

# USING VERB TENSES CORRECTLY \*

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Under each tense you will find notes and examples on –

- How to structure it (**form**)
- When to use it (**function**)

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as Present Continuous. Same tense. Two possible names. "Progressive" and "Continuous" are two names for the same aspect (BE + verb+ing).

## Simple Present Tense

### Examples -

**Q:** How do you get to work?

**A:** I **usually** drive.  
**Sometimes** I drive, **sometimes** I take a cab.  
 I walk **every day**. I live a block from the office.

**Q:** **How often** do you go out of town?

**A:** I go **almost every weekend**.  
 I go **once in a while**.  
 I go **twice a month**.

### Function

The **simple present tense** has **four major functions**. Use it to describe or state:

- (1) repeated action
- (2) definitions
- (3) scientific/economic truths
- (4) non-progressive verbs

#### (1) Repeated Action

*Repeated* action is sometimes called *habitual* or *regular* action.

#### Examples -

He **gets** to the office at 8:00 **every day**.  
 Restaurants in the U.S. **close very early**.  
 I **always drink** a beer when I get home.

The above actions are all *repeated*, *habitual*, *regular*.

The **simple present tense** answers the question: **how often?** (See above example.)

As a result, you will often use the **simple present tense** with adverbs and adverbials of frequency such as:

always usually often sometimes rarely never once in a while twice a week	every now and then from time to time every day every other day every Monday whenever I can whenever I have time on the 1st of each month
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#### (2) Definitions

Under Title 35 of the U.S. Code, a public use **occurs** when the inventor **releases** control over his invention prior to the Section 102(b) critical date.

**(3) Scientific / Economic Truths**

*Examples -*

Water **boils** at 100°C.  
 Light **travels** faster than sound.  
 Money **makes** money.  
 A recession **occurs** when economic activity **slows down**.

**(4) Non-Progressive Verbs**

Verbs of *emotion* and *sensory perception* are not usually used in the present continuous. You do not say “I am loving,” or “He is hearing.” Use the **simple present tense** when describing these actions in present time.<sup>2</sup>

*Examples -*

I <b>hear</b> a strange noise.	<i>(sensory perception)</i>
I <b>hear</b> what he’s saying.	<i>(sensory perception)</i>
I <b>love</b> English, but I <b>hate</b> grammar.	<i>(emotion)</i>
He <b>likes</b> New York, but he <b>wants</b> to go home soon.	<i>(emotion)</i>
I <b>think</b> that’s a good idea.	<i>(mental attitude)</i>
We <b>feel</b> uncomfortable with that decision.	<i>(mental attitude)</i>
Mary <b>has</b> an office on the third floor.	<i>(possession)</i>
That book <b>belongs</b> to us.	<i>(possession)</i>

**Form**

The simple present tense has a relatively simple formation.

Use the **simple verb** for all persons, except the third-person singular, in the affirmative. Add “**s**” to the simple verb when using the **third-person singular**.<sup>3</sup>

*Examples -*

I **need** those papers right now.  
 He **needs** those papers right now.

They **make** good contacts at those conferences.  
 He **makes** good contacts at those conferences.

When making a negative statement or asking a question in the simple present tense, use **does** for the third-person singular and **do** for all other subjects.

*Examples -*

**Do you** need anything else?  
**Does he** need anything else?

<sup>2</sup> Other non-progressive verbs in this category include: *see, taste, smell, understand, know, believe, own.*

<sup>3</sup> (Examples: *Joe, Mary, the president, our client, this offer, my mother, their daughter, our house, he, she and it.*)

I **do not** (don't) need anything else.  
 He **does not** (doesn't) need anything else.

**REMEMBER:** **Do** and **does** express the **time** in interrogative and negative statements.  
 Use the **simple verb** when asking a question or making a negative statement.

*Examples -*

Where **do they store** their documents?  
 Where **does the firm store** its documents?

They **don't store** their documents with that company any longer.  
 It **doesn't store** its documents with that company any longer.

