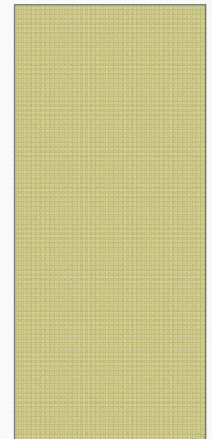


# FEELING TENSE ABOUT TENSES?

HOW TO USE PAST AND PRESENT TENSES IN  
ACADEMIC WRITING



# WELCOME

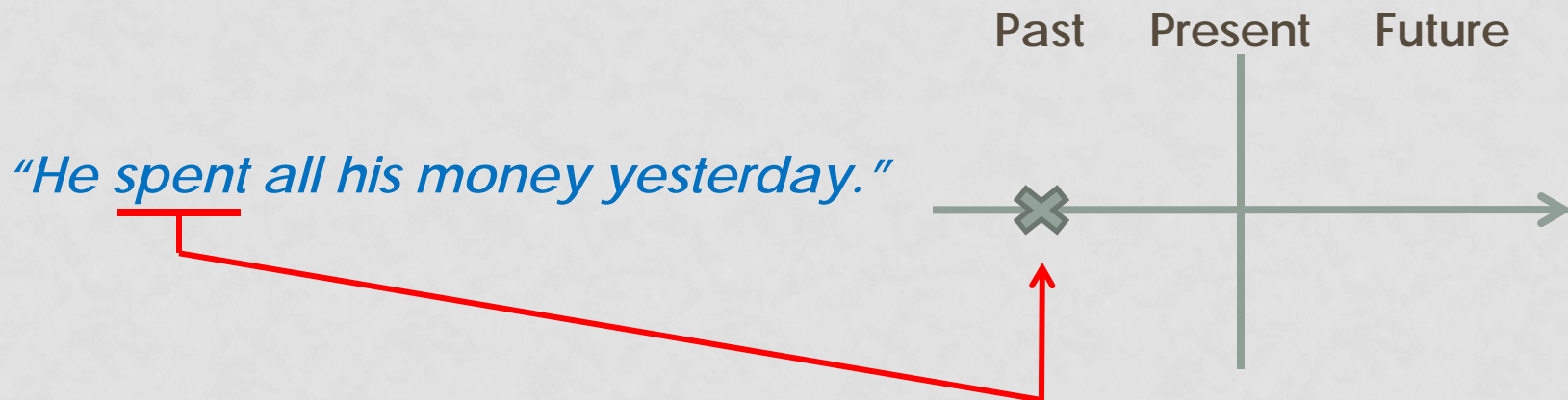
- Many thanks to the ACT Learning Support and ESL staff for providing the space for this workshop
- The example sentences used in this presentation are taken from *Grammar Sense 2 (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)*, *Fundamentals of English Grammar (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*, as well as the *Purdue University Online Writing Lab* ("OWL"), available at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>
- As usual, check [ung.edu](http://ung.edu) and the campus announcement boards for additional upcoming Writing Center workshops!

# OVERVIEW

1. What are tenses, anyway?
2. Simple present and simple past
3. Present perfect
4. Simple past vs. present perfect
5. Past perfect
6. The Progressive aspect
7. Action vs. non-action verbs

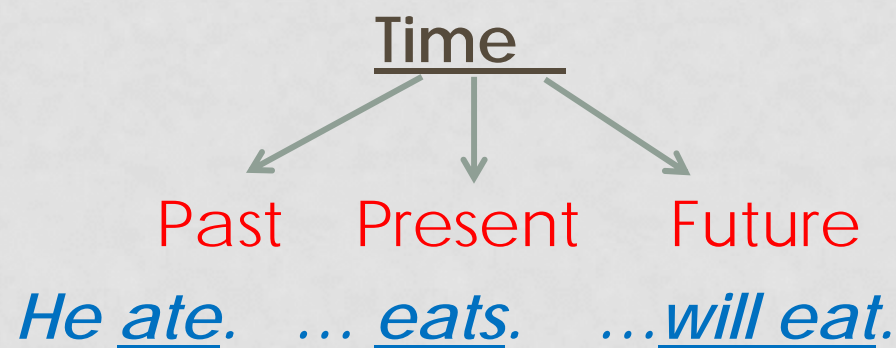
# WHAT ARE TENSES, ANYWAY?

