

# Tenses

## [The English Tense System](#)

The links below are to lessons for each of the 12 basic tenses. In each lesson we look at two aspects of the tense:

- **Structure:** How do we make the tense?
- **Use:** When and why do we use the tense?

Some lessons look at additional aspects, and most of them finish with a quiz to check your understanding.

### [Present Tense](#)

I do do, I do

### [Present Continuous Tense](#)

I am doing, I am doing tomorrow

### [Present Perfect Tense](#)

I have done

### [Present Perfect Continuous Tense](#)

I have been doing

### [Past Tense](#)

I did do, I did

### [Past Continuous Tense](#)

I was doing

### [Past Perfect Tense](#)

I had done

### [Past Perfect Continuous Tense](#)

I had been doing

### [Future Tense](#)

I will do

### [Future Continuous Tense](#)

I will be doing

### [Future Perfect Tense](#)

I will have done

### [Future Perfect Continuous Tense](#)

I will have been doing

Many English learners worry too much about tense. If you stopped 100 native English speakers in the street and asked them about tense, one of them might give you an intelligent answer—if you were lucky. The other 99 would know little about terms like "past perfect" or "present continuous". And they would know nothing about aspect, voice or mood. But they can all speak fluent English and communicate effectively. Of course, for ESL it helps to know about tenses, but don't become obsessed with them. Be like those native speakers! Speak naturally!

# Simple Present Tense

*I sing*

## How do we make the Simple Present Tense?

subject + auxiliary verb + main verb

do

base

There are three important **exceptions**:

1. For positive sentences, **we do not normally use the auxiliary.**
2. For the 3rd person singular (he, she, it), we add **s** to the main verb or **es** to the auxiliary.
3. For the verb **to be**, we do not use an auxiliary, even for questions and negatives.

Look at these examples with the main verb *like*:

|   | subject          | auxiliary verb   |     | main verb |         |
|---|------------------|------------------|-----|-----------|---------|
| + | I, you, we, they |                  |     | like      | coffee. |
|   | He, she, it      |                  |     | likes     | coffee. |
| - | I, you, we, they | do               | not | like      | coffee. |
|   | He, she, it      | does             | not | like      | coffee. |
| ? | Do               | I, you, we, they |     | like      | coffee? |
|   | Does             | he, she, it      |     | like      | coffee? |

Look at these examples with the main verb *be*. Notice that there is no auxiliary:

|   | subject       | main verb |     |         |
|---|---------------|-----------|-----|---------|
| + | I             | am        |     | French. |
|   | You, we, they | are       |     | French. |
|   | He, she, it   | is        |     | French. |
| - | I             | am        | not | old.    |
|   | You, we, they | are       | not | old.    |
|   | He, she, it   | is        | not | old.    |
| ? | Am            | I         |     | late?   |



I am not fat.  
Why are you so beautiful?  
Ram is tall.

**past**

**present**

**future**

\_\_\_\_\_

The situation is general. Past, present and future.

This page shows the use of the simple present tense to talk about general events. But note that there are some other uses for the simple present tense, for example in conditional or **if** sentences, or to talk about the **future**. You will learn about those later.




# How do we use the Present Continuous Tense?

We use the present continuous tense to talk about:

- action happening now
- action in the future

## ***Present continuous tense for action happening now***

a) for action happening **exactly now**

|   |                              |               |
|---|------------------------------|---------------|
| I am eating my lunch.   |                              |               |
| <b>past</b>   | <b>present</b>               | <b>future</b> |
|  |                              |               |
|   | The action is happening now. |               |

Look at these examples. Right now you are looking at this screen and at the same time...



...the pages are turning.




...the candle is burning.



...the numbers are spinning.

b) for action happening **around now**

The action may not be happening exactly now, but it is happening just before and just after now, and it is not permanent or habitual.

|  |                                     |               |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| John is going out with Mary.   |                                     |               |
| <b>past</b>  | <b>present</b>                      | <b>future</b> |
|  |                                     |               |
|  | The action is happening around now. |               |

Look at these examples:

- Muriel **is learning** to drive.
- I **am living** with my sister until I find an apartment.

## Present continuous tense for the future

We can also use the present continuous tense to talk about the **future**—if we add a **future word**!! We must add (or understand from the context) a future word. "Future words" include, for example, **tomorrow, next year, in June, at Christmas** etc. We only use the present continuous tense to talk about the future when we have planned to do something before we speak. We have already **made a decision and a plan** before speaking.

|                                 |                                      |                              |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| I am taking my exam next month. |                                      |                              |
| past                            | present                              | future                       |
|                                 | !!!                                  | —————                        |
|                                 | A firm plan or programme exists now. | The action is in the future. |

Look at these examples:

- We're **eating** in a restaurant tonight. We've already booked the table..
- They can play tennis with you tomorrow. They're not **working**.
- When **are** you **starting** your new job?

In these examples, we have a **firm plan or programme before speaking**. The decision and plan were made **before** speaking.