**NOTE:** Three high-frequency verbs form their third-person singular in an irregular fashion.

- (1) do ⇒ **does** (pronounced: **duz**)
- (2) go ⇒ **goes** (the **o** does not change pronunciation - e is *silent*)
- (3) have ⇒ **has**

*Examples -*

My friend <b>does</b> estate planning and some tax work.	<b>(affirmative)</b>
He <b>doesn't do</b> any litigation at all.	<b>(negative)</b>
What kind of law <b>does he do</b> ?	<b>(interrogative)</b>
Linda <b>goes</b> to court every morning.	<b>(affirmative)</b>
Linda <b>doesn't go</b> to court in the afternoon.	<b>(negative)</b>
When <b>does Linda go</b> to court?	<b>(interrogative)</b>
Our client <b>has</b> \$250, 000 to invest.	<b>(affirmative)</b>
He <b>doesn't have</b> a million dollars to invest.	<b>(negative)</b>
How much <b>does your client have</b> to invest?	<b>(interrogative)</b>

## INTERROGATIVE PATTERNS: *Simple Present Tense*

### Yes / No Questions

Do you drive to work every day?

Does he drive to work every day?

<b>DO</b> <b>DOES</b>	subject	simple verb	?
--------------------------	---------	-------------	---



Do	you	know	Jack?
Do	they	like	their job?
Does	he	work	with you?
Does	she	have	any partners?
Do	her	have	a significant market share?
	clients		
Does	the judge	understand	anything about intellectual property ?

### Either/Or Questions

Does he drink coffee or tea?

Do you live in the city or the suburbs?

### **NOTE:**

- **Form** *either/or* questions like a yes/no question. (The auxiliary comes first.)
- **Do not pronounce** *either/or* questions like *yes/no* questions, however.
  - Stress the **action**<sup>4</sup> in both types of questions.
  - Place a secondary (light) stress on the auxiliary in the yes/no question.
  - Do not stress the auxiliary in the *either/or* question. Instead, stress the two choices.<sup>5</sup>
  - By stressing the information you are seeking from your listener (affirmation or denial in the yes/no question; a choice between two options in the *either/or* question), your listener understands what you need from him, and can provide you with the information you are seeking.

<sup>4</sup> Simple verb.

<sup>5</sup> For example – “up or down?” “Litigation or transactions?” “English or Portuguese?”

**Information Questions** <sup>6</sup>

How do you get to work?  
How does he get to work?

*Pattern One -*

<b>WHO simple verb/s?</b>
---------------------------

↓	↓	
Who	works	in that office?
Who	approves	license applications?
Who	wants	to get an LL.M.?

*Pattern Two -*

<b>WHAT</b>		<b><u>DO</u></b>	<b>subject</b>	<b>simple verb ?</b>
<b>WHEN</b>		<b>DOES</b>		
<b>WHERE</b>				
<b>WHY</b>				
<b>HOW</b>				

↓	↓	↓	↓	
Where	do	you	live?	
Where	does	your partner	live?	
Where	do	your parents	live?	
When	do	they	need to leave?	
When	does	your secretary	need to leave?	
Why	do	you	say that?	
Why	does	she	say that?	
How often	do	you	go there?	
How often	does	Bill	go there?	
What	do	you	think?	
What	does	your client	think?	

<sup>6</sup> Also called **wh-questions** (*who? what? when? where? why? which one? how?*)

## **PRESENT CONTINUOUS / PROGRESSIVE**

### **Examples -**

I **am leaving** now.

I have to go. My colleague **is waiting** for me.

I **am leaving** for Dallas on Friday.

**Q:** When are you calling their office?

**A:** Next week.

The **present continuous** tense is sometimes called the **present progressive** tense. Use this tense to express one of the following **two functions**.

### **Functions**

- (1)** *Action in progress in the present*
- (2)** *One-time action in the specified future*

### ***Action in progress in the present***

#### ***Examples -***

He is reading the report.

I am making a cup of coffee.

They are talking to their in-laws.

In the above examples, the action is taking place now (in the present). The above actions answer the following questions:

- What is he doing?  
He's reading the report.
- What are you doing?  
I'm making a cup of coffee.
- What are they doing?  
They're talking to their in-laws.

### ***One-time Action in the Specified Future***

#### ***Examples -***

I'm filing the motion **tomorrow**. (*tomorrow* is **specific** and in the **future**)

They're not testifying at the hearings next month.

She's giving her presentation a week from Thursday.

