PRESENT SIMPLE IN NARRATIVES, REVIEWS, AND SUMMARIES

A. QUICK GRAMMAR REMINDER

Trong bài này, chúng ta học một cách dùng nâng cao hơn của Present Simple:

Dùng Present Simple để tóm tắt nội dung phim, truyện, sách, bài báo, vở kịch, hoặc sự kiện theo phong cách kể chuyện / review / commentary.

Cách dùng này rất phổ biến trong:

- film reviews = bài review phim
- book reviews = bài review sách
- plot summaries = tóm tắt cốt truyện
- historical summaries = tóm tắt lịch sử
- article summaries = tóm tắt bài báo
- presentations = bài thuyết trình
- academic discussions = thảo luận học thuật

1. Present Simple for plot summaries

Ta dùng Present Simple để kể lại nội dung của một bộ phim, cuốn sách, câu chuyện hoặc vở kịch.

Dù câu chuyện xảy ra trong quá khứ hoặc trong thế giới hư cấu, khi tóm tắt nội dung, ta thường dùng Present Simple.

Examples:

- The story begins in a small village. → Câu chuyện bắt đầu ở một ngôi làng nhỏ.
- The main character discovers a hidden secret. → Nhân vật chính phát hiện ra một bí mật được che giấu.
- In the final scene, he realises that he has misunderstood everything. → Ở cảnh cuối, anh ấy nhận ra rằng mình đã hiểu nhầm mọi chuyện.
- The novel follows a young student who struggles to balance family expectations and personal dreams. → Cuốn tiểu thuyết theo chân một học sinh trẻ đang cố cân bằng giữa kỳ vọng gia đình và ước mơ cá nhân.

2. Present Simple for reviews and commentaries

Khi viết review hoặc bình luận về một tác phẩm, ta dùng Present Simple để nói tác phẩm làm gì, tác giả thể hiện điều gì, hoặc nhân vật đại diện cho điều gì.

Examples:

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- The film explores the pressure young people face at school. → Bộ phim khai thác áp lực mà người trẻ phải đối mặt ở trường.
- The writer presents education as both an opportunity and a burden. → Tác giả thể hiện giáo dục vừa là cơ hội, vừa là gánh nặng.
- The article argues that technology is changing the way students learn. → Bài báo lập luận rằng công nghệ đang thay đổi cách học sinh học tập.
- The novel highlights the conflict between ambition and happiness. → Cuốn tiểu thuyết làm nổi bật mâu thuẫn giữa tham vọng và hạnh phúc.

3. Present Simple for historical summaries

Present Simple cũng có thể được dùng khi tóm tắt sự kiện lịch sử theo kiểu timeline, textbook, documentary, hoặc commentary.

Examples:

- In 1789, the French Revolution begins. → Năm 1789, Cách mạng Pháp bắt đầu.
- The movement spreads across the country. → Phong trào lan rộng khắp đất nước.
- The government introduces several important reforms. → Chính phủ đưa ra một số cải cách quan trọng.

Lưu ý:

Trong bài viết thông thường, khi nói về sự kiện lịch sử thật đã xảy ra, Past Simple vẫn phổ biến hơn.

Example:

- The French Revolution began in 1789. → Cách mạng Pháp bắt đầu năm 1789.

Nhưng trong timeline, documentary style, hoặc summary sinh động, Present Simple có thể được dùng.

4. Present Simple vs Past Simple in reviews

Cần phân biệt:

Past Simple dùng để nói về thông tin thật bên ngoài tác phẩm: tác giả viết khi nào, phim ra mắt năm nào, sự kiện xảy ra khi nào.

Present Simple dùng để nói về nội dung bên trong tác phẩm: câu chuyện diễn ra thế nào, nhân vật làm gì, tác phẩm khai thác chủ đề gì.

Compare:

- The author wrote the novel in 1949. → Tác giả viết cuốn tiểu thuyết vào năm 1949.

→ Đây là sự kiện thật trong quá khứ.

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- The novel describes a society controlled by fear. → Cuốn tiểu thuyết miêu tả một xã hội bị kiểm soát bởi nỗi sợ.

→ Đây là nội dung của tác phẩm.

- The film was released in 2019. → Bộ phim được phát hành năm 2019.

