

Tense

The tense in a sentence tells the time of the action mentioned in the sentence. Broadly speaking, the tense in a sentence can be present tense, future tense or past tense. The sentence can be affirmative/positive, negative and/or interrogative.

Present Tense

Look at the following sentences.

1. I am playing. (Affirmative)
2. We aren't playing. (Negative)
3. Are they playing? (Interrogative)
4. How are they playing? (Interrogative)

All these sentences are in the present tense.

The present tense comprises simple present tense, present continuous tense, present perfect tense, and present perfect continuous tense.

We use the Simple Present Tense to talk about things in general. We do not use it only to refer actions happening now but also actions that happen all the time or repeatedly or things that are universally true.

For example:

1. I have breakfast every day.
2. We go to school.

We use the Present Continuous Tense to talk about an action that is happening at or around the time of speaking. The action has not finished.

In such sentences, is/am/are + -ing form of the verb are used to show the continuation.

For example:

1. Girls are playing.
2. I am watching TV.

We use the Present Perfect Tense to talk about an action that has recently been completed. It is also used to talk about a past action that has a result now.

In such sentences, have/has + 3rd form of the verb are used.

For example:

1. Tom has lost his key.
2. I have forgotten your name.

We use the Present Perfect Continuous Tense to indicate an activity that continues from the past, until now, repeatedly, or an activity that has recently stopped.

In such sentences, have/has + been + -ing form of the verb are used.

For example:

1. John looks sunburnt. He has been working in the sun since morning.
2. Your clothes are very dirty. What have you been doing?

Past Tense

Look at the following sentences.

1. I/You/He/She/It/We/They played. (Affirmative)
2. I/You/He/She/It/We/They didn't play. (Negative)
3. Did I/you/he/she/it/we/they play? (Interrogative)
4. What did I/you/he/she/we/they play? (Interrogative)

All these sentences are in the past tense.

The past tense comprises simple past tense, past continuous tense, past perfect tense, and past perfect continuous tense.

Now, look at the following sentences.

1. She visited the temple regularly.
2. Last year, we attended a summer camp together.
3. He learnt speed skating at the sports academy every weekend when he was in class eight.

We use the Simple Past Tense for actions completed in the past, actions which happened at a specific point of time, and past habits and actions.

Next, look at the following sentences.

1. The children went on a long drive last Saturday.
2. The coach was always helping the weaker student till they caught up with the others.
3. Sara was neatening the house when Zack was washing the dishes.

These sentences are in the past continuous tense.

We use the Past Continuous Tense for an action that was in progress at a stated time in the past, a past action which was a habit in the past, and two or more actions which were happening at the same time.

In such sentences was/were + -ing form of the verb are used.

Look at the following sentences.

1. Rohit had already left when we arrived at the party.
2. He had broken his leg and was being taken to the medical clinic.
3. Everything had seemed normal at first.

These sentences are in the past perfect tense.

Modal	Examples	Indicators
Can/Can't	She can swim.	Ability
	It can be risky if you jump.	Possibility/Probability
	Can I borrow your book?	Seeking permission
	Can you lend me your project file?	Request
	Can I carry your bag?	Offer
Could/Couldn't	There was a time when I could skip very fast.	Past ability
	We could go to the theatre for the matinee show.	Suggestion
	Could you please open the door?	Request
	Could I borrow your books?	Seeking permission
Will/Won't	It is very hot outside, so I will spend my day at home.	Intention
	It will rain tonight.	Prediction
	I will get you a toy from the market.	Promise
Shall	Shall we put the dinner on the table?	Suggestion
	Shall I iron your shirt?	Offer
Would/Wouldn't	Would you prefer wearing a coat or a jacket?	Preference
	Would you come to our wedding?	Invitation
	Would you mind if I reach an hour late?	Seeking permission / Polite request
	He would talk for long hours on phone.	Past habit
Should	We should listen to our elders.	Advice
	You should check the timings of the train.	Recommended action
May	May I help you?	Offer
	May I close the window?	Seeking permission
	May I have some water?	Request
	India may become a sport-loving nation after the Commonwealth Games.	Possibility/Probability
	May God bless you.	Wish/Desire
Might	The guest might drop in at night.	Future possibility
Ought to	You ought to do your duty.	Advice
	The team of players ought to be here any time.	Probability
Must/Mustn't	You must listen to your mother.	Obligation
	You must not steal things.	Necessity
Need/Needn't	You need to learn computers.	Compulsion
	He need not write letters to the office.	Necessity

(3) Future Perfect: Would + have + v3

For example:

1. He would have eaten by the time you come.
2. She would have taken a power nap by the time the tuition began.

(4) Future Perfect Progressive/Continuous: Would + have + been + v1 + ing

For example:

1. The children would have been watching the match for two hours.
2. Mother would have been waiting for the boys for a few hours.

