

Campus Academic Resource Program

Verb Tenses

This handout will:

- Analyze how ‘time’ and ‘aspect’ influences the conjugation of a verb.
- Explore the various versions of the past tense.
- Present examples of the past tense.
- Consider the various versions of the present tense.
- Demonstrate examples of the present tense.
- Investigate the various versions of the future tense.
- Highlight examples of the future tense.
- Examine the various versions of the conditional tense.
- Review examples of the conditional tense.

Verb tenses in English reflect: *time* and *aspect* of time. Every variation (or, conjugation of the verb) represents both the time and aspect it needs to demonstrate in the sentence. There are four variations of *time*: Past, Present, Future, and Conditional. There are four variations of *aspect*: Simple, Continuous/Progressive, Perfect, and Perfect Continuous.

Time:

- Past refers to that which has already happened.
- Present refers to that which is currently happening.
- Future refers to that which will happen, or has yet to happen.
- Conditional refers to that which may happen (in the future) or may have happened (in the past).

Aspect:

- Simple refers to an event that has already happened, at one specific point in time.
 - The war *ended* in 1945.
 - Simple also refers to something that always happens, or a rule.
 - It *rains* in the winter.
- Continuous/Progressive refers to an event that happens for an extended period of time.
 - I *am writing* a letter
- Perfect refers to an event that has happened but still holds relevance at the time of speaking.
 - Since she *has lived* in so many places, she would make a good travel agent.
- Perfect Continuous is a conflation of the Perfect and Continuous.
 - It is used with: has/have + been + participle (past, present, future)
 - I *have been thinking* about you lately.
 - In this example, we can see the use of both has/have as a verb, and thinking as a form of the continuous.

Additionally, we need to define the term “Verb Conjugation.” **Conjugating** a verb means that you are changing the verb from the infinitive form to its proper form, based on time, aspect, and who the verb relates to. For example:

- The verb, “to play” is in the infinitive form because it is not referring to a specific time, aspect, or person. The best way to know if a verb is in its infinitive form is when the word “to” is in front of the verb.
 - So, conjugating the infinitive verb “to play” to first-person, past tense use is:

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- *I played.*
 - Understanding this concept of conjugation will help when reading through the rest of this handout. We will see how verbs get conjugated based on the time spoken of.

<u>Aspect</u>	<u>Time</u>			
	Past	Present	Future	Conditional
Simple	Simple Past	Simple Present	Simple Future	Simple Conditional
Continuous	Past Continuous	Present Continuous	Future Continuous	Conditional Continuous
Perfect	Past Perfect	Present Perfect	Future Perfect	Conditional Perfect
Perfect Continuous	Past Perfect Continuous	Present Perfect Continuous	Future Perfect Continuous	Conditional Perfect Continuous

The Table above shows the correlation between Time and Aspect for Verb Tenses.

Now that we have a categorized list of how Verb Times and Aspects interact, we can go into more detail for each specific Verb Tense.

The Past Tense

The Past Tense, as described above, refers to events that have already happened. These events are completed by the time the sentence is being written. Most verbs in the past tense end in “-ed.”

Simple Past

This verb tense indicates an action that has happened once, never, or several times.

Completed Action in the Past



Series of Completed Actions



Duration in the Past



Habits in the Past



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Past Facts or Generalizations



- Completed Action in the Past
 - I *finished* my homework last night.
 - You *saw* the movie?
 - She already *charged* her phone.
 - They *upgraded* their internet service.
 - We *cleaned* the living room!
- Series of Completed Actions
 - I *woke* up, *made* breakfast, and still *left* by 9:00 am.
- Duration in the Past
 - He *worked* on his novel for seven years.
 - *Were* you at the park all day?
 - We *hiked* for hours.
- Habits in the Past
 - I *ran* twenty miles a week during high school.
 - She *woke* up before 6:00 am when she *had* that job.
 - They *stayed* in the library before tests.
- Past Facts or Generalizations
 - As a child, I *didn't* drink milk.
 - They *lived* in Puerto Rico for years.
 - *Did* you *play* sports as a child?

