

Verb Tenses

There are 12 main verb tenses in English and each serves a distinct purpose. This handout is meant to be a general overview on how the different tenses are used in writing.

	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect Continuous
Past	I studied yesterday.	I was studying when the phone rang.	I had studied Business models before enrolling in the Commerce program at SMU.	I had been studying Business models for 2 hrs. when you arrived.
Present	Eric reviews his lecture notes daily.	Eric is reviewing his lecture notes in the Atrium.	Eric has reviewed his lecture notes.	Eric has been reviewing her lecture notes for 3 days.
Future	Sarah will be an engineer.	Sarah will be working as an engineer next summer.	Sarah will have worked as an engineer for 4 years.	Sarah will have been working for 4 year by 2019.

The following sections list the functions of the verb tenses:

Past Tenses

Past Simple is used for completed past actions. Regular verbs take the “-ed” stem and for more information on irregular verbs in the past tense, check out page 2.

Past Continuous/Progressive is used for actions that happen for extended period of time in the past or when one past action interrupts another. It is formed using was/were + ing form of another verb.

Past Perfect is used to indicate an event preceded another past event. This tense is formed using had + 3rd form of a verb.

Past Perfect Continuous is used for an event that took place over an extended period of time in the past and then stopped in the past.

Present Tenses

Present Simple is used for schedules, routines, and habits. It is formed with the 1st form of the verb. Note that most 3rd person present simple verbs take an ‘s’

I write

She writes

Present Continuous/Progressive is used for actions that are happen in this exact moment. It is formed using am/is/are + ing form of another verb. If there is a time indicator, it can sometimes be used for the future.

I am creating this handout.(right now)

I am reviewing this handout tomorrow.(future as it has the time indicator tomorrow)

Present Perfect is used for actions that happened at an unspecific time before the present and to talk about experiences. The time must be unspecific for this tense to be used.

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Present Perfect Continuous is used for something that started in the past but continued until the present. It is formed using have been + ing form of the verb.

Ex. I have been working here for three years.

Future Tenses

Future Simple has two forms will and going to that have specific uses. There are some exceptions to these rules:

Will is used for promises and voluntary actions

Going to is used for plans

Future Continuous/Progressive is used when an action takes place in the future but it is interrupted. It is formed using will be+-ing form or going to + -ing form of a verb.

Jake will be studying sociology tonight before Shannon gets there.

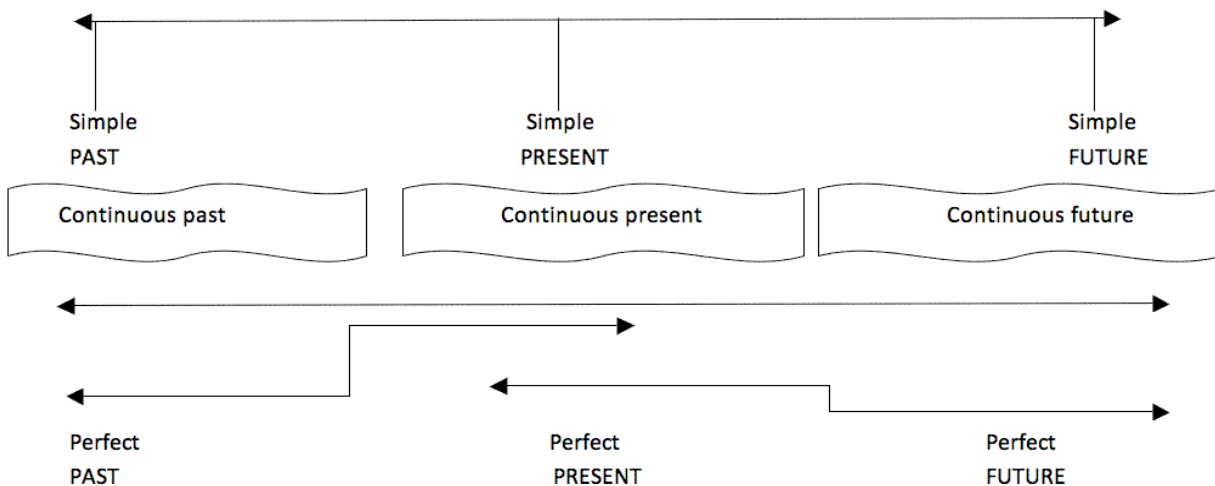
Future Perfect indicates an action that will be completed by a particular time in the future. It usually contains a time indicator. It is formed using will + have + past participle

Ex. She will have completed her degree by May 2015.

Future Perfect Continuous/Progressive is used to describe an event that will take place and end at a particular moment in the future. It is formed using will have been + ing form or going to + have been + ing form of the verb.

Ex. Jane will have been working as a tutor for four years by 2016.

Timeline of Tenses



From: <http://www.pics-searcher.appspot.com/?image=tenses-in-english-grammar-chart>