

THE TENSE AND ASPECT SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 6 we presented a form-oriented account of tense and aspect in English and introduced the following phrase structure rule:

$$\text{AUX} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{\text{T}\} \\ \{\text{M}\} \\ -\text{imper} \end{array} \right. \begin{array}{l} (\text{pm}) \\ (\text{perf}) \\ (\text{prog}) \end{array} \right\}$$

According to this rule, the auxiliary of a non-imperative English sentence must have either a modal or a tense marker (which a later rule specifies as either *past* or *present*), and it may have several optional components: phrasal modals, perfect aspect, and progressive aspect. The expression “future tense” was viewed as a misnomer since in English finite verb stems¹ are not inflected to express future time, as they are in certain other languages, such as most Romance and Slavic languages. Of course, this does not mean that English speakers cannot talk of future events. They do so by using other means, such as modals, phrasal modals, and adverbials of time, rather than by placing a formal marking on the verb itself.

However, as we have already seen, language teachers need to deal with meaning and use as well as form. It is not enough to say to ESL/EFL students, “English does not have a future tense,” and be done with the matter. Therefore, in this chapter we start by invento-riying the forms that English *does* use to deal with the three time periods: present, past, and future. We also discuss perfect and progressive aspects, leaving most of the discussion of modals and phrasal modals to the next chapter. Because the exact mapping of form, meaning, and use varies considerably from language to language, mastering the English tense-aspect system requires considerable effort on the part of ESL/EFL students. Because of its importance and its challenge, we devote two chapters to its consideration. In this first chapter we explore the form, meaning, and use of the English tense-aspect system at the sentence level. Sentence-level use is perhaps the way most teachers first introduce the forms. To really understand how the system functions, however, it is necessary to appreciate its application at the suprasentential, or discourse, level. Without this perspective it is impossible to fully explain the various patterns of tense-aspect combinations that occur, which we do in Chapter 9.

One point we wish to underscore here for teachers is that even at the sentence level a system is operating. We have sometimes seen teachers introduce a tense, yet fail to show students how that tense contrasts with others, let alone how it fits into the system as a whole. In order to see how the system operates, we first describe its form. Next, we propose a core meaning for each of the tenses and aspects of the system and illustrate how the core meaning applies when tenses are used by themselves and when they are

combined with one or both aspects. Finally, we contrast the uses of some of the most commonly confused combinations.

THE FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TENSE-ASPECT SYSTEM

Over the years, the important distinction between tense and aspect has become blurred. Instead, English has been said to have 12 “tenses.” We have tried to be careful in the preceding discussion to talk about the *tense-aspect* system and *tense-aspect* combinations. We feel that if the natural division between tense, which relates to *time*,² and aspect, which has to do with the internal structure of the action occurring *at any time*, are dealt with separately at first, the system that results from their subsequent combination is much easier to see and, therefore, easier to learn. We do this in the following chart by listing the two tenses, present and past, along the vertical axis. We include the future on this list of tenses as well, for although there is no verb inflection for future time, any description of the English tense-aspect system needs to account for what form-meaning combinations *do* exist that relate to future time. The four aspects—simple (sometimes called zero aspect), perfect, progressive, and their combination, perfect progressive—are arrayed along the horizontal axis. We illustrate the tense-aspect combinations with the irregular verb *write* and the regular verb *walk*.

	Simple	Perfect	Progressive	Perfect Progressive
	Ø	have + -en	be + -ing	have + -en be + -ing
Present	<i>write/writes</i>	<i>has/have written</i>	<i>am/is/are writing</i>	<i>has/have been writing</i>
	<i>walk/walks</i>	<i>has/have walked</i>	<i>am/is/are walking</i>	<i>has/have been walking</i>
Past	<i>wrote</i>	<i>had written</i>	<i>was/were writing</i>	<i>had been writing</i>
	<i>walked</i>	<i>had walked</i>	<i>was/were walking</i>	<i>had been walking</i>
Future	<i>will write</i>	<i>will have written</i>	<i>will be writing</i>	<i>will have been writing</i>
	<i>will walk</i>	<i>will have walked</i>	<i>will be walking</i>	<i>will have been walking</i>

You can see in the chart that the traditional 12 “tenses” are actually 12 combinations of tense and aspect. They are named by combining a tense with an aspect or aspects, such as present perfect or past perfect progressive. Only the forms in the first column receive their names by first specifying the aspect—simple—and then the tense, such as simple present.³

The simple present remains in its base form (*write*, *walk*) with one exception—the third person singular form, which is made by adding an *-s* to the verb (*writes*, *walks*). The present perfect is formed with the verb *have* (*has* for third person singular) and the past participle, here symbolized by *-en*. It is important to remember that *-en* is only a symbol. Sometimes the past participle does indeed end in *-en*, as does our example irregular verb, *written*. Other times, the past participle is identical to the past tense form of the verb, as you can see in our other example, where the regular verb *walk* has the past participle *walked*. The present progressive form (sometimes called the present continuous) combines a form of the *be* verb (*am*, *is*, *are*), depending on the person and number of the subject, with the present participle, an *-ing* form.⁴ Finally, the present perfect progressive can be seen to be a combination of the perfect form with *have + -en* and the progressive form with *be + -ing*. In this case, the *be* verb of the progressive carries the *-en* perfect ending; in other words, it is in its past participle form, *been*.

Reading down the chart, you can see that the various combinations with past tense and aspect pattern in much the same way as the present tense. The past tense in its simple

form in English is formed by using its past irregular form, as in the irregular verb in our chart, *wrote*, or with a regular verb such as *walk* by adding an *-ed* to give us *walked*. One difference from the simple present is that the form of the simple past remains invariant for all persons and numbers. The past perfect form is made with the past form of the *have* verb (i.e., *had*) followed by the past participle of the main verb. The past progressive form combines the past form of the *be* verb, here in two forms—first and third person singular form *was* and all the other persons and numbers with *were*—followed by the present participle. The past perfect progressive is formed with the past form of the *have* verb (i.e., *had*) followed by the past participle of the *be* verb (i.e., *been*) and the present participle of the main verb, here *writing* or *walking*.

For the future line in our matrix, we use the modal *will*, since there is no future tense that appears as a marking on the verb in English. As we have also already noted, however, English uses a number of ways in addition to the use of *will* to indicate that an action or event is to take place in the future. (We discuss these in the section on The Use of the Tense-Aspect System later in this chapter). The future adheres to the same patterns as the present and past in terms of its combination of aspect markers: *will* with the base form for the simple future, *will + have + -en* for the future perfect, *will* with *be + -ing* for the future progressive, and *will + have + -en + be + -ing* for the future perfect progressive.

Thus, one of the reasons for displaying the tense-aspect combinations in this manner is to demonstrate that the 12 “tenses” are simply combinations of tense and aspect. Since the perfect and progressive aspect markers contribute consistent meanings regardless of tense, in effect, ESL/EFL students have to learn only the form and meaning of the three tenses (in their simple form) and the two aspects (perfect and progressive) to develop an understanding of the tense-aspect system of English. This is why we say that by viewing the tenses and aspects as a system, the learning burden is lessened.

If we think of this matrix as a map of the territory that the tense-aspect system of English covers, we can make some further observations that have pedagogical import. For example, the traffic on our map is focused more in the northwest (including the present progressive) than in other areas. In other words, the frequency with which these tense-aspect combinations are used is greater than in other regions of our map. Such observations can help teachers to decide where to put the limited time they have to best advantage. The southeast, for example, receives very little traffic and consequently should probably not receive as much attention as those combinations in the northwest.

