

Paul Emmerson **Business**
Grammar
Builder

2nd edition

Intermediate to upper-intermediate

Clear explanations for real situations


MACMILLAN

1

Present time 1

A Present simple: form

The present simple is formed with the infinitive of the verb.
We add *s* for *he/she/it*.

I/you/we/they work here.

He/she works here.

Negatives are formed with *do/does not*. In speech and informal writing we use contractions.

I/you/we/they do not (don't) work here.

He/she/it does not (doesn't) work here.

Questions are formed with the auxiliary verb *do/does* and the infinitive. Short answers to *yes/no* questions repeat the auxiliary.

A: **Do you work here?**

B: Yes, I **do**. / No, I **don't**.

A: **Does she work here?**

B: Yes, she **does**. / No, she **doesn't**.

B Present simple: uses

We use the present simple for permanent facts.

This machine cuts the metal.

We use the present simple for actions and situations that are generally true.

We offer a full range of financial products.

We use the present simple for actions which are repeated regularly over a long period of time, for example habits and routines.

Most of our customers invest a regular amount every month.

C Present simple: time expressions

We often use frequency adverbs with the present simple.

Examples include: *always, often, usually, normally, sometimes, occasionally, rarely, hardly ever, never*.

Note the position of frequency adverbs:

Before the main verb.

I often use my laptop on the train.

After the verb *be*.

I'm usually nervous before a presentation.

Adverb phrases like *every day/year, once a week/quarter, most of the time, now and then* can come at the beginning or end of the sentence. If they come at the beginning there is more focus on the time phrase.

We use the present simple, not a future form, after these time expressions: *when, after, before, unless, in case, as soon as, until*.

I'll tell her when I see her.

(NOT *I'll tell her when I will see her*.)

D Present continuous: form

The present continuous is formed with the auxiliary verb *be* and the *-ing* form of the main verb. In speech and informal writing we use contractions.

I am (I'm) working here.

You are (you're) working here.

She is (she's) working here.

We are (we're) working here.

They are (they're) working here.

Negatives are formed with *be + not*.

I'm not working here.

You're not/You aren't working here.

She's not/She isn't working here.

We're not/We aren't working here.

They're not/They aren't working here.

Questions are formed by inverting the subject and the auxiliary *be*. Short answers to *yes/no* questions repeat the auxiliary.

A: **Are you working here?**

B: Yes, I **am**. / No, I **am not**.

A: **Is he working here?**

B: Yes, **he is**. / No, **he isn't**.

E Present continuous: uses

We use the present continuous to talk about temporary actions and situations that are happening now.

The action or situation may be in progress now, at the moment of speaking.

Sorry, Mr Clark can't see you at the moment. He's talking to a customer.

The action or situation may be happening 'around now', even if it is not happening exactly at the moment of speaking.

Mr Clark is out of the office today. He's talking at a conference in Stuttgart.

The action or situation may be a current trend.

Workers all over the world are retiring later in life.

F Present continuous: time expressions

The present continuous is often used with these time expressions: *now, at the moment, nowadays, currently, these days, right now*.

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system.

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Present time 2

A Present simple or continuous?

The present simple and present continuous are explained separately in unit 1. Now compare them:

Present simple

permanent
habits & routines
general situations

Present continuous

temporary
events in progress now
a particular situation

*I **live** in Budapest.*

(all the time)

*I'm **living** in Budapest.*

(for a few months)

*The plane **lands** at 10.25.*

(routine)

*Look! We're **landing**.*

(in progress now)

*We **offer** IT solutions.*

(general situation)

*We're **offering** you a special deal.*

(particular situation)

B Present continuous or present perfect continuous?

The present continuous is used for a temporary action happening now.

The present perfect continuous (unit 6) describes an action in progress from the past up to the present.

*Sue **is working** on the new design.*

(in progress now, and will continue)

*Sue **has been working** on the new design.*

(in progress up to now, and may or may not continue)

C Other uses of present tenses

PRESENT SIMPLE

The present simple can be used to refer to timetables and schedules, and here we are often thinking about the future.

*British Airways flight BA729 **leaves** Geneva at 16.40 and **arrives** in London at 17.20.*

The present simple can be used to make a story appear more immediate and interesting. This is common in journalism.

*Senior managers **walk** into the annual shareholders meeting through the back door. The steelworkers **throw** smoke bombs at the front. They **are not** happy about the job cuts.*

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

The present continuous can be used to describe a fixed future arrangement. There is usually a future time expression (unit 7).

*HSBC **are moving** to new premises next year.*

We can use *always* with the present continuous. This is often used for exaggerating or complaining. We emphasize *always* in speech in this case.

*This photocopier **is always** breaking down!*

D State verbs

Some verbs describe states, not actions; nothing 'happens'. Verbs like this are not normally used in the continuous form of any tense.