→ Đây là thông tin thật trong quá khứ.

- The film follows a boy who tries to find his missing father. → Bộ phim theo chân một cậu bé cố gắng tìm người cha mất tích.

→ Đây là nội dung phim.

5. Useful B2 verbs for reviews and summaries

explore = khai thác / khám phá một chủ đề
examine = xem xét
portray = khắc họa
depict = miêu tả
highlight = làm nổi bật
reveal = tiết lộ / cho thấy
suggest = cho thấy / gợi ý
argue = lập luận rằng
criticise = phê phán
challenge = thách thức
represent = đại diện cho / thể hiện
symbolise = tượng trưng cho
focus on = tập trung vào
deal with = xử lý / nói về
raise questions about = đặt ra câu hỏi về
take place = diễn ra
be set in = lấy bối cảnh ở
centre on = xoay quanh
follow = theo chân
lead to = dẫn đến
result in = dẫn đến
come to realise = dần nhận ra

B. NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE

Pair 1

- The author wrote the novel in 2020. → Đây là thông tin thật về thời điểm tác phẩm được viết.

→ Dùng Past Simple.

- The novel explores the challenges faced by teenagers. → Đây là nội dung / chủ đề của tác phẩm.

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→ Dùng Present Simple.

Pair 2

- The film was released last year. → Đây là thông tin thật trong quá khứ.

→ Dùng Past Simple.

- The film follows a young musician who moves to a new city. → Đây là tóm tắt nội dung phim.

→ Dùng Present Simple.

Pair 3

- The writer grew up in a poor neighbourhood. → Đây là sự kiện thật trong cuộc đời tác giả.

→ Dùng Past Simple.

- The story is set in a poor neighbourhood. → Đây là bối cảnh của câu chuyện.

→ Dùng Present Simple.

Pair 4

- The director won several awards for the film. → Đây là sự kiện thật trong quá khứ.

→ Dùng Past Simple.

- The film raises important questions about friendship and loyalty. → Đây là điều bộ phim thể hiện.

→ Dùng Present Simple.

Pair 5

- The article was published in 2023. → Đây là thời điểm bài báo được xuất bản.

→ Dùng Past Simple.

- The article argues that students need more emotional support. → Đây là nội dung lập luận của bài báo.

→ Dùng Present Simple.

EXERCISE 1. IDENTIFY THE USE

Write:

P = plot summary / story content R = review or commentary

H = historical summary / timeline style F = real past fact outside the work

1. The novel follows a young student who struggles with family expectations.
2. The author wrote the novel while he was living abroad.
3. The film explores the pressure teenagers face in modern education.
4. In the final chapter, the main character discovers the truth about his father.

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5. The documentary was first shown at an international film festival.
6. In 1914, the conflict begins and quickly spreads across Europe.
7. The article argues that online learning can increase educational inequality.
8. The story takes place in a small coastal town.
9. The director won a major award for the film.
10. The writer portrays the teacher as strict but deeply caring.
11. In the second act, the hero refuses to follow his father's plan.
12. The movement grows stronger as more people join the protests.
13. The film criticises the way society judges young people by exam results.
14. The book was published ten years ago.
15. The play ends with the two families finally understanding each other.

EXERCISE 2. PRESENT SIMPLE OR PAST SIMPLE?

1. The novel describes / described a world where people are constantly watched.
2. The author writes / wrote the novel after experiencing political conflict in his own country.
3. The film follows / followed a young girl who refuses to accept the limits placed on her.
4. The film wins / won several awards after it was released.
5. The article argues / argued that schools should teach students how to think, not just what to remember.
6. The article appears / appeared in a national newspaper last month.
7. The story begins / began with a mysterious letter.
8. The writer was born / is born in a small village in the north of the country.
9. The documentary examines / examined how technology affects children's attention span.
10. The documentary was released / is released in 2021.
11. The play takes / took place in a wealthy family's house.
12. The playwright based / bases the story on a real event that happened in the 19th century.
13. The main character realises / realised that success does not always bring happiness.
14. The book becomes / became popular shortly after publication.
15. The review suggests / suggested that the ending is powerful but slightly predictable.