Another point worth making in viewing the semantic territory covered by the tense-aspect system as a map is that the borders between the various regions of the map which prove to be most problematic. Where, for example, does the semantic domain of the past tense end and the present perfect begin? If you were to draw circles on our map to connect those areas with troublesome boundaries, you would find that there are a few that prove particularly challenging to ESL/EFL students. You may wish to try to do this now. We revisit these difficult distinctions in a later section on the use of the tense-aspect system.

MEANING IN THE ENGLISH TENSE-ASPECT SYSTEM

This is an exceedingly important dimension in helping students manage the tense-aspect system. If students are able to develop a feel for the meanings conveyed by components of the system, they will have a tremendous advantage in learning to cope with the boundary problems introduced above and discussed in detail below. In this section, therefore, we attempt to capture the semantic core of each of the components of the system—the three tenses with simple aspect and the two other aspect markers used independently and in tandem.

As we have asserted earlier, understanding the semantics of the tenses in terms of time is inadequate. For instance, if we label the *-ed* marker as a past-tense marker that denotes past time, then we have a hard time explaining its presence in sentences such as the following:

If I walked home after school today, it would take me all afternoon.

They said that they loved grammar.

Host to guest: Did you want something to eat before the game?

Sales clerk to customer: What sort of price did you have in mind?

In the first sentence, the action is hypothetical and hasn't taken place, so obviously the *-ed* is not signifying past time. In the second sentence, an example of reported or indirect speech, the verb in the embedded clause is in past tense, but the expression of their affection for grammar could well still apply—that is, it may not be over and done with. In the third example, the irregular form of the past tense of the verb *do* is used in a present offer; in the fourth, it is used in a question pertaining to the present. We could cite many other examples. The point is that in order to understand the meaning of the tenses, you must go to a deeper level of abstraction than that of temporal meaning. By so doing, you will see what core meaning underlies the use of the past tense in the preceding example sentences and in all other sentences in which it occurs. The *core meaning* of a particular form is the meaning that is most central, primary, or invariant (Hatch and Brown 1995). We begin by analyzing the core meanings of the tenses with simple aspect.

SIMPLE ASPECT

Hirtle (1967) explains that simple aspect refers to events that are conceptualized as complete wholes. The events are not presented as allowing for further development. This aspect stands in contrast to progressive aspect, which is incomplete or imperfective—where the event or state is viewed as some portion of a whole and where there is room for further development or change. We can see this difference by comparing examples with the simple present tense and present progressive:

Susan and Carl live in Newark.

Susan and Carl are living in Newark.

The simple present in the first sentence presents the fact that Susan and Carl live in Newark as a whole event, not allowing for further development, and with no suggestion of change. The present progressive in the second sentence suggests that their living in Newark may be temporary, thus allowing for the possibility of change. In the second sentence, Susan and Carl's living in Newark is some portion of the whole, in the sense that we understand that they may have lived elsewhere before moving to Newark and will likely in the future move again.

With this explanation of the core meaning of simple aspect as a backdrop, let us consider what core meaning each of the tenses adds.

Simple Present Tense

The present tense conveys immediate factuality (Lewis 1986):

I skim the New York Times at breakfast.

The earth rotates around the sun.

My mother loves daisies.

It is a beautiful day.

Let us now show how the core meanings of the simple present, its complete or unchanging nature, and its immediate factuality, apply.

- a. Habitual actions in the present:

He walks to school every day.

- b. General timeless truths, such as physical laws or customs:

Water freezes at 0 degrees centigrade.

Spaniards eat dinner late.

- c. With *be* and other stative verbs to indicate states:

There is a large house on the corner.

I know Mr. Jackson.

The car belongs to Bill.

or even the inception of states:

Now, I understand.

- d. In the subordinate clauses of time or condition when the main clause contains a future-time verb:⁵

After he finishes work, he'll do the errands.

If Cindy passes the bar exam, she'll be able to practice law.

- e. Expresses future (when a scheduled event is involved, usually with a future-time adverbial):

I have a meeting next Wednesday at that time.

- f. Present event/action (usually in sporting events or demonstrations/procedures of some sort):

Here comes the pitch; Vaughn swings and misses.

Now I add three eggs to the mixture.

- g. Present speech acts (where the action is accomplished in the speaking of it):

I resign from the commission.

- h. Conversational historical present (used to refer to certain past events in narration):

"So he stands up in the boat and waves his arms to catch our attention."

It can be seen then, how each event being reported on in the simple present is complete; we can infer there will be no change. Further, each use is an immediate factual report. Next, let us consider the simple past tense. The same general semantic character for simple aspect holds for the simple past as well. Simple past describes events as wholes, ones not conducive to change or development.

Simple Past Tense

The simple past also states facts. What the core meaning of the past tense adds is a sense of remoteness (Knowles 1979). The event can be remote in time:

The Toronto Blue Jays won the World Series in 1992.

And even if the event is a recent one, such as

I finished my term paper!

the “remoteness” comes in the feeling that the event is over and done with. As we saw earlier, the feeling of remoteness can apply even to notions other than time:

If I walked home from school, it would take all afternoon.

Here, the remoteness is due to the conditional, hypothetical nature of this statement. In fact, this is an imaginary conditional (see Chapter 27), and remote from reality.⁶ In the example sentence given earlier, “They said that they loved grammar,” the remoteness comes from the fact that this is a report of what some other people originally said. It is indirect, not their actual expression of affection. And, in the host’s offer, “Did you want something to eat before the game?” the use of the past-tense form of the *do* verb makes the offer more indirect than it would be if the present-tense form *do* were used. Here indirectness can be a sign of politeness. This same interpretation explains why the clerk used the past tense in his question to the customer about the price she had in mind. Another example of indirectness as social distance conveyed by the past tense occurs in the following preliminary to a request:

I am calling because I wanted to ask you a favor.

Let us now examine uses of the past tense to see how these notions of completeness and remoteness apply:

- a. A definite single completed event/action in the past:

I attended a meeting of that committee last week.

- b. Habitual or repeated action/event in the past:

It snowed almost every weekend last winter.

- c. An event with duration that applied in the past with the implication that it no longer applies in the present:

Professor Nelson taught at Yale for 30 years.

- d. With states in the past:

He appeared to be a creative genius.

He owed me a lot of money.

- e. Imaginative conditional in the subordinate clause (referring to present time—discussed in Chapter 27):

If he took better care of himself, he wouldn’t be absent so often.

- f. Social distancing:

Did you want to sit down and stay a while?

So as we can see, the simple past is used when the speaker conceptualizes a complete event factually, but as remote in some way.

Simple Future Tense with *will* (or Contracted ‘ll)

We have already made the point several times that there are many ways to talk about the future in English. We discuss the alternatives later in this chapter and then again in Chapter 9. For now, the picture we have been painting for simple aspect holds for the simple future as well. In other words, simple future is used when the event is conceptualized as a whole. One

difference in its core meaning is that events in the future time cannot be factually knowable in the same way as those in the past or present can. Therefore, because, strictly speaking, the future can't be reported on factually, *will* is said to be used for strong predictions, not factual reports:

We will cover the first half of the book this term.

We will never know what cures tropical plants possess if we don't become serious about preserving the forests in which they grow.

Will has other meanings as well, and these are dealt with in the chapter on modals.

