

Grammar: Tenses

How to improve your use of verb tenses in writing

Writing Support Desk, Fall 2017

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4 types of tenses

Simple tenses

- past
- present
- future

Perfect tenses

- past
- present
- future

Progressive/ Continuous tenses

- past
- present
- future

Perfect progressive tenses

- past
- present
- future

Simple tenses

past	present	future
Yesterday, Queen B announced her pregnancy with a maternity photoshoot.	She already appears in the news every day. 	Next week, dozens of maternity photographers will copy her shoot.

The Simple Past

indicates **exactly** when an action or event took place
in the past.



Amy **asked** me on a date last week.
Last night, we **saw** *The Avengers 4*.



The Simple Past

also describes actions and/or events that are
now completed and **no longer true**.



I **lived** in Portland in 2012.
(I no longer live in Portland)

I **biked** to work every day in my 20s.
(I no longer bike to work very often).

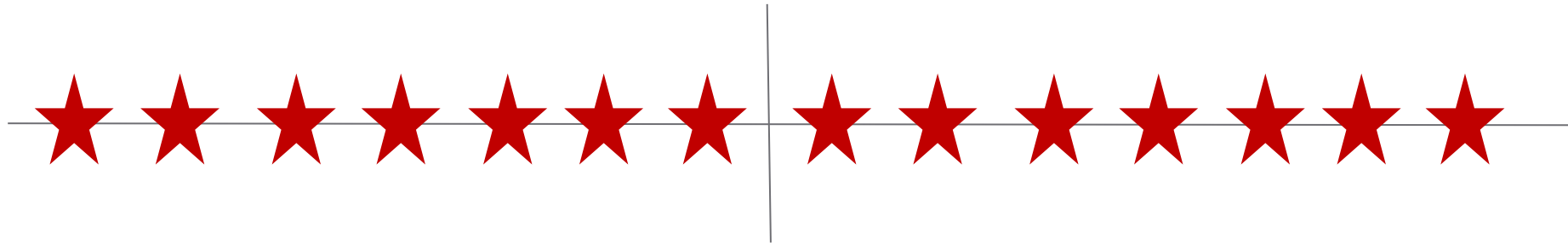


For regular verbs, just add -ed

The Simple Present

*expresses a **habit** or **often-repeated action**.*

Look out for adverbs like **often**, **seldom**, **sometimes**, or **never**.



She *sometimes* **sends** me the funniest Snapchats.

My roommates *always* **leave** their dishes in the sink.



The Simple Future

describes **future** actions

will + verb
am/is/are+ going to

Twitter **will give** all users
more characters per tweet
tomorrow.

The company **is going to**
regret this decision.

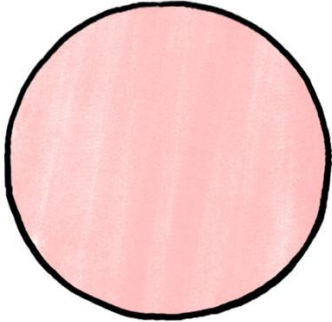


The background of the image is a stylized world map divided into four quadrants by a vertical and a horizontal line. The top-left quadrant is red, the top-right is blue, the bottom-left is yellow, and the bottom-right is green. The word "Kahoot!" is written in a large, white, rounded font across the center of the image, spanning across all four quadrants.

Kahoot!

