

Verb Tenses

Explanation

Tense refers to the form a verb takes in a sentence, whether to express the present, past or future.

Examples

Simple Tenses

Present: I *learn*.

Past: I *learned*.

Future: I *will learn*.

Perfect Tenses

Present perfect: I *have learned*.

Past perfect: I *had learned*.

Future perfect: I *will have learned*.

Progressive Tenses

Present progressive: I *am learning*.

Past progressive: I *was learning*.

Future progressive: I *will be learning*.

Present perfect progressive: I *have been learning*.

SIMPLE TENSES

Present

The present tense indicates that an action is taking place at the time you express it, or an action that occurs regularly.

- We *wear* organic cotton shirts [an action taking place when it is expressed].
- I *watch* the documentary on PBS each Sunday night [an action that occurs regularly].

Past

The past tense indicates that an action is completed and has already taken place.

- Martin Luther King, Jr. *gave* his most famous speech in 1963 [an action completed in the past].
- As a girl, she *wondered* how her college degree would help her career [an action that occurred once or many times in the past but did not extend to the present].

Future

The future tense indicates that an action will or is likely to take place.

- Later today I *will rinse* the dishes [a future action that will definitely occur].
- The defendant probably *will plead* innocent [a future action that is likely to occur].

PERFECT TENSES

Perfect tenses designate actions that were or will be completed before other actions. You can form the perfect tenses with the appropriate tense form of the helping, or auxiliary, verb *have* plus the past participle.

Present perfect

The present perfect tense indicates that an action is taking place at the time you express it, or an action that occurs regularly.

- We *have worn* organic cotton shirts [an action that began in the past and is finished at the present].
- She *has donated* extensively to UNICEF [an action that began in the past and extends into the present].

Past perfect

The past perfect tense indicates an action occurring before a certain time in the past.

- o By 1995, Doctor Harvey *had built* the first artificial brain.

Future perfect

The future perfect tense indicates that an action will be finished by a certain time.

- o By Thursday, the President *will have apologized* for his mistake.

Progressive/Continuous Tenses

The progressive tenses express continuing action. You can form them with the appropriate tense of the verb *be* plus the present participle.

Present progressive

The present progressive tense indicates that something is happening at the time you express it.

- o The worker *is hammering*, and her foreman *is watching* lazily.

Past progressive

The past progressive tense indicates two kinds of past action.

- o Poe's writing *was becoming* increasingly bizarre and dark [a continuing action in the past].
o The mob tackled Jean-Luc Goddard while he *was introducing* the film [an action occurring at the same time in the past as another action].

Future progressive

The future progressive tense indicates a continuing in the future.

- o The government *will be monitoring* the phones in the lab.

Present perfect progressive

The present perfect progressive tense indicates action continuing from the past into the present and possibly into the future.

- o The teacher *has been grading* since yesterday afternoon.

Future perfect progressive

The future perfect progressive tense indicates that an action will continue until a certain future time.

- o On Tuesday I *will have been working* on this paper for six weeks.

Adapted from *The Brief Holt Handbook, Fourth Edition*, Kirsner & Mandell, 2004.

PRACTICE. Complete WITH the correct tense

1. Amanda (sit, **usually**) _____ in the front row in class, but **right now** she (sit) _____ in the last row.
2. It's ten p.m. Andrik _____ (study) for two hours and probably won't finish until midnight.
3. Paula (read) _____ only two chapters **last week**.
4. Diana can't come to the phone because she (wash) _____ her hair **in this moment**.