*I **notice** that you've changed the design.*

(NOT ~~I'm noticing~~)

*Let me help you – I **know** what to do.*

(NOT ~~I'm knowing~~)

*How much **does it cost**?*

(NOT ~~How much is it costing?~~)

*It **weighs** 4 kg with the packaging.*

(NOT ~~It is weighing~~)

The examples are in the present simple above, even though we are talking about temporary situations.

State verbs include:

the senses

appear, hear, look like, notice, see, seem, smell, sound, taste

feelings

dislike, fear, hate, like, love, prefer, want, wish

thinking

agree, believe, doubt, expect, feel, forget, imagine, know, realize, recognize, suppose, suspect, think

possession

belong to, contain, have, include, own, possess

being

be, consist of, exist

other verbs

cost, depend on, fit, involve, matter, measure, mean, need, satisfy, surprise, weigh

Many of the verbs in the previous list can have a 'state' meaning and an 'action' meaning.

*Our suppliers **are** usually very helpful. (state)*

*Our suppliers **are being** very helpful. (action)*

*I **feel** that the plan won't work. (feel = think)*

*I'm **feeling** cold – is the window open? (feel ≠ think)*

*I **have** two sisters. (state)*

*I'm **having** problems with this laptop. (action)*

*The manual **includes** cleaning instructions. (state)*

*I'm **including** you in the plans for dinner. (action)*

*I **think** you're right. (state)*

*I'm **thinking** about changing my job. (action)*

*I **weigh** 85 kg. (state)*

*I'm **weighing** the flour for your cake. (action)*

State verbs are not normally used in the imperative.

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system.

3

Past time 1

A Past simple: form

The past simple of regular verbs is formed by adding *-ed* to the infinitive. Verbs ending in *-e* simply add *-d*. Common irregular verbs are listed on page 240.

check-checked I **checked** the figures.
like-liked They **liked** her idea.

Irregular: *buy-bought* *do-did* *eat-ate* *drink-drank* *go-went*
sell-sold *think-thought*, etc.

Negatives are formed with *did not* and the infinitive. This is contracted to *didn't* in speech and informal writing.

*I **didn't** go to the meeting.*

Questions are formed with the auxiliary verb *did* and the infinitive. Short answers to *yes/no* questions repeat the auxiliary.

A: **Did** you check the figures?

B: Yes, I **did**. / No, I **didn't**.

The verb *to be* is irregular and follows a different pattern. In negatives there is no *did*. In questions there is no *did* and the subject and verb are inverted.

*He **was** late. He **wasn't** late. **Was** he late?*

B Past simple: uses

We use the past simple to describe actions and states in a completed period of time. We know when the action happened, and this may be mentioned or clear from the situation.

*I **checked** the figures very carefully **yesterday**.*

The past simple is also used to describe habitual actions in the past.

*Every evening we **went out** and **ate** in a different restaurant.*

C Past simple: time expressions

Time expressions used with the past simple include:

at	<i>twelve o'clock / the end of the year</i>
in	<i>the morning / June / 2008 / the nineties</i>
on	<i>Friday / the second of April</i>
(no preposition)	<i>last week / yesterday / ago</i>

See unit 40 for more time expressions.

D Past continuous: form

The past continuous is formed with the past of *be* and the *-ing* form of the main verb. Negatives are formed with the verb *be* + *not*. In speech and informal writing we use contractions.

*He **was** / **wasn't** working yesterday.*

Questions are formed by inverting the subject and the auxiliary verb *be*. Short answers to *yes/no* questions repeat the auxiliary.

A: **Was** he working yesterday?

B: Yes, he **was**. / No, he **wasn't**.

E Past continuous: uses

The past continuous is used to describe a situation in progress in the past.

*I **was waiting** in the departure lounge for more than two hours.*

There can be several situations in progress, happening at the same time.

*The company **was losing** its way and many employees **were leaving**.*

The past continuous is used to give information about the background situation. The separate, completed actions that happen during or after this period are in the past simple.

*I **was trying** to call you but my battery **died**.*

*I **came** into the company as it **was recovering** from the recession.*

If we do not mention the background situation, then the separate actions are in the past simple in the normal way.

*I **arrived** at the conference, **registered**, and **went** straight to the first presentation.*

F Past continuous: time expressions

We can use *when*, *while* or *as* with the past continuous to mean 'during the time that something was happening'.

***While/When** we **were developing** the software, we carried on a variety of simulations.*

But if we mean 'at the time that', then we only use *when* with the past simple.

*He **wasn't** very happy **when** I told him the news.*

(NOT *while* I told him ...)

G Past simple or continuous?

Sometimes the past simple or past continuous can be used. The past simple suggests a separate, complete action or event. The past continuous emphasizes the duration of the action.