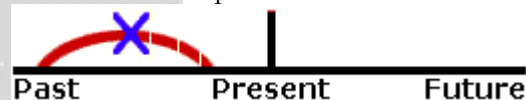
Past Continuous

This Verb Tense is used to identify an ongoing action that was completed by the time of speaking. It is written as “was/were + present participle.” The Present Participle is a verb ending in “-ing.”

Interrupted Action in the Past



Specific Time of Interruption



Parallel Actions



- Interrupted Action in the Past
 - I *was sleeping* when you noisily *came* home.
 - She *was talking* to me when there was a knock at the door.
 - We *were typing* until they asked us to stop.
- Specific Time of Interruption
 - I *was still eating* at 9 o'clock when the restaurant closed.
 - It *was raining* at 11:00 pm.

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- Parallel Actions
 - He was *combing* his hair while *talking* to me.
 - I tried *calling* them while *getting* ready.
 - They were busy on Friday: *writing*, *reading*, and *researching*.

Past Perfect

This verb tense is used to portray that an event is completed, but still holds relevance. It is formed as “had + past participle.” A Past Participle is a verb usually ending in “-ed.”

A Completed Action Before Something in the Past



Duration Before Something in the Past



Specific Times with Past Perfect



- Completed Action Before Something in the Past
 - He *had already eaten* when I asked him to lunch.
 - The Past Participle of “to eat” is “eaten,” making it irregular.
 - They *had finished* the race by the time you got there.
 - We *had completed* the assignment when the professor gave an extension.
- Duration Before Something in the Past
 - She *had worked* on her garden for months before the storm tore it apart.
 - The phone had *had problems* before it broke in November.
 - When I finished the program, I *had spent* thousands of dollars.
- Specific Times with Past Perfect
 - The Past Perfect can be used to indicate specific times, if desired. For example:
 - They *had seen* the movie once in 2011 before seeing it again in 2014.
 - In this example, the specific time is used to indicate what had happened previously. Although the Past Perfect does not need to be used in this instance, it can.

Past Perfect Continuous

This verb tense combines both the Perfect and the Continuous tenses in the past. It is written as: “Had Been + Present Participle.” The Present Participle is a verb ending in “-ing.”

Duration Before Something in the Past



Cause of Something in the Past



- Duration Before Something in the Past: This is used to portray an event that happened in the past up until a closer time in the past.
 - She *had been trying* to call them for twenty minutes when they knocked at her door.

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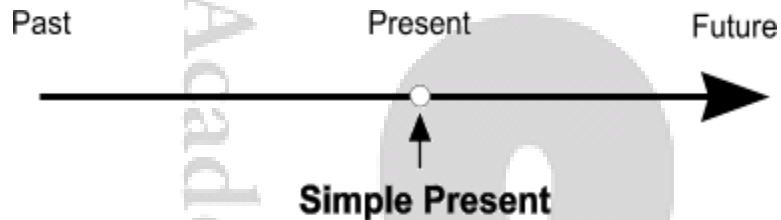
- They *had been ignoring* her phone calls so they could surprise her at her door.
- Cause of Something in the Past
 - It was easy for him to fall asleep since he *had been hiking* all day.
 - I failed my History class because I *had not been studying*.

The Present Tense

The Present Tense, as described above, refers to events that occur in present time, at the moment of speaking.

Simple Present

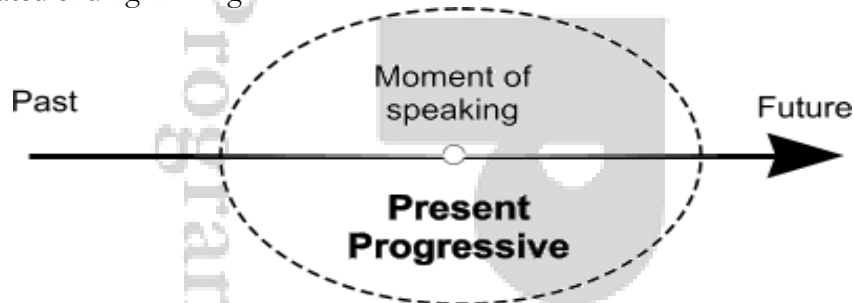
This verb tense is used with several different verbs, as long as they are in the present tense.