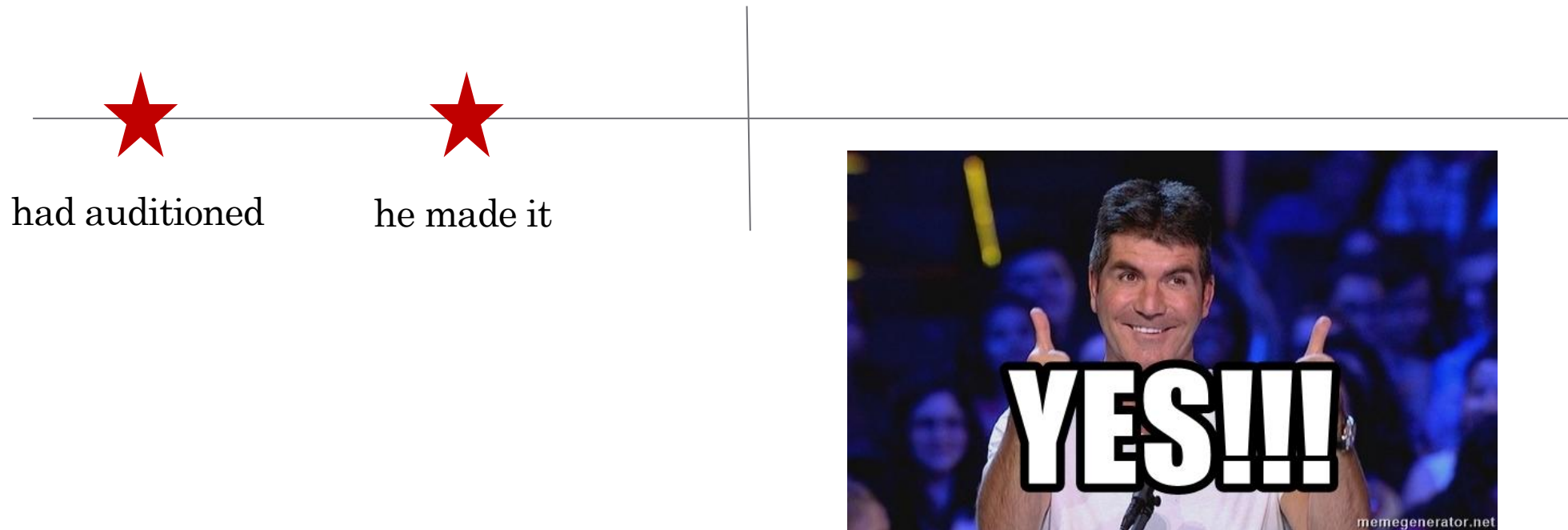
Perfect tenses

show when an action happened **in relation to another action**, using the helping verb **to have**.

past	present	future
100 people had liked my new Instagram post before I even checked my phone.	She has worn a new lipstick colour every day this week. THINGS YOU INTEND TO BUY IN SEPHORA  <input type="checkbox"/> LITERALLY EVERYTHING	By the end of the month, Jo will have spent over \$800 at Sephora.

The Past Perfect

describes **completed events** that took place in the past
before another past event.



Bryan **had auditioned** for American Idol 8 times before he made it.

*Add **had** before the verb and **-ed** to regular verbs.*

The Present Perfect

talks about an event that **began in the past** and **continues up to the present**.



Ariana **has worn** her hair in a ponytail for five years.

(She started wearing her hair that way five years ago and still does).



Add has/have before the verb and -ed to regular verbs.

The Present Perfect

also talks about an event that **was completed in the past**
but the **specific time is not important**.



He **has** already **spent**
his entire pay check.



The Future Perfect

describes an event or action that **will be completed before another event or time** in the future.



We **will have gone** to bed by the time James is ready to go out.

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Kahoot!

Progressive Tenses

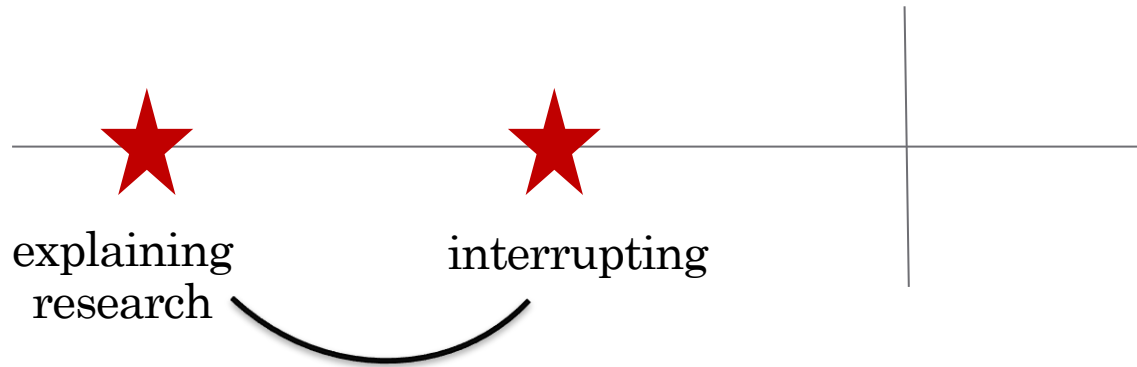
aka **continuous tenses** show that an action is or was **ongoing** or **continuing** at the same time as something else.

past	present	future
Yesterday, Emma was playing <i>Call of Duty</i> when I asked her to go out.	She is staying home from work today to finish her game.	She will be missing my party this weekend because she bought the sequel.

Use *to be* (am/is/are, was/were, will be) and the -ing form of the verb

The Past Continuous

is often used with the **simple past** to show that **one action was in progress** when **another action occurred**.