In the above examples, the action is taking place **one time** in the future. The future moment of each action is **specific**, and is stated.

Use the **present continuous tense** with adverbs and adverbials such as:

right now  
right away  
soon

tomorrow  
next weekend  
a week from Thursday  
this Monday  
this week  
this summer

in June  
at the end of next week  
two weeks from Tuesday  
later today  
tonight  
this afternoon

### **Form**

Use the present tense of the BE auxiliary when speaking in the **present continuous/present progressive tense**.

You must use **ALL THREE PARTS** of the present continuous to speak correctly.

(1) **BE**

I am  
you are  
he/she is  
we are  
they are

(2) **verb +**

(3) **ing**

He **is leaving** the day after tomorrow.  
I **am taking** a trip to Dallas next month.

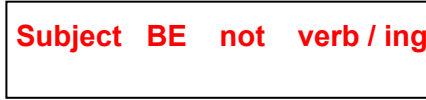
<b>Subject</b>	<b>BE</b>	<b>verb / ing</b>	
↓	↓	↓	
Mr. Smith	is	leaving	the day after tomorrow.
We	are	filing	an amended complaint next week.
The defendant	is	moving	for summary judgment.
Their firm	is	moving	into new offices at the end of the month.
I	am	drafting	that motion this weekend.



**Negative:** *not* always follows BE <sup>7</sup>

**Examples:**

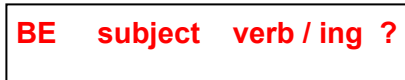
I am not sleeping. (I'm not sleeping.)  
 She is not coming with us. (She's not coming / She isn't coming with us.)



↓	↓	↓	↓
The kids	are	not	sleeping.
My son	is	not	coming with us.
You	are	not	listening to what I'm saying.
Their accountant	is	not	testifying.

**Interrogative:** Invert the *subject* and *BE*

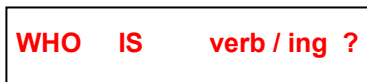
**Yes / No Questions**



↓	↓	↓
Are	you	planning to appeal?
Is	Joe Tim and	deposing the witnesses?
Are	Tom	writing the brief?
Are	they	writing the brief?

**Information Questions**

**Pattern One** - For questions requesting *who*, construct as follows:



↓	↓	↓
Who	is	representing them on appeal?
Who	is	working on this case?

<sup>7</sup> **NOT** always follows the auxiliary (whether *time* or *modal*) in English. **For example:** He does *not*; Parties may *not*.. **NOT** always precedes the verb. **For example:** He does *not* litigate; Parties may *not* disclose. With two auxiliaries, **NOT** follows the first auxiliary. (e.g. He should **not** have settled for so little. / I have **not** been sleeping well lately.)

Who is testifying for the other side? VERB TENSES / J. CAMPAGNA - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED ©

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**Information Questions:**

**Pattern Two** - For all other kinds of information, construct as follows:

<b>wh-word</b>	<b>BE</b>	<b>subject</b>	<b>verb / ing ?</b>
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When	are	you	leaving?
When	is	he	leaving?
Why	are	you	settling on those terms?
Why	is	plaintiff	settling?
Why	are	they	settling?
How	are	you	getting there?
How	is	Tom	getting there?
How	are	the jurors	getting there?
What	are	you	looking for?
What	is	your son	looking for?
What	are	your kids	looking for?

## SIMPLE PAST TENSE

### Examples -

I **took** a taxi to the airport.  
 We **saw** a good movie last night.  
 I **lived** in London from 1988 to 1990.

**Q:** When **did you talk** to her?

**A:** Two weeks ago.

**Q:** **Did you finish** the brief?

**A:** Yes, I **did**.

### Function

Use the **simple past tense** to describe action completed in the past.

The simple past tense answers the questions:

- **when?**
- **how long ago?**

### Form

#### Affirmative

The regular past-tense **affirmative** is formed by adding **-ed** to the simple verb.

Examples:

talked	I <b>talked</b> to him last night.
worked	Joe <b>worked</b> there two years ago.
filed	They <b>filed</b> the charges yesterday.

The most common verbs are irregular in the past. You need to memorize their forms. These verbs are also very important since most phrasal verbs<sup>8</sup> are coined from the irregular verbs.