## How do we spell the Present Continuous Tense?

We make the present continuous tense by adding -ing to the base verb. Normally it's simple—we just add -ing. But sometimes we have to change the word a little. Perhaps we double the last letter, or we drop a letter. Here are the rules to help you know how to spell the present continuous tense.

|                    |  |   |           |
|--------------------|--|---|-----------|
| <b>Basic rule</b>  | Just add <b>-ing</b> to the base verb:   |   |           |
|                    | work   | > | working   |
|                    | play   | > | playing   |
|                    | assist   | > | assisting |
|                    | see  | > | seeing    |
|                    | be   | > | being     |
| <b>Exception 1</b> | If the base verb ends in <b>consonant + stressed vowel + consonant</b> , double the last letter: |   |           |

**s**

**t**

**o**

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|                    | consonant  | stressed vowel | consonant |
|--------------------|--|----------------|-----------|
|                    | (vowels = a, e, i, o, u)   |                |           |
|                    | stop   | >              | stopping  |
|                    | run  | >              | running   |
|                    | begin  | >              | beginning |
|                    | <i>Note that this exception does <b>not</b> apply when the last syllable of the base verb is not stressed:</i> |                |           |
|                    | open   | >              | opening   |
| <b>Exception 2</b> | If the base verb ends in <b>ie</b> , change the <b>ie</b> to <b>y</b> :  |                |           |
|                    | lie  | >              | lying     |
|                    | die  | >              | dying     |
| <b>Exception 3</b> | If the base verb ends in <b>vowel + consonant + e</b> , omit the <b>e</b> :                                    |                |           |
|                    | come   | >              | coming    |
|                    | mistake  | >              | mistaking |



# Present Perfect Tense

## *I have sung*

The present perfect tense is a rather important tense in English, but it gives speakers of some languages a difficult time. That is because it uses concepts or ideas that do not exist in those languages. In fact, the **structure** of the present perfect tense is very simple. The problems come with the **use** of the tense. In addition, there are some differences in usage between British and American English.

In this lesson we look at the structure and use of the present perfect, followed by a quiz to check your understanding:

- [Structure: how to make the present perfect tense](#)
- [Use: when and why to use the present perfect tense](#)
- [For and Since with the present perfect tense. What's the difference?](#)
- [Present Perfect Quiz](#)

The present perfect tense is really a very interesting tense, and a very useful one. Try not to translate the present perfect tense into your language. Just try to accept the concepts of this tense and learn to "think" present perfect! You will soon learn to **like** the present perfect tense!

## How do we make the Present Perfect Tense?

The structure of the present perfect tense is:

subject + auxiliary verb + main verb  
                                   have                    past participle

Here are some examples of the present perfect tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | main verb |           |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| + | I       | have           |     | seen      | ET.       |
| + | You     | have           |     | eaten     | mine.     |
| - | She     | has            | not | been      | to Rome.  |
| - | We      | have           | not | played    | football. |

|   |      |      |  |           |     |
|---|------|------|--|-----------|-----|
| ? | Have | you  |  | finished? |     |
| ? | Have | they |  | done      | it? |

## Contractions with the present perfect tense

When we use the present perfect tense in speaking, we usually contract the subject and auxiliary verb. We also sometimes do this when we write.

|             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| I have      | I've      |
| You have    | You've    |
| He has      | He's      |
| She has     | She's     |
| It has      | It's      |
| John has    | John's    |
| The car has | The car's |
| We have     | We've     |
| They have   | They've   |

**He's or he's???** Be careful! The 's contraction is used for the auxiliary verbs *have* and *be*. For example, "It's eaten" can mean:

- It **has** eaten. [present perfect tense, active voice]
- It **is** eaten. [present tense, passive voice]

It is usually clear from the context.

Here are some examples:

- I've finished my work.
- John's seen ET.
- They've gone home.

## How do we use the Present Perfect Tense?

This tense is called the **present** perfect tense. There is always a connection with the past and with the **present**. There are basically three uses for the present perfect tense:

1. experience
2. change
3. continuing situation

### 1. Present perfect tense for experience

We often use the present perfect tense to talk about **experience** from the past. We are not interested in **when** you did something. We only want to know **if** you did it:

I have seen ET.

He has lived in Bangkok.  
Have you been there?  
We have never eaten caviar.

| past                                 | present                          | future |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| ■                                    | !!!                              |        |
| The action or state was in the past. | In my head, I have a memory now. |        |

**Connection with past:** the event was in the past.

**Connection with present:** in my head, **now**, I have a memory of the event; I **know** something about the event; I have **experience** of it.

## 2. Present perfect tense for change

We also use the present perfect tense to talk about a **change** or **new** information:

| I have bought a car.           |                   |        |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------|
| past                           | present           | future |
| -                              | +                 |        |
| Last week I didn't have a car. | Now I have a car. |        |

| John has broken his leg.       |                       |        |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| past                           | present               | future |
| +                              | -                     |        |
| Yesterday John had a good leg. | Now he has a bad leg. |        |

| Has the price gone up?          |                            |        |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------|
| past                            | present                    | future |
| +                               | -                          |        |
| Was the price \$1.50 yesterday? | Is the price \$1.70 today? |        |

|                                      |                      |               |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| The police have arrested the killer. |                      |               |
| <b>past</b>                          | <b>present</b>       | <b>future</b> |
| -                                    | +                    |               |
| Yesterday the killer was free.       | Now he is in prison. |               |



**Connection with past:** the past is the opposite of the present.

**Connection with present:** the present is the opposite of the past.

Americans do not use the present perfect tense so much as British speakers. Americans often use the past tense instead. An American might say "Did you have lunch?", where a British person would say "Have you had lunch?"