Let us now see how its core meaning of strong predictability applies:

- a. An action to take place at some definite future time:

Joel will take the bar exam next month.

- b. A future habitual action or state:

After October, Judy will take the 7:30 train to Chicago every day.

And even for present habits, about which strong predictions can be made:

Erik is so funny. He'll wake up, and before coming downstairs, he'll start playing with his trains. (example from Lori Gray)

- c. A situation that may obtain in the present and will obtain in the future but with some future termination in sight (notice here it is not the *will* that suggests the limitation on the event, but the subordinate clause):

Nora will live in Caracas until she improves her Spanish.

- d. In the main (result) clause of future conditionals:

If you go, you'll be sorry.

Here again, we should be able to see that the simple tense allows us to talk about events as wholes. Before moving on, then, let us summarize. Simple aspect allows us to talk about events as not open to development or change and to make factual statements or strong predictions about them. This is true despite the tense and is true for both specific facts and general ones.

<i>Specific</i>	<i>General</i>
Joe misses Susie.	Leap year comes every four years.
You slept till noon!	Dinosaurs roamed the earth for millions of years.
I'll be home by 6 P.M.	Oil will float on water.

PERFECT ASPECT

The core meaning of the perfect is "prior," and it is used in relation to some other point in time. For instance, present perfect is used retrospectively to refer to a time prior to now:

Have you done your homework?

The past perfect offers a retrospective point of view on some past time:

He had left before I arrived.

The future perfect offers a retrospective point of view on some future time:

Mark will have finished all his chores by the time we get there.

Next, we examine in detail the combination of the perfect with the three tenses to see how this core meaning obtains.

Present Perfect

- a. A situation that began at a prior point in time and continues into the present:

I have been a teacher since 1967.

- b. An action occurring or not occurring at an unspecified prior time that has current relevance

I have already seen that movie.

- c. A very recently completed action (often with *just*):

Mort has just finished his homework.

- d. An action that occurred over a prior time period and that is completed at the moment of speaking:

The value of the Johnson's house has doubled in the last four years.

- e. With verbs in subordinate clauses of time or condition:

She won't be satisfied until she has finished another chapter.⁷

If you have done your homework, you can watch TV.

Past Perfect

- a. An action completed in the past prior to some other past event or time:

He had already left before I could offer him a ride.

She had worked at the post office before 1962.

- b. Imaginative conditional in the subordinate clause (referring to past time):

If Sally had studied harder, she would have passed the exam.

Future Perfect

- a. A future action that will be completed prior to a specific future time:

I will have finished all this word processing by 5 P.M.

- b. A state or accomplishment that will be completed in the future prior to some other future time or event:

At the end of the summer the Blakes will have been married for 10 years.

Thus, you can see that when it interacts with each of the three tenses, perfect aspect allows us a retrospective point of view from a particular point in time: present, past, and future.

PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

We have already made the case for the core meaning of progressive aspect as being imperfective, meaning that it portrays an event in a way that allows for it to be incomplete, or somehow limited. You saw how this core meaning was manifest in the contrast between an event of a temporary nature:

Susan and Carl are living in Newark.

in contrast with an ongoing state:

Susan and Carl live in Newark.

Another difference is that while the simple tenses can be used to make generic statements:

Weeds grow like wildfire.

progressive aspect is always specific:

Weeds are growing like wildfire (in my garden).

Here are uses of the tense-progressive combinations, so you can see how the core meaning of the progressive holds for all the tenses:

Present Progressive (Sometimes Called Present Continuous)

- a. Activity in progress:

He is attending a meeting now.

- b. Extended present (action will end and therefore lacks the permanence of the simple present tense):

I'm studying geology at the University of Colorado.

- c. A temporary situation:

Phyllis is living with her parents.

- d. Repetition or iteration in a series of similar ongoing actions:

Henry is kicking the soccer ball around the backyard.

- e. Expresses future (when event is planned; usually with a future-time adverbial):⁸

She's coming tomorrow.

- f. Emotional comment on present habit (usually co-occurring with frequency adverbs *always* or *forever*):

He's always delivering in a clutch situation. (approving)

He's forever acting up at these affairs. (disapproving)

- g. A change in progress:

She's becoming more and more like her mother.

Past Progressive

- a. An action in progress at a specific point of time in the past:

He was walking to school at 8:30 this morning.

- b. Past action simultaneous with some other event that is usually stated in the simple past:

Karen was washing her hair when the phone rang.

While Alex was traveling in Europe, he ran into an old friend.

- c. Repetition or iteration of some ongoing past action:

Jake was coughing all night long.

- d. Social distancing (which comes from the past tense and the tentativeness of the progressive aspect):

I was hoping you could lend me \$10.

Future Progressive

- a. An action that will be in progress at a specific time in the future:

He will be taking a test at 8 A.M. tomorrow.

- b. Duration of some specific future action:

Mavis will be working on her thesis for the next three years.

PERFECT PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

As its name implies, this aspect combines the sense of “prior” of the perfect with the meaning of “incompleteness” inherent in the progressive aspect.

He has been working hard on a special project.

We understand that the event being reported here was begun prior to now and that his hard work is limited—that is, it will not continue indefinitely. Next, we examine how these two core meanings work in tandem for each of the tenses.

Present Perfect Progressive

- a. A situation or habit that began in the past (recent or distant) and that continues up to the present (and possibly into the future):

Burt has been going out with Alice.

- b. An action in progress that is not yet completed:

I have been reading that book.

- c. A state that changes over time:

The students have been getting better and better.

- d. An evaluative comment on something observed over time triggered by current evidence:

You've been drinking again!

Past Perfect Progressive

- a. An action or habit taking place over a period of time in the past prior to some other past event or time:

Carol had been working hard, so her doctor told her to take a vacation.
She had been trying to finish her degree that year.

- b. A past action in progress that was interrupted by a more recent past action:

We had been planning to vacation in Maine, but changed our minds after receiving the brochure on Nova Scotia.

- c. An ongoing past action or state that becomes satisfied by some other event:

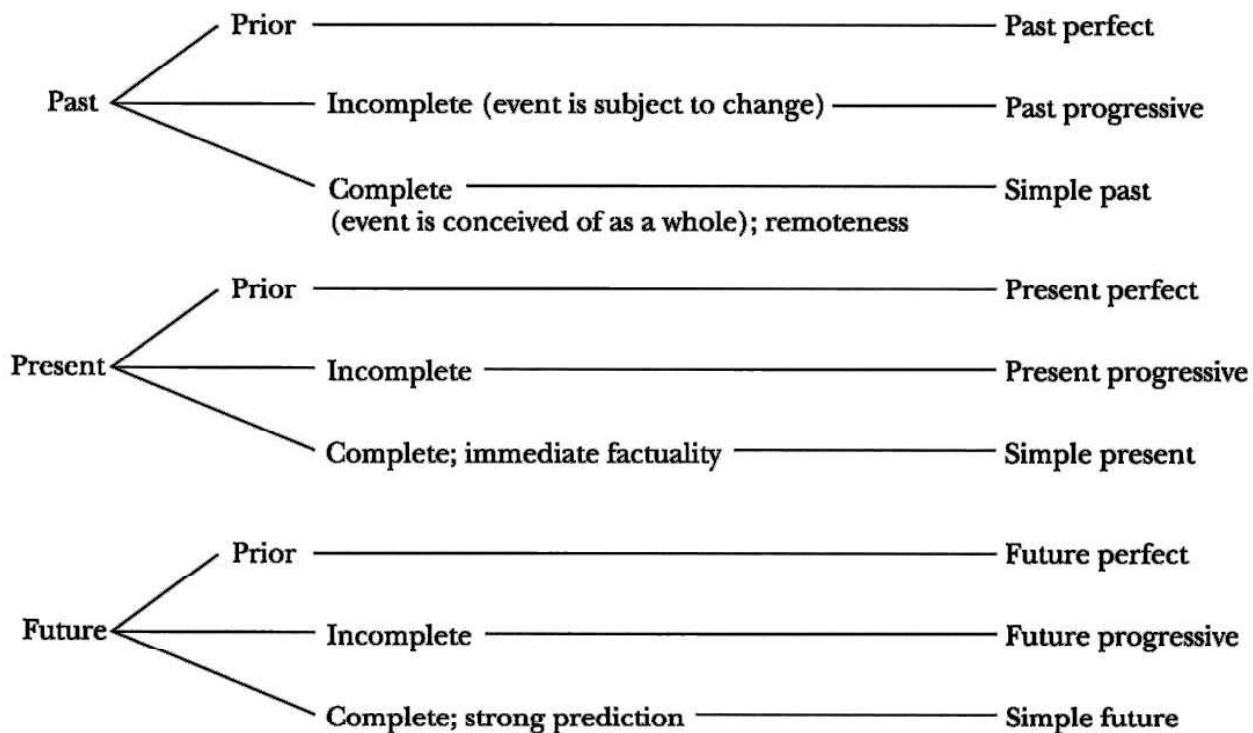
I had been wanting to see that play, so I was pleased when I won the tickets.

Future Perfect Progressive

Durative or habitual action that is taking place in the present and that will continue into the future up until or through a specific future time:

On Christmas Eve we will have been living in the same house for 20 years.
He will have been keeping a journal for 10 years next month.

We can sum up our observations so far concerning the core meanings of the English tense-aspect system with this diagram:



While this approach accounts, we feel, for much of the core semantics of the system, it does need some refinement at a more local level. For one thing, the meaning of the grammatical aspect can be affected by the choice of verb since verbs have their own inherent lexical aspect.

THE LEXICAL ASPECT OF VERBS

As you saw in Chapter 3, verbs have not only grammatical aspect but lexical aspect as well. Verbs can be divided into four categories based on their inherent lexical aspect (Vendler 1967).

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Accomplishment</i>	<i>Achievement (punctual)</i>	<i>State⁹</i>
run	paint (a picture)	recognize (something)	have
walk	make (a chair)	realize (something)	contain
swim	build (a house)	lose (something)	seem
live	write (a novel)	find (something)	want
study	grow up	win the race	like

Activities, accomplishments, and achievements all involve changes of state. Activity verbs are durative and describe an ongoing action. They each have an undefined beginning and end point. Accomplishment verbs, on the other hand, share with activity verbs their durability but each has a well-defined end point, when the particular action described in the verb phrase is—or is not—completed. Achievement verbs also each have a well-defined end

point; however, they have no duration. They are punctual. Stative verbs do not involve change. They depict a stable situation that is assumed to last more or less indefinitely. Often stative verbs are broken down into the following subcategories, with several verbs appearing in more than one category depending on their meaning:

Sensory perception: *smell, see, hear, taste, feel*

Mental perception: *know, believe, think, understand, mean, doubt*

Possession: *possess, have, own, belong*

Emotions, attitudes, and opinions: *like, love, hate, dislike, want, desire, need, prefer, appreciate, doubt, feel, wish*

Measurement: *equal, measure, weigh, cost*

Relationship: *contain, entail, consist of*

Description: *be, resemble, sound, appear, seem, look*

How these four main categories of verbs—activity, accomplishment, achievement, and state—interact with the aspects we have just considered is as follows:

With Simple Aspect

The simple tenses can express either specific or general facts, events, habits, and states with all four verb types.

With Perfect Aspect

Activity verbs are not as commonly used with perfect aspect as some of the other categories of verbs. When they are used with perfect aspect, they describe a prior experience or activity.

I have run before.

Accomplishment and achievement verbs go easily with perfect aspect and signal prior events that are completed:

John Updike has written many novels.

The true meaning of that holiday has been lost.

Stative verbs with perfect aspect signal a state that may or may not have ended at the time of speech:

I have owned a Rolls Royce { before.
since 1987.

With Progressive Aspect

Activity verbs readily take the progressive, which reinforces the fact that the action has duration:

Meg is washing her car.

Accomplishment verbs also take the progressive, but in this case the progressive focuses on progress toward a particular end that has not yet been completed:

The contractors are building the new civic center.

With achievement verbs, because they are punctual, the progressive gives the meaning of iteration:

He is nodding his head in agreement.

or inception of an event:

Joe is realizing his mistake.

Alternatively, by stretching out the moment, the speaker can place emphasis on the action associated with the achievement:

The plane is landing right on schedule.

It has been said that stative verbs do not normally take the progressive because of a fundamental semantic conflict between a grammatical aspect that denotes a limited duration and a lexical aspect that expresses a stable state.

*I am knowing the answer.

However, such an unqualified generalization discounts the frequently made observation that the progressive can occur with stative verbs to achieve certain effects. (See Kesner Bland 1988 for discussion). The progressive turns states into events. As such, “progressive statives” can be used to

- a. intensify the emotion expressed by the verb:

I'm hating this assignment.
I hate this assignment.

- b. indicate current behavior as opposed to general description:

He's being rude.
He's rude.

- c. introduce change in states by focusing on differences in degree across time:

I'm understanding less and less about life, the older I get.

Other uses of progressive statives found by Gavis (1997) are to:

- d. show limited duration

“Are you understanding this?”

- e. emphasize conscious involvement:

“What we are seeing is a red dwarf star.”

- f. show vividness

“One night in the middle of the night, I'm hearing dripping.”

- g. express politeness

“Are you liking it?” (cf. “Do you like it?”)

- h. mitigate criticism

“I like the first piano notes, but I'm not liking it where the strings come in.”
(cf. . . . “but I do not like it . . .”)

- i. avoid imposition

“I was just wanting to invite you to a gathering . . .” (answering machine message)

The other difficulty we run into in claiming that stative verbs do not take the progressive is that many stative verbs, even the classic verb of state, the copula *be*, have nonstative counterparts that are active in meaning and that may occur with the progressive.

State (subject is not the agent)

The steak weighs 12 ounces.

You are a fool.

I taste cinnamon in these rolls.

Action (subject is the agent)

The butcher is weighing the steak.

You're being a fool.

We'll be tasting wine at the vineyard.

All this means that we have to think in terms of stative “meanings” rather than stative “verbs” to correctly understand and explain restrictions on the use of the progressive aspect in English.

With Perfect Progressive Aspect

With activity verbs, perfect progressive aspect implies that the action began in the past and has duration at the present time:

Mike has been running for two hours.

or is iterative and/or habitual:

Mike has been running for years.

With accomplishment verbs, the perfect progressive indicates that the action has been going on for some time and is not yet complete:

They have been repairing that bridge for months.

With achievement verbs, perfect progressive aspect is a bit strange if only one action is intended, due to the fact that achievement verbs are punctual:

?Mike has been winning that race for hours.

but not if the achievement is iterative:

Mike has been winning that race for years.

With stative verbs, perfect progressive aspect often appears to be more compatible than progressive aspect alone:

?I am wanting to see you.

I have been wanting to see you.