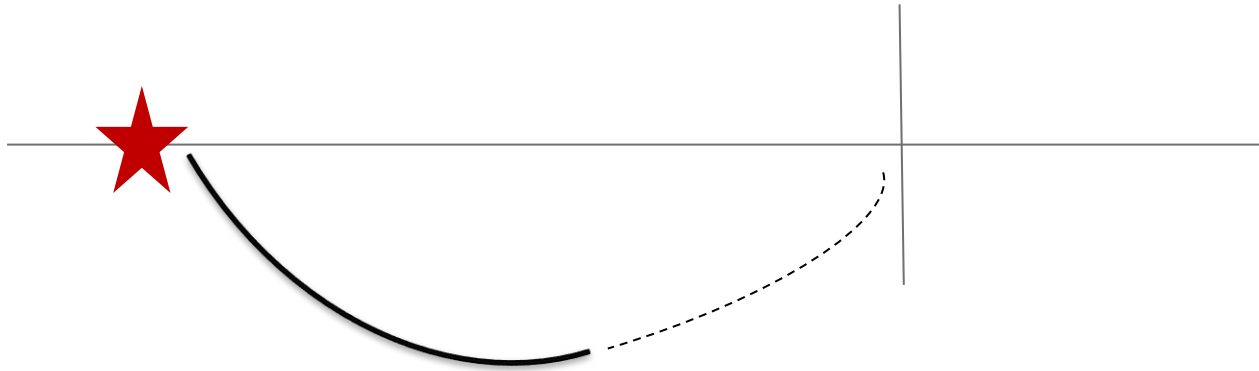


"Let me interrupt your expertise with my confidence."

I **was explaining** my research when he interrupted me.
Add was/were before the verb and -ing to the verb.

The Past Continuous

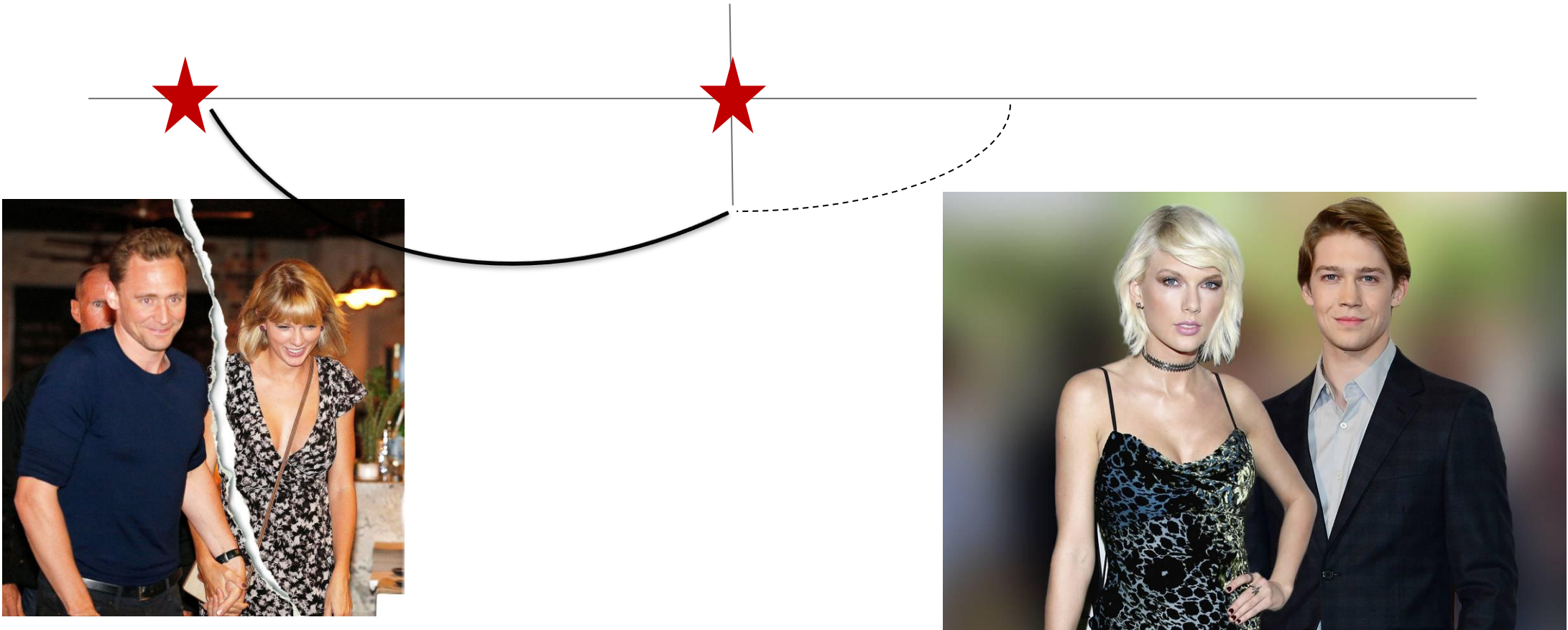
is also used to talk about an event that **was in progress** at a **specific point of time in the past** with an emphasis on its **duration**.



