

GRAMMAR OF THE

Perfect Tense, indefinite.

This form of the perfect tense represents an action completely past, and often at no great distance, but the time not specified; as, "I have accomplished my design." But if a particular time is named, the tense must be the *past*; as, "I accomplished my design last week." "I have seen my friend last week," is not correct English. In this respect, the French idiom is different from the English, for "J'ai vu mon oncle hier" is good French, but "I have seen my friend yesterday" is not good English. The words must be translated, "I saw my friend yesterday." No fault is more common than a mistranslation of this tense.

It is to be noted however that this perfect indefinite tense is that in which we express *continued* or *repeated* action; as, "My father has lived about eighty years." "The king has reigned more than forty years." "He has been frequently heard to lament." *Life of Corper*. We use it also when a specified past time is represented, if that time is expressed as a *part of the present period*. Thus, although we cannot say, "We have been together yesterday," we usually say, "We have been together this morning, or this evening." We even use this tense in mentioning events which happened at a greater distance of time, if we connect that time with the present; as, "His brother has visited him once within two years." "He has not seen his sister, since the year 1800."

Perfect Tense, definite.

This form represents an action as just finished; as, "I have been reading a history of the revolution in France."

Prior-past Tense, indefinite, [pluperfect.]

This form of the prior past tense expresses an action which was past at or before some other past time specified; as, "he had received the news before the messenger arrived."

Prior-past, definite.

This form denotes an action to be just past, at or before another time specified; as, "I had been reading your letter when the messenger arrived."

Future Tense, indefinite.

This form of the future tense gives notice of an event to happen hereafter; as, "Your son will obtain a commission in the navy." "We shall have a fine season."

Future Tense, definite.

This form expresses an action which is to take place and be unfinished at a specified future time; as, "He will be preparing for a visit, at the time you arrive."

Prior-Future, indefinite.

This form of the future tense denotes an action which will be past at a future time specified; as, "They will have performed their task, by the appointed hour."

Prior-Future, definite.

This form represents an action which will be just past at a future specified time; as, "We shall have been making preparations, a week before our friends arrive."

In the use of the present tense, the following things are to be noticed.

1. The present tense is customarily used to express future time, when by any mode of expression, the mind is transported forward to the time, so as to conceive it present; as, "I cannot determine, till the mail arrives." "As soon as it is light, we shall depart." "When he has an opportunity, he will write." The words *till*, *when*, *as soon as*, carry the mind to the time of an event to happen, and we speak of it as present.

2. By an easy transition, the imagination passes from an author to his writings; we substitute the writer's name for his works, and speak of him as living, or in the present tense; thus, *Milton resembles Homer* in sublimity and invention, as *Pope resembles Virgil*, in smoothness of versification. *Plato is fanciful*; *Aristotle is profound*.

* The common names and distribution of the tenses, are so utterly incorrect and incompetent to give a just idea of their uses, that I have ventured to offer a new division, retaining the old names, as far as truth will warrant. The terms *prior-past*, and *prior-future*, are so perfectly descriptive of the tenses arranged under them, that I cannot but think they will be well received. The distinction of indefinite and definite is not wholly new; but I have never seen the definite forms displayed, though they are as necessary as the indefinite forms. Indeed, I see not how a foreigner can learn our language, as the tenses are commonly distributed and defined.

3. It gives great life and effect to description, in prose or verse, to represent past events as present; to introduce them to the view of the reader or hearer, as having a present existence. Hence the frequent use of the present tense for the future, by the historian, the poet and the orator:

"She spoke; Minerva burns to meet the war;
And now heaven's empress calls the blazing car;
At her command rush forth the steeds divine,
Rich with immortal gold, the trappings shine."

Iliad, 5.

The definite tenses, it will be observed, are formed by the participle of the present tense, and the substantive verb, *be*. This participle always expresses present time, even when annexed to a past or future tense; for, *I was writing*, denotes that, at the past time mentioned, the action was present; *I shall be writing*, denotes future time, but an action then to be present.

The past tense of every regular verb ends in *ed*; *d* being added to a verb ending in *e*, and *ed* to a verb with other terminations; as *hate*, *hated*; *look*, *looked*.

The future tense is formed by the present tense of *shall* and *will*; for, *I shall go*, *he will go*, are merely an appropriate use of *I shall go*, *I will go*. See an explanation of these words under the head of auxiliaries.

There are other modes of expressing future time; as, "I am going to write"; "I am about to write." These have been called the *inceptive future*, as they note the commencement of an action, or an intention to commence an action without delay.

We have another mode of expression, which does not strictly and positively foretell an action, yet it implies a necessity of performing an act, and clearly indicates that it will take place. For example, "I have to pay a sum of money to-morrow." That is, I am under a *present* necessity or obligation to do a future act.

The substantive verb followed by a radical verb, forms another idiomatic expression of future time; as, "John is to command a regiment." "Enes went in search of the seat of an empire which *was*, one day, to command the world." The latter expression is a future past; that is, *past* to the narrator, but *future* as to the event, at the time specified.

Modes.

Mode, in grammar, is the manner of representing action and being, or the wishes and determinations of the mind. This is performed by inflections of the verb, or by combinations of verbs with auxiliaries and participles, and by their various positions.

As there are scarcely two authors who are agreed in the number and denominations of the modes in English, I shall offer a distribution of the verbs, and a display of their inflections and combinations, somewhat different from any which I have seen.

1. The first and most simple form of the verb, is the verb without inflections, and unconnected with persons. This form usually has the prefix *to*, as *to love*.

This form of the verb, not being restricted to person or number, is usually called the *Infinitive Mode*.

2. Another use of the verb is to *affirm*, *assert* or *declare* some action or existence, either positively, as *he runs*, or negatively, as *you are not in health*. This form is called the *Indicative Mode*.

3. Another office of the verb is to command, direct, ask, or exhort; as *arise*, *make haste*, *let us be content*. This is called the *Imperative Mode*.

4. Another form of the verb is used to declare the power, liberty, possibility or necessity of acting or being, by means of certain words called auxiliaries, as *may*, *can*, *must*, &c. This form is called the *Potential Mode*; as, *I may or can write*; *he must wait*.

5. Another use of verbs is to represent actions or events which are uncertain, conditional or contingent; as, *if he shall go*; *if they would attend*. This is called the *Subjunctive Mode*, but would better be denominated the *Conditional*. The Indicative and Potential become *conditional*, by means of words used to express condition; as *if*, *though*, *unless*, *whether*.

The *Modes* then are five; the *Infinitive*, the *Indicative*, the *Imperative*, the *Potential*, and the *Subjunctive*.

It may also be observed that the combinations and arrangements of our verbs and auxiliaries to express negative, and interrogative propositions, are really *modes* of the verb, and a place might be assigned to the verb for each purpose, were it not for the inconvenience of having *modes of modes*. For the sake of distinction, I denominate these verbs *interrogative* and *negative*, and have exhibited the conjugation of each.

Participles.

Participles are derivatives from verbs, formed by particular terminations, and having the sense of verbs, attributes or names.

There are two species of participles; one denoting present time, and formed by adding *ing* to the verb, as *turn*, *turning*, or when the verb ends with *e*, by dropping that letter and adding *ing*, as *place*, *placing*. But *e* is

* This mode is inserted in compliance with the opinions of many Grammarians; but in opposition to my opinion. It is in fact the indicative mode, affirming the power, &c. of acting, instead of the act itself.