

# Present time

## 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                                    | Event                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Jack <b>is</b> noisy.</i>             | <i>Jill's <b>being</b> noisy.</i>                                     |
| <i>Deirdre <b>has</b> a Porsche.</i>     | <i>We're <b>having</b> an interesting conversation!</i>               |
| <i>I <b>think</b> I like you!</i>        | <i>David's <b>thinking</b> about getting a new job.</i>               |
| <i>This fish <b>tastes</b> awful!</i>    | <i>I'm just <b>tasting</b> the soup.</i>                              |
| <i>I <b>feel</b> that you are wrong.</i> | <i>I'm <b>feeling</b> terrible.</i>                                   |
| <i>This bag <b>weighs</b> a ton!</i>     | <i>We're <b>weighing</b> the baby.</i>                                |
| <i>It <b>depends</b> what you mean.</i>  | <i>Bill, I'm <b>depending</b> on you to win this contract for us.</i> |

The differences here apply to all tense forms, not just to present tense 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** sarcastic 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 **realize** 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 ...*

**1 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.**

- 1 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.
- 2 All right, you try to fix the television! But *I hope/I'm hoping* you know what you're doing.
- 3 Every year *I visit/I'm visiting* Britain to improve my English.
- 4 It's time we turned on the central heating. *It gets/It's getting* colder every day.
- 5 Of course, you're Mary, aren't you! *I recognize/I am recognizing* you now.
- 6 The film of 'War and Peace' is very long. *It lasts/It is lasting* over four hours.
- 7 I can see from what you say that your mornings are very busy! But what *do you do/are you doing* in the afternoons?
- 8 I'm going to buy a new swimming costume. My old one *doesn't fit/isn't fitting* any more.
- 9 That must be the end of the first part of the performance. What *happens/is happening* now?
- 10 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.**

- 1 I work in this office *all this year/all the time*.
- 2 Harry Potter is *currently/for long* top of the best-sellers' list.
- 3 I am not making much money *these days/so far this year*.
- 4 The food tastes even worse *now/presently*. You've put too much salt in.
- 5 *Normally/Previously* we get in touch with customers by post.
- 6 Pete was ill but he is getting over his illness *soon/now*.
- 7 I'm feeling rather run down *lately/at present*, doctor.
- 8 I always stay on duty *since/until* six o'clock.
- 9 I'm *often/forever* tidying up the mess in your room!
- 10 Fortunately the baby *now/recently* sleeps all night.





**3 Complete each sentence with the present simple or present continuous form of the verbs in brackets.**

- 1 I (hear) hear that you have been promoted. Congratulations!
- 2 British people (drink) more and more wine, apparently.
- 3 I hope Sarah will be here soon. I (depend) on her.
- 4 Please be quiet, David. You (forever/interrupt) .
- 5 Hey, you! What (you/think) you're doing?
- 6 Could you come here, please? I (want) to talk to you now.
- 7 Jane is away on holiday so Linda (handle) her work.
- 8 To be honest, I (doubt) whether Jim will be here next week.
- 9 You've only just started the job, haven't you? How (you/get on) ?
- 10 Pay no attention to Graham. He (just/be) sarcastic.

**4 Complete the text with the present simple or present continuous form of the verbs in brackets.**

I work in a large office with about thirty other people, most of whom I (1) know (know) quite well. We (2) (spend) most of the day together, so we have all become friends. In fact, most of my colleagues are so interesting, that I (3) (think) of writing a book about them! (4) (take) Helen Watson, for example. Helen (5) (run) the Accounts department. At the moment she (6) (go) out with Keith Ballantine, one of the sales representatives, and they (7) (seem) very happy together. But everyone – except Helen apparently – (8) (know) that Keith (9) (fancy) Susan Porter. But I (10) (happen) to know that Susan (11) (dislike) Keith. 'I can't stand people who never (12) (stop) apologizing all the time!' she told me. 'And besides, I know he (13) (deceive) poor Helen. He (14) (see) Betty Wills from the Overseas department.' And plenty of other interesting things (15) (currently/go on). For instance, every week we (16) (experience) more and more problems with theft – personal belongings and even money have been stolen. When you (17) (realize) that someone in your office is a thief, it (18) (upset) you at first. But I (19) (also/try) to catch whoever it is before the police are called in. I'm not going to tell you who I (20) (suspect). Well, not yet anyway!

**5 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using one of the words in bold. Do not change the word in bold.**

- 1 Charles and his father are exactly alike in appearance.

