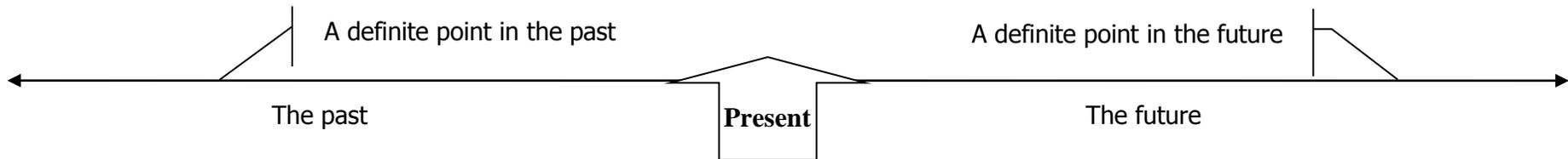


Verb Tenses for English Language Learners

In English, verbs contain a lot of information. They express when something occurred (past, present, or future) as well as whether an event was completed, is still going on, or is expected to continue. They can even express whether an action was interrupted by another action. The following examples show how to use verb tenses. You can also use the timeline to place the actions in the past, present, or future.



Verb tense	Use	Example
simple present	--habitual actions --regular schedules --general truths unrelated to time	Election day <i>is</i> in November. He usually <i>sleeps</i> late. I <i>hate</i> it when politicians <i>lie</i> .
simple past	--completed past actions --actions in the definite past	He <i>registered</i> to vote with the Libertarian party. He <i>slept</i> late last Saturday.
simple future	--future promises, predictions --decisions made now about future events	The bank <i>will correct</i> the error in your account. <i>We'll drive</i> to Santa Cruz next month.
present progressive	--actions happening at the present moment --near future intention, scheduling	I <i>am eating</i> lunch; what do you want? <i>We are going</i> to Sacramento tomorrow.
past progressive	--interrupted past action	She <i>was driving</i> home when her tire went flat.
future progressive	--future action at a specified future time --future intent or planned action	He <i>will be flying</i> to Vermont for a conference in May.
be + <i>going to</i>	(informal)	He <i>is going to</i> Vermont in May; we <i>are going</i> in June.

Verb tense	Use	Example
present perfect	--action begun in the past & continuing into the present --action that occurred in an unspecified past --recent past action that has a present effect	The new administration <i>has begun</i> to mail out stimulus checks. She <i>has</i> already <i>registered</i> for her nursing class. They <i>have decided</i> to close the library on Saturdays.
past perfect	--action that occurred before another past action	She <i>had registered</i> for classes before she got the job at the clinic.
future perfect	--to say what will have happened up to a certain point in the future	By August she <i>will have earned</i> enough money for next year's tuition.
present perfect progressive	--to show duration of a continuing action begun in the past	I <i>have been waiting</i> for you since this morning.
past perfect progressive	--to show duration of continuing action begun before another past action	The team <i>had been practicing</i> daily until the coach broke his leg.
future perfect progressive	--to show duration of an action up to a point in time in the future	He <i>will have been studying</i> biology for six years by the time he graduates.

Note: *Progressive* tenses are also known as *continuous* tenses.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



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