

# 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 <b>do</b> it everyday    | We <b>do</b> it everyday   |
| Second Person | You <b>do</b> it everyday  | You <b>do</b> it everyday  |
| Third Person  | He <b>does</b> it everyday | They <b>do</b> it everyday |

### Simple Past

|               | Singular                      | Plural                         |
|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| First Person  | I <b>did</b> that yesterday   | We <b>did</b> that yesterday   |
| Second Person | You <b>did</b> that yesterday | You <b>did</b> that yesterday  |
| Third Person  | He <b>did</b> that yesterday  | They <b>did</b> that yesterday |

### Simple Future

|  | Singular | Plural |
|--|----------|--------|
|--|----------|--------|

|                      |                                  |                                   |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>First Person</b>  | I <b>will do</b> that tomorrow   | We <b>will do</b> that tomorrow   |
| <b>Second Person</b> | You <b>will do</b> that tomorrow | You <b>will do</b> that tomorrow  |
| <b>Third Person</b>  | He <b>will do</b> that tomorrow  | They <b>will do</b> 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 <b>takes</b> the 6:00 P.M. local train everyday on his way back home. |
|                       | Urvashi <b>drinks</b> coffee in the evenings.                                |

***To describe facts/general truths***

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

***To describe actions or events which follow a routine***

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

***To describe regular occurrences/habits in the past***

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

***To describe regular occurrences/habits in the past***

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

***To describe actions or events in the past***

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

***To describe uncertain/likely future actions or events***

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

**The Continuous Tense**

**Present Continuous**

|  |                 |               |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
|  | <b>Singular</b> | <b>Plural</b> |
|--|-----------------|---------------|

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

### Past Continuous

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

### Future Continuous

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

|                     |                                                |                                                  |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Third Person</b> | He <b><i>will be doing</i></b> it at that time | They <b><i>will be doing</i></b> 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**.



**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 <b>is always growling</b> at the tigress.               |
|                           | I <b>am always trying</b> to escape the real issue.               |
|                           | The boys <b>are always getting</b> into one problem or the other. |

*To describe actions or events going on in the present*

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

***To describe certain future actions or events***

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

***To describe actions or events going on in the past***

|                 |                                                       |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Past Continuous | The girls <b>were laughing</b> all the way back home. |
|                 | I <b>was talking</b> to him about the robbery.        |

***To describe actions or events going on in the future***

|                   |                                                                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Future Continuous | The maid <b>will be coming</b> tomorrow to collect her wages.         |
|                   | They <b>will be meeting</b> 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 <b><i>have done</i></b> this recently   | We <b><i>have done</i></b> this recently   |
| Second Person | You <b><i>have done</i></b> this recently | You <b><i>have done</i></b> this recently  |
| Third Person  | He <b><i>has done</i></b> this recently   | They <b><i>have done</i></b> this recently |

### Past Perfect Simple

|               | Singular                                             | Plural                                                |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| First Person  | I <b><i>had done</i></b> this before that happened   | We <b><i>had done</i></b> this before that happened   |
| Second Person | You <b><i>had done</i></b> this before that happened | You <b><i>had done</i></b> this before that happened  |
| Third Person  | He <b><i>had done</i></b> this before that happened  | They <b><i>had done</i></b> 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<br/>Simple</i> | I <b>have finished</b> the portrait.                             |
|                                   | He <b>has made sure</b> that no one would suffer in his absence. |
|                                   | They <b>have been</b> friends since high school.                 |
|                                   | We <b>have gained</b> 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<br/>Simple</i> | They <b>had met</b> last on the 2nd of October, 1987.          |
|                                | The boys <b>had left</b> by the time I reached the playground. |