*We **discussed** the report and agreed that direct marketing was a viable strategy.*

*We **were discussing** the report for over an hour. Eventually we came to some important decisions.*

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system

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Past time 2

A Past perfect: form

The past perfect is formed with the auxiliary *had* and the past participle. In speech and informal writing *had* is contracted to 'd.

We **had** (We'd) already **done** a lot of market research before we launched the product.

Negatives are formed with *not* and contractions are used (*hadn't*). Questions are formed by inverting the subject and *had*.

At that time we still **hadn't done** any research.

Had you already **done** some market research?

B Past perfect: uses

The past perfect is used to show clearly that one past event happened before another past event. We use the past perfect for the earlier event.

Compare these examples, which describe exactly the same situation:

- 1 Sue **left** at 2 pm. We **arrived** at her office at 2.15.
(both verbs in past simple)
- 2 When we **arrived** at Sue's office, she **had left**.
(earlier action in past perfect)

In example 1 the two actions are separate in the mind of the speaker. In example 2 there is a stronger connection between the two actions and the past perfect emphasizes which one happened first.

It may not be necessary to use the past perfect if we use *before* or *after* to make the time sequence clear. In this case we use the past simple for both actions.

Sue **left** / **had left** her office **before** we arrived.
(both forms are possible)

The past perfect is often used with verbs of thinking, like *know*, *realize*, *remember*, *be sure*, *think*.

When I got to their office, I **realized I'd left** all my papers behind.

Makan **was sure they hadn't received** the invoice, but he checked one more time.

C Past perfect: time expressions

The time expressions *after*, *once*, *by*, *already*, *just*, *never*, *meanwhile* are often used with the past perfect. The word *still* is often used with negative forms.

I **had just started** my presentation when the fire alarm rang.
It was Friday lunchtime and I still **hadn't finished** the report.

D Past perfect continuous: form

The past perfect continuous is formed with the auxiliary phrase *had been* and the *-ing* form of the main verb.

I'd **been working** on the project for two months before they decided to cancel it.

Negatives are formed with *had not been* and the *-ing* form of the main verb.

Questions are formed by inverting the subject and *had*.

We **hadn't been doing** enough quality checks, and the number of defects was too high.

Had you been working on the project for a long time before they cancelled it?

E Past perfect continuous: uses

The past perfect continuous is used to describe a situation that was in progress up to a certain point in the past. It often emphasizes the duration of time.

I'd **been thinking** of changing my job for a long time before I finally made the decision.

The past perfect and the past perfect continuous both look back from a point in the past. The past perfect looks back at an earlier event. The past perfect continuous looks back at a situation in progress.

The economy was improving. The central bank **had lowered** interest rates because inflation **had been falling** steadily for several years.

F Used to / would + infinitive

Used to describes a habit, state or repeated action in the past. *Used to* normally suggests that the action or situation is no longer true and so makes a contrast with the present.

We **used to do** a big sales promotion every summer.
(= but now we don't)

I **used to work** in marketing.

(= but now I work in another area)

With negatives and questions *used to* becomes *use to*.

Did you use to work in marketing?

I didn't use to spend so much time on reports.

Would is used in the same way as *used to*, but it only describes repeated actions in the past, not states. It is slightly more formal.

In the old days we **used to archive** / **would archive** every single email.

Our company **used to belong** to an American multinational.
(NOT ~~would belong~~)

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system

5

Connecting past and present 1

A Present perfect: form

The present perfect is formed with the present tense of the auxiliary verb *have* and the past participle. In speech and informal writing we use contractions ('ve and 's).

I / you / we / they **have** ('ve) **gone**.

He / she / it **has** ('s) **gone**.

Negatives are formed with *not*.

I / you / we / they **have not** (haven't) **gone**.

He / she / it **has not** (hasn't) **gone**.

Questions are formed by inverting the subject and the auxiliary verb *have*. Short answers to *yes/no* questions repeat the auxiliary.

A: **Have they gone?**

B: Yes, **they have**. / No, **they haven't**.

A: **Has he gone?**

B: Yes, **he has**. / No, **he hasn't**.

B Present perfect: uses

In general we use the present perfect to talk about a present situation which is connected to the past.

There may be a present situation that started in the past.

I've lived here for about ten years.

There may be a series of actions that happened in our life up to now.

I've been to Singapore many times.

There may be a result in the present of a past event.

I think I've set up the spreadsheet incorrectly – **I hope I don't have** to enter all the data again.

In this last case we are explaining the current importance of a past event. When it happened is not important and is not mentioned.

C Present perfect: time expressions

We use *ever* and *never* to ask and talk about our general life experience.

Have you ever spoken to a large audience?

I've never used this software before.

If the answer to the question is *Yes* then we continue to give more information about the specific events by using verbs in the past simple.

A: **Have you ever spoken** to a large audience?

