

English Verb Tenses

(Edited by Dr. Thaer Obaid Roomi)

Verb tense refers to when the action in a sentence takes place—whether it happened in the past, is happening in the present, or will happen in the future. Most verbs take a past, present, or future tense.

1. The Present Simple Tense

An action that happens any time

This tense is used in the following cases:

A. To express habitual actions:

Tom comes round for dinner every weekend.

B. To express permanent states as general truths (facts).

Water freezes at 0 °C.

Bob works for a computer company.

Fish live in water.

C. To express future events or action that are part of a timetable.

Tomorrow is Sunday.

The next show starts in half an hour.

The train leaves at 6 pm.

D. In exclamatory sentences beginning with *here* and *there* (the simple present tense is used in exclamatory beginning with *here* and *there* to express what is actually happening in the present).

There goes your husband !

Here comes the bus !

Note: There are also other uses of the simple present tense:

1. To introduce quotations

Keates says, 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.'

2. In clauses of time and condition

I will call you when dinner is ready. (Not I will call you when dinner will be ready.)

I will go abroad after I finish my studies. (Not I will go abroad after I will finish studies.)

3. In broadcast commentaries on sporting events, the simple present tense is used instead of the present continuous tense to talk about activities in progress.

2. The Present Continuous

am/is/are + done

This tense is used:

- a. To express an action actually going on now.
Ex: We are writing notes on the tenses at the moment.
Ex: Somebody is waiting for you out the office.
- b. To express an action covering a period around now but not actually happening on at the moment of speaking.
Ex: They are building a new bridge across the river.
- c. To indicate a temporary state of affairs related to the present.
Ex: I usually go to work by car but I am going by bus this week because my car is being repaired.
- d. To express future plans or arrangements.
Ex: We've packed up because we are taking the plane early tomorrow morning.
- e. To express criticism of an action happening too often.
Ex: You are always smoking at office.

3. Past Simple

Did/was/were/had

This tense is used:

- a. To indicate something that happened at a specific point of time in the past.
Ex: The bus arrived ten minutes ago.
Ex: We went to France last summer.
- b. To express an action or a state that covered a period of time in the past.
Ex: We lived in Spain from 1990 to 1994.
Ex: We stayed there for four years.
- c. To refer to habitual actions in the past.
Ex: We always had dinner out at weekends when were children (=we used to have diner...).
- d. The past simple can be used to express the hypothetical present when expressing wishes or conditions.
Ex: If I were you, I would like this job (= but I am not you, so I am not to take it) (If only)
Ex: I wish I had another chance (= but I don't have another chance)