



# ALL THE ENGLISH TENSES

## GRAMMAR LESSON & QUIZ



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There are 16 tenses in English and, if you want to be able to speak fluently, you need to know them all. Here, you're going to learn about the past, present, future and conditional tenses and see lots of examples so you'll be confident when you need to use them.

Each of these tenses has a simple, continuous, perfect and perfect continuous form, making the 16 English tenses.

**1**

## The present tenses

There are four present tenses: the present simple, the present continuous, the present perfect and the present perfect continuous. Let's start with the tense native speakers use about 50% of the time in English: the present simple.

### The present simple

We use the present simple to talk about **facts** and **general statements** and to tell people about our **habits**. We also use it to talk about **scheduled events in the future**, like plane or train times.

The structure of the present simple is **subject + base form of the verb** except in the third person singular when we add **-s**.

**Be** is also an exception and it has its own forms in the present simple: I am, you are, he/she/it is, we are, they are.



Here are some examples of the **present simple**:

- I **am** a woman.
- My name **is** Lucy.
- I **live** in England.
- The train to London **leaves** at 8 pm.
- Water **freezes** at 0 degrees Celsius.
- Helen **loves** dogs.
- Will **goes** to the gym three times a week.

## The present continuous

The structure of the present continuous is **subject + be + verb-ing**.

You can use the present continuous to talk about things that are **happening at the moment of speaking**. Be careful! We **can't** use state verbs in the present continuous tense. These are verbs like have, want, love and hate.

Here are some examples:

- I **am eating** breakfast.
- They **are baking** cookies.
- It **is snowing**.

We also use the present continuous tense to talk about things that we think are **temporary**, for example:

- James **is living** in Manchester.
- They **are working** from home at the moment.

And, you can use the present continuous to talk about **arrangements in the future**. These are plans that we have with another person. Take a look at these examples.

- Sarah **is meeting** her parents for dinner tomorrow.
- I **am having** my hair cut on Monday. (the arrangement is with the hairdresser)



## The present perfect

There are three main ways we use the present perfect in English and they're all very useful. First, here's the structure of the present perfect: **subject + have/has + past participle**. Here are the three ways we use this tense:

1. To talk about things that **started in the past** and **continue to the present**. These are **unfinished actions** and we often say **how long** or when they **started**.

- I **have lived** in the UK all my life.
- She **has been** at university since 2020.
- We **have been** married for about 35 years.

2. To talk about our **experiences** up to the present time. With this tense, we **don't** say exactly **when** something happened. We are simply telling someone about our life's experiences.

- She **has been** to Canada three times.
- We **have met** the Queen.
- I **have read** all the Harry Potter books.

3. To talk about **past actions** that have **consequences** in the **present**.

- I **have eaten** breakfast so I'm not hungry.
- Mike **has lost** his keys so he is going to be late for work.
- We **have left** our passports at home and we can't board the plane.

## The present perfect continuous

We use the present perfect continuous to talk about something that **started in the past** and **continues to the present**. This might sound similar to the present perfect, and it is, but there are a few key differences.



One difference, of course, is the structure. We make this tense with: **subject + have/has + been + verb-ing.**

With the present perfect continuous, we often talk about things we have done **uninterrupted** and that **haven't finished**. We can also use this tense to emphasise **how long** an action has been happening:

- I **have been watching** that new series on TV (and you have not finished).
- Ellen **has been replying** to emails for two hours already.

This tense is also often used with the words **recently** and **lately** and to talk about things that have **just happened**. Here are a couple of examples:

- I **have been practising** my football skills a lot lately.
- Oh look! It's **been snowing**!

*I have a video about the differences between the present perfect simple and the present perfect continuous. [Click the link](#) if you want to learn more!*

## 2 The past tenses

We use the past tenses to talk about things that happened before the present. There are four past tenses and again, we're going to start with the one native speakers use the most often.

### The past simple

We use the past simple to talk about events that happened **before** the present moment. These must be **finished** events or actions and we often say **when** they happened, though we don't have to. The structure of this tense is: **subject + past simple.**



Here are some examples of the past simple:

- I **went** to bed at 10 pm last night
- Dennis **ate** a whole box of chocolates for breakfast.
- My mum **bought** me a birthday present.
- They **played** tennis at school.