### 3. Present perfect tense for continuing situation

We often use the present perfect tense to talk about a **continuing situation**. This is a state that started in the **past** and continues in the **present** (and will probably continue into the future). This is a **state** (not an action). We usually use **for** or **since** with this structure.

|  |                         |   |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| I have worked here since June.<br>He has been ill for 2 days.<br>How long have you known Tara? |                         |   |
| <b>past</b>  | <b>present</b>          | <b>future</b>   |
|             |                         |  |
| The situation started in the past.   | It continues up to now. | (It will probably continue into the future.)  |

**Connection with past:** the situation started in the past.

**Connection with present:** the situation continues in the present.

## For & Since with Present Perfect Tense

We often use **for** and **since** with the present perfect tense.

- We use **for** to talk about a **period** of time—5 minutes, 2 weeks, 6 years.
- We use **since** to talk about a **point** in past time—9 o'clock, 1st January, Monday.

| for                     | since                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>a period of time</b> | <b>a point in past time</b> |
| —————                   | x-----                      |
| 20 minutes              | 6.15pm                      |
| three days              | Monday                      |
| 6 months                | January                     |
| 4 years                 | 1994                        |
| 2 centuries             | 1800                        |
| a long time             | I left school               |
| ever                    | the beginning of time       |
| etc                     | etc                         |

Here are some examples:

- I have been here **for** 20 minutes.
- I have been here **since** 9 o'clock.
- John hasn't called **for** 6 months.
- John hasn't called **since** February.
- He has worked in New York **for** a long time.
- He has worked in New York **since** he left school.

**For** can be used with all tenses. **Since** is usually used with perfect tenses only.

# Present Perfect Continuous Tense

*I have been singing*

## How do we make the Present Perfect Continuous Tense?

The structure of the present perfect continuous tense is:

**subject + auxiliary verb + auxiliary verb + main verb**

have  
has

been

base + ing

Here are some examples of the present perfect continuous tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | auxiliary verb | main verb |                 |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| + | I       | have           |     | been           | waiting   | for one hour.   |
| + | You     | have           |     | been           | talking   | too much.       |
| - | It      | has            | not | been           | raining.  |                 |
| - | We      | have           | not | been           | playing   | football.       |
| ? | Have    | you            |     | been           | seeing    | her?            |
| ? | Have    | they           |     | been           | doing     | their homework? |

## Contractions

When we use the present perfect continuous tense in speaking, we often contract the subject and the first auxiliary. We also sometimes do this in informal writing.

|                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| I have been      | I've been      |
| You have been    | You've been    |
| He has been      | He's been      |
| She has been     | She's been     |
| It has been      | It's been      |
| John has been    | John's been    |
| The car has been | The car's been |

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| We have been   | We've been   |
| They have been | They've been |

Here are some examples:

- I've been reading.
- The car's been giving trouble.
- We've been playing tennis for two hours.

### **How do we use the Present Perfect Continuous Tense?**

This tense is called the **present** perfect continuous tense. There is usually a connection with the **present** or now. There are basically two uses for the present perfect continuous tense:

#### **1. An action that has just stopped or recently stopped**

We use the present perfect continuous tense to talk about an **action** that started in the past and stopped recently. There is usually a result **now**.

|                                      |                |               |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| I'm tired because I've been running. |                |               |
| <b>past</b>                          | <b>present</b> | <b>future</b> |
| ■                                    | !!!            |               |
| Recent action.                       | Result now.    |               |

- I'm tired <sup>[now]</sup> because I've **been running**.
- Why is the grass wet <sup>[now]</sup>? **Has it been raining?**
- You don't understand <sup>[now]</sup> because you **haven't been listening**.

#### **2. An action continuing up to now**

We use the present perfect continuous tense to talk about an **action** that started in the past and is continuing **now**. This is often used with **for** or **since**.

|                                  |                           |               |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| I have been reading for 2 hours. |                           |               |
| <b>past</b>                      | <b>present</b>            | <b>future</b> |
| ■                                |                           |               |
| Action started in past.          | Action is continuing now. |               |

- I **have been reading for** 2 hours. [I am still reading now.]

- We've **been studying** **since** 9 o'clock. [We're still studying now.]
- How long **have** you **been learning** English? [You are still learning now.]
- We **have** not **been smoking**. [And we are not smoking now.]

### ***For and Since with Present Perfect Continuous Tense***

We often use **for** and **since** with the present perfect tense.

- We use **for** to talk about a **period** of time—5 minutes, 2 weeks, 6 years.
- We use **since** to talk about a **point** in past time—9 o'clock, 1st January, Monday.

| for                     | since                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>a period of time</b> | <b>a point in past time</b> |
| 20 minutes              | 6.15pm                      |
| three days              | Monday                      |
| 6 months                | January                     |
| 4 years                 | 1994                        |
| 2 centuries             | 1800                        |
| a long time             | I left school               |
| ever                    | the beginning of time       |
| etc                     | etc                         |

Here are some examples:

- I have been studying **for** 3 hours.
- I have been watching TV **since** 7pm.
- Tara hasn't been feeling well **for** 2 weeks.
- Tara hasn't been visiting us **since** March.
- He has been playing football **for** a long time.
- He has been living in Bangkok **since** he left school.

