

Choose the right verb tense: Putting it all together

Present tense

Describes an event in the present:

Each morning, **I run** to catch the train.

How to form it:

When it follows a singular noun or *he, she, or it*: Add **–s** or **–es**

She runs to catch the train.

If it’s happening while you’re speaking: Use “**I am**” or “**I’m**”

I am running to catch the train right now!



When an event began in the past and continues into the present, use the verb **have** or **has**.

I **have learned** a lesson about leaving on time.

Past tense

Describes an event in the past:

She walked to the train station this morning.

How to form it:

For a single event in the past: Add **–d** or **–ed**

The train **pulled** away.

For two past events, one before the other: Use the verb “**had**”

She **had reached** the train when it **pulled** away.



Do not use **HAD** when describing a single event in the past.



Some verbs do not follow a pattern for forming the past tense. Check a dictionary if you are not sure.

Future tense

Describes an event in the future:

The train **will leave** soon.

How to form it:

Use the verb “**will**”

We **will be** late and we **will miss** the train.

Showing order of events

Decide when events occurred and use the same tense:

Events in the past

He **stubbed** his toe and **spilled** coffee on himself.

Events in the present

He **stubs** his toe and **spills** coffee on himself.



Use one tense when the story doesn’t rely on time or when all of the events happened at the same time.

Shift tense **ONLY** when the events happened at different times:

Shift from present to past

She **is happy** that she **caught** the train.

Shift from past to future

I almost **missed** the train and **will leave** earlier next time.



Think about when each event occurred and choose the correct tense.

Avoiding common errors

Lie vs. Lay

“Lie” means to **rest in a reclining position**. The past tense of “**lie**” is “**lay**”

Yesterday a bear **lay** on my towel. . .

“Lay” means to **put or place something**. The past tense of “**lay**” is “**laid**”

. . .after I **laid** it down on the beach.



Choose vs Chose

“Choose” means to **select one option from a group**. The past tense of “**choose**” is “**chose**”

Today, I **choose** to stay inside, out of the sun.

Yesterday, I **chose** to go to the beach without sunscreen.