- **Time** – past, present, and future – and **aspect** – simple, progressive, and perfect - **combine to form the English tenses** (12 of them!).
- To make time and aspect more visible, we use diagrams like this one:



# WHAT ARE TENSES, ANYWAY?

1. **Tense** simply give information about when in time something happened.
2. **Aspect** adds additional time-related meaning: “Is the event **continuing** (progressive), or has it been **completed** (perfect)?”





# I. “SIMPLE” TENSES

# THE “SIMPLE” TENSES

Simple past: *I was at the doctor's office yesterday.*  
*The students left their desks and studied.*

Simple present: *The bus leaves at 4:20pm every day.*  
*Dogs often prefer meat over dog food.*  
*Water boils at 100°C.*

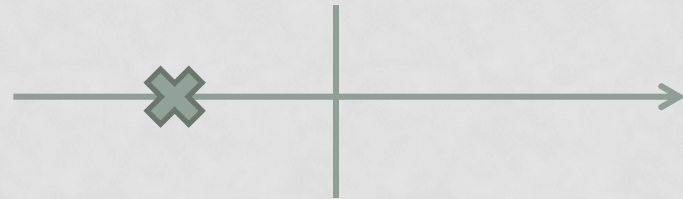
The simple present is usually used for expressing **regular**, **habitual**, or **pre-scheduled events**, or to explain how often something happens – **NOT FOR ONGOING ACTIONS!**

Simple future: *I think everybody will sign the card.*  
*Are they going to eat together?*

# THE “SIMPLE” TENSES

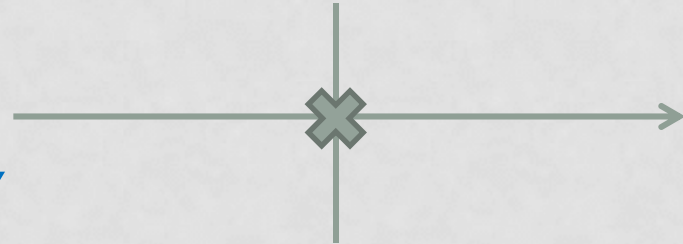
Simple Past

*The festival happened  
last year.*



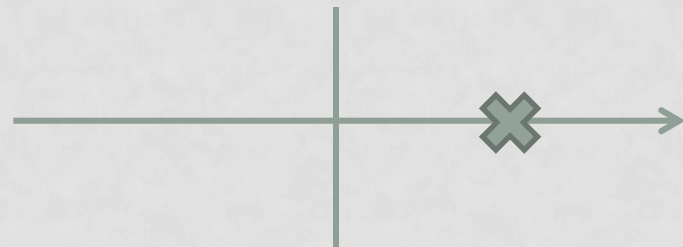
Simple Present

*The cafeteria food is usually  
bad.*



Simple future

*The prices will rise in June.*





## II. PRESENT PERFECT

# THE PRESENT PERFECT

To form the present perfect:

*have/has* + past participle form of the verb

Past participle of regular verbs: **add “-ed”**

Past participle of irregular verbs: **look up in a list** (see handout)

Try it:

*He \_\_\_\_\_ (to eat) lunch already.*

*The children all \_\_\_\_\_ (to leave).*

*The movie \_\_\_\_\_ (to be) over for 20 minutes.*

*\_\_\_\_\_ (you, to buy) this vegetable before?*

*None of the students \_\_\_\_\_ (to do) their homework.*

*The family \_\_\_\_\_ (to live) here since January.*

# THE PRESENT PERFECT

*have/has* + past participle form of the verb  
(Regular verbs: add “-ed”; irregular verbs: look up in a list)

*He has eaten lunch already.*

*The children all have left.*

*The movie has been over for 20 minutes.*

*Have you bought this vegetable before?*

*None of the students have done their homework.*

*The family has lived here since January.*

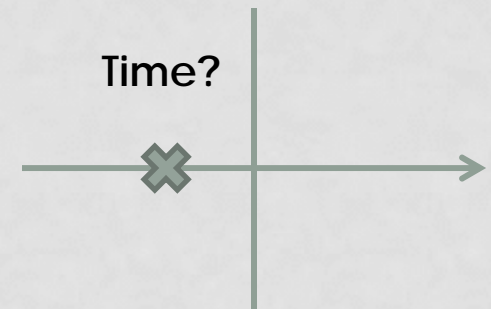
# WHEN TO USE THE PRESENT PERFECT

In academic writing, the present perfect is used to...