**For** can be used with all tenses. **Since** is usually used with perfect tenses only.



# Simple Past Tense

**I sang**

The **simple past tense** is sometimes called the preterit tense. We can use several tenses to talk about the past, but the simple past tense is the one we use most often.

In this lesson we look at the structure and use of the simple past tense, followed by a quiz to check your understanding:

## How do we make the Simple Past Tense?

To make the simple past tense, we use:

- **past form** only  
or
- auxiliary **did** + **base form**

Here you can see examples of the **past form** and **base form** for irregular verbs and regular verbs:

|                | <b>V1<br/>base</b>               | <b>V2<br/>past</b>                   | <b>V3<br/>past participle</b>   |   |
|----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| regular verb   | <b>work<br/>explode<br/>like</b> | <b>worked<br/>exploded<br/>liked</b> | worked<br>exploded<br>liked   | The past form for all regular verbs ends in -ed.                              |
| irregular verb | <b>go<br/>see<br/>sing</b>       | <b>went<br/>saw<br/>sang</b>         | gone<br>seen<br>sung  | The past form for irregular verbs is variable. You need to learn it by heart. |
|                |                                  |                                      | You do not need the past participle form to make the simple past tense. It is shown here for completeness only. |   |

The structure for **positive** sentences in the simple past tense is:

**subject + main verb**

past

The structure for **negative** sentences in the simple past tense is:

**subject + auxiliary verb + not + main verb**

did

base

The structure for **question** sentences in the simple past tense is:

## auxiliary verb + subject + main verb

did

base

The auxiliary verb **did** is not conjugated. It is the same for all persons (I did, you did, he did etc). And the base form and past form do not change. Look at these examples with the main verbs **go** and **work**:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | main verb |            |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|-----------|------------|
| + | I       |                |     | went      | to school. |
|   | You     |                |     | worked    | very hard. |
| - | She     | did            | not | go        | with me.   |
|   | We      | did            | not | work      | yesterday. |
| ? | Did     | you            |     | go        | to London? |
|   | Did     | they           |     | work      | at home?   |

**Exception!** The verb **to be** is different. We conjugate the verb to be (I was, you were, he/she/it was, we were, they were); and we do **not** use an auxiliary for negative and question sentences. To make a question, we exchange the subject and verb. Look at these examples:

|   | subject       | main verb     |     |            |
|---|---------------|---------------|-----|------------|
| + | I, he/she/it  | was           |     | here.      |
|   | You, we, they | were          |     | in London. |
| - | I, he/she/it  | was           | not | there.     |
|   | You, we, they | were          | not | happy.     |
| ? | Was           | I, he/she/it  |     | right?     |
|   | Were          | you, we, they |     | late?      |

## How do we use the Simple Past Tense?

We use the simple past tense to talk about an action or a situation—an event—in the past. The event can be **short** or **long**.

Here are some **short** events with the simple past tense:

The car exploded at 9.30am yesterday.  
 She went to the door.  
 We did not hear the telephone.  
 Did you see that car?

| past                       | present | future |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|
| ■                          |         |        |
| The action is in the past. |         |        |

Here are some **long** events with the simple past tense:

I lived in Bangkok for 10 years.  
 The Jurassic period lasted about 62 million years.  
 We did not sing at the concert.  
 Did you watch TV last night?

| past                       | present | future |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|
| ■■■■■■■■■■                 |         |        |
| The action is in the past. |         |        |

Notice that it does not matter how long ago the event is: it can be a few minutes or seconds in the past, or millions of years in the past. Also it does not matter how long the event is. It can be a few milliseconds (car explosion) or millions of years (Jurassic period). We use the simple past tense when:

- the event is **in the past**
- the event is **completely finished**
- we say (or understand) the **time** and/or **place** of the event

In general, if we say the **time** or **place** of the event, we must use the simple past tense; we cannot use the present perfect.

Here are some more examples:

- I **lived** in that house when I was young.
- He **didn't like** the movie.
- What **did** you **eat** for dinner?
- John **drove** to London on Monday.
- Mary **did** not **go** to work yesterday.

- **Did** you **play** tennis last week?
- I **was** at work yesterday.
- We **were** not late (for the train).
- **Were** you angry?

Note that when we tell a story, we usually use the simple past tense. We may use the past continuous tense to "set the scene", but we almost always use the simple past tense for the action. Look at this example of the beginning of a story:

"The wind was howling around the hotel and the rain was pouring down. It **was** cold. The door **opened** and James Bond **entered**. He **took off** his coat, which **was** very wet, and **ordered** a drink at the bar. He **sat down** in the corner of the lounge and quietly **drank** his..."

This page shows the use of the simple past tense to talk about past events. But note that there are some other uses for the simple past tense, for example in conditional or **if** sentences.

# Past Continuous Tense

*I was singing*

The **past continuous tense** is an important tense in English. We use it to say what we were in the middle of doing at a particular moment in the past.