We **were scrolling** Instagram for three hours last night.

The Present Continuous

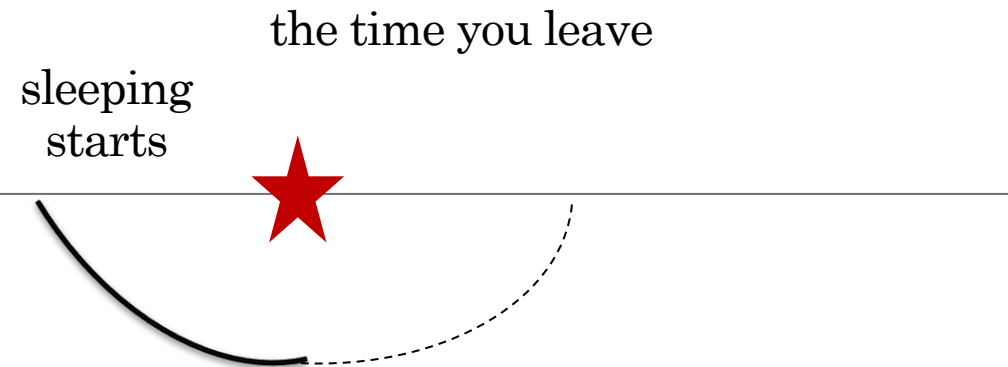
is used to describe an action that **is occurring right now**



Taylor Swift **is dating** a British actor again.

The Future Continuous

is used to describe an action that **will occur** over a **period of time** at a **specific point in the future**.



I **will be sleeping** by the time you leave for the party.

Use will be + ing

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Kahoot!

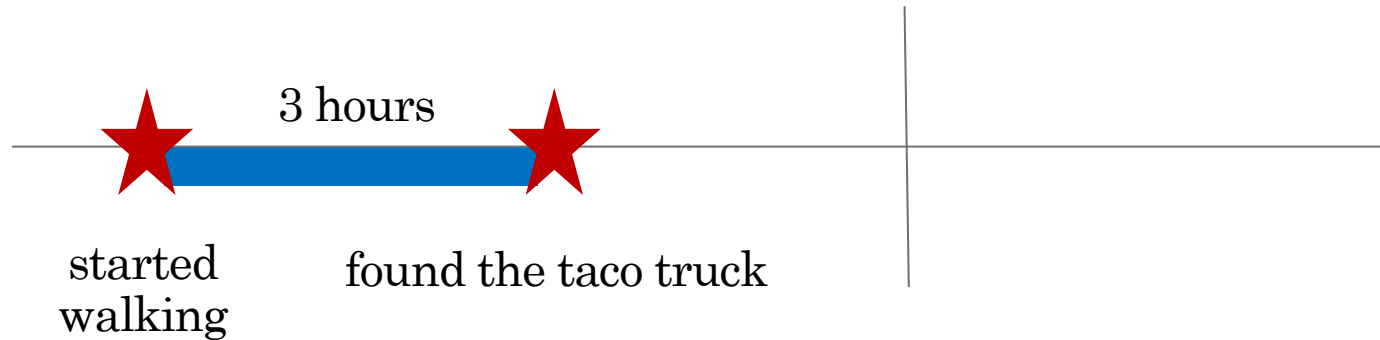
Perfect Progressive Tenses

are a **combination** of **perfect** (completed before) and **progressive** (ongoing) tenses. They show that something **began, continued, and ended *before* another action.**

past	present	future
My younger brother had been watching Netflix for 15 hours when our mom unplugged the internet.	She has been refusing to reconnect the internet all day.	I will have been waiting three hours to watch my favourite show by the time she leaves for work.

Past Perfect Continuous

is used to **emphasize the duration** of an action that was completed **before another event or action** in the past.

