

ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Complete Study Guide

MASTERING ALL 12 TENSES

Past · Present · Future

Formulas · Examples · Usage Rules · Quick Reference

With Practice Tables & Memory Tips

INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH TENSES

WHAT IS A TENSE?

*A tense is a grammatical form of a verb that indicates the **TIME** at which an action, event, or state occurs — whether it happened in the past, is happening in the present, or will happen in the future.*

In English, verbs change their form to show tense. These changes tell the reader or listener **WHEN** something happened and **HOW** it relates to the present moment.

Time	Indicates whether the action is in the Past, Present, or Future.
Aspect	Shows if the action is Simple, Continuous (ongoing), Perfect (completed), or Perfect Continuous (ongoing then completed).
Form	Expressed through verb changes: base form, -s/-es, -ed, -ing, or auxiliary verbs (have, has, had, will, be).
Function	Helps convey habits, facts, events, duration, sequences, and plans precisely and clearly.

Classification of English Tenses

TIME	SIMPLE	CONTINUOUS	PERFECT	PERFECT CONT.
PAST	Simple Past Sub + V2	Past Continuous Sub + was/were + V-ing	Past Perfect Sub + had + V3	Past Perf. Cont. Sub + had been + V-ing
PRESENT	Simple Present Sub + V1	Pres. Continuous Sub + am/is/are + V-ing	Pres. Perfect Sub + have/has + V3	Pres. Perf. Cont. Sub + have/has been + V-ing
FUTURE	Simple Future Sub + will + V1	Future Continuous Sub + will be + V-ing	Future Perfect Sub + will have + V3	Future Perf. Cont. Sub + will have been + V-ing
ASPECT →	No ongoing / No completion	Ongoing / In progress	Completed / Resulted	Ongoing + Duration focus

Tenses by Time Frame

PAST (4 Tenses) • Simple Past • Past Continuous • Past Perfect • Past Perfect Continuous	PRESENT (4 Tenses) • Simple Present • Present Continuous • Present Perfect • Present Perfect Continuous	FUTURE (4 Tenses) • Simple Future • Future Continuous • Future Perfect • Future Perfect Continuous
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PAST TENSES

01. Simple Past

FORMULA: Subject + V2 (Past Form) / Subject + did not + V1

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	She visited Paris last year.
Negative	They did not watch the game.
Question	Did he finish his homework?

When to Use It

- ▶ Completed actions at a definite time in the past
- ▶ Series of completed actions in the past
- ▶ Past habits or repeated actions (with 'used to')
- ▶ Storytelling and narration

Key Time Words: yesterday, last week, ago, in 2010, once, when...

 **Tip:** Look for time markers like 'yesterday', 'last year', or 'ago' — they almost always signal Simple Past.

02. Past Continuous

FORMULA: Subject + was/were + V-ing

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	I was reading a book when she called.
Negative	They were not sleeping at midnight.
Question	Was he studying during the exam?

When to Use It

- ▶ Action in progress at a specific past time
- ▶ Background action interrupted by another (Simple Past)
- ▶ Two simultaneous past actions

- Polite or tentative requests

Key Time Words: *while, when, at this time yesterday, all day long, as*

 **Tip:** If you see 'while' + action + 'when' + another action, the continuous action uses Past Continuous.

03. Past Perfect

FORMULA: Subject + had + Past Participle (V3)

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	She had already eaten before he arrived.
Negative	He had not seen that movie before.
Question	Had they finished the project by Monday?

When to Use It

- Action completed before another past action
- Reporting speech (backshift from Present Perfect)
- Unrealized past wishes or regrets
- Third conditional sentences

Key Time Words: *by the time, before, after, already, just, never, until*

 **Tip:** Past Perfect is used when two things happened in the past — it marks the one that happened FIRST.

04. Past Perfect Continuous

FORMULA: Subject + had + been + V-ing

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	She had been working for 6 hours when he arrived.
Negative	They had not been living there long.
Question	Had you been waiting long before the bus came?

When to Use It

- ▶ Action ongoing up to a point in the past
- ▶ Emphasizing the duration of a past action
- ▶ Cause and effect in the past

Key Time Words: *for, since, how long, all day, before, when*

 **Tip:** Think of it as the 'past version' of Present Perfect Continuous — it stresses duration that ended at a past point.

PRESENT TENSES

05. Simple Present

FORMULA: Subject + V1 (base form) / Subject + V1+s/es (he/she/it)

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	The sun rises in the east.
Negative	She does not eat meat.
Question	Do they play football every Sunday?

When to Use It

- ▶ Universal truths and facts
- ▶ Habits and routines
- ▶ Scheduled future events (timetables)
- ▶ Directions and instructions

Key Time Words: *always, usually, often, sometimes, rarely, never, every day*

 **Tip:** Add -s or -es to the verb for he/she/it subjects: *He plays, She watches, It runs.*

06. Present Continuous

FORMULA: Subject + am/is/are + V-ing

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	She is writing a letter right now.
Negative	They are not watching TV at the moment.
Question	Is he cooking dinner tonight?

When to Use It

- ▶ Actions happening right now
- ▶ Temporary situations
- ▶ Planned future events (near future)

- Annoying habits with 'always'

Key Time Words: *now, at the moment, currently, right now, today, tonight*

 **Tip:** Some verbs are NOT used in continuous form: *know, like, love, hate, believe, want, need*. Use Simple Present instead.

