

Diagram of the English verb system *Notes to the diagram*

The diagram is a way of showing the whole English tense system in a simplified form. Using the diagram has three benefits:

- It can help to study the individual tenses if you see at the same time how they are all related.
- It shows that there is a pattern and logic to English verbs.
- Some people like a visual picture to help them to understand and learn.

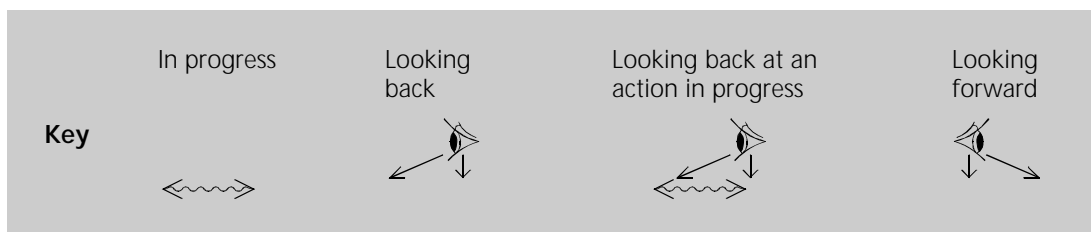
Read through these notes and refer to the diagram at the same time:

- 1 The first time line shows the past simple as a completed action/situation, the present simple as referring to actions/situations that go all along the time line (facts, habits, etc), and the *will* future as a future fact or general belief.
- 2 The second time line shows the three continuous tenses, which all have the meaning of an action in progress (there is also an associated meaning that the action has a limited duration).
- 3 The third time line shows the three perfect tenses, which all have the meaning of looking back. The past perfect looks back from the past, the present perfect looks back from the present, and the future perfect looks back from the future.
- 4 The fourth time line shows the three perfect continuous tenses, which all have the meaning of looking back at an action in progress. Note that this is a combination of the meanings of the previous two lines.
- 5 The fifth time line shows the two ways to use *going to*, which both have a meaning of looking forward.

Units 1–8 of the book have a much fuller explanation of all these verb tenses.

There are some uses of English verbs that a diagram cannot show. Many of these other uses can be explained by one idea: 'the past' in English can refer to *social distance* and *distant probability* as well as its more obvious meaning of *distance in time*. So:

- Knowing that we can use the past to show social distance helps to understand why *Could I ...?* is more formal or polite than *Can I ...?*
- Knowing that we can use the past to show distant probability helps to understand why we use it for imaginary or unlikely situations (*If I **were** the Finance Minister, I'd ...*).



Past

Past Simple

I **started** this job three years ago.

Present

Present simple

I usually **leave** home around 7:30.

Future

will future

I'll be forty next year.
Inflation **will** probably rise in the long term.

Past continuous



While I **was working** at ABC I moved from Sales to Marketing.

Present continuous



We're **developing** two new products at the moment.

Future continuous



I'll **be working** at our Paris office next year.

Past perfect



The merger **had** already **happened** when I joined the company.

Present perfect



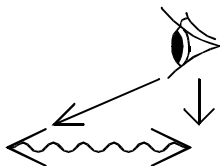
I've **been** in this job for three years.
I've **finished** the report.

Future perfect



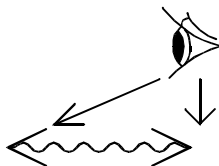
By the end of the year sales **will have improved**.

Past perfect continuous



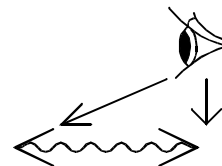
We'd **been selling** the same product for years before we changed the design.

Present perfect continuous

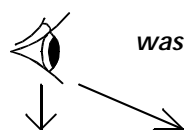


I've **been writing** this report all morning.

Future perfect continuous

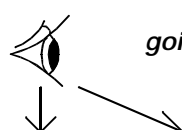


If I retire when I'm sixty I'll **have been working** here for more than twenty years.



was going to

Sorry, I **was going to call** you, but I completely forgot.



going to future

I'm **going to ask** my boss for a raise.
That's **going to be** difficult.