**looks/looking**

Charles ..... *looks just/exactly like* ..... his father.

- 2 Take all your possessions and walk slowly to the exit.

**belongs/belonging**

Take everything ..... and walk slowly to the exit.

- 3 I'm finding it really enjoyable to work here.

**enjoy/enjoying**

I ..... here.

- 4 I take work home regularly because of my new responsibility at work.

**means/meaning**

My new responsibility at work ..... work home regularly.

- 5 In my cycling group there's George, Tom, Harry and me.

**consists/consisting**

My ..... George, Tom, Harry and me.

- 6 In your opinion, who's going to win the Cup?

**think/thinking**

Who do ..... win the Cup?

- 7 I'm seeing how wide the door is.

**measure/measuring**

I ..... the door.

- 8 Neil always forgets his wife's birthday.

**remembers/remembering**

Neil ..... his wife's birthday.

- 9 Its ability to catch fish is the key to the polar bear's survival.

**depends/depending**

The polar bear's ..... to catch fish.

- 10 What's on your mind at the moment?

**think/thinking**

What ..... at the moment?

## ADVANCED LANGUAGE PRACTICE

### 6 Correct any errors in these sentences. Some sentences are correct.

- 1 I'm depending on you, so don't make any mistakes!  
.....✓.....
- 2 Is this total including the new students?  
.....Does this total include the new students?.....
- 3 Excuse me, but do you wait for somebody?  
.....
- 4 These potatoes are tasting a bit funny.  
.....
- 5 How are you feeling today?  
.....
- 6 I look forward to hearing from you.  
.....
- 7 I have a feeling that something goes wrong.  
.....
- 8 What's that you're eating?  
.....
- 9 Are you hearing anything from Wendy these days?  
.....
- 10 I think you're being rather mean about this.  
.....

### 7 Complete each sentence with a word from the box.

|         |           |        |          |
|---------|-----------|--------|----------|
| coming  | making    | trying | asking   |
| talking | listening | taking | shooting |

- 1 I'm .....trying..... to concentrate.
- 2 Are you ..... off now, or can we talk?
- 3 Go on, I'm .....
- 4 I think we're ..... at cross purposes.
- 5 You're ..... for trouble.
- 6 It's ..... along nicely.
- 7 You don't seem to be ..... much interest.
- 8 You're ..... a fuss about nothing.

Which expression means one of the following?

- a Are you in a hurry to leave?
- b We're talking about different things without realizing it.
- c If you say or do this you will get into difficulties.



## Future time

### Basic contrasts: *will*, *going to*, present continuous

- *Will* is normally known as the predictive future, and describes known facts, or what we suppose is true.  
*I'll be late home this evening.*  
*The company will make a profit next year.*  
 This can also take the form of an assumption.  
*That'll be Jim at the door.* (This means that I suppose it is Jim.)
- *Will* is also used to express an immediate decision.  
*I'll take this one.*
- *Going to* describes intentions or plans. At the moment of speaking the plans have already been made.  
*I'm going to wait here until Carol gets back.*  
*Going to* is also used to describe an event whose cause is present or evident.  
*Look at that tree! It's going to fall.*  
 Compare the following with the *will* examples above:  
*I'm going to be late this evening. I've got lots of paperwork to finish off.*  
*The figures are good. I can see the company is going to make a profit this year.*  
 Decisions expressed with *going to* refer to a more distant point in the future.
- Present continuous describes fixed arrangements, especially social and travel arrangements. A time reference is usually included. Note the strong similarity to the *going to* future. *I am having a party next week* and *I am going to have a party next week* are communicating the same message.

### Future continuous

- This describes an event which will be happening at a future point.  
*Come round in the morning. I'll be painting in the kitchen.*
- It can also describe events which are going to happen anyway, rather than events which we choose to make happen.  
*I won't bother to fix a time to see you, because I'll be calling into the office anyway several times next week.*
- In some contexts future continuous also sounds more polite than *will*.  
*Will you be going to the shops later? If you go, could you get me some milk?*
- It can also be used to refer to fixed arrangements and plans.  
*The band will be performing live in Paris this summer.*

### Future perfect

- This has both simple and continuous forms, and refers to time which we look back at from a future point.

*In two year's time I'll have finished the book.*

*By the end of the month, I'll have been working for this firm for a year.*

- It can also be used to express an assumption on the part of the speaker.  
*You won't have heard the news, of course. (I assume you have not heard the news.)*

### Other ways of referring to the future

- *Is/are to be*

This is used to describe formal arrangements.

