

Verb Tenses

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

A verb takes different tenses (or forms) to tell the reader when the action occurs. 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.

EXAMPLE: I **laughed** at the clown.

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.

EXAMPLE: As I look at the clown, I **laugh**.

Simple Future

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

EXAMPLE: When I go to the circus tonight, I **will laugh** at the clown.

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.

EXAMPLE: Before I came home, I **had** already **eaten** dinner.

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*.

EXAMPLE: I **have eaten** candy all day long!

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*.

EXAMPLE: By the end of the day, I **will have eaten** one hundred almonds.

Progressive Tenses

A **progressive tense** corresponds to each of the simple and perfect tenses. Generally, progressive forms indicate the same time relationships as non-progressive verbs, but progressive verbs show that the action of the verb is still *in progress*.

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

EXAMPLE: I **was going** to the beach when I saw a whale.

Simple Present Progressive

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

EXAMPLE: I **am going** to the beach.

Simple Future Progressive

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

EXAMPLE: I **will be going** to the beach on Tuesday.

Past Perfect Progressive

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

EXAMPLE: I **had been going** to the beach when I stopped to stare at the whale.

Present Perfect Progressive

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

EXAMPLE: I **have been going** to Pine Beach for years.

Future Perfect Progressive

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

EXAMPLE: I **will have been going** to Pine Beach for two years at the end of July.

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