Here, the perfect adds the notion of inception prior to present time and thus signals that the state has history, or duration.

Besides the obvious implication that lexical aspect interacts with grammatical aspect to affect meaning, another point we should make is that lexical aspect influences the acquisition of the simple tenses as well. Researchers in second language acquisition have discovered that the acquisition of past tense is not a unitary phenomenon but rather proceeds in stages. Typically, learners use the past tense with achievement (punctual) verbs first and then, later, its use spreads to accomplishment verbs and, finally, to activities and states. Another trend is for learners not to use past tense with adverbs of frequency, such as *never* and *always* (Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds 1995). These observations regarding the acquisition of past tense have implications for the selection of example sentences. Teachers may well want to supplement the natural input to which students are exposed and to focus their attention on the use of past tense with activity and stative verbs and its co-occurrence with adverbs of frequency (Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds 1995).

ADVERBS OF TENSE AND TIME

To conclude our discussion of the meanings associated with the verb tense-aspect system in English, we should point out that because of the semantics of the tense-aspect combinations, certain adverbs of indefinite time (*still*, *yet*, *soon*, *already*, *anymore*, and *just*) often co-occur with particular combinations. Consider how they all could be used as different answers to the following question:

Has Chris finished her M.A. thesis?

1. Yes, she has *just* finished it.
2. Yes, she has *already* filed it.
3. No, she hasn't finished it *yet*.
4. No, but she'll finish it *soon*.
5. No, she's *still* working on it.
6. No, she's not working on it *anymore*.

In answer 1, *just* signals recent completion, while in 2, *already* is used to signal a result that occurred previously—perhaps earlier than anticipated. In 3, the adverb *yet* indicates noncompletion. All three occur with the present perfect, although American English, unlike Standard British English, also permits simple past tense to occur with these three adverbs. For example:

1. Yes, she *just* finished it.
2. Yes, she *already* finished it.
3. No, she didn't finish it *yet*.

Like 3, answer 4 also signals noncompletion; however, future completion is implied in *soon*, whereas it is less certain in *yet*. The present progressive with *still* in 5 signals a state of affairs that is somehow persisting in the present—perhaps longer than anticipated—while answer 6 indicates noncompletion, and one is led to believe that the task has been abandoned.

Consider also the following situation. A parent may ask his or her child either

Have you done your homework *already*?
or
Have you done your homework *yet*?

The question with *already* suggests that the parent expects a positive answer but perhaps is surprised because he or she did not expect completion that early. The question with *yet* is more neutral, or it may be used to signal that the parent does not expect the homework to be finished but wants to make the child feel as though it should be.

Note also that *just* and *soon* appear to be complementary retrospective and future markers—signaling recent completion and expected completion in the immediate future, respectively:

Joe has *just* finished his assignment, and I will finish mine *soon*.

A final point is that *anymore*,¹⁰ which negates the past, can be viewed as complementary to *still*,¹¹ which affirms continuation of the past in the present:

Helen's *still* living in Omaha, but she doesn't go to school *anymore*.

The semantically incomplete connotations of *yet*, *anymore*, and *still* and the semantically complete (or about to be completed) nature of *just*, *soon*, and *already*—as well as the tenses with which these forms co-occur most frequently—are facts about English that you should be prepared to convey to your students. Of course, some of these adverbs have other nontemporal meanings as well, which we discuss in Chapter 25 and elsewhere. We leave the meaning dimension of the tense-aspect system now and turn to the use dimension.

THE USE OF THE TENSE-ASPECT SYSTEM

In ways that are not true for other structures, the meaning/use distinction in the tense-aspect system is difficult to discern. What we have therefore attempted to do is to anticipate the troublesome boundaries for ESL/EFL students, to which we alluded earlier, and to elucidate the differences by calling upon both semantic and pragmatic resources. Chapter 9 in its entirety is devoted further to issues of use.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFICULT CONTRASTS IN TENSE-ASPECT COMBINATIONS

1. Simple Present Versus Present Progressive

The present progressive is used for limited action in progress, while the simple present is more compatible with states. Thus, this distinction is manifest in the following ways:

- a. Action happening at the moment of speaking versus a habit:

Why are you wearing glasses? (moment of speech—i.e., right now)
Why do you wear glasses? (habitual)

- b. Temporary event versus permanent situation:

Linda is living with her parents. (temporary—until she gets a better job)
Linda lives with her parents. (permanent—because it costs her too much to live alone)

- c. Specific event versus general situation:

What are you doing for Thanksgiving? (one specific Thanksgiving holiday—the forthcoming one)
What do you do for Thanksgiving? (the holiday each year)

- d. Activity versus state (two different lexical entries required):

I am thinking about the answer. (mental activity)
I think it is 144. (mental state/report)

2. Present Perfect Versus Present Perfect Progressive

The present perfect progressive emphasizes activity as compared with achievement with the present perfect. Thus, the following distinctions may occur:

- a. Specific and possibly still ongoing activity versus prior event:

I have been visiting my great-grandmother. (possibly still ongoing)
I have visited my great-grandmother. (prior event)

- b. Strong implication of continuation versus continuation being only a possibility:

I have been teaching for 25 years. (and I can't imagine doing anything else)
I have taught for 25 years. (so now it's time to think about doing something else)

Notice, in fact with this pair, that the present perfect progressive implies continuation unless it is contradicted by another clause:

I have been teaching for 25 years, but now I want to do something else.

- c. Single accomplishment, incomplete, versus a completed one:

Gail has been remodeling her home. (incomplete)
Gail has remodeled her home. (complete)

3. Simple Past Versus Present Perfect

This distinction is extremely difficult for many ESL/EFL students to make. You could call their attention to some sentence-level contrasts, but this distinction is often best sorted out at the level of discourse (see Chapter 9). One thing is certain: Even though one is a

present tense and the other a past, the choice is not dependent upon the time at which the event took place. As Inoue (1979) has pointed out, the truth value of the present perfect is identical to the past. For example, in the following pair of sentences, the time at which Sheila joined is not different:

Sheila has joined the Sierra Club.
Sheila joined the Sierra Club.

If the time of her joining is the same, what accounts for the difference? We might say that the use of the present perfect has more to do with our present perspective on the event rather than on the actual time at which it took place. This concept is difficult to get across to ESL/EFL students. Therefore, some additional sentence-level ways to help students determine whether to use the present perfect or the simple past tense are the following:

- a. The simple past often occurs with specific past-time adverbials. Recall that the core meaning of the past tense is remoteness. The use of specific past-time adverbials (e.g., *yesterday*, *last year*, *1990*) makes the past tense obligatory. As we have already seen, the use of certain more general temporal adverbials is commonly associated with the perfect (e.g., *already*, *since*, *yet*).
b. Even if a past-time adverbial isn't explicit, the remoteness may be defined elsewhere in the context or simply implied:

John Lennon was a creative genius.

- c. The past tense is used for a completed historical period versus an incomplete one:

My father lived here all his life. (complete—implies the father has left or is dead)
My father has lived here all his life. (incomplete—the father still lives there)

- d. The present perfect is used for an indefinite versus a definite query:

Have you ever gone to Phoenix?

Did you go to Phoenix? (You said that you traveled to the Southwest last summer)

In fact, you would almost have to have some shared knowledge with your listener to use the specific past tense in such situations. Use of the present perfect in such a context does not presume shared knowledge.