In this lesson we look at the structure and the use of the past continuous tense, followed by a quiz to check your understanding:

## How do we make the Past Continuous Tense?

The structure of the past continuous tense is:

|         |   |                                 |   |                    |
|---------|---|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| subject | + | auxiliary verb BE               | + | main verb          |
|         |   | conjugated in simple past tense |   | present participle |
|         |   | <b>was<br/>were</b>             |   | <b>base + ing</b>  |


For negative sentences in the past continuous tense, we insert **not** between the auxiliary verb and main verb. For question sentences, we exchange the **subject** and **auxiliary verb**. Look at these example sentences with the past continuous tense:

|   | subject     | auxiliary verb |     | main verb |           |
|---|-------------|----------------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| + | I           | was            |     | watching  | TV.       |
| + | You         | were           |     | working   | hard.     |
| - | He, she, it | was            | not | helping   | Mary.     |
| - | We          | were           | not | joking.   |           |
| ? | Were        | you            |     | being     | silly?    |
| ? | Were        | they           |     | playing   | football? |

The [spelling rules](#) for adding **ing** to make the past continuous tense are the same as for the present continuous tense.

## How do we use the Past Continuous Tense?

The past continuous tense expresses action at a **particular moment** in the past. The action started before that moment but has not finished at that moment. For example, yesterday I watched a film on TV. The film started at 7pm and finished at 9pm.

|   |                |               |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| At 8pm yesterday, I <b>was watching</b> TV.                                       |                |               |
| <b>past</b>   | <b>present</b> | <b>future</b> |
|  |                |               |
| At 8pm, I was in the middle of watching TV.                                       |                |               |

When we use the past continuous tense, our listener usually knows or understands what time we are talking about. Look at these examples:

- I **was working** at 10pm last night.
- They **were not playing** football at 9am this morning.
- What **were you doing** at 10pm last night?
- What **were you doing** when he arrived?
- She **was cooking** when I telephoned her.
- We **were having** dinner when it started to rain.
- Ram went home early because it **was snowing**.

[Some verbs cannot be used](#) in continuous/progressive tenses.

We often use the past continuous tense to "set the scene" in stories. We use it to describe the background situation at the moment when the action begins. Often, the story starts with the past continuous tense and then moves into the simple past tense. Here is an example:


" James Bond **was driving** through town. It **was raining**. The wind **was blowing** hard. Nobody **was walking** in the streets. Suddenly, Bond saw the killer in a telephone box..."

## Past Continuous Tense + Simple Past Tense

We often use the past continuous tense with the simple past tense. We use the past continuous tense to express a **long** action. And we use the simple past tense to express a **short** action that happens **in the middle** of the long action. We can join the two ideas with **when** or **while**.

In the following example, we have two actions:

1. long action (watching TV), expressed with past continuous tense
2. short action (telephoned), expressed with simple past tense

| past  | present | future |
|---|---------|--------|
| Long action.  |         |        |
| I <b>was watching</b> TV at 8pm.<br> You <b>telephoned</b> at 8pm. |         |        |
| Short action.   |         |        |

We can join these two actions with **when**:

- I was watching TV **when** you telephoned.

(Notice that "when you telephoned" is also a way of defining the time [8pm].)

We use:

- **when** + **short action** (simple past tense)
- **while** + **long action** (past continuous tense)

There are four basic combinations:

|              |                            |              |                        |
|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
|              | I was walking past the car | <b>when</b>  | it exploded.           |
| <b>When</b>  | the car exploded           |              | I was walking past it. |
|              | The car exploded           | <b>while</b> | I was walking past it. |
| <b>While</b> | I was walking past the car |              | it exploded.           |

Notice that the **long action** and **short action** are relative.

- "Watching TV" took a few hours. "Telephoned" took a few seconds.
- "Walking past the car" took a few seconds. "Exploded" took a few milliseconds.

# Past Perfect Tense

## *I had sung*

The **past perfect tense** is quite an easy tense to understand and to use. This tense talks about the "past in the past".

In this lesson we look at:

## How do we make the Past Perfect Tense?

The structure of the past perfect tense is:

|         |   |                                 |   |                 |
|---------|---|---------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| subject | + | auxiliary verb HAVE             | + | main verb       |
|         |   | conjugated in simple past tense |   | past participle |
|         |   | had                             |   | V3              |

For negative sentences in the past perfect tense, we insert **not** between the auxiliary verb and main verb. For question sentences, we exchange the **subject** and **auxiliary verb**. Look at these example sentences with the past perfect tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | main verb |            |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|-----------|------------|
| + | I       | had            |     | finished  | my work.   |
| + | You     | had            |     | stopped   | before me. |
| - | She     | had            | not | gone      | to school. |
| - | We      | had            | not | left.     |            |
| ? | Had     | you            |     | arrived?  |            |
| ? | Had     | they           |     | eaten     | dinner?    |

When speaking with the past perfect tense, we often contract the subject and auxiliary verb:

|         |       |
|---------|-------|
| I had   | I'd   |
| you had | you'd |



|                             |                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| he had<br>she had<br>it had | he'd<br>she'd<br>it'd |
| we had                      | we'd                  |
| they had                    | they'd                |

The **'d** contraction is also used for the auxiliary verb **would**. For example, **we'd** can mean:

- We **had**  
or
- We **would**

But usually the main verb is in a different form, for example:

- We had **arrived** (past participle)
- We would **arrive** (base)

It is always clear from the context.