- For example, the verb, in its infinitive form, “to play” conjugates to:
 - I *play*
 - You *play*
 - He/She *plays*
 - They *play*
 - We *play*
 - These are in the present tense because it indicates the action is currently happening.
 - The Simple Present tense is indicated with this conjugation.
 - I *play* with the toys.
 - You *are* tired.
 - She *is* lazy.
 - They *see* the dog.
 - We *like* that music.

Present Continuous

This verb tense is used to indicate something that continues to happen in present time. Verbs are usually conjugated ending in “-ing.”



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- When conjugating a verb to Present Continuous, the main verb needs to remain in present tense while the second verb changes to end in “-ing.”
 - I *am writing* your letter.
 - You *are trying* too hard.
 - He *is not laughing*.
 - They *are not running*.
 - We *are traveling*.
 - The verbs before the “-ing” verbs are considered “to be” verbs since they indicate a sense of existing. They remain in the present tense to show when the action is taking place.

Present Perfect

Since the Perfect tense indicates an action that has ended, but still holds relevance for the moment speaking, the main verb stays in the present tense. It is indicated through the verb “to have,” as in, to have done something. The purpose of the Perfect tense is to emphasize the result of the action.

- For example:
 - I *have written* your letter.
 - You *have tried* too hard.
 - He *has laughed*.
 - They *have run*.
 - We *have traveled*.
- These following examples show specific ways to use the Present Perfect.
 - To place emphasis on the result:
 - I *have written* your letter.
 - This action was completed by the time of speaking, but still contains relevance for the present time.
 - An action that is still occurring:
 - The concert *has not yet started*.
 - This action has yet to begin, but still contains relevance for the present time.
 - An action that has recently stopped.
 - We *have finished* our papers.
 - This action just ended, and it used to show relevance for the present.
 - A completed action that has direct relevance for the present.
 - They *have left* the building.
 - An action that has either taken place: once, never, or several times before the present.
 - She *had tried* chicken before. (Once)
 - I *have not been arrested*. (Never)
 - We *have visited* the farm before. (Several Times)
 - There are also key words and phrases that gesture toward using the Present Perfect.
 - Already, ever, just, never, not yet, so far, till now, up to/until now

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Present Perfect Continuous

This conjugated verb tense also indicates an action that has recently stopped but has relevance for the present time. Unlike the Perfect tense, which emphasizes the results of the action, the Perfect Continuous emphasizes the duration of the action. Therefore, we combine the Perfect with the Continuous: “Have/Has + Been + Verb ending in –ing”

- For example:
 - I *have been trying*.
 - You *have been calling*.
 - He/She *has been studying*.
 - They *have been hiking*.
 - We *have been sleeping*.
- The following examples show specific ways to use the Present Perfect Continuous.
 - To place emphasis on the length of the action, not the result.
 - She needs a break; she *has been working* on her project all day.
 - An action that recently stopped or is still continuing.
 - It *has been* a hard semester.
 - They *have been going* to school since September.

Future Tense

The Future Tense refers to something that has not yet happened, but will happen.

Simple Future

In order to indicate this verb tense, you can use two trigger words, “will” and “be going to.”



- The first trigger word is used as “Will + Verb”
 - You *will see* me later.
 - *Will I see* you later?
 - They *will travel* tomorrow.
- The second trigger word is used as “To Be (Conjugated) + Going To + Verb.”
 - You *are going to see* me later.
 - *Are we going to see* them later?
 - They *are going to travel* tomorrow.

Future Continuous

Like other forms of the continuous, this verb tense uses the Present Participle to indicate continuation. Since these actions will occur, in the future, we still use the same trigger words listed above with the Present Participle added at the end.

- “Will Be + Present Participle”
 - You *will be seeing* me later.
 - *Will I be seeing* you later?
 - They *will be traveling* tomorrow.
- “To Be (Conjugated) + Going to Be + Present Participle”
 - You *are going to be seeing* me later.

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- *Am I going to be seeing* you later?
- They *are going to be traveling* tomorrow.

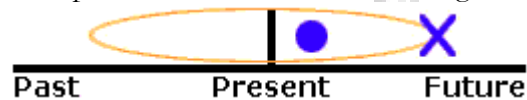
Future Perfect

Although it may seem counterintuitive, the Future Perfect tense discusses the past in the future. This verb tense is structured as “Subject + will + have + Past Participle.”