07. Present Perfect

FORMULA: Subject + have/has + Past Participle (V3)

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	I have visited Japan twice.
Negative	She has not finished her report yet.
Question	Have you ever tried sushi?

When to Use It

- Past actions with present relevance
- Life experiences (indefinite time)
- Unfinished actions continuing to now
- Very recent actions (with 'just')

Key Time Words: *ever, never, already, yet, just, recently, since, for, so far*

 **Tip:** Never use specific past time with Present Perfect. 'I have seen him yesterday' is WRONG. Use: 'I saw him yesterday.'

08. Present Perfect Continuous

FORMULA: Subject + have/has + been + V-ing

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	She has been studying for three hours.
Negative	I have not been feeling well lately.

Question	How long have you been waiting here?
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When to Use It

- ▶ Action started in past, still continuing now
- ▶ Emphasizing duration of an ongoing activity
- ▶ Recent actions showing visible results

Key Time Words: *for, since, all day, how long, lately, recently*

 **Tip:** Compare: 'I have read 3 books' (result focus) vs 'I have been reading' (activity focus/duration).

FUTURE TENSES

09. Simple Future

FORMULA: Subject + will + V1 (base form)

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	She will call you tomorrow.
Negative	They will not attend the meeting.
Question	Will he pass the exam?

When to Use It

- ▶ Decisions made at the moment of speaking
- ▶ Predictions (with believe/think/hope)
- ▶ Promises, offers, and requests
- ▶ Facts about the future

Key Time Words: *tomorrow, next week/month/year, soon, in the future, someday*

 **Tip:** Use 'going to' for plans already decided, and 'will' for spontaneous decisions made at the moment of speaking.

10. Future Continuous

FORMULA: Subject + will + be + V-ing

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	This time tomorrow, I will be flying to London.
Negative	She will not be working next Monday.
Question	Will they be attending the ceremony?

When to Use It

- ▶ Action in progress at a specific future time
- ▶ Planned or expected future actions
- ▶ Polite questions about future plans

- Parallel future actions

Key Time Words: *this time tomorrow, at 8 PM, next week at this time*

 **Tip:** Use it for polite inquiries: 'Will you be using the car tonight?' feels less demanding than 'Will you use the car?'

11. Future Perfect

FORMULA: Subject + will + have + Past Participle (V3)

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	By June, she will have graduated.
Negative	He will not have finished the book by Friday.
Question	Will they have left before we arrive?

When to Use It

- Action completed before a specific future time
- Expectations about the present or future
- Predictions about completed actions

Key Time Words: *by, by the time, before, already, by then*

 **Tip:** The key word is 'BY'. 'By the time X happens, Y will have been done.' The future perfect action finishes **BEFORE** the deadline.

12. Future Perfect Continuous

FORMULA: Subject + will + have + been + V-ing

Examples

Type	Example Sentence
Positive	By December, I will have been working here for 5 years.
Negative	She will not have been sleeping for long.
Question	Will you have been teaching for 10 years by next month?

When to Use It

- ▶ Ongoing action up to a specific future point
- ▶ Emphasizing duration of a future action
- ▶ Actions expected to continue up to a deadline

Key Time Words: *by, for, since, for how long, by the time*

 **Tip:** *This is the most complex tense! It combines Future Perfect with duration — focus on HOW LONG something will have been happening.*

QUICK REFERENCE CHART — ALL 12 TENSES

Tense	Formula	Time Words	Example
Simple Past	Sub + V2	yesterday, ago	She walked.
Past Continuous	Sub + was/were + V-ing	while, when	She was walking.
Past Perfect	Sub + had + V3	before, by the time	She had walked.
Past Perfect Continuous	Sub + had been + V-ing	for, since (past)	She had been walking.
Simple Present	Sub + V1 / V1+s	always, usually	She walks.
Present Continuous	Sub + am/is/are + V-ing	now, at the moment	She is walking.
Present Perfect	Sub + have/has + V3	ever, never, yet, just	She has walked.
Present Perfect Continuous	Sub + have/has been + V-ing	for, since, how long	She has been walking.
Simple Future	Sub + will + V1	tomorrow, next year	She will walk.
Future Continuous	Sub + will be + V-ing	at this time tomorrow	She will be walking.
Future Perfect	Sub + will have + V3	by, before (future)	She will have walked.
Future Perfect Continuous	Sub + will have been + V-ing	by...for how long	She will have been walking.

Common Signal Words Summary

Signal Word	Tense(s) Suggested
<i>yesterday / last night / ago</i>	Simple Past
<i>while / as (two actions)</i>	Past Continuous
<i>by the time / before (past)</i>	Past Perfect
<i>always / usually / every day</i>	Simple Present
<i>now / at the moment / currently</i>	Present Continuous
<i>ever / never / already / yet / just</i>	Present Perfect
<i>for / since + ongoing duration</i>	Present/Past Perfect Continuous
<i>tomorrow / next week / soon</i>	Simple Future
<i>this time tomorrow / at 3 PM future</i>	Future Continuous
<i>by + future date/time</i>	Future Perfect
<i>by + future date + for + duration</i>	Future Perfect Continuous

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT!

Identify the tense in every sentence you read, and you'll master all 12 in no time.