B: Yes, **I have**. Last year **I went** to a sales conference in Berne and **I gave** a presentation to about 100 people.

The present perfect is often used with *already* and *yet*. *Already* is normally used in affirmative sentences.

We have already made 75% of our planned investment.

Yet is used in questions and negatives, and suggests that although something has not happened, we do expect it to happen.

Have you finished the report **yet**?

We haven't had any delays with the project – **yet!**

We use *just* to describe something that happened a short time ago.

I've just spoken to her on the phone.

The present perfect is often used with time expressions that refer to unfinished time. In other words, the time period includes the present. Common expressions like this are: *this morning, today, this month, so far, up to now, recently, lately, over the last few years*, etc.

Growth in the Asia-Pacific region **has exceeded** 5% annually **over the past few years**.

We use *for* and *since* with the present perfect to refer to periods of time.

A: How long **has** Wolfgang **worked** here?

B: **He's worked** here **for** three months.

OR

B: **He's worked** here **since** May.

For describes the length of the time period. *Since* describes the point when the time period started. (Unit 40C).

Frequency adverbs that are used with the present simple (unit 1C) can also be used with the present perfect.

Our lawyers have often given us good advice.

Some time expressions can be used with the present perfect or the past simple, depending on when you are speaking.

Have you spoken to Sue **this morning**?

(It is now 11 am; the morning has not finished.)

Did you speak to Sue **this morning**?

(It is now 3 pm; the morning has finished.)

D been (to) and gone (to)

If we *have been* to a place, we went there and have now returned. If we *have gone* to a place, we went there but have not yet returned.

She's been to Head Office. Everything is sorted out now. (she has come back)

She's gone to Head Office. I hope everything will be sorted out. (she is still there)

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system.

6

Connecting past and present 2

A Past simple or present perfect?

The past simple is used to describe actions in a completed time period.

The present perfect is used when the time period includes the present.

*I **lived** in Milan many years ago.*

(completed: now I live in another place)

*I **'ve lived** in Milan since 2008.*

(a situation that started in the past and continues in the present: I still live there)

*I **'ve been** to Milan several times.*

(life experience)

*My boss **has agreed** to your proposal.*

(present result of a past action)

Time phrases used with the past simple (unit 3C) refer to a particular point in the past: *yesterday, last month.*

Time phrases used with the present perfect (unit 5C) link the past to the present: *since, never, this month.*

The choice of tense often depends on the situation and where our attention is.

*Good news! We **'ve won** the contract!*

(recent news: the event is present in my mind)

*So, we **won** the contract, and then ...*

(telling a story: the event feels distant in my mind)

B Present simple or present perfect?

The present simple is used for permanent facts and states, and regular habits.

The present perfect makes a connection between past and present.

*I **work** here.*

(a permanent state: I work here every day)

*I **'ve worked** here for two years.*

(I started two years ago and still work here now)

C Present perfect continuous: form

The present perfect continuous is formed with the present perfect of *be*, and the *-ing* form of the verb. Negatives are formed with *not*.

*I **'ve been (haven't been)** waiting here for more than an hour.*

*She **'s been (hasn't been)** waiting here for ages.*

Questions are formed by inverting the subject and *have*.

***Have you** been waiting long?*

***Has she** been waiting long?*

D Present perfect continuous: uses

The present perfect continuous describes an action or situation in progress from the past up to the present.

*Production at this site **has been increasing** steadily since we started here five years ago.*

The present perfect continuous often emphasizes the length of time of the action.

*I **'ve been working on** this report all week.*

The present perfect continuous can be used for repeated actions.

*I **'ve been calling** her all afternoon, but she's always in a meeting.*

The action may be finished or continuing; we only know by the situation.

*You're late! I **'ve been waiting** here for ages!*

(the waiting is finished now)

*I **'ve been waiting** for ages. Where is she?*

(I will continue waiting)

E Present perfect continuous: time expressions

Typical time expressions used with the present perfect continuous include: *all day, for months, for ages, recently, over the last few years, since, for.*

F Present perfect or present perfect continuous?

Sometimes there is no difference in meaning between the present perfect and present perfect continuous.

*I **'ve worked/been working** here for two years.*

The choice of tense often depends on where our attention is. We use the present perfect if our attention is on the present result.

*I **'ve written** the report. Here it is.*

(the finished report is in my mind)

We use the present perfect continuous if our attention is on the action in progress.

*I **'ve been writing** the report. I'm exhausted.*

(the act of writing is in my mind)

If we give details of how many or how much, we do not use a continuous form.

*I **'ve written** three reports this week.*

*I **'ve done** a lot of research on this company.*

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system.

7

Future 1

A will

We can use *will* + the infinitive (without *to*) to refer to the future. *Will* is usually shortened in speech and informal writing to *'ll*. The negative of *will* is *won't*.

