

Uses of the present

Present time

We use the present simple tense for things that we do regularly and for facts, habits, truths and permanent situations. We often use time expressions like every day, once a week, on Fridays.

I check my email every day. (regular activity)

Yuki works at the bank. (permanent situation)

Future time

We use the present simple to talk about timetabled future events

I'd better hurry, my bus leaves in 5 minutes.

The exam starts at 9

Past time

1) Telling a story

This makes the events more immediate and exciting for the listener.

*Last year I was swimming off the coast in NZ when suddenly I **see** a shark fin heading towards me...*

2) Newspaper headlines

Journalists often use the present not the past in newspaper headlines to make newspaper stories more exciting, fresh and immediate.

*Man **dies** in forest fire.*

3) With hear, tell, gather, say

This puts more emphasis on the information we heard rather than the fact you heard it.

*I **hear** you're getting married!*

*She **says** she didn't like the present!*

4) When telling jokes

This makes the joke more immediate and dramatic for the listener (even if the joke is not very funny!)

*A man **walks** into a bar...*

Will, going to, be likely to and might

Form - will and might

For **will** and **might**, the form is **subject + will / might + infinitive**.

We use the same form for all persons (I, you, he, she, and so on). You can contract **will** to **'ll** in the positive form - we normally do this in spoken language.

Positive

*The new Smartphone **will have** all sorts of special features.*

*We'll **be connected** 24/7 when everywhere has free wifi.*

*I've ordered a new phone for the office. **It might arrive** today.*

Negative

*This video call **will not last long** - we only have one thing to discuss.*

*We **won't see** much change in keyboard layouts for the next few years.*

*There **might not be** any announcements about the new technology room today - don't count on it!*

We can use the contracted form **won't** for all persons (I, you, he, she, and so on). Sometimes we contract **might not** to **mightn't**, especially in speaking.

Form - going to and be likely to

For **going to** and **likely to**, the form is **subject + am/are/is + going to/likely to + infinitive**. We can contract **I am** (I'm), **you are/we are/they are** (you're/we're/they're) and **he is/she is** (he's/she's).

Positive

They're going to announce a new line of laptops soon.

The line is going to come out in September. It's going to be all over the news.

It's likely to be a major advance in computing technology.

Negative

Some people say technology isn't going to change our lives that much.

We aren't going to see the smartring any time soon.

The negative of **likely** is **unlikely**.

The new smart watches are unlikely to be a big revolution in technology.

Questions

To form questions with **will**, **going to** and **likely**, it's **auxiliary** (Will/Am/Is/Are) + **subject** + **verb**. We often use short answers.

Will this new smartwatch change my life? No, it won't.

Are they going to announce the software release today? Yes, they are.

Is it likely to be any better than the previous version? No, it isn't.

We can also make questions with question words.

When will they sort out the computers at work?

Who will win the tech race?

Where are they going to release the new phone first?

It is possible to ask a question with **Might** + **subject** + **infinitive**, but it's more common to form a question with **Do you think** + **subject** + **might** + **infinitive**.

Do you think this might change computing as we know it?

Important note: Will and might

Remember that **will** and **might** are modal verbs, so we use the infinitive without **to** after them.

WRONG:

People will to go on holiday to the moon within 50 years.

They might to make a computer that is really small.

CORRECT:

People will go on holiday to the moon within 50 years.

They might make a computer that is really small.

5 ways you can use past forms to talk about times other than the past

1. When a plan isn't certain

I was thinking of going to that party later.

In this example, the use of the past continuous makes the plan less definite in the speaker's mind than if she had used a present continuous sentence *I am thinking of going to the party later*.

2. To be polite

I was wondering if your report was ready.

In this example, the use of the past continuous and past simple make the speaker sound more polite than if he had used present tenses *I am wondering if your report is ready*. This is because the past sounds less direct.

3. To sound more urgent

It's time we left.

In this example, the use of the past tense makes the speaker sound more urgent than if she had used the present tense *It's time to leave*. By using the past, the speaker gives the idea that we should have left already.

4. With 'wish' and 'if only'

*I wish I **had** more time.*

*If only I **had** more time.*

After **wish** and **if only**, we have to use the past tense. Present tenses are not correct. However, these sentences have a hypothetical present of future meaning.

5. With 'suppose' and 'what if'

*Suppose we **went** on holiday to Thailand.*

*What if we **finished** before the deadline?*

When we use past tenses after **suppose** and **what if**, the situation sounds less likely than if we had used present tenses *Suppose we **go** on holiday to Thailand.*

Past simple and past continuous review

Meaning and use

We use the past simple for something that happened and finished in the past. We use it when we say or know the time when something happened. It is often used in stories, when one thing happened after another.

*Last year, we **travelled** by jeep across the Sahara.*

*When the car **stopped**, we all **got** out.*

We use the past continuous for something that happened in the past but was not finished at a particular time. This can be an exact time in the past (12 o'clock, etc.) or the time when another thing happened.

*It was 12 o'clock and we **were standing** in the midday sun.*

*Mick **was checking** the engine when the rescue helicopter arrived.*

We also use the past continuous to describe a scene or situation in the past or for an action that continued for some time.

*The stars **were beginning** to come out.*

*The dog **was barking** loudly.*

Form

Past simple: positive

For regular verbs, the past simple ends in **-ed**. Irregular verbs have different forms. The past simple form is the same for all persons (*I, you, he, she*, etc).

*Suddenly the jeep **skidded** and **stopped**.*

*Jake **thought** that we had a puncture.*

Past continuous: positive

The past continuous is **subject + was/were + -ing form**. There are no short forms of **was/were**.

*Fortunately, we **were carrying** a toolkit.*

Past simple: negative

We make the negative past simple with **didn't + infinitive**.

