

Verb Tenses

Explanation

Tense refers to the form a verb takes in a sentence, whether to express the present, past or future.

...connections...

For more help identifying subjects and verbs, turn to Subjects, Verbs & Clauses.

Examples

Simple Tenses

Present: I *learn*.
Past: I *learned*.
Future: I *will learn*.

Perfect Tenses

Present perfect: I *have learned*.
Past perfect: I *had learned*.
Future perfect: I *will have learned*.

Progressive Tenses

Present progressive: I *am learning*.
Past progressive: I *was learning*.
Future progressive: I *will be learning*.
Present perfect progressive: I *have been learning*.
Past perfect progressive: I *had been learning*.
Future perfect progressive: I *will have been learning*.

Simple Tenses

Present

The present tense indicates that an action is taking place at the time you express it, or an action that occurs regularly.

- We *wear* organic cotton shirts [an action taking place when it is expressed].
- I *watch* the documentary on PBS each Sunday night [an action that occurs regularly].

Past

The past tense indicates that an action is completed and has already taken place.

- Martin Luther King, Jr. *gave* his most famous speech in 1963 [an action completed in the past].
- As a girl, she *wondered* how her college degree would help her career [an action that occurred once or many times in the past but did not extend to the present].

Future

The future tense indicates that an action will or is likely to take place.

- Later today I *will rinse* the dishes [a future action that will definitely occur].
- The defendant probably *will plead* innocent [a future action that is likely to occur].

Perfect Tenses

Perfect tenses designate actions that were or will be completed before other actions. You can form the perfect tenses with the appropriate tense form of the helping, or auxiliary, verb *have* plus the past participle.

Present perfect

The present tense indicates that an action is taking place at the time you express it, or an action that occurs regularly.

- We *have worn* organic cotton shirts [an action that began in the past and is finished at the present].
- She *has donated* extensively to UNICEF [an action that began in the past and extends into the present].

Past perfect

The past perfect tense indicates an action occurring before a certain time in the past.

- By 1995, Doctor Harvey *had built* the first artificial brain.

Future perfect

The future perfect tense indicates that an action will be finished by a certain time.

- By Thursday, the President *will have apologized* for his mistake.

Progressive Tenses

The progressive tenses express continuing action. You can form them with the appropriate tense of the verb *be* plus the present participle.

Present progressive

The present progressive tense indicates that something is happening at the time you express it.

- The worker *is hammering*, and her foreman *is watching* lazily.

Past progressive

The past progressive tense indicates two kinds of past action.

- Poe's writing *was becoming* increasingly bizarre and dark [a continuing action in the past].
- The mob tackled Jean-Luc Goddard while he *was introducing* the film [an action occurring at the same time in the past as another action].

Future progressive

The future progressive tense indicates a continuing in the future.

- The government *will be monitoring* the phones in the lab.

Present perfect progressive

The present perfect progressive tense indicates action continuing from the past into the present and possibly into the future.

- The teacher *has been grading* since yesterday afternoon.

Past perfect progressive

The past perfect progressive tense indicates that a past action went on until another occurred.

- Before her promotion, Nico *had been working* on restoring open space on campus.

Future perfect progressive

The future perfect progressive tense indicates that an action will continue until a certain future time.

- On Tuesday I *will have been working* on this paper for six weeks.

Adapted from The Brief Holt Handbook, Fourth Edition, Kirsner & Mandell, 2004.

Exercise 1 – Simple Past Tense

Fill in each blank with the correct past tense form of the verb provided.

Example:

PLAY We played dodgeball all afternoon.

FRY 1. We _____ the fish we caught in the lake.

STUDY 2. All of us _____ hard for the physics exam.

CRY 3. Mary _____ on his shoulder all through the movie.

MARRY 4. She _____ him on Tuesday and played slots that night.

TRY 5. Fred _____ to get in the concert by posing as a security guard.

SHOP 6. I _____ for all of my birthday presents at the art fair.

ADMIT 7. No one _____ that he was tired.

PLAN 8. Marty and Isabel _____ their marriage simply and loosely.

TERRIFY 9. The fireworks _____ the younger children.

COMPILE 10. The assistants _____ the materials into a great handbook.

Exercise 2 – Simple Past Tense

In each of the following sentences, underline any verbs that should have –ed or –d endings and supply the missing letters. Watch for time expressions (last week, yesterday, years ago) that indicate past time.

incorrect: The committee vote to adjourn yesterday.
correct: The committee voted to adjourn yesterday.

1. The driver ask for the exact fare last week.
2. Oliver use to live in Berkeley when he was a college student.
3. Katerina studied all the time and so she graduate from college last year.
4. College students are suppose to attend every class meeting.
5. Last Sunday, Laura listen to the drummers in the park.
6. Until I started school, I work twenty hours per week and study the rest of the time.
7. Finally Gayle's cat return home.
8. Several years ago I witness a crime and identify the criminal.

Exercise 3 – Perfect Tenses

Use the perfect tense to fill in the blank using the same time period (past, present, future) as the sample.

Example: Joan licks the popsicle. (present tense)

Joan has licked the popsicle. (present perfect tense)

(Remember: Perfect tenses for the verb *to run* are:

Present: she *has run*

Past: she *had run*

Future: she *will have run*)

1. Eric took piano lessons.

Eric _____ piano lessons since he was ten years old.

2. Tara raises as many children as she can.

Tara _____ as many children as she can.

3. Bill, on the other hand, will join the Coast Guard.

Bill, on the other hand, _____ the Coast Guard.

4. Alyssa gives a drawing to each of her friends.

Alyssa _____ a drawing to each of her friends.

5. Chickens pecked at bugs and fruit in the garden.

Chickens _____ at bugs and fruit in the garden.

6. Each egg will travel a thousand miles before it lands on her lap.

Each egg _____ a thousand miles before it lands on her lap.

7. The wings had plenty of room to spread.

The wings _____ plenty of room to spread.

8. Madison collects the hay in the morning after breakfast.

Madison _____ the hay in the morning after breakfast.

Exercise 4 – Progressive Tenses

In the following sentences, change the simple tense verbs to progressive tense verbs using the same time period (present, past, future). Avoid the perfect tense for this exercise.

Example: Martians land on the planet Earth. (present)

Martians are landing on the planet Earth. (present progressive)

(Remember: Progresssive tenses for the verb *to run* are:

Present: she *is running*

Past: she *was running*

Future: she *will be running*)

1. Ferdinand coffed when his friends all left for college.

Ferdinand _____ when his friends all left for college.

2. He enjoys his flowers, vegetables and herbs.

He _____ his flowers, vegetables and herbs.

3. The pumpkins ripened too long last year.

The pumpkins _____ too long last year.

4. His friends will call at the next holiday or break.

His friends _____ at the next holiday or break.

5. Ferdinand answers the phone saying “What?”

Ferdinand _____ the phone saying “What?”

6. He screened his calls last week to avoid bill collectors.

He _____ his calls last week to avoid bill collectors.

7. His money goes under his mattress until he needs it.

His money _____ under his mattress until he needs it.

8. He will go fishing next week if he gets his license.

He _____ next week if he gets his license.