We use *will* to make predictions and to state facts about future events.

Over the next decade there will be a big increase in the use of nuclear power.

In June we will bring out two new models.

We can add *perhaps/maybe* or *probably*.

Maybe I'll join you later in the bar.

Notice that *probably* comes after *will* but before *won't*.

He'll probably agree with you.

He probably won't agree with you.

We can use *will* with an introductory phrase to give other meanings. For example, a personal opinion (*I think*), a hope (*I hope*) or an expectation (*I expect*).

I think we'll probably open an office in Taipei next year.

Will can be used for instant decisions and thoughts that come into our head at the moment of speaking.

I'll wait for you outside.

I'll call you tomorrow.

See unit 11D for more uses of *will*.

B be going to

We use the verb *be* + *going to* + the infinitive to make a connection between the present and the future.

We use *be going to* for plans and intentions. These are things we have already decided to do.

I'm going to email her this afternoon.

The ECB is going to monitor inflation closely.

We use *be going to* to make predictions when there is evidence in the present situation (we already know or can see something).

Be careful! It's going to fall.

(I can see it on the edge of the table)

Note that *be going to* can refer to near or distant time. For example, we can say *'the world is going to end in 8 billion years'* because scientists have evidence now.

C Present continuous

We can use the present continuous to talk about things we have arranged to do. There is nearly always a future time expression.

HSBC are moving to new premises next year.

The arrangements are often social arrangements or appointments.

I'm busy on Tuesday afternoon. I'm seeing Jack at two, and after that I'm meeting my bank manager.

See also units 1E and 2C for the present continuous.

D will or be going to?

There are many occasions when we can use either form.

In my presentation I'll talk / I'm going to talk about three main areas. First, ...

Here the speaker could see it as a fact (*will*) or an intention (*going to*).

Will and *be going to* are both used for decisions. *Will* is used for instant decisions; *be going to* is used for decisions already made (i.e. plans and intentions).

Great idea! I'll do it tomorrow.

(an instant decision)

Yes, I know. I'm going to do it tomorrow.

(a plan or intention)

Will and *be going to* are both used for predictions. *Will* is used for general beliefs about the future; *be going to* is used when there is some present evidence.

I'm sure they'll like the new design.

(general belief or opinion)

We're going to make a loss on this product line.

(I have the figures in front of me)

Will is more usual in writing. *'ll* and *be going to* are more usual in speech.

E be going to or present continuous?

For plans and arrangements there is often little difference in meaning. However, *be going to* can suggest that the details of the arrangement are still open, while the present continuous can suggest that the arrangement is more fixed.

I'm going to meet her next week.

(just a plan – time and place are still unknown)

I'm meeting her at ten in my office.

(a definite arrangement with a time and place)

F Time expressions

Common time expressions for the future include: *tomorrow*, *the day after tomorrow*, *on Friday*, *at the weekend*, *next week/year*, *in a few days' time*, *in the next five minutes/months*.

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system.

8

Future 2

A Using *when, after, until, etc.*

We use the present simple or present perfect (not *will*) to refer to the future after these words: *when, after, before, unless, in case, as soon as, until, by the time, the next time.*

When I see her, I'll pass on your message.

We'll discuss it again **after** you **get back**.

As soon as I've finished, I'll tell you.

Notice that *will* can be used in the other part of the sentence.

B Fixed timetables

We often use the present simple (or present continuous) when we talk about events in the future based on a fixed timetable, program or calendar.

Jim's plane **leaves (is leaving)** at 12.20.

Our boss **retires (is retiring)** next year.

C Future continuous

The future continuous is formed with *will + be + the -ing form of the verb*.

I'll be seeing Konstantin this afternoon.

Where will you be working next month?

The future continuous describes an activity in progress in the future. We often use it when we compare activities now and in the future. There is nearly always a time expression.

Next year I'll be working in our São Paulo office.

The future continuous is often used to say that something will definitely happen.

We'll be holding a meeting soon, so we can make a decision then.

D Future perfect

The future perfect is formed with *will + have + past participle*.

By the time I retire, I'll have been in banking for over thirty years.

By the time the contract expires, what will we have paid in total?

We use the future perfect to look back from one point in the future to an earlier event or period of time. We often use *by* or *by the time* with the future perfect.

By the end of the year we'll have sold around 20,000 units.

By the time our supplier ships this order **we'll have run out of** inventory in the warehouse.

It is common to use a simple *will* form in place of the future perfect.

By the end of the year we'll sell around 20,000 units.

We use the continuous form of the future perfect to look back from one point in the future at an activity in progress.

Next year we'll have been manufacturing the same model, without a facelift, for four years.

E *was going to*

Was/were going to is not a future form. We use it to talk about plans or intentions in the past that didn't actually happen.