Modals are auxiliary verbs used along with main verbs. A modal gives additional information about the function of the main verb that follows it and forms the tense, mood, and voice of the main verb.

Modals cannot be used on their own but along with other main verbs to express attitudes.

1 When something happens, they form the tense of the main verb.

For example:

1. I shall go.
2. He will go.

1 They express permission, necessity or possibility to do something.

For example:

1. They may go.
2. You must go.
3. I can't go.
4. I might go.
5. She would go if she could.

Observe the highlighted words in these sentences.

1. We can make our nation a superpower by the year 2020.
2. Kalam says that we need to do things ourselves. We must not import equipment from other nations.
3. In twenty years, each one of us ought to have our destiny worked out.

All the highlighted words are modal auxiliaries that are used with another verb to express the mood of the speaker.

Necessity Modals - Examples and Indicators

We use the Past Perfect Tense to talk about an action which finished before another action in the past.

In such sentences, had + past form of the verb are used.

We use certain time expressions with the past perfect tense, like before, already, after, just, when, and never.

Now, look at the following sentences.

1. I had been watching TV for an hour when I remembered I had forgotten to call my friend.
2. She had been painting her room and has just washed up.

These sentences are in the past perfect continuous tense.

We use the Past Perfect Continuous Tense to talk about a past action which started and finished in the past before another past action, putting emphasis on the duration, and an action which lasted for some time in the past and was recently completed.

In such sentences, had been + -ing form of the verb are used.

We use certain time expressions with the past perfect continuous tense, like for, since, and until.

Future Tense

Look at the following sentences.

1. We will play. (Affirmative)
2. She won't play. (Negative)
3. Why won't we play? (Interrogative)

All these sentences are in the future tense.

The future tense comprises simple future tense, future continuous tense, future perfect tense, and future perfect continuous tense. These can be affirmative/positive, negative and/or interrogative.

Now, look at the following sentences.

1. It will rain soon.
2. I will carry an umbrella to school.
3. The road will become slippery.
4. I must cancel the visit to the coffee shop.
5. There might be a traffic jam.
6. I will make corn soup for all of us.
7. Will you give some of the soup to grandfather for his breakfast?

These are in the simple future tense.

We use the Simple Future Tense to refer an action that will happen in the future or an action we intend to do in the future, a general statement about the future, an action we decide to do right at the time of speaking. It is also used to express a view, an offer to do something or a request that is made to someone to do.

In such sentences, will/shall + base form of the verb are used.

Next, look at the following sentences.

1. The boys will be attending college from next session.
2. The flight will be landing at the international airport at New Delhi.
3. The maid will be cooking when we reach home.

These sentences are in the future continuous tense.

We use the Future Continuous Tense to refer an action that will be going on in the future, a pre-scheduled future plan, and a longer on-going action interrupted by another shorter future action.

In such sentences, will be + -ing form of the verb are used.

Look at the following sentences.

1. I shall have gone shopping before you return from coaching.
2. He will have perfected his bowling before you join cricket coaching.

These sentences are in the future perfect tense.

We use the future perfect tense to refer to an action which would have completed before another action in the future.

In such sentences will/shall have + past participle form of the verb are used.

Now, look at the following sentences.

1. The children will be ready for their performance an hour before the chief guest's arrival.
2. Soon after the programme ends, the parents will be collecting their wards from their classrooms.

These sentences are in the future perfect continuous tense.

We use the Future Perfect Continuous Tense to refer to a long action before a particular time in the future or an action that will begin at a point of time in the future and continue after that.

In such sentences will have been + -ing form of the verb are used.

Future Time Reference

For referring to the future, the modal auxiliaries shall and will are used with the base infinitive.

Let us read the following sentences.

1. We will go to the zoo tomorrow.
2. He will be on leave next week.

All these sentences indicate that we use will to talk about an event in progress at some point in future.

However, there are different modes in English that can be used to refer incidents that occur at some time in future. This mode of reference is called as future time reference.

Future time is expressed in the following ways:

I. Present Future Tense

(1) Simple Future: Will/Shall + v1 (To denote future action).

For example:

1. We shall go for a picnic tomorrow.
2. He will reach by 5:30 p.m.

(2) Future Progressive/Continuous: Will/Shall + be + v1 + ing

For example:

1. We shall be playing football this evening.
2. They will be visiting us next week.

(3) Future Perfect: Shall/Will + have + v3

For example:

1. We will have completed the book.
2. I shall have arranged the books in the shelf by evening.

Shall/Will + have + been + v1 + ing

For example:

1. They will have been eating for some time.
2. We shall have been sleeping before your departure.

II. Past Future Tense

(1) Simple Future: Would + v1

For example:

1. He would go to play.
2. They would sing the school song.

(2) Future Progressive/Continuous: Would + be + v1 + ing

For example:

1. He would be going to play a match at 8 p.m.
2. I would be training for the marathon this evening.