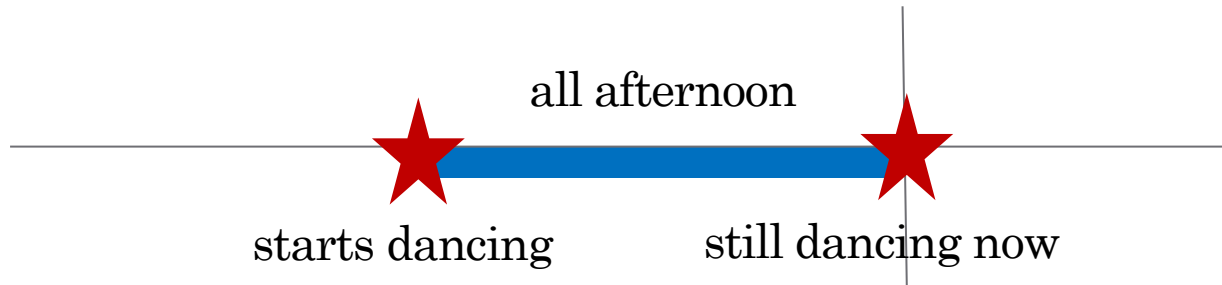


She **had been walking** around the neighbourhood for three hours before she finally found the taco truck.

*Add **had+ been + verb + -ing.***

Present Perfect Continuous

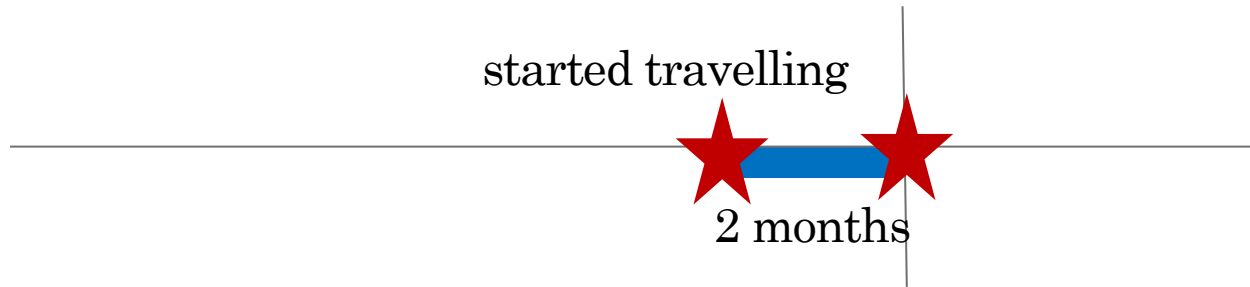
is used to describe the **duration of an action that began in the past and continues in the present.**



Drake **has been dancing** all afternoon.
(He is still dancing).

Present Perfect Continuous

is also used to describe events that **have been in progress recently** and are **rather temporary**.

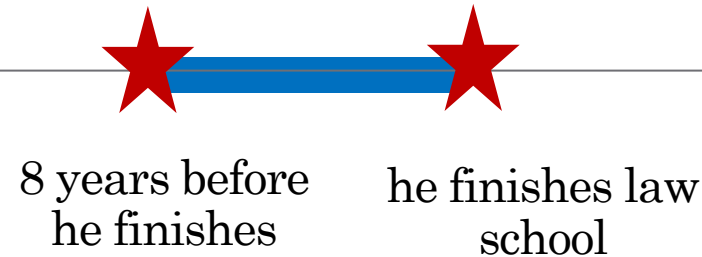


They **have been travelling** in Australia for the last two months, but they will come home soon.

*Add **has/have + been + verb +ing***

Future Perfect Continuous

describes an action that has been **in progress for a duration of time before another event** or time in the future.



By the time he finishes law school, he **will have been living** on macaroni and cheese for eight years straight.

Add will + has/have + been + verb +-ing

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Kahoot!

Avoiding shifts in verb tense



INCORRECT

She **caught** the bouquet and **throws** it to her sister.

CORRECT

She **caught** the bouquet and **threw** it to her sister.

or

She **catches** the bouquet and **throws** it to her sister.

Clue words
can help us
choose the
correct
tense!

	Simple	Progressive	Perfect	Perfect Progressive
Present	always, every..., never, normally, often, seldom, sometimes, usually, frequently, the first time	now, right now, this week, at the moment, Listen!, Look!, just, just now	(un)till now. up to now, just, since, ever, never, always, so far, many times/weeks/years... for three minutes/hours/..., lately, recently	for the past year/month/week/..., for 2 weeks, up to now, all day, since 1945, How long?, the whole week
Past	yesterday, minutes ago, last year, before, one year ago, finally	while, when, as long as	already, before, after, just, never, not yet, once until then/last week/...	before, for one hour/week/month/..., since, all day, the whole day
Future	tomorrow, tonight, next week, soon, in the future, afternoon, someday	when, after, before, as soon as, next week, all day long, for..., at this time tomorrow	by the time you go (somewhere) by the time you do (something)	by the time, for 5 minutes/days/weeks/.. .

References

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