## How do we use the Past Perfect Tense?

The past perfect tense expresses action in the **past** before another action in the **past**. This is the **past in the past**. For example:

- The train left at 9am. We arrived at 9.15am. When we arrived, the train **had left**.

|  |                |               |
|--|----------------|---------------|
| <b>The train <b>had left</b> when <b>we arrived</b>.</b> |                |               |
| <b>past</b>  | <b>present</b> | <b>future</b> |
| Train leaves in past at 9am.                             |                |               |
| We arrive in past at 9.15am.                             |                |               |

Look at some more examples:

- I wasn't hungry. I **had** just **eaten**.
- They were hungry. They **had** not **eaten** for five hours.
- I didn't know who he was. I **had** never **seen** him before.

- "Mary wasn't at home when I arrived."  
"Really? Where **had** she **gone**?"

You can sometimes think of the past perfect tense like the present perfect tense, but instead of the time being **now** the time is **past**.

**past perfect tense**

had |  
done |  
> |

**past**

**now**

**future**

**present perfect tense**

have |  
done |  
> |

**past**

**now**

**future**

For example, imagine that you arrive at the station at 9.15am. The stationmaster says to you:

- "You **are** too late. The train **has left**."

Later, you tell your friends:

- "We **were** too late. The train **had left**."

We often use the past perfect tense in reported speech after verbs like **said, told, asked, thought, wondered**:

Look at these examples:

- He told us that the train **had left**.
- I thought I **had met** her before, but I was wrong.
- He explained that he **had closed** the window because of the rain.
- I wondered if I **had been** there before.
- I asked them why they **had not finished**.

# Past Perfect Continuous Tense

*I had been singing*

## How do we make the Past Perfect Continuous Tense?

The structure of the past perfect continuous tense is:

|         |   |                                 |   |                      |   |                    |
|---------|---|---------------------------------|---|----------------------|---|--------------------|
| subject | + | auxiliary verb<br>HAVE          | + | auxiliary verb<br>BE | + | main verb          |
|         |   | conjugated in simple past tense |   | past participle      |   | present participle |
|         |   | had                             |   | been                 |   | base + ing         |

For negative sentences in the past perfect continuous tense, we insert **not** after the first auxiliary verb. For question sentences, we exchange the **subject** and **first auxiliary verb**. Look at these example sentences with the past perfect continuous tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | auxiliary verb | main verb |         |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----------|---------|
| + | I       | had            |     | been           | working.  |         |
| + | You     | had            |     | been           | playing   | tennis. |
| - | It      | had            | not | been           | working   | well.   |
| - | We      | had            | not | been           | expecting | her.    |
| ? | Had     | you            |     | been           | drinking? |         |
| ? | Had     | they           |     | been           | waiting   | long?   |

When speaking with the past perfect continuous tense, we often contract the subject and first auxiliary verb:

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| I had been             | I'd been                |
| you had been           | you'd been              |
| he had<br>she had been | he'd been<br>she'd been |

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| it had been   | it'd been   |
| we had been   | we'd been   |
| they had been | they'd been |

**How do we use the Past Perfect Continuous Tense?**

The past perfect continuous tense is like the past perfect tense, but it expresses longer actions in the **past** before another action in the **past**. For example:

- Ram started waiting at 9am. I arrived at 11am. When I arrived, Ram **had been waiting** for two hours.

|   |                |               |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| <b>Ram had been waiting</b> for two hours when <b>I arrived</b> . |                |               |
| <b>past</b>   | <b>present</b> | <b>future</b> |
| Ram starts waiting in past at 9am.                                |                |               |
| 9   | 11             |               |
|   |                |               |
| I arrive in past at 11am.   |                |               |

Here are some more examples:

- John was very tired. He **had been running**.
- I could smell cigarettes. Somebody **had been smoking**.
- Suddenly, my car broke down. I was not surprised. It **had not been running** well for a long time.
- **Had** the pilot **been drinking** before the crash?

You can sometimes think of the past perfect continuous tense like the present perfect continuous tense, but instead of the time being **now** the time is **past**.

**past perfect continuous tense**

had |  
 been |  
 doing |  
 >>>> |

**present perfect continuous tense**

| have |  
 | been |  
 | doing |  
 | >>>> |

**past**                      **now**                      **future**

**past**                      **now**                      **future**

For example, imagine that you meet Ram at 11am. Ram says to you:

- "I **am** angry. I **have been waiting** for two hours."

Later, you tell your friends:

- "Ram **was** angry. He **had been waiting** for two hours."

# Simple Future Tense

*I will sing*

The **simple future tense** is often called **will**, because we make the simple future tense with the modal auxiliary **will**.

