

Simple Verb Tenses

Simple Tenses

Present (Simple Present): Formed with the base of plain form, the present customary, habitual, or ongoing actions and general truths. Note that for subject-verb agreement, when the subject is third person singular, the present tense verb ends with *s* or *es*.

Signal words: often, seldom, never, always, sometimes, usually.

I *work* at a bookstore. (habitual action)
Chris *works* at a restaurant. (habitual action)
The earth *is* round. (general truth)

Present Continuous: *am, is, are* + base form + *-ing* (present participle) to describe actions occurring at the present, time, now, immediately. *Signal words:* now, for the time being, at present, at the moment, temporarily.

I *am wearing* my new raincoat.
We *are hoping* that the rain will stop soon.

Past (Simple Past): Formed with the adaptation of *d* or *ed* to regular verbs or according to the principal part chart for irregular verbs, the past tense shows completion before the present—a single past occurrence or a definite past time.

Signal words: yesterday, last year, a month ago, when, before.

I *walked* to school when I *lived* in Alabama.
I *worked* at a bookstore last summer.
I *drove* to school yesterday.

Past continuous: *was* or *were* + base form + *-ing* (present participle) to describe a past action interrupted by another past action.

Signal words: while, as, when.

I *was jogging* in the park when the rain began.
Jane and Roy *were painting* the living room when the phone rang.

Future (Simple Future): Formed with *will* plus the present (base) form of the main verb, the future tense shows anticipation action, action that is expected to take place after the present.

Signal words: tomorrow, later, next week, next year, soon.

John *will work* at a bookstore next summer.
Margaret *will sing* at the concert on Friday.

Future continuous: *will* +be base form + *ing* (present participle) to describe an action that will be in progress in the future. *Signal words*: this time next year, by the time that.

Kelly *will be wearing* a new red hat at the concert.

Perfect Tenses

Present Tense: Formed with the present tense of *have* (choose either have or, if the subject is third person singular, *has*) plus the past participle of the main verb, the present tense is used under several circumstances.

Signal words: since, several times, every, just, recent.

1. Action that began in the past and continues to the present with the sense that it will continue in the future.
John has *worked* at the bookstore since last summer.
2. Action that occurred more than once or repeatedly in the past.
Margaret has *sung* at every Friday concert held at the school.
3. Action that happened at an unknown past time.
Our friends have *traveled* to Paris.
4. A recent occurrence given extra emphasis.
The boys have just *found* the coins.
5. A completed action given extra emphasis.
Yes, we have *studied* for the test.

Past perfect: Formed with *had* plus the past participle of the main verb, the past perfect tense emphasizes the earlier of two past actions.

1. Use the *simple past* when two past actions are presented in normal chronological (time) order. Use the *past perfect* when two past actions are presented out of time order, as in the examples below.

Signal words: by the time, after, before, already

Chronological (normal time) order. The children *picked* a quart of strawberries and *ate* them for dessert. Note that these two actions appear in normal chronological order in the sentence; therefore, both verbs are in the simple past tense.

Nonchronological order: For dessert the children ate the quart of strawberries they *had picked*. Note that the actions are presented here out of chronological order, the action that happened earlier comes later in the sentence. Therefore, the earlier action is emphasized by the past perfect tense.

We *painted* the house blue after we *had scrubbed* the dirt off.
After he had *stepped* on the nail, his foot *began* to hurt.

2. Use the *past perfect* when two actions appear in normal chronological order with *special emphasis* on the first action's having been completed before the beginning of the second action.

Signal words: after, before, by the time

No emphasis on completion: The secretary *typed* the letter, and the boss *signed* it.

Emphasis on completion: After the secretary *had typed* the letter, the boss *signed* it.

Future Perfect: Formed with *will have* plus the past participle of the main verb, the future perfect shows an action that is expected to occur before another future action or before a specific future time.

The Smiths will have *painted* their house before you arrive.
John *will have worked* at the bookstore for a year by May.