EXERCISE 3. COMPLETE THE PLOT SUMMARY

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The Silent Classroom

The Silent Classroom _____ (tell) the story of Minh, a quiet but intelligent student who _____ (feel) invisible at school. At the beginning of the story, Minh _____ (avoid) speaking in class because he _____ (believe) that nobody _____ (listen) to him.

Everything _____ (change) when a new literature teacher _____ (arrive). She _____ (notice) Minh's talent for writing and _____ (encourage) him to enter a national essay competition. At first, Minh _____ (refuse) because he _____ (lack) confidence. However, he gradually _____ (realise) that writing _____ (give) him a voice.

The story _____ (focus) on the conflict between fear and self-expression. It _____ (show) how one supportive teacher can transform a student's attitude towards learning. In the final chapter, Minh _____ (stand) in front of the whole school and _____ (read) his winning essay aloud.

EXERCISE 4. COMPLETE THE REVIEW WITH THE WORDS BELOW

explores portrays highlights reveals suggests

focuses challenges represents deals raises

The film _____ on the life of a teenager preparing for an important entrance examination. It _____ the pressure that many students experience when their families expect excellent results. The main character _____ a generation of young people who are ambitious but emotionally exhausted.

The film also _____ important questions about the purpose of education. It _____ the idea that high scores always lead to happiness. Through the relationship between the student and his teacher, the story _____ how encouragement can be more powerful than criticism.

Although the film _____ with serious issues, it never becomes too heavy. It _____ moments of humour and warmth, especially in the scenes between classmates. Overall, the film _____ the emotional cost of academic success and _____ that students need support, not just pressure.

EXERCISE 5. Rewrite the sentences using the Present Simple to make them sound like a plot summary or review.

1. The story began in a small village near the mountains.

→ The story _____.

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2. The main character discovered that his best friend had lied to him.

→ The main character _____.

3. The film showed how difficult it was for teenagers to talk about mental health.

→ The film _____.

4. The writer presented the school as a place of both opportunity and pressure.

→ The writer _____.

5. The article argued that homework should be more meaningful, not just longer.

→ The article _____.

6. The documentary examined the relationship between technology and attention.

→ The documentary _____.

7. The play ended with the two brothers forgiving each other.

→ The play _____.

8. The novel raised important questions about ambition and happiness.

→ The novel _____.

9. The story followed a young athlete who wanted to escape poverty.

→ The story _____.

10. The final scene revealed the real reason for the father's silence.

→ The final scene _____.

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EXERCISE 6. Explain the difference in meaning between each pair of sentences.

You may answer in Vietnamese or English.

1.

a. The writer published the article in 2022.

b. The article argues that students need better career guidance.

2.

a. The film was released last summer.

b. The film follows a young student preparing for a scholarship interview.

3.

a. The author grew up in a working-class family.

b. The novel portrays the struggles of working-class families.

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4.

a. The director won several awards.

b. The film highlights the emotional pressure placed on teenagers.

5.

a. The book became popular after a famous teacher recommended it.

b. The book examines the relationship between discipline and creativity.

6.

a. The journalist interviewed several students.

b. The article raises questions about the fairness of entrance exams.

7.

a. The story was based on a true event.

b. The story takes place during a period of political change

8.

a. The reviewer criticised the ending.

b. The review suggests that the ending is too predictable.

EXERCISE 7. CHOOSE THE BEST REVIEW VERB

1. The novel explores / arrives the relationship between ambition and loneliness.
2. The article argues / discovers that students should be taught financial skills at school.
3. The film portrays / submits the teacher as strict but fair.
4. The documentary raises / commences important questions about the influence of social media.
5. The writer highlights / departs the contrast between rich and poor students.
6. The story follows / concludes a young girl who wants to become a scientist.
7. The film challenges / attends the belief that exam results are the only measure of success.
8. The book is set / is arranged in a city where education is extremely competitive.
9. The play deals / launches with family conflict and social expectations.
10. The final scene reveals / registers the truth about the main character's past.

EXERCISE 8. COMPLETE THE MINI-DIALOGUES

Dialogue 1

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A: What is the book about?

B: It _____ the story of a teenager who wants to study abroad. (tell)

A: Who _____ it? (write)

B: A Vietnamese author. She _____ it after working with international students for several years. (write)

Dialogue 2

A: Did you enjoy the film?