- e. Citing Joos (1967), Knowles (1976) gives us another way to view the differences between the simple past and present perfect. According to Knowles, the function of the present perfect is to change the nature of the relationship between the subject and predicate—it emphasizes the predicated event's result on the grammatical subject. In the following example,

I've been to Japan twice already, but I still don't speak much Japanese.

the speaker is not so much talking about an event as characterizing "I" at the time of the discourse. To know the time of the trips requires additional questions and answers. Thus, the present perfect functions as a "scene setter," a topic we return to in Chapter 9.

4. Simple Past Versus Past Progressive

- a. The past progressive indicates incomplete versus complete action:

He was drowning in the lake, so the lifeguard raced into the water. (incomplete)
He drowned in the lake. (complete)

- b. Simple past sees the event as a totality with no room for change; past progressive indicates that an event has already begun and extends the event in time and thus allows for a change or its interruption:

He left when I came in.

He was leaving when I came in. (and so may have changed his mind and stayed.)

- c. Permanent versus temporary state:

They lived in Baltimore all their lives. (past permanent)

They were living in Baltimore during the seventies. (past temporary)

5. Simple Past Versus Past Perfect

- a. The past perfect is used to mark the completion of some event before a past time period:

By the end of the 1920s, women in the United States had won the right to vote.

or before another past event that is in the simple past:

Pat had blamed them for the problem before he considered all the evidence.

However, it is possible to report this same sequence with two events using just the simple past tense for both since the time adverbial *before* makes clear the sequence (cf. endnote 7):

Pat blamed them for the problem before he considered all the evidence.

Even without a time adverbial, the simple past tense can be used with both clauses if the sequence of the clauses follows the sequence of events:

Marion worked in an insurance company for 20 years and retired in 1997.

Only when the clauses report two events out of sequence and there are no time adverbials that indicate the actual order is the past perfect necessary:

When Marion became a photographer, she had finished her degree in fine arts.

- b. Sometimes the past perfect appears to mark the later rather than the earlier of the two events in a two-clause sequence (G. Stevens, personal communication):

I answered before she had asked.

She collected it before I had finished.

Notice here, though, the event in the subordinate clause was not actually completed. In this case, it appears that the past perfect is a kind of implied counterfactual, suggesting that the event in the subordinate clause was not completed or did not occur. Here again, a simple past tense will often do without a change in meaning:

I answered before she asked.

6. Simple Future (*will*) Versus Other Ways of Indicating Futurity

- a. Simple future with *will* is used for the following:

Future predictions:

Belinda will be 40 next year.

Spontaneous decision when the person has control over the action:

I'll get the phone.

- b. *Be going to* is used for the following:

Future predictions (more informal than *will*):

Belinda's going to be 40 next year.

Future intentions (based on prior decision):

Randy and Joyce are going to get married in October.

Future certainty based on current condition or present evidence:

Pauline's going to have a baby.

It's going to rain today.

- c. Present progressive is used for the following:

Future plans that have already been made:

I'm marching in the parade next week.

- d. Simple present is used for the following:

Fixed scheduled events:

We get paid next Friday.

Subordinate clauses of time (i.e., those beginning with *when*, *after*, *before*, etc.) or condition (i.e., *provided that*, *if*, *as long as*, etc.):

If the train arrives on time, we'll beat rush hour getting home.

Some of these uses are very close, and difficulties may arise accordingly. Here are some observations that may help to distinguish some uses:

- a. The distinction between future scheduled events and future plans is sometimes indiscernible, and the same event can be referred to either way—simple present or present progressive. However, the simple present is more formal and impersonal and is not very common except with travel arrangements and fixed timetables.:

Aunt Jeanne arrives today.

Aunt Jeanne is arriving today.

- b. The present progressive is very common and sometimes overlaps with *be going to*. The present progressive, however, emphasizes that the arrangements have already been made, whereas *be going to* focuses more on the speaker's plans or intentions:

I'm staying at the Marriott.

I'm going to stay at the Marriott.

Of course, the present progressive is not likely to be used to express the future with stative verbs or where the subject is inanimate:

*The red car is belonging to me tomorrow.

The red car is going to belong to me tomorrow.

*That tree is falling tomorrow.

That tree is going to fall tomorrow.

or any time when no planning or preparation can guarantee the outcome:

*We are winning the tennis match next weekend.

- c. *Will* and *be going to* are sometimes interchangeable when *be going to* expresses the speaker's certainty and *will* is used to make a strong prediction. However, since *be going to* is a present-tense form, it is used especially when there is evidence in the present to support the prediction; this is not necessarily the case with *will*.

Mark is going to be tall like his dad.

?Mark will be tall like his dad.

And they also differ in that *will* is used for quick, "on-the-spot" decisions, whereas *be going to* is used with more premeditated ones:

What can I give Jill for her birthday? Oh, I know. I'll get her that new novel.

Oh, I know. ?I'm going to get her that new novel.

Finally, when they occur together, the *be going to* tends to come first, to introduce the event, with details supplied with *will* (see Chapter 9).

Tomorrow night we're going to have a cookout. Our guests'll bring something to grill, and we'll supply the rest.

7. Simple Future Versus Future Progressive

The future progressive allows for the possibility of change with regard to some future event:

We'll go to Everglades National Park on our vacation. (definite plan)

We'll be going to Everglades National Park on our vacation. (less definite in that it allows for a change in plans; i.e., We'll be going to Everglades National Park unless we run out of time)

We will offer that class next semester. (more definite)

We will be offering that class next semester.¹² (more tentative in that it allows for change—i.e., its cancellation if not enough students enroll in it)

8. Simple Future Versus Future Perfect

As do the other perfect aspects, the future perfect marks an event/activity that is complete prior to some other time (in this case, future), or complete prior to some other future event:

By the year 2008, the information superhighway will have become accessible to all.

Megan will have moved by the time she completes her studies.

Simple future alone suggests that the event/activity begins with the time mentioned:

The information superhighway will become accessible to all by the year 2008.

Megan will move when she completes her studies.

SOME ADDITIONAL FACTS REGARDING USE

In the next chapter, we deal comprehensively with the modal system of English. It is worth calling attention at this point, however, to some modals and phrasal modals whose functions relate to the uses of the tense and aspect markers. There are three observations that we would like to make here.

1. Although we have already shown a number of ways to talk about future events and states, many modals, in addition to *will*, and phrasal modals, in addition to *be going to*, can be used for this purpose as well. Here are just a few of them:

<i>may, could, might</i>	It <i>may/could/might</i> rain tomorrow. (less certain than <i>will</i>)
<i>be to</i>	The recruit <i>is to</i> report at 7 A.M. tomorrow morning.
<i>be about to</i>	Look out! You <i>'re about to</i> step in a puddle.
<i>be supposed to</i>	We <i>'re supposed to</i> go on a field trip tomorrow, but the weather forecast doesn't look good.

Of course, meanings differ among these, and we explore them in the following chapter on modals.

2. We can use the phrasal modal *used to* and the modal *would* to express past habits. When they occur together, *used to* tends to frame the discourse, and *would* serves to elaborate (see Chapter 9).

When we were children, we *used to* swing on the lawn swing for hours. We *would* stop only when we were called for dinner.

3. The past form of the phrasal modal *be going to* can be used to talk about failed future plans from a past perspective:

Pam *was going to* play tennis this weekend, but she sprained her ankle.

CONCLUSION

This ends our analysis of the form, meaning, and use of the verb tense-aspect system as it operates at the sentence level. We hope this treatment has helped demonstrate some of the systematicity underlying what might seem at first to be disparate facts. Much more of the systematic nature of English tense-aspect is revealed when we examine the use of the tense-aspect system at the discourse level in Chapter 9.