## How do we make the Simple Future Tense?

The structure of the simple future tense is:

|         |   |                     |   |           |
|---------|---|---------------------|---|-----------|
| subject | + | auxiliary verb WILL | + | main verb |
|         |   | invariable          |   | base      |
|         |   | <b>will</b>         |   | <b>V1</b> |

For negative sentences in the simple future tense, we insert **not** between the auxiliary verb and main verb. For question sentences, we exchange the **subject** and **auxiliary verb**. Look at these example sentences with the simple future tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | main verb |                     |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|-----------|---------------------|
| + | I       | will           |     | open      | the door.           |
| + | You     | will           |     | finish    | before me.          |
| - | She     | will           | not | be        | at school tomorrow. |
| - | We      | will           | not | leave     | yet.                |
| ? | Will    | you            |     | arrive    | on time?            |
| ? | Will    | they           |     | want      | dinner?             |

When we use the simple future tense in speaking, we often contract the subject and auxiliary verb:

|          |        |
|----------|--------|
| I will   | I'll   |
| you will | you'll |

|           |         |
|-----------|---------|
| he will   | he'll   |
| she will  | she'll  |
| it will   | it'll   |
| we will   | we'll   |
| they will | they'll |

For negative sentences in the simple future tense, we contract with **won't**, like this:

|  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| I will not                                 | I won't                           |
| you will not                               | you won't                         |
| he will not<br>she will not<br>it will not | he won't<br>she won't<br>it won't |
| we will not                                | we won't                          |
| they will not                              | they won't                        |

### ***How do we use the Simple Future Tense?***

#### **No Plan**

We use the simple future tense when there is no plan or decision to do something before we speak. We make the decision spontaneously at the time of speaking. Look at these examples:

- Hold on. I'll **get** a pen.
- We **will see** what we can do to help you.
- Maybe we'll **stay in** and **watch** television tonight.

In these examples, we had no firm plan before speaking. The decision is made **at the time of speaking**.

We often use the simple future tense with the verb **to think** before it:

- I **think** I'll go to the gym tomorrow.
- I **think** I will have a holiday next year.
- I don't **think** I'll buy that car.

#### **Prediction**

We often use the simple future tense to make a prediction about the future. Again, there is no firm plan. We are saying **what we think will happen**. Here are some examples:

- It **will rain** tomorrow.
-

- People **won't go** to Jupiter before the 22nd century.
- Who do you think **will get** the job?

## Be

When the main verb is **be**, we can use the simple future tense even if we have a firm plan or decision before speaking. Examples:

- I'll **be** in London tomorrow.
- I'm going shopping. I **won't be** very long.
- **Will** you **be** at work tomorrow?

Note that when we have a plan or intention to do something in the future, we usually use other tenses or expressions, such as the **present continuous tense** or **going to**.



# Future Continuous Tense

*I will be singing*

## How do we make the Future Continuous Tense?

The structure of the future continuous tense is:

|         |   |                        |   |                      |   |                       |
|---------|---|------------------------|---|----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| subject | + | auxiliary verb<br>WILL | + | auxiliary verb<br>BE | + | main verb             |
|         |   | invariable             |   | invariable           |   | present<br>participle |
|         |   | will                   |   | be                   |   | base + ing            |

For negative sentences in the future continuous tense, we insert **not** between **will** and **be**. For question sentences, we exchange the **subject** and **will**. Look at these example sentences with the future continuous tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | auxiliary verb | main verb |                      |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----------|----------------------|
| + | I       | will           |     | be             | working   | at 10am.             |
| + | You     | will           |     | be             | lying     | on a beach tomorrow. |
| - | She     | will           | not | be             | using     | the car.             |
| - | We      | will           | not | be             | having    | dinner at home.      |
| ? | Will    | you            |     | be             | playing   | football?            |
| ? | Will    | they           |     | be             | watching  | TV?                  |

When we use the future continuous tense in speaking, we often contract the subject and will:

|          |        |
|----------|--------|
| I will   | I'll   |
| you will | you'll |
| he will  | he'll  |
| she will | she'll |
| it will  | it'll  |

|           |         |
|-----------|---------|
| we will   | we'll   |
| they will | they'll |

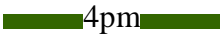
For spoken negative sentences in the future continuous tense, we contract with **won't**, like this:

|  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| I will not                                 | I won't                           |
| you will not                               | you won't                         |
| he will not<br>she will not<br>it will not | he won't<br>she won't<br>it won't |
| we will not                                | we won't                          |
| they will not                              | they won't                        |

We sometimes use **shall** instead of **will**, especially for I and we.

### ***How do we use the Future Continuous Tense?***

The future continuous tense expresses action at a **particular moment** in the future. The action will start before that moment but it will not have finished at that moment. For example, tomorrow I will start work at 2pm and stop work at 6pm:

|   |                |   |
|---|----------------|---|
| At 4pm tomorrow, I <b>will be working</b> . |                |   |
| <b>past</b>                                 | <b>present</b> | <b>future</b>   |
|   |                |  |
|   |                | At 4pm, I will be in the middle of working.   |

When we use the future continuous tense, our listener usually knows or understands what time we are talking about. Look at these examples:

- I **will be playing** tennis at 10am tomorrow.
- They **won't be watching** TV at 9pm tonight.
- What **will you be doing** at 10pm tonight?
- What **will you be doing** when I arrive?
- She **will not be sleeping** when you telephone her.
- We **'ll be having** dinner when the film starts.
- Take your umbrella. It **will be raining** when you return.

