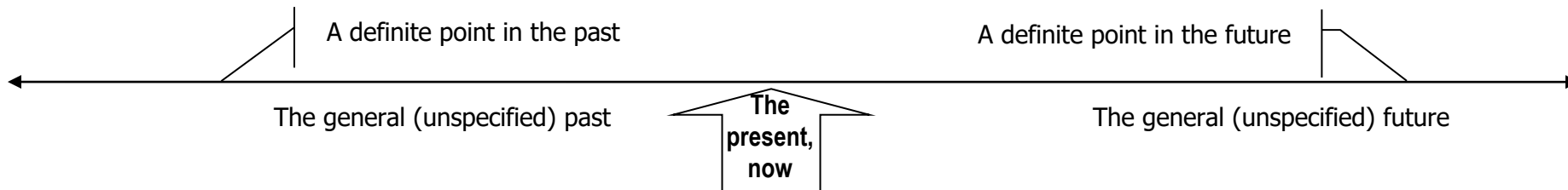


Verb Tenses for English Language Learners

In English verbs contain a lot of information. They express when something occurred (past, present, or future) as well as whether an event was completed, is still going on, or is expected to continue. They can express whether an action was interrupted by another action. The following examples show the basics of verb tenses. Try illustrating the verb tenses by using the timeline to place the actions in the past, present, or future.



Simple verb tenses

Tense	When to use it	Example
simple present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --regular schedules --recurring or habitual actions --general truths unrelated to time --a planned future action (with a future time word) 	Election day <i>is</i> in November. He <i>sleeps</i> late on weekends. I <i>hate</i> it when politicians <i>lie</i> . We <i>leave</i> for Spain tomorrow.
simple past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --completed past actions --actions in the definite past 	We <i>moved</i> here from Canada when I was a child. He <i>slept</i> late last Saturday.
simple future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --future promises or agreements --predictions --decisions made just now about future events 	<i>Will</i> you <i>marry</i> him? The bank <i>will correct</i> the error in your account on your next statement. We <i>will join</i> you at the movies; wait for us.

Progressive verb tenses

Tense	When to use it	Example
present progressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --actions happening at the present moment --a recurring event --upcoming action (with a future time word) 	I <i>am eating</i> lunch now; what do you want? Jose <i>is working</i> swing shift this month. He <i>is going</i> to Vermont in May; we <i>are going</i> in June.
past progressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --interrupted past action --a past action that occurred over a long time 	She <i>was driving</i> home when her tire went flat. I <i>was living</i> in Canada with my parents for nine years.
future progressive (rarely used)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --future action that begins before another action 	He <i>will be attending</i> the conference while you are in Spain.

Note: *Progressive* tenses are also known as *continuous* tenses. We cannot use progressive verb tenses with most non-action verbs.

Perfect verb tenses

Tense	When to use it	Example
present perfect	--action begun in the past & continuing in the present --action that occurred in an unspecified past --recent past action that has a present effect --a repeated action in the past	The Financial Aid Office <i>has begun</i> to mail out checks. She <i>has</i> already <i>registered</i> for her nursing class. They <i>have decided</i> to close the library on Saturdays. I have visited Ontario several times since we moved.
past perfect	--action that occurred before another past action	She <i>had registered</i> for classes before she got the job at the clinic.
future perfect (rarely used)	--a future action that will occur earlier than another future action	By August she <i>will have earned</i> enough money for next year's tuition.

Perfect progressive verb tenses

Tense	When to use it	Example
present perfect progressive	--to emphasize the duration of a continuing action begun in the past --action that began in the past and ended recently --action in the recent general, unspecified past	I <i>have been waiting</i> for you since this morning. Dillon <i>has been running</i> , but he will be ready when you are. Cheyenne <i>has been practicing</i> Japanese in her spare time.
past perfect progressive (rarely used)	--to show duration of continuing action begun before another past action	The team <i>had been practicing</i> daily until the coach broke his leg.
future perfect progressive (rarely used)	--to show duration of a future action relative to another future action --to show a long action occurring before a point in time in the future	He <i>will have been studying</i> biology for six years by the time he graduates. We <i>will have been camping</i> for three weeks just prior to the reunion, so we may not feel like attending.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



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