

Grammar Verb Tenses

A verb can take different tenses (or forms) to tell the reader when the verb's action or state of being takes place. There are twelve active verb tenses: three **simple** tenses, three **perfect** tenses, and six **progressive** tenses.

SIMPLE TENSE

The **simple tenses** are used to express *basic* time relationships. For these tenses, the writer/speaker is viewing the action of the sentence from the point in time when the sentence is written.

SIMPLE PAST

The **simple past** tense portrays an action or state of being that took place *before* the time when the sentence is written. It is often formed by adding *-ed* to the end of the verb.

SIMPLE PRESENT

The **simple present** tense is used to describe an action or state of being that occurs *at the time* the sentence is written.

SIMPLE FUTURE

The **simple future** tense portrays an action or state of being that will occur some time *after* the sentence is written. It is often formed with the word *will* followed by the infinitive of the verb.

VERB: To walk

Time	Simple Tense
Past	walked
Present	walk
Future	will walk

PERFECT TENSE

The **perfect tenses** are used to express more *complex* time relationships. They are created by adding a form of the verb *to have* to the past participle of the main verb. (Past participles are usually formed by adding *-ed* to the verb. See the *Verbals* handout for questions regarding participles.)

PAST PERFECT

The **past perfect** tense shows that the verb's action was completed at some time *before a second past event*. It consists of the word *had* plus the past participle of the verb.

PRESENT PERFECT

The **present perfect** tense indicates that the verb's action began in the past and *continued up through the time the sentence is written*. It is formed by adding the past participle of the verb to the word *have*.

FUTURE PERFECT

The **future perfect** tense indicates that by the time of a specified future event, the verb's action *will have been completed*. It is formed by adding the past participle of the verb to the words *will have*.

VERB: To walk

Time	Perfect Tense
Past	had walked
Present	have walked
Future	will have walked

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PROGRESSIVE TENSES

There is a **progressive tense** corresponding to each of the simple and perfect tenses. Generally, these progressive forms of a verb indicate the same time relationships between events as do their non-progressive counterparts. However, a progressive verb shows that the action of the verb is still *in progress* at the time the sentence focuses on.

The progressive tenses are created by a form of the word *to be* followed by the present participle form (the *-ing* form) of the main verb. The tense of the verb *to be* indicates whether the overall progressive verb is simple present, simple past, simple future, present perfect, past perfect, or future perfect.

SIMPLE PAST PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the past tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

SIMPLE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the present tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

SIMPLE FUTURE PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the future tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the past perfect tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the present perfect tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

FUTURE PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the future perfect tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

VERB: To walk

Time	Simple Progressive	Perfect Progressive
Past	was walking	had been walking
Present	am walking	have been walking
Future	will be walking	will have been walking

HELPFUL HINTS ABOUT VERB TENSES

CONSISTENCY

Be careful not to switch verb tenses inappropriately. A paper should never shift tenses unless there is a reason to do so and that reason is clear to the reader.

WRITING ABOUT FICTION

When writing about literature or fictional events, use the present tense unless instructed otherwise by your teacher.

EXAMPLE: In Laura's personal narrative, she *describes* several events of her childhood.