight.
He is definitely going to meet Jane tonight.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Simple Future (is going to meet), adverbs usually come between the first part and the second part (is definitely going to meet).

IMPORTANT No Future in Time Clauses

Like all future forms, the Simple Future cannot be used in clauses beginning with "when", "while", "before", "after", "by the time", "as soon as", "if" and "unless." In this lesson, all verbs in Time Clauses are *italicized*.

EXAMPLES:

When you arrive tonight, we will go out for dinner. **Correct**
When you will arrive tonight, we will go out for dinner. **Not Correct**

USE 1 "Will" to Express a Voluntary Action

"Will" often suggests that a speaker will do something voluntarily. A voluntary action is one the speaker offers to do for someone else. Often we use "will" to respond to someone else's complaint or request for help.

EXAMPLES:

A: I'm really hungry.
B: I'll make some sandwiches.
A: I'm so tired. I'm about to fall asleep.
B: I'll get you some coffee.
A: The phone is ringing.
B: I'll get it.

USE 2 "Will" to Express a Promise

"Will" is usually used in promises.

EXAMPLES:

I will call you when I arrive.
If I am elected President of the United States, I will make sure everyone has access to inexpensive health insurance.
I promise I will not tell him about the surprise party.

USE 3 "Be going to" to Express a Plan

"Be going to" expresses that something is a plan. It expresses the idea that a person intends to do something in the future.

EXAMPLES:

He is going to spend his vacation in Hawaii.
We are going to meet each other tonight at 6:00 PM.
A: Who is going to make John's birthday cake.
B: Sue is going to make John's birthday cake.

USE 4 "Will" or "Be Going to" to Express a Prediction

Both "will" and "be going to" can express the idea of a general prediction about the future. Predictions are guesses about what might happen in the future. In "prediction" sentences, the subject usually has little control over the future and therefore USES 1-3 do not apply. In the following examples there is no difference in meaning.

EXAMPLES:

The year 2000 will be a very interesting year.
The year 2000 is going to be a very interesting year.

John Smith will be the next President.
John Smith is going to be the next President.

The movie "Zenith" will win several Academy Awards.
The movie "Zenith" is going to win several Academy Awards.

IMPORTANT

In the Simple Future, it is not always clear which USE the speaker has in mind. Often, there is more than one way to interpret a sentence's meaning.

ACTIVE / PASSIVE FORMS Simple Future

EXAMPLES:

John will certainly finish the work by 5:00 PM. **ACTIVE**
The work will certainly be finished by 5:00 PM. **PASSIVE**

Sally is going to make a beautiful dinner tonight. **ACTIVE**
A beautiful dinner is going to be made by Sally tonight. **PASSIVE**

Future Continuous

IMPORTANT No Future in Time Clauses

Like all future forms, the Future Continuous cannot be used in clauses beginning with "when", "while", "before", "after", "by the time", "as soon as", "if" and "unless". In this lesson, all verbs in Time Clauses are *italicized*.

EXAMPLES:

While I *am finishing* my homework, she is going to make dinner. **Correct**
While I *will be finishing* my homework, she is going to make dinner. **Not Correct**

FORM Future Continuous

[WILL BE] + [VERB+ing]

EXAMPLE:

When your plane *arrives* tonight, I will be waiting for you.

[AM / IS / ARE] + [GOING TO] + [VERBing]

EXAMPLE:

When your plane *arrives* tonight, I am going to be waiting for you.

NOTE: It is possible to use either "will" or "going to" to create the Future Continuous with little or no difference in meaning.

USE 1 Interrupted Action in the Future



Use the Future Continuous to indicate that a longer action in the future will be interrupted. The interruption is usually an action in the Simple Future. Remember this can be a real interruption or just an interruption in time.

EXAMPLES:

I will be watching TV when she *arrives* tonight.

I will be waiting for you when your bus *arrives*.

While I *am working*, Steve *will* make dinner. (NOTICE "am working" because of "while.")

I am going to be staying at the Madison Hotel, if anything *happens* and you need to contact me.