*All students are to assemble in the hall at 9.00.*

See also Grammar 9 and 10 for uses expressing obligation.

- *Be about to, be on the point of, be due to, just/just about to*

*Be about to* and *be on the point of* both refer to the next moment.

*I think the play is about to start now.*

*Be due to* refers to scheduled times.

*Ann's flight is due to arrive at 6.20. (or is due at 6.20)*

*Just* can be used to describe something on the point of happening.

*Hurry up! The train is just leaving/just about to leave.*

- Present simple and present perfect

Present simple is used to refer to future time in future time clauses.

*When we get there, we'll have dinner.*

Present perfect can also be used instead of present simple when the completion of the event is emphasized.

*When we've had a rest, we'll go out.*

- Present simple is also used to describe fixed events which are not simply the wishes of the speaker.

*Tom retires in three years.*

Similarly, calendar references use the present simple.

*Christmas is on a Tuesday next year.*

### Other future references

- *Hope*

This can be followed by either present or future verb forms.

*I hope it doesn't rain. I hope it won't rain.*

- Other verbs followed by *will*

Most verbs of thinking can be followed by *will* if there is future reference. These include: *think, believe, expect, doubt.*

*I expect the train will be late. I doubt whether United will win.*

- *Shall*

The use of *shall* for first person in future reference is declining in use in everyday informal speech. See Grammar 9 and 10 for other uses of *shall* and *will*.



**1 Complete each sentence using the cues in brackets.**

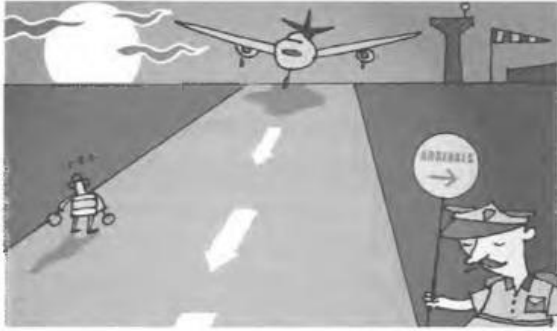
- 1 In twenty-four hours' time I (relax) will be relaxing on my yacht.
- 2 'There's someone at the door.' 'That (be) ..... the postman.'
- 3 By the time you get back Harry (leave) .....
- 4 It's only a short trip. I (be) ..... back in an hour.
- 5 What (you/do) ..... this Saturday evening? Would you like to go out?
- 6 By the end of the week we (decide) ..... what to do.
- 7 It (not/be) ..... long before Doctor Smith is here.
- 8 We'll go to the park when you (finish) ..... your tea.
- 9 It's very hot in here. I think I (faint) .....
- 10 What (you/give) ..... Ann for her birthday? Have you decided yet?

**2 Underline the most suitable verb form in each sentence.**

In July Gordon (1) will be/will have been at his company for 30 years and (2) he's finally retiring/he'll finally retire on his 65th birthday. We've decided to have a long holiday and (3) we're going to take/we'll take the opportunity to visit some old friends in Hungary, and then travel around in that region. (4) We leave/We'll be leaving towards the end of August, and our aim is to visit as many countries as we can. (5) We're flying/We'll fly to Budapest on the 25th and then (6) we stop over/we'll be stopping over with our friends – they've got a house on Lake Balaton. (7) We'll have spent/We'll probably spend a couple of weeks in Hungary and travel around. After that (8) we're thinking/we'll think of going to Romania, but we haven't planned anything definite. (9) We'll know/We'll have known a bit more this weekend when (10) we'll research/we'll be researching the whole thing on the Internet. We'd like to go on from there to Bulgaria or Ukraine, but I doubt whether (11) we'll have/we're having time. Money could be a problem too – I hope the whole trip (12) won't be/won't have been too expensive. From now on (13) we are really having to/we'll really have to save as much as we can. We're really looking forward to it – I can hardly wait! Just think, in just over two months' time (14) we'll be travelling/we'll have travelled around Europe like a couple of old hippies! When we come back, (15) you aren't recognizing us/you won't recognize us!