**Examples** of irregular verbs include:

<i>began</i> (the past form of <i>begin</i> )	I <b>began</b> the course three days ago.
<i>left</i> (the past form of <i>leave</i> )	He <b>left</b> the country last week.
<i>told</i> (the past form of <i>tell</i> )	She <b>told</b> me the bad news earlier today.

<sup>8</sup> Phrasal verbs are two- and three-word verbs, such as *come across*, *make up*, and *put up with*, which have idiomatic meaning

## Negative

Use the auxiliary **did** (the past tense of the auxiliary *do*) to express **negative** past action. Place the word **not** immediately after **did**.<sup>9</sup>

### Example:

I **didn't talk** to him last night.

Express the **action** (above, *talk*) using the **simple verb**. **Did**, the auxiliary, expresses the **time**. You do *not* need to express the time of the action twice.<sup>10</sup>

### Examples:

Joe **worked** there two years ago.  
Joe **didn't work** here two years ago.

They **filed** the charges yesterday.  
They **didn't file** the charges last week.

**Irregular verbs** are very easy to use in the past-tense negative. Just like the regular verbs, use **did** to express the time, and use the **simple verb** to express the action.

### Examples:

I **didn't begin** the course a month ago.  
I **began** the course three days ago.

He **didn't leave** the country last year.  
He **left** the country last week.

She **didn't tell** me the bad news yesterday.  
She **told** me the bad news earlier today.

## Interrogative

Use the same constructions for all verbs (regular and irregular), except BE. Use **did** to represent the time. Follow **did** with the subject of the question:

Examples:

did you?	did Bill?
did they?	did your father?

Place the **simple verb** after the subject.

### Examples:

did you meet?	did Bill go?
did they sign?	did your father work?

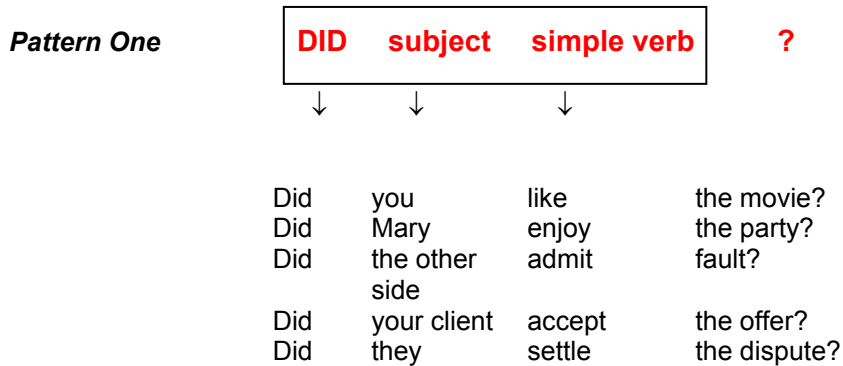
<sup>9</sup> Remember that “**not**” ALWAYS follows the auxiliary in English. “**Not**” precedes all verbs except BE.

<sup>10</sup> Thus, do *not* say: “I didn't talked to them.” Both *did* and the suffix *ed* on the verb *talk* express time. You do not need to express time twice.

There are **three basic patterns** to past-tense questions.

- **Yes / No Questions**

Did you understand him?  
Did Joe have a good time?



**Answers**

Use only the auxiliary, **did**, to answer the **yes/no** question in the past.

**Examples:**

**Q:** Did you depose the witness?  
**A:** Yes, I did.

**Q:** Did Joe testify at the hearing?  
**A:** No, he didn't.

**Q:** Did you like the movie?  
**A:** Yes, I did. It was very good.

**Q:** Did your client accept the offer?  
**A:** Yes, he did. We changed one small item, and then he signed.

**Q:** Did they do a good job?  
**A:** No, they didn't. We were not satisfied with the quality of their work.

**Q:** Did Mary enjoy the party?  
**A:** No, she didn't. She didn't know anyone there.

**OR**

**Q:** Did Mary enjoy the party?  
**A:** Yes, she did. A lot of her friends were there. They danced all night.



## Asking “who?”

Who went to the convention with you?  
Who made the most money last year?

**Pattern Three -**

<b>WHO</b>	<b>simple past verb</b>	<b>?</b>
------------	-------------------------	----------

↓                      ↓

Who	told	you this story?
Who	gave	them all this information?
Who	called	while I was out?
Who	worked	on that deal with you?