1. ...describe **a past event at some unspecified time** (often **with relevance to the present**):

*Jim has already eaten lunch.*

*Have you ever eaten at that restaurant?*

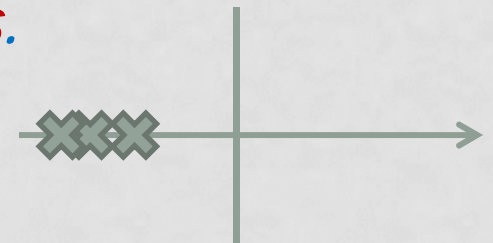


2. ...describe **repeated past events at unspecified times** in the past, or events that have never happened:

*Peter has walked by this house **many times**.*

*I have met him **twice** before.*

*She has **never** seen this movie!*



# WHEN TO USE THE PRESENT PERFECT

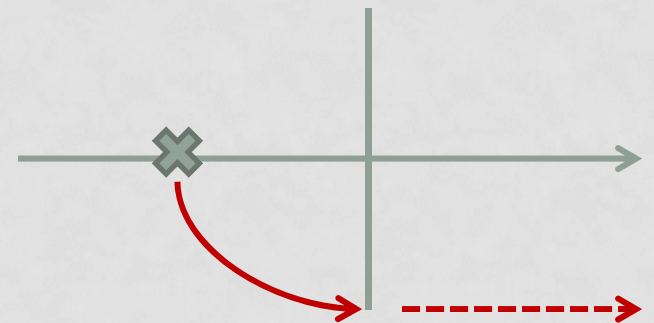
3. ...describe a situation that **began in the past and continues to the present** when combined with *for* and *since*:

*We have been in this workshop **since** 4pm this afternoon.*

*I have known Ben **for** ten years.*

*They have lived in New York **for** a long time.*

*He has worked at this company **since** 2001.*





# SIMPLE PAST vs. PRESENT PERFECT

Both simple past and present perfect can be used to talk about past events, but **they have specific differences!**

<u>Simple Past</u>	<u>Present Perfect</u>
Past event at a <u>specific</u> time: <i>I <u>finished</u> my work 2 hours ago.</i>	Past event at an <u>unspecific</u> time, or relevant NOW: <i>I <u>have already finished</u> my work.</i>
Multiple past events at <u>specific</u> times: <i>I <u>was</u> in Europe in April and June.</i>	Multiple past events at <u>unspecific</u> times: <i>I <u>have been</u> to Europe several times.</i>
Using <u>for</u> to describe events that began and ended in the past: <i>Ann <u>was</u> in Miami for two weeks.</i>	Using <u>for</u> and <u>since</u> to describe events that began in the past and continue to the present: <i>Ann <u>has been</u> in Miami for 2 weeks. She <u>has been</u> there since May.</i>

# PRACTICE!

Choose either simple past or present perfect.

- *The students \_\_\_\_\_ (to hear) this lecture last year. However, they \_\_\_\_\_ (never, to see) this teacher!*
- *It's true, she \_\_\_\_\_ (to be) in this store at least three times over the past month. But she \_\_\_\_\_ (not, to be) there for at least 12 months. I think Mark just \_\_\_\_\_ (to go) there last week.*
- *The candidate will not discuss the issue with them; he \_\_\_\_\_ (to address) it already and now he will remain quiet. Last night, however, he \_\_\_\_\_ (to mention) it himself.*

- *The students heard this lecture last year. However, they have never seen this teacher!*
- *It's true, she has been in this store at least three times over the past month. But she has not been there for at least 12 months. I think Mark just went there last week.*
- *The candidate will not discuss the issue with them; he has addressed it already and now he will remain quiet. Last night, however, he mentioned it himself.*

### III. PAST PERFECT



# THE PAST PERFECT

The form of the past perfect is very similar to the present perfect:

*had* + past participle form of the verb

*When his friends arrived, he had already eaten lunch.*

*Jane finally found the store, but they had sold all of the talking dolls.*

Use for **two events at two different times in the past!** one event ended before the other began.