## The past continuous

The structure of the past continuous is **subject + was/were +verb-ing**. Let's look at three ways we can use this tense:

1. To say what was happening at a **specific moment** in the past, like this:

- Tom **was cooking** dinner yesterday evening.
- At 2 pm, I **was waiting** for the bus.

2. To give **background information** about something:

- Will **was speaking** to me while I was recording a video.
- It **was snowing** when I went outside.

3. To say an **ongoing action** was **interrupted** by another action.

In this case, it's usually paired with a clause in the **past simple**.

Look at these examples:

- We **were eating** dinner when he arrived.
- They **were chatting** about their holiday when Ben called them.
- People **were shouting** and **singing** when I arrived at the party.



## The past perfect

The past perfect tense is used to speak about events that happened **before** another **event** or **up to** a **certain time** in the past. It's often used with the **past simple**. The structure is **subject + had + past participle**.

Read through these examples:

- I **had lived** in London for 20 years by the time I moved to France.
- When I arrived at the stop, the bus **had** already **left**.
- She **had worked** at the company for five years when it closed.
- You **had travelled** to ten countries before your second birthday!

## The past perfect continuous

The structure of this tense is **subject + had been + verb-ing**.

The **past perfect** and the **past perfect continuous** are often used interchangeably by native English speakers. There's no difference in overall meaning between these two sentences, for example:

- I had worked there for five years when the company closed.
- I **had been working** there for five years when the company closed.

However, if you want to emphasise the length of time, it is better to use the continuous form.

- She **had been asking** the students to get ready for fifteen minutes before they decided to listen to her.
- They **had been walking** for hours when they finally decided they were lost and called for help





If you are talking about an action in the past that **continued** up to a **certain time** and **continued after it**, you should use the past perfect continuous.

- I **had been writing** my book for almost a year when the publisher told me we finally had a deal.

Or, if you're talking about a **repeated action** in the past up to a **certain point**, the continuous tense should be used.

- Dan **had been training** for the marathon every day until he broke his ankle.
- The orchestra **had been practising** for months before the concert happened.

## 3 The future tenses

### The future simple

The easiest way to talk about the future is to use the verb **will**. The structure of the future simple is **subject + will + base form of the verb**.

We can use will to talk about things we **think** will happen in the future:

- I think it **will rain** tomorrow.
- I believe she **will come**.

To make **offers** or **promises**:

- I **will help** you carry those boxes.
- Richard **will call** you tomorrow.



We also use **will** to talk about **facts in the future**:

- It **will be** our 20th wedding anniversary next year.
- Our house **will be** 150 years old soon.

## The future continuous

This tense is used to talk about actions that will be **in progress** at a **certain time** in the future. These actions will start and end in the future but we don't know when. Or, we use the future continuous to talk about a future action that will happen **over some time** and not simply in an instant.

The structure of the future continuous is **subject + will be + verb-ing**.

- I **will be eating** dinner at 8 pm tomorrow. (You don't know what time I'll start or finish my dinner but you know what I'll be doing at 8 pm.)
- They **'ll be playing** tennis tomorrow.
- We **'ll be meeting** with the shareholders tomorrow.
- What **will** you **be doing** at 9 pm this evening?

## The future perfect

We use the future perfect to talk about actions or states that will be **completed before** a **certain point** in the future. We often use time clauses like **by** or **when I'm older** with this tense.

The structure of the future perfect is **subject + will have + past participle**. Here are some examples of this tense:

- They **will have been** married for forty years this time next week.
- I **will have retired** by the time I'm 55.





- You **will have finished** that popcorn before the film starts!
- Come over at 9 pm. My parents **will have left** by then.

## The future perfect continuous

This tense describes actions that will be **continuing** at a **certain point** in the future. When you use this tense, you're thinking about the **duration** of that action **up to** a **specific point in time**. The structure is **subject + will have been + verb-ing**.

Let's look at some examples:

- I **will have been living** in Cardiff for three years in August.
- When I retire next month, I'll **have been working** here for 16 years.
- We'll **have been walking** for six hours by the time we finish this hike.
- They'll **have been travelling** continuously for seven years in June.

Like with most other continuous tenses, you **can't** use state verbs in the future perfect continuous. You should use the future perfect simple instead.

- I will have had my cat for five years by Christmas.

