

Verb Tenses & Time

The Simple Tenses

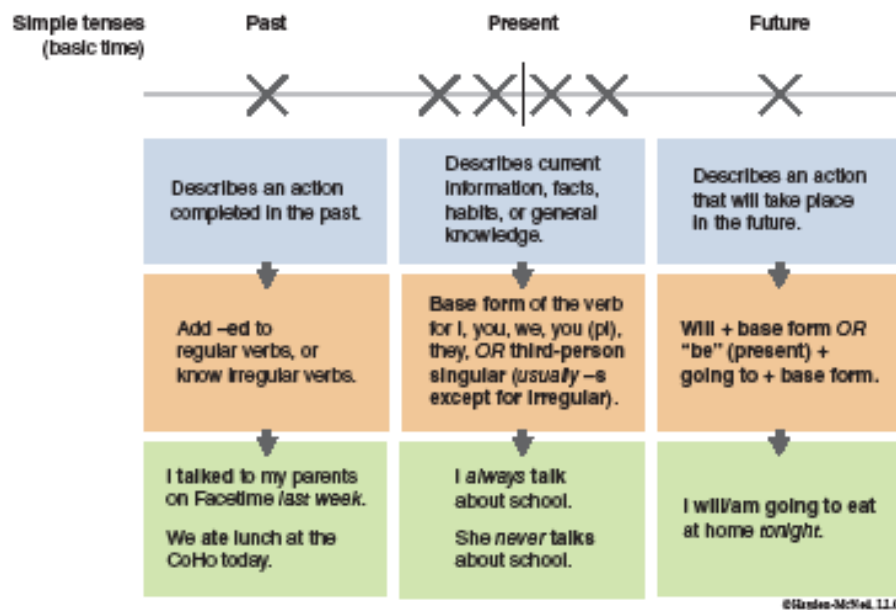
Basic time means the time reference is the simple idea of past, present, or future. There is no reference to progressive or perfect meaning. **This group of tenses is the most commonly used.** The **simple present tense** is often used for the thesis statement and for topic sentences in an academic essay. The thesis statement and topic sentences generally express opinions, beliefs, or ideas and thus require the simple present. The simple present tense can also be used in body paragraphs to provide the writer's commentary or analysis.



Did you know?

In Vietnamese, verb forms do not change to show tense. The reader/listener will understand the time from the context of the sentence.

The **simple past tense** is most often used for the support in a paragraph. It is used to describe past events or activities. These past events or activities can provide evidence for the writer's position. The simple past tense is also used to write about events and information, another important source for supporting evidence.