He will be studying at the library tonight, so he *will* not see Jennifer when she *arrives*.

NOTE: No future tenses can be used in Time Clauses therefore you must say "While I am working... ." See the warning at the top of this section.

USE 2 Specific Time as an Interruption



In USE 1, described above, the Future Continuous is interrupted by an action in the Simple Future. However, you can also use a specific time as an interruption.

EXAMPLES:

Tonight at 6 p.m., I am going to be eating dinner.
At midnight tonight, we will still be driving through the desert.

IMPORTANT

In the Simple Future a specific time is used to show the time an action will begin. In the Future Continuous, a specific time only interrupts the action.

EXAMPLES:

Tonight at 6 p.m., I am going to eat dinner.
I am going to start eating at 6 p.m.

Tonight at 6 p.m., I am going to be eating dinner.
I am going to start earlier and I will be in the process of eating dinner at 6 p.m. .

USE 3 Parallel Actions



When you use the Future Continuous with two actions in the same sentence, it expresses the idea that both actions will be happening at the same time. These are Parallel Actions.

EXAMPLES:

I am going to be studying while he is making dinner.
While Ellen is reading, Tim will be watching television.
Tonight, they will be eating dinner, discussing their plans, and having a good time.

USE 4 Atmosphere

In English we often use a series of Parallel Actions to describe atmosphere in the future.

EXAMPLE:

When I arrive at the party everybody is going to be celebrating. Some will be dancing. Others are going to be talking. A few people will be eating pizza and several people are going to be drinking beer. They always do the same thing.

IMPORTANT Non-Continuous Verbs / Mixed Verbs

It is important to remember that Non-Continuous Verbs cannot be used in any "continuous" tenses. Also, certain

"non-continuous" meanings for [Mixed Verbs](#) cannot be used in "continuous" tenses. To express the idea of Future Continuous with these verbs, you must use Simple Future.

EXAMPLES:

Jane will be being at my house when you arrive. **Not Correct**

Jane will be at my house when you arrive. **Correct**

ACTIVE / PASSIVE FORMS Future Continuous

EXAMPLES:

At 8:00 PM tonight, John will be washing the dog. **ACTIVE**

At 8:00 PM tonight, the dog will be being washed by John. **PASSIVE**

NOTE: Passive forms of the Future Continuous are not common.

Future in the Past

Like Simple Future, Future in the Past has two different forms in English, "Would" and "Was Going to." Although the two forms can sometimes be used interchangeably, they often express two very different meanings.

FORM Would

[WOULD] + [verb]

EXAMPLES:

I said I would help him later.

I said I would never help him.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Future in the Past (would help), adverbs usually come between the first part and the second part (would never help).

FORM Was Going To

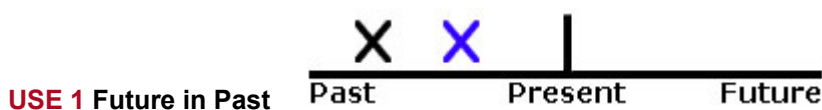
[WAS / WERE] + [GOING TO] + [verb]

EXAMPLES:

I knew John was going to meet Jane after the party.

I knew John was secretly going to meet Jane after the party.

NOTE: When you are using a verb tense with more than one part such as Future in the Past (was going to meet), adverbs often come between the first part and the second part (was secretly going to meet).



Future in the Past, follows the same basic rules as the Simple Future. "Would" follows the same basic rules as "Will," and "Was Going to" follows the same rules as "Be Going to." Future in the Past is used to express the idea that in the past you thought something would happen in the future. It does not matter if you are correct or not.

EXAMPLES:

I told you he was going to come to the party.
I knew Julie would make dinner.
Jane said Sam would bring his sister with him, but he came alone.
I had a feeling that the vacation was going to be a disaster.
He promised he would send a postcard from Egypt.

IMPORTANT No Future in Time Clauses

Like all future forms, Future in the Past cannot be used in clauses beginning with "when," "while," "before," "after," "by the time," "as soon as," "if" and "unless." In this lesson, all verbs in Time Clauses are *italicized*.