*I'm sorry, I **was going to call** this morning, but we had an urgent quality control issue that I had to deal with.*

F Other ways to talk about the future

We use the verbs *expect, hope, intend, would like, plan, want* followed by an infinitive to refer to the future.

We hope to get the contract.

I'd like to discuss this in more detail *when we meet*.

We plan to extend our sales network next year.

Notice the different negative forms:

*I expect/hope I **won't** ...*

*I **wouldn't** like to ...*

*We **don't** intend/plan/want to ...*

We often use the verb *think* followed by 'll:

I think I'll change my mobile network.

We can use *be due to* for things that we expect to happen soon.

He is due to name his replacement as CEO *within the next few days*.

We can use *be about to* for things that will (or will not) happen very soon.

*The pace of development in new technology **is not about to** slow.*

Shall is used as a simple future like *will* only in very formal contexts, for example legal documents and contracts.

Normally *Shall I/we ... ?* are used to make suggestions (about the present or the future).

Shall I open the window?

Shall we meet again next week?

G Future probability

We can use modals and other phrases to talk about the probability that something will happen in the future. The table below gives an overview which is developed in unit 13 (page 58) and not practised here.

100%	certainty	<i>will, be certain to</i>
95-100%	deduction	<i>must, can't</i>
80%	expectation	<i>should, shouldn't, ought to, ought not to, be likely to, be unlikely to</i>
30-70%	uncertainty	<i>may, may not, might, might not, could</i>
0%	certainty	<i>won't</i>

See page 243 for an overview of the English verb tense system.

9

Passive 1

A Form

To make the passive we use *to be* and a past participle. Compare the Active (A) and Passive (P) for different tenses:

- A: Intel **produces** millions of chips every year.
 P: Millions of chips **are produced** every year.
- A: Our supplier is **shipping** the goods next week.
 P: The goods **are being shipped** next week.
- A: The ECB **raised** interest rates by 0.25%.
 P: Interest rates **were raised** by 0.25%.
- A: He **was asking** me some difficult questions.
 P: I **was being asked** some difficult questions.
- A: They **have chosen** the new design.
 P: The new design **has been chosen**.
- A: Rosa **will give** a briefing tomorrow.
 P: A briefing **will be given** tomorrow.
- A: They **can arrange** a loan within three days.
 P: A loan **can be arranged** within three days.
- A: We **may produce** some new sales targets.
 P: Some new sales targets **may be produced**.

The object in the active sentence (*millions of chips / interest rates*) moves to the front in the passive sentence and becomes the new subject.

We form negatives and questions in the same way as in active sentences.

*The new design **hasn't been** chosen.*
***Has** the new design **been** chosen?*

B Uses: focus on important information

In the active sentences above the person or organization who does the action (*Intel / The ECB / Rosa*) is important.

In the passive sentences above the person or organization who does the action is not mentioned. It might be:

- unimportant
- clear from the situation
- unknown

Instead, the important information is either the actions (*raised / chosen*) or the things affected by the action (*Millions of chips / The goods / A briefing*).

C Uses: systems and processes

We often use the passive to talk about systems, processes and procedures. Language is often specialized and technical, as in this example adapted from the Dewar's Scotch Whisky website.

Malt whisky **is made** exclusively from barley. In August the barley **is harvested** and then **left** to rest for a couple of months. The next step is 'malting', where the grain **is soaked** in water to germinate, and then **heated**. This causes the grain to produce starches, which **are** later **converted** to sugars and then alcohol. The malted barley **is placed** into huge vessels and **mixed** with water to make a 'wort'. The wort **is cooled**, then **run** into another vessel. After that yeast **is added**, and fermentation begins. When fermentation is complete, a liquid called 'the wash' remains. This liquid is ready for distilling. In distilling, the liquid **is heated** until the spirit turns to vapour, which **is** then **condensed** back into liquid. Repeated distillation produces whisky. The final stage is maturing, and by law Scotch whisky **must be aged** for at least three years in oak barrels.

To show a sequence in a process we use linking words like: *Firstly / First of all, Then, The next step is, Next, After that, Later, Finally, The final stage is*. There are some examples in the text above.

D Saying who does the action: by

In the passive examples in section A the person or organization that does the action is not mentioned. If we want to say who does the action, we use *by*.

*The goods are being shipped next week **by our supplier in China**.*

*A briefing will be given tomorrow **by our Information Officer, Rosa Mendoza**.*

E Transitive and intransitive verbs

Verbs which usually take objects are called transitive verbs, while verbs which do not are called intransitive verbs. Dictionaries show this information with T or I, and some verbs can be both. Only transitive verbs can be made passive.

Raise (T) *Taxes were raised last year.*
 possible

Increase (T/I) *Taxes were increased last year.*
 possible

Go up (I) *Taxes were ~~gone up~~ last year.*
 not possible

10 Passive 2

A Uses: maintaining the focus

A passive can be used to keep the focus of a paragraph. The second sentence starts with a word that relates to the subject of the first sentence.