Also: **the past perfect is not often used in academic essay!**

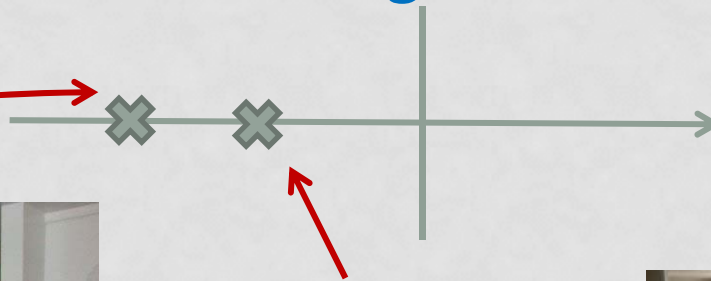


# FORM AND USE OF THE PAST PERFECT

Again: **use the past perfect the first of two past events!**  
(And simple past for the second event after the first one!)

*At 10am, John came home; however, his friends had trashed the apartment the night before.*

1<sup>st</sup>: Friday night



2<sup>nd</sup>: Sat. morning



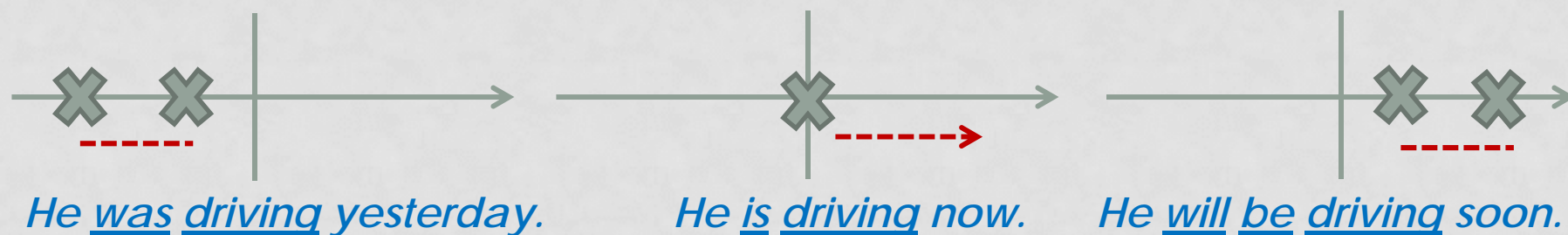
## IV. PROGRESSIVE TENSES

# THE PROGRESSIVE TENSES

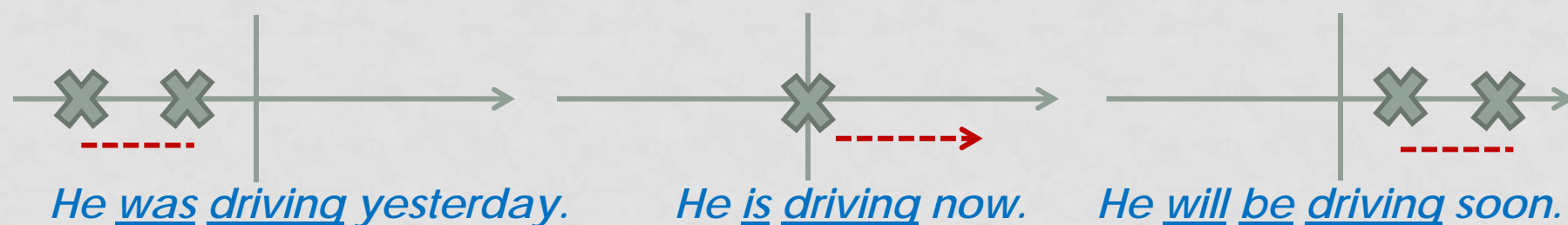
Use the progressive to say that **something was, is, or will be done for a duration or period of time**, either in the past, present, or future.

To form the progressive:

*to be* (past or present) + **verb** + *-ing*.