EXAMPLES:

I already told Mark that when he arrived, we would go out for dinner. **Correct**
I already told Mark that when he would arrive, we would go out for dinner. **Not Correct**

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Future in the Past

EXAMPLES:

I knew John would certainly finish the work by 5:00 PM. **ACTIVE**
I knew the work would certainly be finished by 5:00 PM. **PASSIVE**
I thought Sally was going to make a beautiful dinner tonight. **ACTIVE**
I thought a beautiful dinner was going to be made by Sally tonight. **PASSIVE**

Future Perfect

IMPORTANT No Future in Time Clauses

Like all future forms, the Future Perfect cannot be used in clauses beginning with "when," "while," "before," "after," "by the time," "as soon as," "if" and "unless". In this lesson, all verbs in Time Clauses are *italicized*.

EXAMPLES:

I am going to see a movie when I have finished my homework. **Correct**
I am going to see a movie when I will have finished my homework. **Not Correct**

FORM Future Perfect

[WILL HAVE] + [PAST PARTICIPLE]

EXAMPLE:

I will have perfected my English by the time I *come* back from the U.S.

[AM / IS / ARE] + [GOING TO HAVE] + [PAST PARTICIPLE]

EXAMPLE:

I am going to have perfected my English by the time I *come* back from the US.

NOTE: It is possible to use either "will" or "going to" to create the Future Perfect with little or no difference in meaning.

USE 1 Completed Action Before Something in the Future



The Future Perfect expresses the idea that something will occur before another action in the future. It can also show that something will happen before a specific time in the future.

EXAMPLES:

By next November, I will have received my promotion.
By the time he *gets* home, she is going to have cleaned the entire house.

USE 2 Duration Before Something in the Future (Non-continuous Verbs)



With Non-continuous Verbs and some non-continuous uses of Mixed Verbs, we use the Future Perfect to show that something will continue up until another action in the future.

EXAMPLES:

I will have been in London for six months by the time I *leave*.
By Monday, Susan is going to have had my book for a week.

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Past Perfect

EXAMPLES:

The Post Office will have returned my package before I can *pick* it up. **ACTIVE**
My package will have been returned by the Post Office before I can *pick* it up. **PASSIVE**

Future Perfect Continuous

IMPORTANT No Future in Time Clauses

Like all future forms, the Future Perfect Continuous cannot be used in clauses beginning with "when," "while," "before," "after," "by the time," "as soon as," "until," "if" and "unless". In this lesson, all verbs in Time Clauses are *italicized*.

EXAMPLES:

I won't tell the student the answer until he has been working on the math problem for more than an hour.

Correct

I won't tell the student the answer until he will have been working on the math problem for more than an hour.

Not Correct

FORM Present Perfect Continuous

[WILL HAVE BEEN] + [VERB+ing]

EXAMPLE:

I will have been waiting for two hours when her plane finally *arrives*.

[AM / IS / ARE] + [GOING TO HAVE BEEN] + [VERB+ing]

EXAMPLE:

I am going to have been waiting for two hours when her plane finally *arrives*.

NOTE: It is possible to use either "will" or "going to" to create the Future Perfect Continuous with little or no difference in meaning.

USE 1 Duration Before Something in the Future



We use the Future Perfect Continuous to show that something will continue up until a particular event or time in the future. "For five minutes," "for two weeks" and "since Friday" are all durations which can be used with the Future Perfect Continuous. Notice that this is related to the Present Perfect Continuous and the Past Perfect Continuous, however the duration stops in the future.

EXAMPLES:

They will have been talking for over an hour by the time Tony *arrives*.

She is going to have been working at that company for three years when it finally *closes*.

James will have been teaching at the University for more than a year by the time he *leaves* for Asia.

USE 2 Cause of Something in the Future

Using the Future Perfect Continuous before another action in the future is a good way to show cause and effect.

EXAMPLES:

Jason will be tired when he *gets* home because he will have been jogging for over an hour.

