

Explanations

Basic contrasts:
present simple
and present
continuous

- Present simple generally refers to:
Facts that are always true

Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius.

Habits

British people drink a lot of tea.

States

I don't like gangster films.

- Present continuous (progressive) generally refers to actions which are in progress at the moment. These can be temporary:

I'm staying in a hotel until I find a flat.

They can be actually in progress:

The dog is sleeping on our bed!

Or they can be generally in progress but not actually happening at the moment:

I'm learning to drive.

State verbs and
event (action or
dynamic) verbs

- State verbs describe a continuing state, so do not usually have a continuous form. Typical examples are:
believe, belong, consist, contain, doubt, fit, have, know, like, love, matter, mean, need, own, prefer, seem, suppose, suspect, understand, want, wish

- Some verbs have a stative meaning and a different active meaning. Typical examples are:

be, depend, feel, have, measure, see, taste, think, weigh

Compare these uses:

State

Jack is noisy.

Deirdre has a Porsche.

I think I like you!

This fish tastes awful!

I feel that you are wrong.

This bag weighs a ton!

It depends what you mean.

Event

Jill's being noisy.

We're having an interesting conversation!

David's thinking about getting a new job.

I'm just tasting the soup.

I'm feeling terrible.

We're weighing the baby.

Bill, I'm depending on you to win this contract for us.

The differences here apply to all verb forms, not just to present verb forms.

Other uses of
present
continuous

- Temporary situations
Are you enjoying your stay here?
- Repeated actions
My car has broken down, so I am walking to work these days.
- Complaints about annoying habits
You are always making snide remarks about my cooking!
Other possible adverbs are: *constantly, continually, forever*
- With verbs describing change and development
The weather is getting worse!
More and more people are giving up smoking.

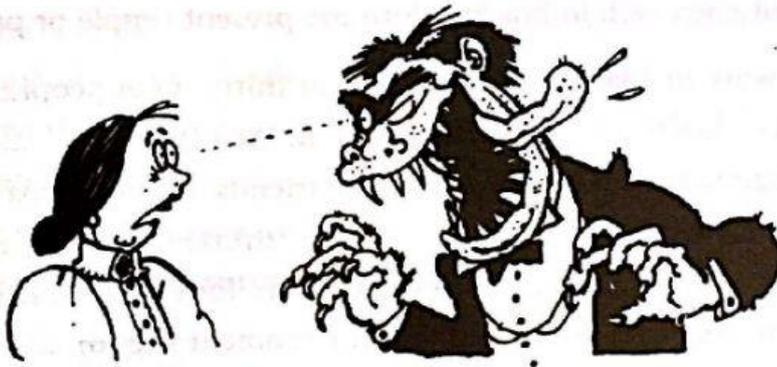
Other uses of
present simple

- Making declarations
Verbs describing opinions and feelings tend to be state verbs.
I hope you'll come to my party.
I bet you don't know the answer!
I hereby declare this hospital open!
- Headlines
These are written in a 'telegram' style, and references to the past are usually simplified to present simple.
Ship sinks in midnight collision.
- Instructions and itineraries
Instructions and recipes can be written in present simple instead of in imperative forms. This style is more personal.
First you roll out the pastry.
Itineraries are descriptions of travel arrangements.
On day three we visit Stratford-upon-Avon.
- Summaries of events
Plots of stories, films etc, and summaries of historical events use present (and present perfect) verb forms.
May 1945: The war in Europe comes to an end.
... At the end of the play both families realise that their hatred caused the deaths of the lovers ...
- 'Historic present' in narrative and funny stories
In informal speech, it is possible to use what we call the 'historic present' to describe past events, especially to make the narration seem more immediate and dramatic.
... So then the second man asks the first one why he has a banana in his ear and the first one says ...

Practice

1 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.

- a) I haven't decided yet about whether to buy a new car or a second-hand one. But I think about it/I'm thinking about it.
- b) All right, you try to fix the television! But I hope/I'm hoping you know what you're doing.
- c) Every year I visit/I'm visiting Britain to improve my English.
- d) It's time we turned on the central heating. It gets/It's getting colder every day.
- e) Of course, you're Mary, aren't you! I recognise/I am recognising you now.
- f) The film of 'War and Peace' is very long. It lasts/It is lasting over four hours.
- g) I can see from what you say that your mornings are very busy! But what do you do/are you doing in the afternoons?
- h) I'm going to buy a new swimming costume. My old one doesn't fit/isn't fitting any more.
- i) That must be the end of the first part of the performance. What happens/is happening now?
- j) What's the matter? Why do you look/are you looking at me like that?



2 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.

- a) I work in this office all this year/all the time.
- b) Emerson is currently/for long top of the driver's league.
- c) I am not making much money these days/so far this year.
- d) The food tastes even worse now/presently. You've put too much salt in.
- e) Normally/Previously we get in touch with customers by post.
- f) Pete was ill but he is getting over his illness soon/now.
- g) I'm feeling rather run down lately/at present, doctor.
- h) I always stay on duty since/until six o'clock.
- i) I'm often/forever picking your hairs out of the bath!
- j) Fortunately the baby now/recently sleeps all night.