(Hasso Plattner) is a German entrepreneur. (He) founded SAP in 1972 after working for IBM.

(Hasso Plattner continues to be the focus)

(SAP) is a world leader in business software. (It) was founded by Hasso Plattner in 1972, after he left IBM.

(SAP continues to be the focus)

Both of the above are good style. Compare with this version, which is poor style:

SAP is a world leader in business software. Hasso Plattner founded # in 1972 after he left IBM.

Here the two sentences begin with a different subject, and it is unclear whether the focus of the paragraph is going to be SAP or Hasso Plattner.

B Uses: being formal and impersonal

Passives are frequent in formal writing generally, for example in reports and legal documents. Try to find a balance between active and passive forms, as too many passive forms can make the text difficult to understand.

A typical context for formal/impersonal language is a complaint. Compare:

ACTIVE

We ordered 20 filter units from you on the 16th March and the courier delivered them yesterday. Unfortunately, when we opened the package, someone had damaged two of the units. Our production department needs these items urgently.

PASSIVE (more formal and serious)

20 filter units were ordered from you on the 16th March and they were delivered yesterday. Unfortunately, when the package was opened, two of the units had been damaged in transit. These items are needed urgently by our production department.

Passives are used in phrases with *It* to report formally what people believe or said.

It was agreed/claimed/suggested that ...

A typical context for this is a summary of a meeting, written after it has finished (unit 27C).

C Passive + infinitive

The verbs *believe, expect, know, report, say, think, suppose, understand* are often used in the present simple passive followed by an infinitive (*to do*). This use is common in news reports.

The Hungarian economy is expected to expand 6% over the next two years.

To refer to the past we use the same verbs with *to have done*.

Credit card companies are believed to have suffered significantly reduced profits.

To refer to an activity in progress at the moment, we use the same verbs with *to be doing*.

Pfizer is known to be looking at the possibility of acquiring some biotech start-ups.

D Verbs with two objects

Some verbs have two objects (unit 21D). We can:

*give/lend/offer/promise/sell/send/take something to somebody.
book/buy/keep/make/prepare/save something for somebody.*

In active sentences we can use these verbs in two ways.

ABB gave us a large order last year.

ABB gave a large order to us last year.

The first form, without *to*, is more usual.

Each way can be made passive. One of the objects becomes the subject of the passive sentence, the other stays as an object.

We were given a large order by ABB last year.

A large order was given to us by ABB last year.

The first form, without *to*, is more usual.

E have something done

When a professional person, for example a builder or an accountant, does some work for us we can use *have something done*.

We have our accounts audited by KPMG.

We're going to have a new air conditioning system installed.

We can use *get* in place of *have* in most cases. This is more informal.

We got the contract checked by our lawyers.

F to be born

To be born is a passive form but does not have an obvious passive meaning.

I was born in a little town in Austria.

17

Conditionals 1

A Conditions and results

Compare these sentences. The 'If ...' clause is the condition, and the other part of the sentence is the result.

- 1 **If sales *increase* (generally), we *make* more profit.**
- 2 **If sales *increase* (next quarter), we'll *make* more profit.**
- 3 **If sales *increased* (next quarter), we'd *make* more profit.**

Sentence 1 is about something that is always true. This is often called a 'zero' conditional. See section B below.

Sentence 2 is about something that is likely to happen in the future. This is often called a 'first' conditional. See section C.

Sentence 3 is about something that is imaginary or unlikely in the future. This is often called a 'second' conditional. See section D.

With all types of conditional, the *If* clause can come second.
We'll make more profit if sales increase.

B Zero conditional (any/all time)

When we talk about things that are always or generally true, we use:

condition	result
IF/WHEN + present,	present or imperative

*If you **don't get** the best people into the company, your reputation **suffers**.*

In this type of conditional we are not referring to one specific event.

In the condition clause there can be a variety of present forms.

When you *fly* business class, you *get* much more legroom.
(present simple)

If interest rates *are rising*, bank loans *become* more expensive.
(present continuous)

When you've *finished* the course, they *give* you a certificate.
(present perfect)

In the result clause there can be a present simple (previous examples) or an imperative.

*Keep trying. If you fail, **try** again.*

We can use either *if* or *when* in every case with no difference in meaning.

C First conditional (likely future)

When we talk about future events that will happen, or are likely to happen, we use:

condition	result
IF + present,	future or imperative

*If the product **is** successful in China, we **will introduce** it into other Asian markets.*

In the condition clause there can be a variety of present forms.