# THE PROGRESSIVE TENSES

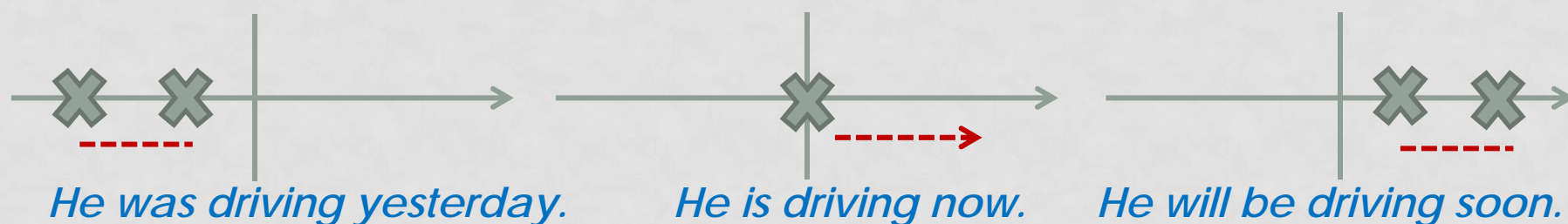


Past prog.: *I called him, but he \_\_\_\_\_ (to listen) to music.*

Present prog.: *The Smiths \_\_\_\_\_ (to hike) in the forest.*

Future prog.: *The police \_\_\_\_\_ (collect) evidence later.*

# THE PROGRESSIVE TENSES



Past prog.: *I called him, but he was listening to music.*

Present prog.: *The Smiths are hiking in the forest.*

Future prog.: *The police will be collecting evidence later.*



# PROGRESSIVE TENSES + NON-ACTION VERBS

But be careful: **we can only use the progressive for action verbs!** Non-action verbs (for example *love, want, believe, have* or *hear*) require the simple present.

**NO:** *The writer ~~is knowing~~ important information.*

**YES:** *The writer knows important information.*

*I think that grammar is easy.* ("think" = believe = progressive is not possible: "*I ~~am thinking~~ that grammar is easy.*")

*I am thinking about grammar right now.* ("think about" = actively focusing on = progressive is possible)

## PROGRESSIVE TENSES + NON-ACTION VERBS

In other words:

**Only “real actions” can be done for  
a stretch of time!**

Which non-action verbs do you know?

# ACTIONS VS. NON-ACTION VERBS

Complete the dialog below; use simple present for non-action verbs and the present progressive for action verbs.

A: "\_\_\_\_\_ (you, to believe) in UFOs?"

B: "What \_\_\_\_\_ (you, to talk) about?"

A: "You know, spaceships from outer space, with aliens!"

B: "In my opinion, UFOs \_\_\_\_\_ (to exist) only in people's imagination. I \_\_\_\_\_ (to know) that they can't be real. Now leave me alone, I \_\_\_\_\_ (to try) to read a book right now."

A: "Okay, but remember, if you \_\_\_\_\_ (to have) questions about aliens, you can always ask me!"

# PRACTICE ACTIONS VS. NON-ACTION VERBS

A: *Do you believe in UFOs?* (non-action)

B: *“What are you talking about?”* (action)

A: *“You know, spaceships from outer space, with aliens!”*

B: *“In my opinion, UFOs exist only in people’s imagination. (non-action) I know that they can’t be real. (non-action) Now leave me alone, I am trying to read a book.”* (action)

A: *“Okay, but remember, if you have questions about aliens, you can always ask me!”* (non-action)



# PRACTICE

Use the correct form of the verb; choose between **simple present**, **present progressive**, or **present perfect**.

1. *My friend Omar \_\_\_\_\_ (to own) his own car now. It \_\_\_\_\_ (to be) brand new. Today, he \_\_\_\_\_ (to drive) to a small town to visit his aunt. He \_\_\_\_\_ (to love) to listen to music, so the CD player \_\_\_\_\_ (to play) his favorite CD right now.*

2. *Harry usually \_\_\_\_\_ (to visit) his aunt once a week. He \_\_\_\_\_ (to do) this for 4 years now. He generally \_\_\_\_\_ (to stay) for a few hours, then \_\_\_\_\_ (to go) home. But today, he \_\_\_\_\_ (to stay) longer than usual – he \_\_\_\_\_ (not, to leave) her house since this morning.*



## ANSWERS TO THE PRACTICE

1. *My friend Omar owns his own car now. It is brand new. Today, he is driving to a small town to visit his aunt. He loves to listen to music, so the CD player is playing his favorite CD right now.*
2. *Harry usually visits his aunt once a week. He has done this for 4 years now. He generally stays for a few hours, then goes home. But today, he is staying longer than usual – he has not left her house since this morning.*

# THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

Make sure to keep checking [gsc.edu](https://gsc.edu) for upcoming workshops!

Visit us:

Writing Center (Ac. IV, Room 2103) for individual conferences about your paper, grammar, or tenses!