*We **didn't stay** inside the jeep because that was even hotter.*

Past continuous: negative

We make the negative past continuous with **wasn't/weren't + -ing form**

*Despite the heat, Jess and Debs **weren't wearing** hats.*

Past simple: question

The past simple question form is **did + subject + infinitive** for all persons. The short answers are **Yes, I did.** / **No, I didn't.**

Did the helicopter land in the desert? Yes it did.

Past continuous: question

The past continuous question form is **was/were + subject + -ing** form. The short answers are **Yes, I was.** / **No, I wasn't.**

How were you feeling when it arrived?

Take note: spelling changes

In the past continuous, all verbs end in **-ing**, but sometimes the spelling changes:

take – taking hit – hitting die – dying

The future in the past

Sometimes when we are talking about past events, we want to refer to something that was in the future at that time. In order to do this, we use the past tenses of verbs we would normally use to talk about the future.

These forms can be used for plans, predictions and events that do happen - and ones that don't happen.

1. Am/is/are going to becomes was/were going to

I **was going to** go for a run today, but I feel a bit tired now!

I knew it **was going to** be sunny today!

Note: When speaking, **was going to** often becomes **was gonna**.

2. Present continuous becomes past continuous

Sorry I was in a rush earlier, I **was meeting** Neil at 10 o'clock and I didn't want to be late.

I **was meeting** a friend for lunch, but I've got too much to do so I'll have to cancel.

3. Will becomes would/'d

Oh I told Neil I'd call him later... I need to do that!

I knew Alex **would** be late today.

4. Am/are/is about to becomes was/were about to

We use **be about to** to refer to something that will happen very soon in the future. When we want to use this structure to talk about the future in the past, we use the past forms of **be**.

I **was about to** call Neil when he phoned me.

5. Future perfect becomes would + have + past participle

It's almost lunchtime, I thought I **would have finished** all my work by now!

Note: When speaking, we often use a double contraction here:

I thought I'd've made more money by now.

Aspect

Tenses in English are made of a time and an aspect. English recognises 3 times (past, present and future) and 3 aspects (simple, continuous and perfect.)

An aspect is the character of a verb. It adds extra information to the verb's meaning and reflects the perception of the speaker.

The **simple aspect** does not modify the verb in terms of its meaning, only in terms of its **form**, e.g. I go / he goes. **The verb alone is enough to fully understand the speaker.** There are broadly three categories:

Long term general truth: I like studying English. Water boils at 100C. He lived an unhappy life. Humanity will continue.

Instantaneous: I now pronounce you man and wife. I walked through the town. Those books will fall!

Habitual: It barks all night when the moon is up. I woke up every day at 6am last year. She will constantly forget her keys.

The **continuous aspect is formed** with some sort of **be plus verbING**. E.g. I am walking. He was waiting. They will be eating.

It makes events seem **in progress, temporary and/or unfinished, and stretches them by giving them duration**. For example:

I walked home and I fell. (First I walked home and the action finished. Then I fell, inside the home)

I was walking home and I fell. (I fell while walking. My walk action was not completed and my fall was in the middle of the walk.)

Actions can be:

At the moment of speaking: I am dancing. That man is singing.

Around a certain time: This week I'm staying with my parents. In those days people were wearing shoulder pads. This time next week I'll be in France.

Happening simultaneously with another action: I was walking and I fell. He was eating chips and watching TV when the phone rang.

The perfect aspect is formed with some version of **have plus the past participle**. E.g. He has eaten. We had left the hotel. He will have finished.

Perfect aspects focus on **joining the events or actions of two time periods together**. E.g. The Present Perfect (Past to Present), The Past Perfect (Past 1 to Past 2), The Future Perfect (Present to Future).

Perfect verb phrases can describe:

States: I've loved you since I first met you. He had been happy for many years. We will have known each other for 5 years next week!

Actions: I have eaten. She had dropped her purse before leaving. I will have gone to the gym by the time you get home.

Habits: My father had started work at 9 o'clock every day for the last 20 years.

We can combine aspects to make **perfect continuous verb phrases**. These **combine the forms of the perfect aspect (have + the past participle) and the continuous aspect (be+verbING)**.

For example, have+been+verbING. We can create verb phrases which focus on **actions or events with duration with relevancy to more than one time period**. For example:

I have been working here for 6 years.

I had been studying hard all that week.

I will have been studying English for 10 years by my next birthday.

Future continuous

Meaning and use

We use the future continuous to talk about events that will be in progress at a particular time or over a period of time in the future. These are usually plans or predictions.

This time next year he 'll be working in Dubai

A taxi will be waiting outside the station when you arrive.

At four o'clock tomorrow I'll be lying here again.

We can also use the future continuous to say that a future action will be in progress at the same time as another action.

I'll be thinking of you when I'm sitting on the beach in the Bahamas.

The future continuous can also be used to talk about a future event that will happen in the normal course of things. This means the action is certain to happen without any effort or decision being made by the speaker.

I'll give John his birthday present since I'll be seeing him at work on Monday.

I can give you a lift as I'll be going into town anyway to do the shopping.

Flight attendants will be circulating around the cabin to offer you refreshments.

We can also use the future continuous to politely enquire about a person's plans for the future.

This is used to ask about someone's plans without any pressure.

Will you be coming to dinner tonight?

Will you be wanting dinner?

Form

Future continuous positive

subject + will + be + -ing form of verb

I'll be starting in the south and making my way north by train.

Future continuous negative

subject + won't + be + -ing form of verb

They won't be staying very long as they have to get back.

Questions

Future continuous questions are made with:

will / won't + subject + be + -ing form of verb

We can also use question words.

Why will they be arriving so late tonight?