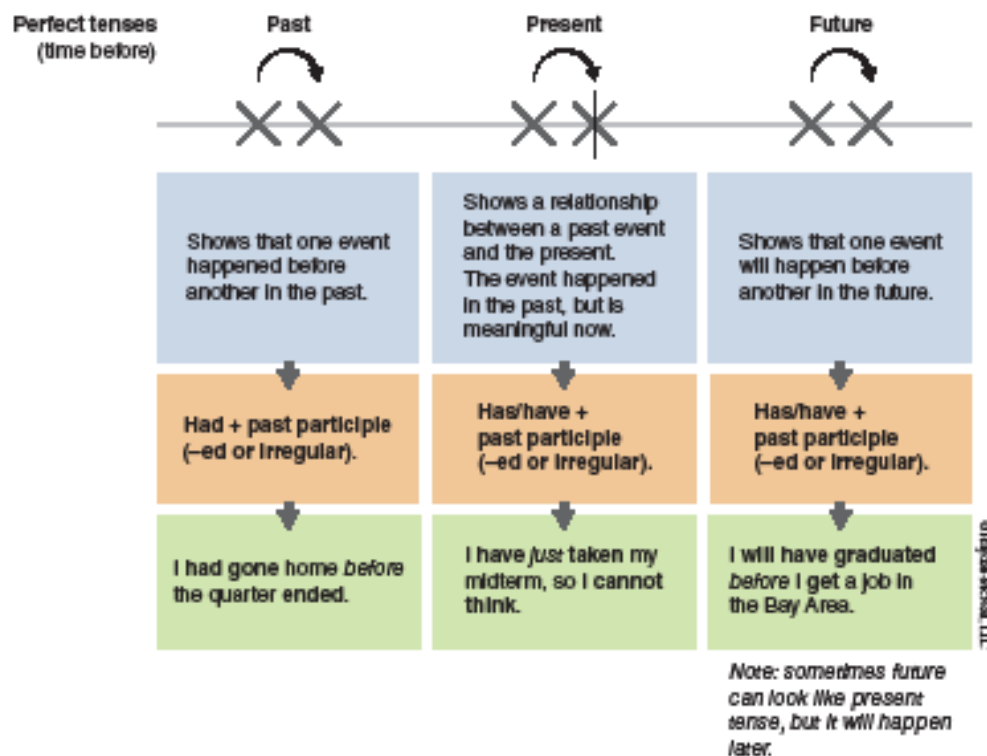
ACTIVITY: RECOGNIZING THE SIMPLE TENSES

Read the student paragraph below. Underline the verb phrases and Circle the subjects. Then, label whether the verb is simple present, simple past, or simple future. Finally correct any errors in verb tense.

Students usually made friends in the place they are for a long time. Khou and Andrew both made a lot of friends in clubs, where they spend a long time to communicate and work together to achieve the same goals. Mingyu and Khou both created relationships with others in their dorms, where they have a ton of opportunities and time to make friends. Marian felt it is difficult for her, a commuter student, to make friends in college because she did not have the same living situation as students living in the dorms. So she join a Kendo club and made friends successfully. She will find more support through her new friendships because she felt a part of the campus community.

The Perfect Tenses

Perfect tense verbs are used to refer to **activities or events that began *before* a basic time in past, present, or future** or to past events that are ***relevant*** to the present time. Think of the perfect tenses as the **“time before”** tenses. They show the relationship between one state or event and a later state or event.



In the chart above, notice for the past and future, there are TWO verb phrases. One describes the simple tense, and the other, which takes the form of the perfect: **have/has/had + past participle**, occurs BEFORE the basic time event.

PAST: I had gone [past perfect] home before the quarter ended [simple past].

In the example above BOTH actions happened in the past, but one occurred before the other. The event that happens first, takes the perfect.

FUTURE: I will have graduated [future perfect] before I get [simple future] a job in the Bay Area.

In the example above, BOTH actions will happen in the future, but one will occur before the other. The event that happens first, takes the perfect.

NOTE: In this case, the future is part of a dependent clause (a clause beginning with the subordinator, because, so you cannot use ‘will get’).

The Present Perfect vs. The Simple Past

The present perfect is different from the other times in the group. It is easy to show two events in the past because the past goes on forever; the same is true for the future, but we have to be careful about when to use the present perfect.



How do we show a TIME BEFORE structure in the PRESENT?

The simple past tense is used to show an action was completed in the past and is over. The event has no connection to now. However, when we use the present perfect, we are still referring to an event that was completed in the past, except that event is still important or meaningful now. There is a connection between past and present time.

I have taken the TOEFL twice in the past year.

The above sentence is communicating to the reader that both attempts at the TOEFL by the writer were completed in the past. However, someone may be asking the writer about the exam. The writer could say, "I took it twice," but they are discussing the TOEFL now so this past experience is now important. Therefore, the past and present are connected, so the writer uses *have taken* to demonstrate this. Another example:

Sam: Hi Taylor! It's good to see you. I'm on my way to grab a bit to eat. Why don't you come and we'll catch up?

Taylor: Good to see you to, Sam....but I can't. I have to get to class. Besides, I'm not hungry anyway, I've just eaten. Let me get your number, though, and I'll call you tomorrow.

In the above dialogue Sam asks Taylor to lunch. Taylor ate some time before they met, so he is full. The event, eating, happened in the past, but it is still important now because Taylor is full; he can't eat any more. Taylor must use the present perfect, "I have eaten," not the past, "I ate." If he said, "I ate," he should go to lunch with Sam and eat again because the past event (eating) no longer affects him.