## ADVANCED LANGUAGE PRACTICE

3 Read each sentence and decide which ending (A, B or C) best fits each space.



- 1 Paula's flight is bound to be late although .....  
A it arrives at 6.00.    B it's due at 6.00.    C it's arriving at six.
- 2 According to the latest forecast, the tunnel .....  
A will be finished next year.    B will have been finished next year.  
C is finishing next year.
- 3 It's no use phoning Bob at the office, he .....  
A will be leaving.    B is leaving.    C will have left.
- 4 Everyone says that this year City .....  
A are going to win the Cup.    B are winning the Cup.    C win the Cup.
- 5 I don't feel like visiting my relatives this year so .....  
A I won't go.    B I'm not going.    C I don't go.
- 6 You can borrow this calculator, I .....  
A am not going to need it.    B won't have been needing it.  
C am not needing it.
- 7 I'm sorry dinner isn't ready yet, but it .....  
A is going to be ready in a minute.    B will have been ready in a minute.  
C will be ready in a minute.
- 8 Can you send me the results as soon as you .....  
A hear anything?    B are hearing anything?    C will have heard anything?
- 9 You can try asking Martin for help but .....  
A it won't do you any good.    B it's not doing you any good.  
C it won't be doing you any good.
- 10 Don't worry about the mistake you made, nobody .....  
A is noticing.    B will notice.    C will be noticing.

4 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given.

- 1 I don't suppose you have heard the news.  
won't  
You ..... *won't have heard* ..... the news.
- 2 The Prime Minister expects an easy victory for his party in the election.  
believes  
The Prime Minister ..... the election easily.
- 3 I've been in this company for almost three years.  
will  
By the end of the month ..... in this company for three years.
- 4 This book will take me two years to write.  
have  
In two years ..... this book.
- 5 Scientists are on the point of making a vital breakthrough.  
about  
Scientists are ..... a vital breakthrough.
- 6 Maria is pregnant again.  
have  
Maria is ..... baby.
- 7 I'll be home late.  
until  
I ..... late.
- 8 No one knows what the result of the match is going to be.  
who  
No one knows ..... the match.
- 9 Don't worry; David won't be late.  
here  
Don't worry; David ..... time.
- 10 Mary and Alan's wedding is next weekend.  
getting  
Mary and Alan ..... next weekend.



## ADVANCED LANGUAGE PRACTICE

- 5 Look at the three options (A, B and C) for each question. Decide which two are correct.



- 1 We've run out of fuel. .... **B, C** .....  
 A What will we do now?      B What do we do now?  
 C What are we going to do now?
- 2 You can't leave early, .....  
 A we're having a meeting.      B we're going to have a meeting.  
 C we will have a meeting.
- 3 Oh dear, I've broken the vase. ....  
 A What will your mother say?      B What is your mother going to say?  
 C What is your mother saying?
- 4 According to the weather forecast, .....  
 A it'll rain tomorrow.      B it's raining tomorrow.  
 C it's going to rain tomorrow.
- 5 I'd like to call round and see you. ....  
 A What will you have done by the morning?      B What'll you be doing in the morning?  
 C What are you doing in the morning?
- 6 I've got nothing to do tomorrow so .....  
 A I'll get up late.      B I am to get up late.      C I'm going to get up late.
- 7 It's my eighteenth birthday next month so .....  
 A I'm on the point of having a party.      B I'm having a party.  
 C I'll be having a party.
- 8 Why don't you come with us? .....  
 A It'll be a great trip.      B It's going to be a great trip.      C It's a great trip.
- 9 When you get to the airport, .....  
 A someone is going to be waiting for you.      B someone is due to wait for you.  
 C someone will be waiting for you.
- 10 Shut up, will you! .....  
 A I'm getting really angry.      B I'm going to get really angry in a minute.  
 C I'm getting really angry in a minute.

**6 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.**

- 1 I'll be back *after a few minutes*/*in a few minutes*.
- 2 I'm sure that everything will be all right *at the end*/*in the end*.
- 3 Please call me *the moment*/*exactly* you hear any news.
- 4 I should be back *by the time*/*at the time* the film begins.
- 5 I'm sure Fiona will be here *before long*/*after a while*.
- 6 I can't leave on Tuesday. I won't be ready *until then*/*by then*.
- 7 *By twenty four hours*/*This time tomorrow* I'll be in Bangkok.
- 8 Diana will be retiring *soon*/*already*.
- 9 There will be no official announcements *forthwith*/*from now on*.
- 10 Bye for now. I'll see you *in two weeks' time*/*two weeks later*.