# Future Perfect Tense

*I will have sung*

The **future perfect tense** is quite an easy tense to understand and use. The future perfect tense talks about the **past in the future**.

## How do we make the Future Perfect Tense?

The structure of the future perfect tense is:

|         |   |                               |   |                               |   |                 |
|---------|---|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| subject | + | auxiliary verb<br><b>WILL</b> | + | auxiliary verb<br><b>HAVE</b> | + | main verb       |
|         |   | invariable                    |   | invariable                    |   | past participle |
|         |   | <b>will</b>                   |   | <b>have</b>                   |   | <b>V3</b>       |

Look at these example sentences in the future perfect tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | auxiliary verb | main verb |             |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| + | I       | will           |     | have           | finished  | by 10am.    |
| + | You     | will           |     | have           | forgotten | me by then. |
| - | She     | will           | not | have           | gone      | to school.  |
| - | We      | will           | not | have           | left.     |             |
| ? | Will    | you            |     | have           | arrived?  |             |
| ? | Will    | they           |     | have           | received  | it?         |

In speaking with the future perfect tense, we often contract the **subject** and **will**. Sometimes, we contract the **subject**, **will** and **have** all together:

|               |             |           |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| I will have   | I'll have   | I'll've   |
| you will have | you'll have | you'll've |
| he will have  | he'll have  | he'll've  |


|                               |                           |                       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| she will have<br>it will have | she'll have<br>it'll have | she'll've<br>it'll've |
| we will have                  | we'll have                | we'll've              |
| they will have                | they'll have              | they'll've            |

We sometimes use **shall** instead of **will**, especially for I and we.

### How do we use the Future Perfect Tense?

The future perfect tense expresses action in the future **before** another action in the future. This is the **past in the future**. For example:

- The train will leave the station at 9am. You will arrive at the station at 9.15am. When you arrive, the train **will have left**.

|  |                |  |
|--|----------------|--|
| The train <b>will have left</b> when <b>you arrive</b> . |                |  |
| <b>past</b>  | <b>present</b> | <b>future</b>  |
|  |                | Train leaves in future at 9am.   |
|  |                | 9      9.15<br> |
|  |                | You arrive in future at 9.15am.  |

Look at some more examples:

- You can call me at work at 8am. I **will have arrived** at the office by 8.
- They will be tired when they arrive. They **will not have slept** for a long time.
- "Mary won't be at home when you arrive."  
"Really? Where **will she have gone**?"

You can sometimes think of the future perfect tense like the present perfect tense, but instead of your viewpoint being in the present, it is in the future:

#### present perfect tense

have |  
done |  
> |

#### future perfect tense

will |  
have |  
done |  
> |

**past                  now                  future**

**past                  now                  future**

# Future Perfect Continuous Tense

*I will have been singing*

## How do we make the Future Perfect Continuous Tense?

The structure of the future perfect continuous tense is:

|         |   |                        |   |                        |   |                      |   |                       |
|---------|---|------------------------|---|------------------------|---|----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| subject | + | auxiliary<br>verb WILL | + | auxiliary<br>verb HAVE | + | auxiliary<br>verb BE | + | main<br>verb          |
|         |   | invariable             |   | invariable             |   | past participle      |   | present<br>participle |
|         |   | <b>will</b>            |   | <b>have</b>            |   | <b>been</b>          |   | <b>base + ing</b>     |

For negative sentences in the future perfect continuous tense, we insert **not** between **will** and **have**. For question sentences, we exchange the **subject** and **will**. Look at these example sentences with the future perfect continuous tense:

|   | subject | auxiliary verb |     | auxiliary verb | auxiliary verb | main verb  |                 |
|---|---------|----------------|-----|----------------|----------------|------------|-----------------|
| + | I       | will           |     | have           | been           | working    | for four hours. |
| + | You     | will           |     | have           | been           | travelling | for two days.   |
| - | She     | will           | not | have           | been           | using      | the car.        |
| - | We      | will           | not | have           | been           | waiting    | long.           |
| ? | Will    | you            |     | have           | been           | playing    | football?       |
| ? | Will    | they           |     | have           | been           | watching   | TV?             |

When we use the future perfect continuous tense in speaking, we often contract the subject and auxiliary verb:

|          |        |
|----------|--------|
| I will   | I'll   |
| you will | you'll |
| he will  | he'll  |
| she will | she'll |

|           |         |
|-----------|---------|
| it will   | it'll   |
| we will   | we'll   |
| they will | they'll |

For negative sentences in the future perfect continuous tense, we contract with **won't**, like this:

|  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| I will not                                 | I won't                           |
| you will not                               | you won't                         |
| he will not<br>she will not<br>it will not | he won't<br>she won't<br>it won't |
| we will not                                | we won't                          |
| they will not                              | they won't                        |

### ***How do we use the Future Perfect Continuous Tense?***

We use the future perfect continuous tense to talk about a long action before some point in the future. Look at these examples:

- I **will have been working** here for ten years next week.
- He will be tired when he arrives. He **will have been traveling** for 24 hours.