From our perspective, the long-term challenge of learning the English tense-aspect system centers around what we have termed “the boundary problem.” In this regard it is very important that as new tense-aspect combinations are introduced, they are contrasted with what has been presented previously. We have spent time examining the core meanings of the aspects and tenses because we feel that some of the difficulty of discerning the differences between pairs of tense-aspect combinations can be dispelled if students can first be taught to associate the core meanings with the forms; then, they can be helped to understand the more peripheral uses that are not easily explicable from a core-meaning perspective. Furthermore, while it is commonplace to introduce the present progressive by teaching students to associate its core meaning with events that are happening this very minute, this is only part of the story of the present progressive. If teachers are sensitive to the core meanings of the various forms that compose the tense-aspect system, perhaps they will assist their students to develop an understanding of the wider usage of these forms.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

1. **Form.** An inductive approach to teaching the form of English tense-aspect combinations is to provide students with naturalistic data in which the input has somehow been enhanced (Sharwood Smith 1993) in order to make the verb endings more salient. You

might try, for example, giving your students short reading passages with certain verb endings boldfaced or italicized. You could do this for a period of time before ever formally drawing their attention to any particular tense-aspect combination.

2. Form. ESL/EFL students will need to learn the irregular past tense and past participle forms. One suggestion for practicing these is to play the game of concentration. Each group of four or five students will need a set of 30 cards. On 15 of the cards, write the base form of the verb; on the other 15 cards, write the past tense and/or past participle.

Shuffle the cards and place them face down, forming a grid of six cards down and five across. Students take turns turning over two cards at a time. If the two cards make a match—that is, if the base form and past tense and/or past participle are of the same verb—the student keeps the pair of cards. If they do not match, the cards must be replaced, face down, in their original spots. When all the pairs have been matched, the student with the most cards wins. This game can be replayed from time to time as new verbs are introduced.

3. Meaning. To teach meaning, we want students to *associate* a form and its meaning. For example, you might bring in a color wheel, or draw one on the board, for practicing the unchanging fact/state core meaning of the simple present tense. Have students make statements about how to form other colors from the primary ones and other combinations:

T: What do red and blue make?
S: Red and blue make purple.
T: What do black and white make?
S: Black and white make gray.
T: What do all the colors together make?
S: All the colors together make black.
T: Now make as many sentences as you can with English words for colors.

4. Meaning. One way of getting students to associate forms and meanings is to teach them certain adverbials that frequently occur with particular tenses. For example, give students a list of three adverbials that commonly go together with the present tense-aspect combinations:

<i>Simple Present</i>	<i>Present Perfect</i>	<i>Present Progressive</i>
every (day)	for X days	this day; these days
once a week	up until now	at the moment
on (Wednesday)	since (Monday)	today

Next, give them a blank monthly calendar for the current month. Read to them a paragraph, such as the following, with Jill's activities and appointments for the month. Ask the students to pencil them in.

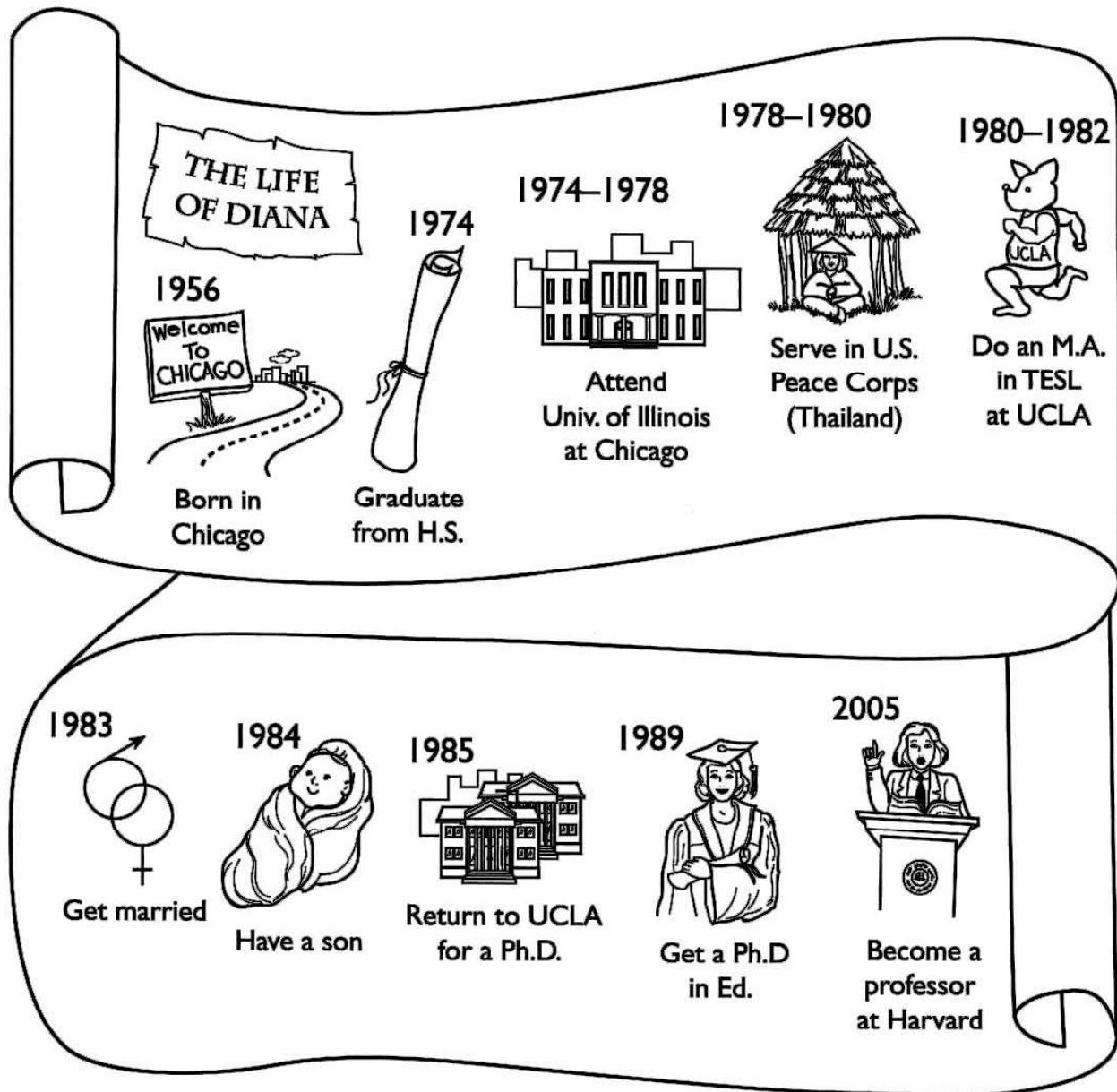
During the month of _____, Jill is very busy. She goes to class every weekday and studies on the weekends too. She has tests once a week on Fridays. These days she is also working. She works on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings after school. She is not working this evening (Wednesday), though, because she is not feeling well. She has been sick since Monday. She has missed school and work for two days. . . .

Finally, give students new blank calendars and have them work in pairs to write down their partner's monthly activities.