The chart below summarizes when to use the present perfect and when to use the simple past:

PRESENT PERFECT	SIMPLE PAST
1. The action took place in the past, but unclear when. <i>I have seen her three times.</i> (when? you don't know)	1. You know precisely when the action took place in the past. <i>I saw her last week.</i> (when? last week)
2. Very recent past or a present result <i>They've just left I have lost my keys</i>	2. A past habit which is now finished <i>She smoked a lot.</i> (not anymore now)
3. To announce news <i>A new president has been elected in Italy.</i>	3. Signal Words yesterday, last week, a month ago, in 2010, this morning, etc....
4. A state or situation which has started in the past and is continuing up to now. <i>I have lived there for a long time.</i> (still living there.)	
5. A finished state or activity but the period of time in which it has taken place is not finished. <i>I have written a letter this morning.</i> (the letter is finished and it is still morning)	
1. Signal Words: since, for, already, yet, before, ever, never, still not, so far, just, up to now, recently, until now	

ACTIVITY: PRESENT PERFECT OR SIMPLE PAST?

Choose the correct answer to complete the sentence.

- They _____, so they feel prepared.
a. studied b. have studied c. had studied d. has studied
- She _____ for this class the last week in May.
a. registered b. has registered c. have registered d. had registered
- The transfer students _____ UWP 1 yet.
a. didn't take b. has not taken c. have not taken d. didn't took

4. I finally _____ my homework, so I can go to the game.
a. finished b. has finished c. have finished d. had finished

ACTIVITY: RECOGNIZING THE PERFECT TENSES

Read the student paragraph below. Underline the verb phrases and circle the subjects. Then, label whether the verb is present perfect or simple past.

When I was a high school student, I barely managed my own time because the workload was not heavy, and there was plenty of time. Since I got into UC Davis, my academic work and the managing of my own time has changed a lot. I was a lazy high school kid because I always saved all the work until the day before the due dates. So far, I have learned that I am not going to pass classes if I wait until the last day to do the work. I have started to schedule all of my work in an organized way.

The Progressive (Continuous) Tenses

Progressive tenses are used to describe an event or action in progress or ongoing at a time in the past, present, or future. The emphasis is on the duration (length of time). Progressive tenses are usually used with active verbs; they are much less frequent with state-of-being verbs. The past and future progressive are used in similar contexts. The only difference is the time the events take place.

The **past progressive** describes something that was happening or was in progress for a certain amount of time in the past. Note also, the past progressive does not function alone. It works with another tense, the simple past. When you use the past progressive, your audience expects that the action you are discussing will eventually be interrupted or end with the simple past. For example:

1. I was walking to class yesterday when I ran into my former biology professor.

In the above sentences, *walking* was in progress in the past. As it was happening, the student saw a professor. The simple past verb, *ran*, indicates the moment that the *walking* ended. If you only wanted to discuss walking, which means you only want to talk about one event in the, past, you should use the simple past: I walked to class yesterday.

The **future progressive** follows similar rules. You must be talking about an event that will be in progress and a second event that will eventually interrupt. For example:

2. I will be studying in the library when **you** finish your test. (note: 'when' signals a dependent clause, so you cannot use 'will finish').

