

THE USE OF THE ENGLISH TENSES IN A NUTSHELL

(1) The PRESENT tense

You use the present tense to express something that happens in the present. The Present Simple differs from the Present Continuous or Progressive in:

Present Simple

1. a present habit or routine

e.g. *She smokes a lot.* (She always smokes a lot.)

2. a general truth

e.g. *Water is wet.*

3. a present situation (not temporary)

e.g. *He lives in Dendermonde.*

4. always with STATE VERBS:

a. verbs of the senses ('zintuigen')

e.g. *Do you hear anything?*

b. verbs of opinion and understanding

e.g. *He doesn't understand Japanese.*

c. verbs of emotions and feelings

e.g. *She hates classical music.*

5. in the first conditional

e.g. *He will come to the party, if you invite him.*

Present Continuous or Progressive

1. a present and temporary activity

e.g. *She is smoking a lot.* (She doesn't normally.)

2. an on-going activity of limited duration

e.g. *He is watching television at the moment.*

3. a future arrangement

e.g. *He is seeing his dentist tomorrow.* (an appointment)

4. repeated actions that irritate the speaker

e.g. *He is always telling other people what to do.*

(2) The PERFECT and PAST tenses

All these tenses describe actions in the past. The Present Perfect differs from the Simple Past in:

Present Perfect

Simple Past

1. you know that the action took place in the past, but don't know when precisely.

e.g. *I have seen her three times.* (when? you don't know)

2. very recent past

e.g. *They've just left.*

1. you know precisely when the action took place in the past.

e.g. *I saw her last week.* (when? last week)

2. a past habit which is now finished

e.g. *She smoked a lot.* (not anymore now)

Present Perfect

3. to announce news

e.g. *A new president has been elected in Italy.*

4. a state or situation which has started in the past and is continuing up to now.

e.g. *I have lived there for a long time.* (I am still living there.)

5. a finished state or activity but the period of time in which it has taken place is not finished.

e.g. *I have written a letter this morning.* (the letter is finished and it is still morning)

6. a present result

e.g. *I have lost my keys.*

Simple Past

3. in the second conditional

e.g. *She would help him, if she knew he was in troubles.*

4. a state or situation which started in the past and is now finished.

e.g. *I lived there for a long time.* (I am living somewhere else now.)

5. a finished state or activity and the period of time in which it has taken place is finished.

e.g. *I wrote a letter this morning.* (the letter is finished and it is no longer morning)

The Present Perfect Simple differs from the Present Perfect Progressive in:

Present Perfect Simple

1. a one-moment action

e.g. *I have cut my finger.*

2. the activity stops after the moment of

Present Perfect Continuous

1. an on-going activity

e.g. *I have been cutting the grass.*

2. the activity started in the past and is

speaking and you are speaking about a result. continuing after the moment of speaking a(so not finished).

e.g. *I have painted the room.* (finished)

e.g. *I have been painting the room.* (still to finish it)

3. to express irritation

e.g. *I have been waiting for hours.*

(3) The PAST Perfect

You use the Past Perfect instead of the Simple Past or Present Perfect when an action has taken place before another action in the past.

e.g. *She found feathers everywhere. The cat had caught a bird.*

(4) Expressing the FUTURE

There is no one future tense in English. Instead, several verb forms and auxiliaries might be used to express the future.

4.1 will + infinitive: (*shall* after *I* and *we* in formal English)

1.) a prediction without proof and which is based upon your own opinion

e.g. *I think Labour will win the elections.* (That is my opinion.)

2.) in the First Conditional but never after *if*

e.g. *If you aren't careful, you'll break that glass.*

3.) a decision or an intention made at the moment of speaking

e.g. *Someone is knocking at the door. I'll open it.*

4.2 - to be going to + infinitive:

1.) a prediction based on a present fact or some evidence

e.g. *Look at the sky. It 's going to be a lovely day.* (The sky proves this.)

2.) a decision or an intention made before the moment of speaking

e.g. *When she grows up, she is going to be a ballet dancer.*

4.3 the Present Progressive or Continuous

1.) a future arrangement (made an appointment)

e.g. I'm seeing *Aida* next month. (You have bought the tickets already.)

4.4 the Present Simple

1.) the certain future of a timetable (schedule) or calendar

e.g. *My flight leaves at 10.00.*

e.g. *It is my birthday tomorrow.*

2.) after *if*, *when*, *before* and so on in the First Conditional

e.g. *If the weather turns bad, the picnic will be cancelled.*

4.5 the Future Continuous: will + be + -ing form

1.) an activity that will be in progress before and after a time in the future

e.g. *Don't phone at 8.00, because we will be having dinner.*

2.) a future event that will happen in the natural course of events

e.g. *Don't worry about our guests. They'll be arriving any minute now.*

4.6 the Future Perfect

1.) an action that will be completed before a definite time in the future.

e.g. *I'll have done all my work by this evening.*