

# Verb Tenses

## WHAT IS A VERB TENSE?

A verb tense is the conjugated form of a verb used to indicate the time of an action, event, or condition. In the English language, there are twelve verb tenses.

## HOW DO YOU FORM VERB TENSES?

- The **simple** past and present tenses are formed without using any auxiliary (helping) verbs; however, the simple future tense requires the use of the helping verb “will.”
- The **perfect** tense is conjugated by using a form of the helping verb “to have” along with the past participle of the main verb. The form of the helping verb “to have” determines if the perfect tense is past, present or future.
- The **progressive** tense is conjugated by using a form of the helping verb “to be” along with the present participle (-ing) of the main verb. The form of the helping verb “to be” determines if the progressive tense is past, present or future.
- The **perfect progressive** tense is conjugated by using a form of “to have” (just as in the perfect tenses), the past participle of the verb “to be” (“been”), plus the present participle of the main verb (-ing, just as in the progressive tenses). The form of the helping verb “to have” determines if the perfect progressive tense is past, present, or future.

The following are examples of each of the twelve verb tenses:

## Present Tenses

- **Simple Present**— this tense expresses a present action or a habitual action.  
She **is** a professor *(present action)*  
He **practices** pitching every Saturday. *(habitual action)*
- **Present Perfect**— this tense expresses an action that began in the past and is still happening in the present, a habitual action, or an action that occurred at an unspecified or indefinite time in the past (used with never, ever or before).  
She **has been** a professor here for five years now. *(past action still happening)*  
He **has practiced** pitching every Saturday. *(habitual action)*  
No one **has ever lived** in the house down the street. *(unspecified time)*
- **Present Progressive**— this tense expresses a continuing action.  
He **is practicing** pitching after school.  
They **are moving** to the house down the street.
- **Present Perfect Progressive**— this tense is used to express the ongoing nature of an action that has begun in the past, continues in the present, and may continue in the future.  
He **has been practicing** pitching for two hours and still has not finished.  
The neighbors **have been moving** furniture all afternoon.

# Past Tenses

- **Simple Past**— this tense expresses a completed action or condition.  
The students **wrote** their papers. (*completed action*)  
The teacher **gave** a test last week. (*completed condition*)
- **Past Perfect**— this tense describes an event that happened in the past before another event in the past. It is also used in reporting speech.  
The students **had written** their papers before class. (*completed condition*)  
The girl said that the teacher **had given** a test last week. (*previous past event*)
- **Past Progressive**— this tense expresses an action in the past that took place over a period of time, or an action in the past that was interrupted.  
The students **were writing** their papers for days. (*period of time*)  
The teacher **was giving** a test when the bell rang. (*interruption*)
- **Past Perfect Progressive**— this tense expresses a past, ongoing action that was completed before some other past action.  
Before the semester ended, the students **had been writing** their papers.  
The teacher **had been giving** a test all morning, but then she went to have lunch.

# Future Tenses

- **Simple Future**— this tense expresses an action that will or is going to take place. It is formed using the helping verb “will” along with the infinitive of the main verb.  
After I get home from work, I **will cook** dinner.  
In August, my mom **will travel** to Mexico on a business trip.
- **Future Perfect**— this tense expresses an action that will occur in the future before another action.  
By the time you get home, I **will have cooked** the entire meal.  
My mom **will have gone** to Mexico before the summer is over.
- **Future Progressive**— this tense expresses an action that may be taking place some time in the future.  
I **will be cooking** dinner when you arrive.  
My mom **will be traveling** to Mexico again in the future.
- **Future Perfect Progressive**— this tense is rarely used; however, it expresses a continuing action that will be completed some time in the future.  
By the end of the month, I **will have been cooking** dinner every night.  
When you call me tomorrow at 9:30, my mom **will have been traveling** to Mexico.