5. Alexandra is talking on the phone. She (talk) _____ on the phone for over a half an hour. She should hang up soon. Long distance is expensive.
6. Fiorella is trying to study. She (try) _____ to study for the last hour, but something always seems to interrupt her I think she'd better go to the library.
7. Soto (wash) _____ his hair every other day or so with Pantene.
8. Daniel _____ (look) for his pen-knife, but he hasn't found it yet.
9. Henry _____ (wait) for the bus for half an hour, but it hasn't arrived yet.
10. Sebastián _____ home **yesterday**. (not come)
11. Bill (arrive) _____ here **three days ago**.
12. Hans (be) _____ here **since** the 22nd.
13. Erick (read) _____ a book last night **when** you called.
14. Please be quiet. Dafne (try) _____ to concentrate for the test she is doing **now**.
15. **Last January**, Ivan (see) _____ snow for the first time in his life.
16. In her whole lifetime, Valeria (see, never) _____ snow.
17. Josué (know) _____ César **for** ten years.
18. Khristina and Montserrat (argue) _____ about something **when** I (walk) _____ into the room.
19. (Lock, you, always) _____ the door to your class when you leave?

20. **While** Fabián and Sharys _____ TV, a thief
_____ in. (watch / climb)
21. Mother _____ dinner, **while** Gabriel _____
his homework. (cook / do)
22. The students _____ cards, **when** their teacher _____
(play / enter)
23. Jimena _____ a nice party **last Saturday** (have)
24. Look! It (snow) _____.
25. Miguel hasn't finished painting his car yet. He _____ (work) on it
for two weeks.
26. Amanda _____ (not come) home yet. She has been shopping in
town since 10 o'clock.
27. Fernanda (go, not) _____ to school **right now**.
28. Julián (be) _____ a newspaper reporter
before he (become) _____ a business man.
29. **Before** Minor (count) _____ the thirty-first sheep they (all / fall)
_____ asleep.
30. José David (feel) _____ a little better **after** he (take)
_____ the medicine.
31. A: How can I get in touch with Sol while she's out of town next week?
B: She (stay) _____ at the Pilgrim Hotel **all week**. You
can reach me there.
32. Felipe (climb) _____ the stairs **when** he (trip)
_____ and (fall) _____.

33. **By 2025**, Fiorella _____ (already / get) her university degree.

34. **Right now**, I am attending class. Yesterday at this time, I was attending class. Tomorrow at this time, I (*attend*) _____ class.

35. **While** I (read) _____ the little boy a story, he (fall) _____ asleep.

36. Class (begin, already) _____ **before** Piarella (get) _____ there, so she (take, quietly) _____ a seat in the back.

37. María Jesús (see, never) _____ any of Picasso's paintings **before** she (visit) _____ the art museum.

38. By this time in two years, the students _____ (finish) high school

39. By February 2021, students _____ (completed) the new MEP evaluations.

40. Next weekend Amelia doesn't want to do anything, she _____ (sleep) **all day**.

PRACTICE. Use any appropriate tenses.

1) Dear Zac,

2) I (*receive*) _____ your letter about two weeks

3) ago and (*try*) _____ to find time to write you back

4) ever since. I (*be*) _____ very busy all days lately.

5) I (*have*) _____ lots of tests for two weeks, and I have

6) another test next week. In addition, a friend (*stay*) _____

- 7) with me since last Thursday. She wanted to see the city, so we *(spend)*
8) _____ a lot of time visiting some of the interesting
9) places here. We *(be)* _____ to the zoo, the art
10) museum, and the botanical gardens. Yesterday we *(go)* _____
11) to the park and *(watch)* _____ a balloon race.
12) Between showing her the city and studying for my exams, I *(have, barely)*
13) _____ enough time to breathe.
14) Right now, it *(be)* _____ 3 A.M. and I *(sit)*
15) _____ at my desk. I *(sit)* _____
16) here for five hours doing my studying. My friend's plane *(leave)*
17) _____ at 6:05, so I *(decide)* _____
18) not to go to bed. That's why I *(write)* _____ you right now at
19) such an early hour in the day. I *(get)* _____ a little
20) sleepy now, but I would rather stay up. I *(take)* _____ a
21) nap after I *(get)* _____ back from taking her to the
22) airport.
23) How *(get, you)* _____ along? How *(go, your)*
24) *classes)* _____? Please write soon.

Yours truly,

Natalia B.