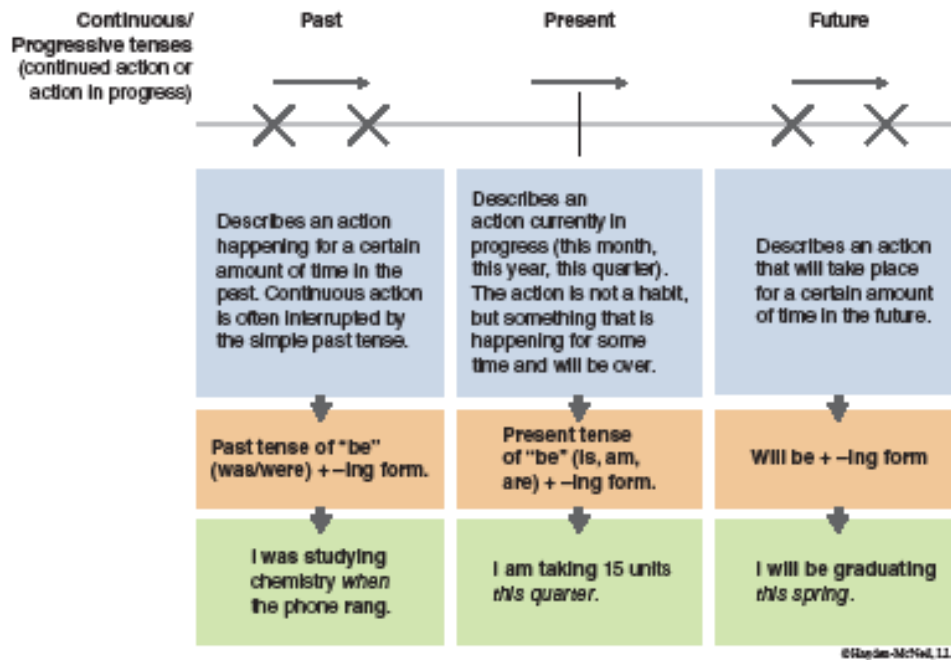
The **present progressive** is different than the past and future. We use the present progressive only when something is currently in progress. For example, can you tell the difference between the two sentences below?

1. I am studying for my physics exam this morning.
2. Every morning, I study for physics.

In sentence 1, the person is currently in the process of studying. We don't know exactly how long it will last, but we know this is a current condition. Sentence 2 indicates a habit. The simple present tense is the tense we use for general statements, facts, or present repeated habits. Note the signal, 'every morning' shows this is something that occurs in a habitual pattern, unlike #1, which is only focusing on the current moment. Remember, simple present is the most common tense in academic writing; the present progressive is only used in a very specific context: to indicate something in progress now (as we speak).

In the space below, explain the different between the two sentences:

- a. I sometimes use the library website for research.
b. I am using the library website for research.



ACTIVITY: RECOGNIZING THE PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Fill in the blanks with the correct present tense (simple present or present progressive)¹

Dear Mom,
 I _____ (JUST WRITE) to tell you how much I _____
 _____ (APPRECIATE) the money you have sent me, and to tell you how I _____
 _____ (GET) on in my first term at university. In fact, I _____ REALLY
 ENJOY) myself. I _____ (ATTEND) lectures every morning, and most
 afternoons I _____ STUDY) in the library. I _____ (STUDY) quite hard as
 well, but at the moment I _____ (SPEND) a lot of time making new friends. I _____
 _____ (STILL STAY) with my friend Jill and I _____ (LOOK) for some place
 to live on my own. Only a small number of first year students _____ (LIVE) in
 college here.
 I think I'll buy some new clothes with the money you've sent me. Everything _____
 (COST) a lot here, and I _____ (SAVE) to buy a coat for the winter months. It ____
 _____ (GET) really cold here in the evenings. I now _____
 (KNOW) some other students and we _____ (HAVE) quite a good time. I _____
 _____ (ALSO LEARN) to drive. University students _____ (GET) a refund if they take

¹ <http://www.english-grammar.at/worksheets/tenses/t032-at-the-university-present-tense.pdf>

their tests here. I _____(LOOK) forward to coming home next month.

See you soon.

Perfect Progressive Tenses

Perfect progressive tenses focus on the completion of an action that is, was, or will be in progress. Think about this sentence in the past perfect progressive: "I had been waiting for three years by the time my application was approved." In this example, the emphasis is on duration of the first verb, "waiting."