**7 Complete each sentence with a word from the box.**

|     |      |    |    |     |      |      |    |    |     |
|-----|------|----|----|-----|------|------|----|----|-----|
| let | give | be | go | see | come | have | go | be | see |
|-----|------|----|----|-----|------|------|----|----|-----|

- 1 I'll ..... see ..... what I can do.
- 2 I'll ..... a look and get back to you.
- 3 I'll ..... it some thought.
- 4 I'll ..... you know by tomorrow.
- 5 I'll just ..... and get it.
- 6 I'll ..... halves with you.
- 7 I'll ..... to it.
- 8 I'll ..... back in a minute.
- 9 I'll ..... about five minutes.
- 10 I'll ..... and show you.

Which expression means one of the following?

- a I'll try and do this for you.
- b I'll share it with you.
- c I'll fix it/arrange it.

**→ SEE ALSO**

**Consolidation 1:** Units 1–4

**Grammar 7:** Conditionals

**Grammar 9 and 10:** Modals

# 3

## GRAMMAR

# Past time

### Basic contrasts: past simple and past continuous

- Past simple generally refers to:
  - Completed actions  
*I got up, switched off the radio, and sat down again.*
  - Habits  
*Every day I went to the park.*
  - States  
*In those days, I **didn't** like reading.*
- Past continuous (progressive) generally refers to:
  - Actions in progress (often interrupted by events)  
*I **was drinking** my coffee at the time.*  
*While I **was opening** the letter, the phone rang.*
  - Background description in narrative  
*I entered the office and looked around. Most people **were working** at their desks, but Jane **was staring** out of the window and **pretending** to write something at the same time.*
  - Changing states  
*The car **was getting** worse all the time. One of the headlights **was gradually falling** off, and the engine **was making** more and more funny noises.*
  - Repeated actions – criticism  
With a frequency adverb, this use is similar to the use of present continuous to express annoyance.  
*When Jane was at school, she **was always losing** things.*
- Past continuous is not used to describe general habitual actions, without the sense of criticism mentioned above. Past simple is used for this meaning.  
*When I lived in London, I **walked** through the park every day.*

### Past perfect simple and continuous

- We use the past perfect when we are already talking about the past, and we want to go back to an earlier past time ('past in the past').  
*By the time I got to the station, the train **had left**.*  
Compare this with:  
*The train **left** five minutes before I got to the station.*  
When we talk about a sequence of past events in the order that they happened, we more commonly use the past simple, especially with quick, short actions.
- Past perfect continuous (progressive)  
The same contrasts between past simple and past continuous (see previous section)



can be made in past perfect verb forms for events further back in the past.

*I **had been living** in a bed-sitter up to then.*

*While I **had been talking** on the phone, Jimmy **had escaped**.*

*The whole place **was deserted**, but it was obvious that someone **had been living** there.*

*They'd **been cooking** in the kitchen for a start, and they **hadn't bothered** to clear up the mess.*

- Past perfect is also common in reported speech. See Grammar 13.
- Past perfect is not used simply to describe an event in the distant past.

### Used to and would

- **Used to**

This often contrasts with the present. The contrast may be stated or understood. There is no present tense form 'use to'.

*I **used to go** swimming a lot (but I don't now).*

The negative form is either: *I **didn't use to*** or *I **used not to*** (rare for some speakers).

The form *I **didn't used to*** may also be found. This is usually considered incorrect, unless we consider *used to* as an unchanging semi-modal form.

- **Would**

This describes repeated actions, not states. It describes a habitual activity which was typical of a person or a time period.

*Every week he'd **buy** his mother a bunch of flowers. (habitual activity)*

*I **used to like** cowboy films.*

Where we use *would* to describe a habitual activity, *used to* is also possible.

*Every week he **used to buy** his mother a bunch of flowers.*

*Would* is more common in written language and often occurs in reminiscences.

### Unfulfilled past events

- These describe events intended to take place, but which did not happen.

*I **was going to phone** you, but I forgot.*

*I **was thinking of going to** Italy this year, but I haven't decided.*

*I **was about to do** it, but I started doing something else.*

*Jack **was to have taken part**, but he fell ill.*

- The contrasting past event is often understood, but not stated.

*How are you? I **was going to phone** you ... (but I didn't).*

### Polite forms

These are common with *wonder*.

*I **was wondering** if you **wanted to come to** the cinema.*

See Grammar 9 and 10 for comment on this.

### Contrasts with present perfect verb forms

See Grammar 4 for contrasts between past simple and present perfect verb forms. Past verb forms are also used to express unreal time. See Grammar 7 and 8.