- For example: I *will have walked* 500 miles when I fall down at your door.
 - Subject=I
 - Past Participle=Walked
 - The only conjugation in this verb tense is the Past Participle, whether the verb is irregular or not.
- The Future Perfect can also be used as: “Subject + am/is/are + going to have + Past Participle.” This form portrays a similar meaning as the above form.
 - For example: You *are going to have completed* your finals by the end of the month.

The Future Perfect can be used in a couple specific ways:

Completed Action before Something in the Future



Duration Before Something in the Future



A Completed Action Before Something in the Future indicates that one action will occur before another one, in the future.

- For example:
 - If you keep up with your hard work, you *will have earned* enough for your vacation by the end of the year.
 - So, before the “end of the year,” is when the second action will occur; and “you will have earned” is the first action. This example of the Future Perfect shows how both of these actions will occur, one before another, in the future.

A Duration Before Something in the Future indicates a near-present action that will continue until another action in the future.

- For example:
 - They *will have read* a total of four books by the time the semester is over.
 - So, “will have read” is the near-present action that will continue until “the time the semester is over,” in the future.

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Future Perfect Continuous

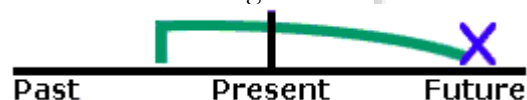
Like the other variations of the “Perfect Continuous,” this particular verb tense shows a continual action in the future. Like other forms of the Future tense, this uses both forms: “Will” and “Be Going To.”

The Future Present Continuous can be used to indicate:

Duration Before Something in the Future



Cause of Something in the Future



- The “will” form is structured as: “Will have been + Present Participle”
 - For example: *We will have been studying* for seven hours by the time the library closes.
 - This example shows the continual act of studying, positioned in the future.
- The “Be Going To” form is structured as: “Am/Is/Are + Going to Have Been + Present Participle.”
 - For example: He is going to *have been looking* for the dog for two days by tomorrow night.
 - Like the above example, this example shows the continual act of looking, positioned in the future.

Conditional Tense

This verb tense is a bit more complicated than the other tenses because it is not positioned in a particular time. Unlike the previous tenses, the Conditional indicates something that may happen (in the future) or might have happened (in the past). Therefore, it differs from the Future tense, which indicates something more certain of happening. It also differs from the Past tense, which also indicates certainty in what has happened. The Conditional is usually triggered by the words “would” and “if.”

Conditional Simple

The Conditional Simple indicates an action that might take place, or might have taken place.

- Might Take Place:
 - They *would* discuss the papers if *there's* time.
 - If I *were* rich, I *would* donate to charity.
- Might Have Taken Place:
 - If there *was* time, they *would have discussed* the papers.
 - If I *had* known the class was going to be so demanding, I *would not have taken* it.
- Both of the above examples use the word “if” to suggest possibility. The examples also vary in their use of tense. For the first example, “Might Take Place,” the conditional verbs are in present and future tense. For the second example, “Might Have Taken Place,” the conditional verbs are in past tense.

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Conditional Continuous

Like the previous forms of the Continuous, this form also portrays an ongoing action. Since the Continuous form is Conditional, emphasis is placed on the duration of the action.

- For example: They *would be talking* for hours if no one was there to interject.
 - In this example, the Continuous verb is “talking” and shows the possibility of continual action if there was no one to stop it.
 - Emphasis is placed on the duration of the action.
- Another example to show the possibility of action in the past: *They would have been talking* for hours if no one was there to interject.
 - This example also shows the continuous verb “talking” but is contextualized in the past by the use of “have been.”
 - Emphasis is still placed on the duration of the action.
 - This is also an example of the Conditional Perfect Continuous.

Conditional Perfect

This verb tense is similar to the above forms, but the verb is conjugated to the Past Participle.

- For example: I *would have completed* the assignment on time if my professor didn't change the due date.
 - Again, we see the use of “if” to suggest possibility. This example follows previous examples in structure: “would have + past participle.” This example indicates something that would have happened in the past.

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