You also can't talk about a finished action using the future perfect continuous tense. You can only use the future perfect:

- She will have finished all those chocolates by the time you arrive!

## 4 The conditional tenses

Finally, we have the conditional tenses! These are the last group of tenses we're going to learn.

### The conditional simple

The first type of conditional sentence we're looking at is the conditional simple. It is formed with **subject + would + base form of the verb**. Like all the conditional tenses, we use this tense to talk about **hypothetical actions or ideas**. Look at these examples:

- I **would travel** in first class.
- She **would walk** to work.

Conditional simple sentences are usually coupled with another idea as they don't have a lot of meaning on their own. These sentences have clearer meanings:

- I **would travel** in first class if I won the lottery.
- She **would walk** to work if she lived closer.
- He **wouldn't be** here if he didn't want to be.
- **Would** you **live** abroad if you had the chance?

### The conditional continuous

When we use the conditional continuous, we put the focus on the **duration** of a **hypothetical action**. This means we use this tense to talk about **longer actions** or when we want people to focus on **how long** something would take. We also use this tense to talk about things we would hypothetically be doing **right now**.

The structure is **subject + would be + verb-ing**.



- I **would be writing** emails if I was at work.
- Robin **would be walking** his dog now if he hadn't broken his ankle.
- They **would be sitting** together normally but they had an argument.
- I **would be studying** right now if I were sensible.
- We **would be watching** the game but our grandchildren are here.

## The conditional perfect

When we want to talk about **changing the past**, we use the conditional perfect tense. Of course, we can't really change the past so this is a **hypothetical tense** to talk about what we would have done.

The structure is **subject + would have + past participle**. Here are some examples:

- I **would have told** John not to come.
- Alan **would have bought** that house.
- Kim **would have cooked** a bigger meal.
- We **would have picked** you **up** from the station if we'd known you were coming.
- They **would have asked** for help if they'd realised how long it would take.

## The conditional perfect continuous

Here we are - the final tense we're looking at in this blog: the conditional perfect continuous. We use this tense to talk about the **hypothetical results** of actions in the past.



The structure of this tense is **subject + would have been + verb-ing**. Let's look at a few examples of this final tense:

- I **would have been wearing** my red dress if I had washed it.
- They **wouldn't have been swimming** in that lake if they had known there were sharks there.
- He **would have been working** in Dubai if he hadn't taken the job in London.
- He **would have been sleeping** when we called.
- Becky **wouldn't have been working** today if the boss hadn't got ill.

*If you want to learn more about conditional tenses, check out my video that is linked [here!](#)*



# Activity

Put the words in brackets into the correct tense.

## The present tenses

1. I \_\_\_\_\_ (learn) English right now.
2. I'm not hungry because I \_\_\_\_\_ (eat) lunch.
3. My name \_\_\_\_\_ (be) Andy.
4. I'm so tired! I \_\_\_\_\_ (work) all day!

## The past tenses

1. When she finally arrived, I \_\_\_\_\_ (wait) for almost an hour.
2. I \_\_\_\_\_ on holiday to France last year.
3. Marco \_\_\_\_\_ (talk) to his mum when I met him.
4. Claire \_\_\_\_\_ (drink) all her water before she started the hike.

## The future tenses

1. I think it \_\_\_\_\_ (rain) tomorrow so we should stay at home.
2. I \_\_\_\_\_ (study) for five years by the time I finally graduate.
3. Ollie \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) his project by Wednesday.
4. This time next week, I \_\_\_\_\_ (sit) on a beach in the Caribbean.

## The conditional tenses

1. I \_\_\_\_\_ (cook) a vegetarian meal if I had known Dave was coming.
2. Katie \_\_\_\_\_ (cycle) to work if she lived nearer to the office.
3. They \_\_\_\_\_ (live) in New Zealand now if they had got the job.
4. We \_\_\_\_\_ (work) today if they hadn't given us all a day off.

would have been working

The conditional tenses: 1. would have cooked, 2. would cycle, 3. would be living, 4.

be sitting

The future tenses: 1. will rain, 2. will have been studying, 3. will have finished, 4. will

The past tenses: 1. had been waiting, 2. went, 3. was talking, 4. had drunk

The present tenses: 1. am learning, 2. have eaten, 3. is, 4. have been working

# The End