If you *increase* your order, we'll *give* you a bigger discount.
(present simple)

If you're *meeting* her at three, I'll *join* you later at about four.
(present continuous)

If I've *made* any mistakes, I'll *correct* them later.
(present perfect)

In the result clause 'll is very common (previous examples). We can also use other future forms or an imperative.

*If anyone from Head Office calls, **say** I'm in a meeting.*
(imperative)

The examples above are about two actions in the future. If the result clause refers to the present, we use a present tense.

*If you need me, I'm **working** in my room.*

D Second conditional (imaginary future)

When we talk about future events that are imaginary, unlikely or impossible, we use:

condition	result
IF + past,	would/could/might + infinitive

If I *worked* for AMC, I'd *get* a better salary.

If you *were* still *working* for AMC, you *could help* me with my application form.

If I *was* more organized, I'd *create* folders and subfolders for all my Word docs.

Note that in the condition clause we use a past form to refer to the future.

We can use *If I were* in place of *If I was* in imaginary futures, particularly when we give advice with the phrase *If I were you*.

If I *were* you, I'd *wait* until tomorrow.
*I'd be more careful, **if I *were* you.***

E Unless

Unless means the same as *If ... not*. Compare these sentences, which have the same meaning:

If he *doesn't* arrive soon, he'll *miss* the flight.

Unless he arrives soon, he'll *miss* the flight.

F Other modals

Many examples of conditionals are given with *will* and *would*. But we can use all other modals (*can*, *should*, *must*, etc.) with their normal meanings (unit 18E).

18 Conditionals 2

A Third conditional (imaginary past)

When we talk about past events that are different to what really happened, we use:

condition	result
IF + past perfect,	would + have + past participle

*If sales **had increased** last quarter, my boss **would have been** happier.*

This is called a 'third' conditional.

There is often a suggestion of criticism or regret.

*If the economic situation **had been** better, we **wouldn't have lost** so many customers.*

A contracted 'd in speech can be *had* in the condition or *would* in the result.

If I'd done an MBA, I think I'd have had more opportunities in my career.

The examples above are about two actions in the past. If the result clause refers to the present, we use *would* + infinitive.

*If I **had done** an MBA, I **would be** on a higher salary now.*

B Conditional (possible past)

When we talk about past events which possibly happened, we just use the normal, appropriate tenses. There are no special rules.

*If you **missed** the TV programme last night, you **can borrow** the DVD I made.*

*If you **were listening** to the radio in your car, you probably **heard** the news.*

This type of conditional has no name.

C Conditionals without if

We use *if* for something that might happen in the future. We use *when* for something that we know will happen.

*I'll call you **if** I get a chance.* (maybe)

*I'll call you **when** I arrive.* (definitely)

We can use *if*, *when* or *whenever* where the meaning is 'every time'.

***If/Whenever** I dial her number, it goes straight to voicemail.*

In informal speech we sometimes use *imagine* or *supposing* in place of *if*.

***Imagine** you **had** a million dollars. How **would** you invest it?*

We can use *provided that*, *providing*, *on condition that*, *as long as* and *so long as* for emphasis. The meaning is 'if and only if'.

***As long as** you're happy with all the clauses, I'll send you a pdf of the final contract.*

We can use *in case* to talk about doing something to avoid a possible problem later. The result clause usually comes first and often uses *going to*.

*I'm **going to** give you my Skype name **in case** we need to have a web conference.*

We use *Unless* to mean *If not* (unit 17E).

D Forms with wish

We use *I wish* to express regret or dissatisfaction. This is like a conditional because we can replace *I wish* with *If only*.

***I wish** I **was** eighteen again.*

***If only** I **was** eighteen again.*

For the present and future, use *I wish* followed by the past simple or continuous.

***I wish** we **didn't have** so many meetings.*

***I wish** I **was playing** golf this afternoon.*

For the past, use *I wish* followed by the past perfect.

***I wish** we **had done** more direct marketing.*

***I wish** I **hadn't eaten** the oysters.*

If the wish is for something good or positive, use *I hope* followed by the present simple or *will*.

***I hope** your presentation **goes well**.*

***I hope** the merger **will be** a success.*

If the wish is about doing something that is difficult or impossible, use *I wish* *I could*.

***I wish** I **could** contact my daughter. She's backpacking in India.*

E Modal verbs in conditionals

Many examples of conditionals are given with *will* and *would*. But other modal verbs like *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must* and *should* are common in conditional sentences and have their usual meanings.

***If you deal with** the Middle East, you **must be** available on Saturdays and Sundays.*

We often use *will* and *can* with first conditionals, and *would* and *could* with second conditionals. However, look at this typical example:

***If we improve** productivity, we **could have** a bigger share of the market.*

An improvement in productivity is likely, so we start with a first conditional form. We expect *will* or *can* in the result clause, but neither one gives the intended meaning of uncertainty about the market share. *Could* does give this meaning and is used in a normal way.