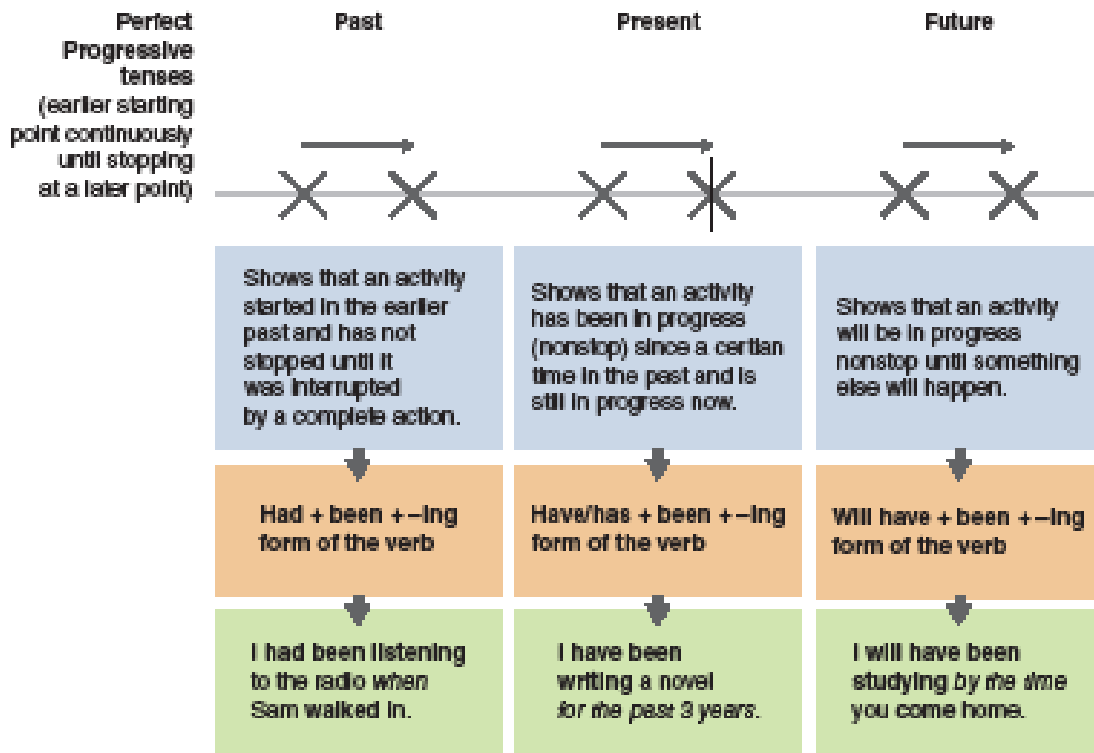
Perfect progressive tenses often answer the question "how long?" It is not used very often, only in very specific contexts. Think of the perfect progressive as a sum total of the perfect and progressive groups of verbs.

	Have	+	Past participle				
+	<hr/>			be	+	present participle	
	Have	+	been	+	present participle.		

ACTIVITY: RECOGNIZING THE PERFECT PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Read each sentence. pay attention to the Time (past, present, future) and write the verb in the perfect progressive.

1. How long _____ (you/study) English?
2. I _____ (read) all day and I haven't finished the book yet.
3. By dinner, she _____ (cook) the whole afternoon.
4. He _____ (work) there for 10 years by 2015.
5. They were very tired in the evening because they _____ (study) all day.
6. They _____ (cycle) all day so their legs were sore in the evening.



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ACTIVITY: COMPARING TENSES

Read the sentences below; then answer the questions that follow.

- a. Next semester, I will be taking 12 units when you transfer.
- b. I had taken 18 units before I became a sophomore.
- c. I was taking 18 units my first semester in college when I realized it was too much.
- d. I have taken 18 units only once before.
- e. I am taking 12 units this semester.
- f. I took 12 units last semester.
- g. Next semester, I will take 12 units.
- h. I take at least 12 units every semester.

1. What is the name of the **verb form** in sentence “c”? _____
2. What **tense** is sentence “c” in? _____
3. Which sentence describes an action that was completed in the past? _____
4. Which sentence describes an action that was in progress at a specific time in the past? _____
5. Which sentence describes a single action that is in progress at a known moment? _____
6. What is the name of the **verb form** in sentence “f”? _____
7. Describe the difference in meaning between sentences “a” and “g.”