5. Meaning. To teach students to associate meaning with verb forms, you can use a real or imaginary biography that details the events in someone's life. This can be effectively presented in the form of a scroll, which you can slowly unwind as you ask students questions. For example, you might ask questions such as the following that help students understand the meaning of the perfect progressives:

- Present perfect progressive: It's 1970. (For) how long has Diana been living in Chicago?
- Past perfect progressive: In 1976, (for) how long had Diana been attending the University of Illinois?
- Future perfect progressive: In 1987, (for) how many years will Diana have been working on her Ph.D.?

Students can create scrolls of their own lives and ask and answer each other's questions.



6. Use. Learning to use the tenses appropriately seems to be the greatest challenge that ESL/EFL students face. To have students see the difference between the simple past and the past progressive, have them think of a famous historical event that took place during their lifetimes. For example, the shooting of Anwar Sadat, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall,

the Kobe earthquake. Ask a student to say what their event was, and then ask other students to tell what they were doing at the time. Have them use the following frame:

When I heard about X, I was Y.

When I heard about Anwar Sadat, I was driving in my car.

7. Use. Another problem students commonly wrestle with is choosing between *will* and *be going to* appropriately. Dalglish, Joshee, and Holzer (personal communication) recommend that the teacher write the following two sentences on the board:

She is going to dive into the water.

She will dive into the water.

Show students a picture of a woman perched on the end of a diving board and lean forward, and ask students which sentence correctly describes the picture. The students may intuitively know that the use of *will* in this context is not appropriate. Help them to see that *be going to* here is more appropriate because the woman's posture and position at the end of the diving board indicates a preplanned activity for which there is evidence. *Will*, on the other hand, expresses intention at the immediate moment of decision when the person has control over the action. Next ask students to create appropriate contexts for each sentence of each pair below:

- a. I'll sell my car.
I'm going to sell my car.
- b. I'll buy her a necklace.
I'm going to buy her a necklace.
- c. I'll have an omelette and a salad.
I'm going to have an omelette and a salad.

8. Use. To help students practice one difference in usage between the simple past and the present perfect, Gene Parulis and Fiona Cook (personal communication) suggest students role-play a job interview.

A: Have you ever $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{taken shorthand} \\ \text{done any computer programming} \\ \text{written advertisements before} \end{array} \right\}$?
·
·
·

B: $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{No, I haven't, but I have edited a newsletter. I worked . . .} \\ \text{Yes, I have. I worked . . .} \end{array} \right\}$

For students who are less advanced, you could work on the same use difference between present perfect and past by asking each student to think up one question to ask another student in the class, using the frame *Have you ever. . . ?* If the student to whom the question is asked answers affirmatively, then the first student asks a follow-up question. For example:

A: Have you ever eaten cous-cous?

B: Yes, I have.

A: Really? When did you eat it?

B: I ate some last week at a restaurant.

EXERCISES**Test your understanding of what has been presented.**

1. Provide original example sentences to illustrate the following terms. Underline the pertinent word(s) in your examples:

a. simple future	d. past perfect	g. accomplishment verb
b. present perfect	e. stative verb	h. present perfect progressive
c. past progressive	f. simple present	
2. Do the following sentences differ at all with regard to the ordering of events?
 - a. I had finished my homework before I practiced the piano.
 - b. I finished my homework before I practiced the piano.Give a reason for your answer.
3. The word *since* does not usually occur with the simple past tense. Why do you think this is so?
4. Compare and contrast the following pairs of sentences:

a. I have read the book.	I have been reading the book.
b. Stan sells vacuum cleaners.	Stan is selling vacuum cleaners.
c. Did you go to Yankee Stadium?	Have you gone to Yankee Stadium?

Test your ability to apply what you know.

5. Why are the following sentences ungrammatical? If your students make these errors, how would you make them aware of the errors, and what activities would you provide to help students avoid these errors?
 - a. *William has bought it last Saturday.
 - b. *I'm believing you.
 - c. *Help! I will fall.
 - d. *When Larry will come, I will go.
 - e. *Phyllis was lived with her parents for 20 years.
6. ESL/EFL teachers often associate "now" with the present progressive, but consider the following:

He goes to the store now. Now you've done it!

What interpretation can you give to these sentences that will explain the tense use?

7. Consider the following verbs of internal sensation: *hurt*, *ache*, *feel*, *itch*. Although sometimes these are considered a subcategory of stative verbs, we have not included them because of their special nature with regard to progressive aspect. Explain.
8. Apart from the British and American dialect difference mentioned under Adverbs of Tense and Time, *just* and *already* can occur with the present perfect and/or the simple past. Is there a difference? Would these sentences occur in different contexts?
 - a. Did you just hear the news about the flooding in Georgia?
 - b. Have you just heard the news about the flooding in Georgia?
9. In American English, sometimes the past participle *gotten* appears to be used the same way as *got*.

Has he gotten/got over his illness?

Other times they appear to have different meanings:

- He has got the following ingredients.
He has gotten the following ingredients.

Can you explain the difference?

10. If a student asks you what the difference between the following two sentences is, how would you answer?
- I have been hearing that melody over and over again.
 - I have been listening to that melody over and over again.

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ENDNOTES

1. Finite verbs are verbs that can stand alone in independent or main clauses; nonfinite verb forms, such as infinitives, occur on their own only in embedded or subordinate clauses.
2. This is the dictionary definition of tense. But as you have already seen, by noting the absence of a future tense in English, there is no one-to-one correspondence between tense and time. Indeed, in the section on meaning you will see that the past tense is used for more than past time, the present tense is also used for future time, and so on.
3. In some British English grammars, though, the pattern is preserved by referring to tense first and then aspect, i.e., “present simple.”
4. For a list of the spelling rules that apply to forming the present participle, see Badalamenti and Henner-Stanchina (1997).
5. Even though the whole sentence expresses future, the present tense is used in the subordinate clause. This follows a general principle of historical linguistics that holds that historically older inflectional/grammatical forms and word orders are preserved in subordinate clauses longer than in independent clauses. Since Old English had only two tenses (present and past) and used the present tense to express future time, this principle seems to apply here.
6. Here and with the host’s offer and sales clerk’s question, the past-tense marker has taken over the subjunctive function in English.
7. Notice, though, that the simple present (*finishes*) could also work here (Lori Gray, personal communication). This is in keeping with the fact that the use of perfect aspect is sometimes optional when its notion of prior can be made explicit by other means—here, the use of *until*. You will encounter the optionality of the perfect again when we contrast the simple past with the past perfect.
8. It is difficult to see how the core meaning applies to the uses of the progressive in e and f. Perhaps this is because these are more marked uses of the progressive—that is, using a present tense to speak about a future event in e and using the progressive with habits as in f, normally the domain for simple aspect.
9. This chart has been somewhat altered from the one that appeared in Andersen and Shirai (1994). Dowty (1979) has shown that there is overlap between the accomplishment and activity categories with certain verbs such as *draw* in sentences such as the following:
 - a. He drew the picture in an hour. (accomplishment)
 - b. He drew the picture for an hour. (activity)For this reason, Dowty argues that classification should occur with the whole verb phrase. While we would not quarrel with his assessment, for our purposes this categorization of verbs is sufficient.
10. There is a dialect of North American English, spoken mainly in the South, that uses *anymore* to mean *lately* or *these days* (Jaimie Scanlon, personal communication).

I don’t have time to read the newspaper. I only read books for school anymore.
11. Although it affirms the persistence of the past in the present, *still* often implies a negative evaluation:

Is Harold still writing his thesis? (He shouldn’t be; he should have finished it long ago.)
12. Example from Norbert Gross, personal communication.