B: Yes. It _____ the pressure students face before major exams. (explore)

A: When _____ it _____? (come out)

B: It _____ out last year, but it still feels very relevant. (come)

Dialogue 3

A: What happens in the final scene?

B: The main character _____ that his father was trying to protect him. (realise)

A: That sounds emotional.

B: It is. The ending _____ how easily family members can misunderstand each other. (show)

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Dialogue 4

A: What does the article say?

B: It _____ that schools should focus more on life skills. (argue)

A: Who _____ the article? (publish)

B: A national education magazine _____ it last month. (publish)

Dialogue 5

A: Is the documentary historical?

B: Yes. It _____ in the early twentieth century and _____ how the movement spreads. (begin / show)

A: Was it based on real events?

B: Yes. The director _____ interviews with historians before making it. (conduct)

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EXERCISE 9. Correct the mistakes. Write Correct if the sentence is already correct.

1. The novel was describing a society controlled by fear.
2. The author wrote the novel in 1949.
3. The film follows a young athlete who dreams of winning a scholarship.
4. The film released in 2020.
5. The article argued that technology changes the way students learn.
6. The article argues that technology is changing the way students learn.
7. The story was beginning in a small village.
8. The story begins in a small village.
9. The director won an award for the film.
10. The film was exploring the pressure of academic success.
11. The documentary examines the effects of social media on teenagers.
12. The documentary first appeared on television last year.
13. The writer portrays the main character as ambitious but insecure.
14. The writer was portraying the main character as ambitious but insecure.
15. The play ends with a powerful conversation between father and son.

EXERCISE 10. TEXT GAP-FILL

The film Pressure Point _____ (come out) in 2022 and quickly _____ (become) popular among teenage audiences. Although the story _____ (be) fictional, many viewers _____ (feel) that it reflected real problems in modern education.

The film _____ (follow) An, a hardworking student who _____ (prepare) for an important entrance examination. At the beginning, An _____ (believe) that success _____ (depend) only on high scores. However, as the story develops, she _____ (begin) to question what success really means.

The film _____ (explore) the emotional pressure placed on students by parents, teachers and society. It also _____ (portray) friendship as an important source of support. One of the most powerful scenes _____ (show) An arguing with her father, who _____ (want) her to choose a career she does not enjoy.

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The director _____ (say) in an interview that he _____ (want) to make a film about the hidden stress many students experience. In my opinion, the film _____ (raise) important questions about education and mental health. It _____ (not offer) easy answers, but it _____ (encourage) viewers to think more deeply.

EXERCISE 11. The paragraph below contains 10 mistakes with Present Simple or Past Simple. Find and correct them.

The novel The Exam Room was published in 2021 and describes the life of a student preparing for a scholarship interview. The story was beginning in a crowded classroom where the main character felt completely invisible. As the plot develops, he was discovering that his fear of failure affects every part of his life. The writer explored the pressure students face and criticises the belief that exam results define a person's worth. The novel also was portraying teachers in a balanced way: some are strict and distant, while others genuinely care about their students. In the final chapter, the main character realised that success means more than winning a scholarship. Overall, the novel examined ambition, family expectations and self-confidence.

EXERCISE 12. GUIDED WRITING

Write a review paragraph of 120-150 words about a film, book, story, article, or documentary.

You must include:

1. At least five Present Simple verbs to summarise the content.
2. At least two Past Simple verbs to give real background information.
3. At least four B2 review verbs from this unit.
4. One sentence about the main character or main argument.
5. One sentence about the main theme.
6. One sentence giving your opinion.

Useful opening:

The film / book / article / documentary was released / published in _____. It follows / explores / examines _____.

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EXERCISE 13. SPEAKING PRACTICE

Work in pairs. Choose a film, book, story, article, or documentary you know. Answer the questions using Present Simple where appropriate.

1. What is it called?
2. When was it released or published?
3. What does it focus on?
4. Where does the story take place?
5. Who is the main character?
6. What problem does the main character face?
7. What themes does it explore?
8. What questions does it raise?
9. What happens in the final part?
10. Would you recommend it? Why or why not?

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