8. Describe the difference in meaning between sentences “b” and “d.”

9. Describe the difference in meaning between sentences “e” and “h.”

10. Describe the difference in meaning between sentences “d” and “f.”

Shifting Verb Tenses

A verb tense shift occurs when a writer changes tense within a single piece of writing. Any switching of tense within a sentence, paragraph, or longer piece of writing is a verb tense shift. Verb tense shifts are useful for informing readers of the different times at which things happen. Different tenses give us important information about precisely when actions happened in relation to one another and whether those actions were ongoing or one-and-done.²

However, if you shift tenses too often, you might confuse your reader. You should be especially careful with present/past shifts. As a rule, you should not move from one to the other without some kind of signal. For example:

The **instructor** explains the diagram to students **who** asked questions during the lecture.

In the above example, the first verb is in present tense and the second is in past, but there is no reason to switch from one to the other. You must maintain the same verb tense until you have a reason to switch. This ‘reason’ will be given with specific sign posts or time markers. So the above sentence should be:

The instructor explained the diagram to students who asked questions during the lecture.

Here is an example of an appropriate tense shift:

The **instructor** gives a lot of homework in this class, but **yesterday**, **she** didn’t assign any homework at all.

Notice that again there are two verb tenses, but this time, they are logical. The first part explains a current habit of the professor (simple present). The second part signals that we will move to the past as it describes something the professor did yesterday (simple past).

ACTIVITY: VERB TENSE SHIFTS IN CONTEXT

Read each excerpt below. Underline anything in *present time* and highlight anything in *past time*. In the blank that follows, explain why the shifts in tenses occur (HIINT: look for signals).

1. Yahoo chief executive Marissa Mayer said in a Bloomberg interview that at Google she worked all night at least once a week. She ensured that it is totally possible to work 130-hour-long weeks if “you are strategic about when you sleep, when you shower, and how often you go to the bathroom.”

² <https://usflearn.instructure.com/courses/813386/pages/style-slash-grammar-verb-tense-shift>

2. Technology firm Jawbone manufactures a device that measures exercise and sleep. The company collected information from college-age device users to measure how much time they spent sleeping. It found that college students slept an average of 7.03 hours during the week and 7.38 hours on weekends. Female students slept more than male students, getting an extra 23 minutes of sleep on weeknights and 17 more minutes on weekends.

3. Jawbone's study seemed to suggest that college students were getting enough sleep. The time falls into recommendations by the National Sleep Foundation: seven to nine hours of sleep daily for people between the ages of 18 and 25. Jawbone, however, said the average is misleading. Its study found that nearly half the time, students slept fewer than seven hours a night. Earnest of Texas A&M said it is not uncommon for students to sleep 12 or 14 hours one day, after sleeping for little or no time the day before as they cram for tests.

ACTIVITY: EDITING A STUDENT PAPER FOR ALL VERB ERROR TYPES

Read the short essay and edit any errors in verb form, agreement, or tense.

People always wondered how to make friends in college, so let's discuss how four students regarding this question. Most students met their new friends by joining clubs. Marian joined the UC Davis Kendo Club, Khou joined the Tae Kwan Do club, and Andrew joins basketball and boxing clubs which he likes. Clubs joined people with the same hobbies and interests. There they could communicated and made a lot of friends. Thus, it is easy to make friends in clubs since a lot of people in clubs have the same interest and aim as you.

People with the same interests and aims always have plenty of topics to talk about. For instance, Andrew found a lot of friends in his basketball and boxing club as they have the same love of sports even though they were from different countries and spoke different languages. The other reason is that sometimes clubs may had a lot of interactive games in order to build relationships. Khou mentioning "mini-programs such

as the Big and Little sib connection where club officers match up participants with other participants". This kind of game can remarkably improve the relationships among students.

Both Khou and Mingyu became good friends with their roommates and neighbors. Although Marian did not have any roommates because she is a commuter student who lived alone, she thinks that roommates and neighbors were a perfect resource for making friends. She wrote, " I felt somewhat envious of those who lived on campus and how easy it was for them to make friends as their living situation already exposes them to a very social environment." Roommates were an easily accessible friend because you spend a lot of time living with your roommate and saw each other almost every day. So Khou and Mingyu became friends with their roommates very quickly. What's more, most students wrote that a lot of neighbors in college provided them a ton of opportunities to make friends with different people.

In conclusion, making friends with roommates and people who has the same interest with you in club is a common way to meet people in college.