

Verb Forms and Tenses

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A **verb** expresses action or a state of being and tells (in active voice) what the subject of the clause is or does. A verb is necessary to make a complete statement.

All verbs are constructed from three basic forms known as the *principal parts of a verb*:

- *Infinitive* (or *present*) is the base form of a verb, preceded by *to*: *to run, to go, to laugh*.
- *Past* is the simplest form of a verb. Past is used to show action that has already taken place: *ran, gone, laughed*.
- *Past participle* is the form a verb takes when it is accompanied by an auxiliary verb (helping verbs using forms of *be, have, or do*) to show a more complex past tense form: *had gone, will have gone, would have laughed*.

Active and Passive Verbs

Active verbs (active voice) tell what the subject (a person, place, thing, or concept) does.

Example: The boy **kicked** the ball.

Passive verbs (passive voice) tell what is done to the subject.

Example: The ball **was kicked** by the boy.

Verb Forms

Regular Verbs

A **regular verb** is used to form the past tense by adding a suffix *-d* or *-ed*.

Example: hope, hoped laugh, laughed

Irregular Verbs

An **irregular verb** does not take the *-d* or *-ed* ending. The past tense for irregular verbs is formed by changing the verb internally. Refer to the Southeastern Writing Center's handout *Irregular Verbs* for a list of the most commonly used irregular verb forms.

Example: run, ran catch, caught

Verb Tenses

Verb tenses are used to show time. Verb tenses tell when events happen, happened, or will happen.

Simple Tense

Present

The **present tense** may express an action that is repeated or ongoing. It can also express an action that is happening at this moment or a situation that is always true.

Example: Jane and Sarah **jog** every morning.

Past

The **past tense** expresses an action that has already happened. In regular verbs, the past tense is formed by adding *-ed* or *-d* to the base form. In irregular verbs, the past tense takes a variety of forms.

Example: John and Sara **hiked** to the top of the mountain.

Future

The **future tense** expresses an action that will take place in the future. The future tense is formed by adding *will* to the base form.

Example: I **will fly** to Atlanta Friday evening.

Perfect Tense

Present perfect

The **present perfect tense** is used to express an action that took place at some unspecified time in the past. The present perfect tense can also be used to express an action that began in the past and continues in the present. The present perfect tense is formed with the past tense of the verb and the helping verbs *has* or *have*.

Example: Sarah **has watched** the movie.

Past perfect

The **past perfect tense** is used to show that one action in the past began and ended before another action in the past started. The past perfect tense is formed with the past participle of the verb and the helping verb *had*.

Example: Sarah **had seen** the movie before I **watched** it.

Future perfect

The **future perfect tense** is used to show that one action or condition in the future will begin and end before another event in the future starts. The future perfect tense is formed with the past participle of the verb and the construction *will have*.

Example: By the time I finish this semester, I **will have read** ten novels.

Progressive Tense

Present progressive

The **present progressive tense** is used to show an ongoing event that is happening at the moment of speaking or writing. The present progressive tense is formed by using *am*, *is*, or *are* with the verb form ending in *-ing*.

Example: The children **are sleeping**.

Past progressive

The **past progressive tense** is used to show a past event that was happening when another event occurred. The past progressive tense is formed by using *was* or *were* with the verb form ending in *-ing*.

Example: The children **were sleeping** when we arrived.

Future progressive

The **future progressive tense** is used to show an ongoing or continuous event that will take place in the future. The future progressive tense is formed by using *will be* or *shall be* with the verb form ending in *-ing*.

Example: The children **will be sleeping** when we arrive.

Present perfect progressive

The **present perfect progressive tense** is used to show an event that began in the past, continues in the present, and may continue in the future. The present perfect progressive tense is formed by using *has been* or *have been* with the present participle verb form ending in *-ing*.

Example: The children **have been sleeping**.

Past perfect progressive

The **past perfect progressive tense** is used to show a past, ongoing event that was completed before another past event. The past perfect progressive tense is formed by using *had been* with the present perfect verb form ending in *-ing*.

Example: The children **had been sleeping** when we arrived.

Future perfect progressive

The **future perfect progressive tense** is used to show a future, ongoing event that will happen before a specified future time. The future perfect progressive tense is formed by using *will have been* and the present participle verb form ending in *-ing*.

Example: The children **will have been sleeping**.