Claudia's English will be perfect when she *returns* to Germany because she is going to have been studying English in the United States for over two years.

IMPORTANT

If you do not include a duration such as "for five minutes," "for two weeks" or "since Friday", many English speakers choose to use the Future Continuous. There is also a difference in meaning. Compare the examples below.

EXAMPLES:

I will be reading when my roommate *returns*.

The reading will be interrupted.

I will have been reading for an hour when my roommate *returns*.

The reading will stop just before my roommate returns.

ACTIVE / PASSIVE Future Perfect Continuous

EXAMPLES:

The famous artist will have been painting the mural for over six months by the time it *is* finished. **ACTIVE**

The mural will have been being painted by the famous artist for over six months by the time it *is* finished.

PASSIVE

NOTE: Passive forms of the Past Perfect Continuous are not common.

English Grammar - What are signal words?

Signal words help you to put in the correct tense. You can easily put in the correct form of the verb if you know the signal word and which tense it demands.

signal word	tense
every ... (day)	Simple Present
sometimes	
often	
usually	
seldom	
now	
at the moment	
Look!	
Listen!	
last ...	Simple Past
... ago	
yesterday	
in 1990	
yet	Present Perfect
ever	
already	
so far	
up to now	

English Grammar - Irregular verbs (most common)

infinitive	simple past	past participle
to go	went	gone
I go	I went	I have gone
he goes	he went	he has gone
I don't go	I didn't go	I have gone
he doesn't go	he didn't go	he hasn't gone

infinitive	simple past	past participle
be	was/were	been
I am	I was	I have been
he is	he was	he has been
we are	we were	we have been
beat	beat	beaten
become	became	become
begin	began	begun
bet*	bet	bet
blow	blew	blown
break	broke	broken
bring	brought	brought
build	built	built
burn*	burnt	burnt
burst	burst	burst
buy	bought	bought
catch	caught	caught
choose	chose	chosen
come	came	come
cost	cost	cost
cut	cut	cut
deal	dealt	dealt
do	did	done
draw	drew	drawn
dream*	dreamt	dreamt
drink	drank	drunk
drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
feed	fed	fed
feel	felt	felt
fight	fought	fought
find	found	found
fly	flew	flown
forget	forgot	forgotten
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	got
give	gave	given
go	went	gone
grow	grew	grown
hang	hung	hung
have	had	had
hear	heard	heard
hide	hid	hidden
hit	hit	hit
hold	held	held

infinitive	simple past	past participle
hurt	hurt	hurt
keep	kept	kept
know	knew	known
lay	laid	laid
lead	led	led
learn*	learnt	learnt
leave	left	left
lend	lent	lent
let	let	let
lie	lay	lain
light*	lit	lit
lose	lost	lost
make	made	made
mean	meant	meant
meet	met	met
pay	paid	paid
put	put	put
read	read	read
ride	rode	ridden
ring	rang	rung
rise	rose	risen
run	ran	run
say	said	said
see	saw	seen
sell	sold	sold
send	sent	sent
set	set	set
shake	shook	shaken
steal	stole	stolen
shine	shone	shone
shoot	shot	shot
show*	showed	shown
shut	shut	shut
sing	sang	sung
sink	sank	sunk
sit	sat	sat
sleep	slept	slept
slide	slid	slid
smell*	smelt	smelt
speak	spoke	spoken
spell*	spelt	spelt
spend	spent	spent
spring	sprang	sprung
stand	stood	stood
stick	stuck	stuck

infinitive	simple past	past participle
swear	swore	sworn
sweep	swept	swept
swim	swam	swum
swing	swung	swung
take	took	taken
teach	taught	taught
tear	tore	torn
tell	told	told
think	thought	thought
throw	threw	thrown
understand	understood	understood
wake*	woke	woken
wear	wore	worn
weave	wove	woven
win	won	won
write	wrote	written

* regular form (+ -ed) also possible.

This guide to tenses has been taken without any changes from the web site <http://www.englishpage.com>