### Answers

The names of people will be the typical answers to the above questions.

#### Examples:

**Q:** Who drafted these clauses?  
**A:** Miguel. (*short answer*)  
**A:** Miguel did. (*alternative short answer*)  
**A:** Miguel drafted them. (*complete answer*)

**Q:** Who worked on that deal with you?  
**A:** Susan and Lisa. (*short answer*)  
**A:** Susan and Lisa did. (*alternative short answer*)  
**A:** Susan and Lisa worked on it with us. (*complete answer*)

Use the above pattern when asking about the *subject* of an action.

When asking about the *object* of an action, use **Pattern Two**.

#### Examples: <sup>12</sup>

Who did you see there?  
Who did he talk to?

### Answers

**Q:** Who did you see there?  
**A:** Peter Jones. (*short answer*)  
**A:** I saw Peter Jones. (*complete answer*)

**Q:** Who did he talk to?  
**A:** My boss. (*short answer*)  
**A:** He talked to my boss. (*complete answer*)

<sup>12</sup> In written English, and in formal, spoken English, use *whom* to inquire about the *object* of an action. **For example:** **Whom** did you see there? **and To whom** did he speak?



**BE**

**BE** is the only verb in the English language with two past-tense forms: was and were.

I	was
you	were
he/she	was
we	were
they	were

**Examples:**

I was very tired all day yesterday.  
 You were one of our best salespeople last year.  
 Patricia was in the library until 10:00 last night.  
 My friends and I were in Miami three weeks ago.  
 Tim and Tony were law partners from 1988 to 1992.

**Negative**

The negative is very easy to form. **BE** does not use the **do** auxiliary. Place **not** after **was** or **were**.

**Examples:**

I wasn't very energetic yesterday.  
 You weren't in the office when I called.  
 Patricia wasn't home last night.

**Interrogative**

To ask a question using *was* or *were*, invert the verb and the subject.

**Examples:**

- Q:** **Were you** at court yesterday?  
**A:** Yes, I was.  
**A:** No, I wasn't. I was in the office all day.
- Q:** What time **was** the meeting over?  
**A:** At 3:30. (*short answer*)  
**A:** It was over at 3:30. (*complete answer*)
- Q:** Who **was** Frank's assistant at his last job?  
**A:** Larry. (*short answer*)  
**A:** Larry was. (*alternative short answer*)  
**A:** Larry was his assistant. (*complete answer*)

## Expressions of Time

Use the **simple past tense** to describe **completed, past** action. The typical adverbs and adverbial expressions used with the simple past tense include:

yesterday	last year
the day before yesterday	last week
two weeks ago	last month
several months ago	last night <sup>13</sup>
ten years ago	last Monday
a long time ago	last summer
earlier today	on January 14, 1988
from 1976 to 1978	in 1990
from 1980 to 1985	in the 1980s

### Examples:

He got a new job *yesterday*.

We bought our house almost *ten years ago*.

I sent him an e-mail *earlier today*.

She worked in the London office *from 1980 to 1985*.

I visited the U.S. for the first time *in the late 1980s*.

We merged with another law firm *last year*.

I didn't sleep very well *last night*.

Where did you go on vacation *last summer*?

What time did everyone get back *last night*?

He went into business for himself *a long time ago*.<sup>14</sup>

She made partner *three months ago*.<sup>15</sup>

He graduated from law school *on May 13, 1994*.

I ran into my old boss at the airport *the day before yesterday*.

<sup>13</sup> The expression "yesterday night" does not exist in English. Use **last night**.

<sup>14</sup> The expression "go into business for yourself," means to "open a business and work there" instead of working for other people. As an attorney, if you "go into business for yourself," you are the owner of your own law firm.

<sup>15</sup> The express "make partner" means to become a partner, typically in a law firm or an accounting firm. You use this expression for these professions. If an investor decides to form a partnership, you say "he went into a partnership" or "she set up a partnership."

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**PAST PROGRESSIVE / PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE**

Actions take place in time. Sometimes the time is absolute, as in the simple past.

*For example:*

I *went* there *yesterday*.  
 We *saw* the movie *last week*.

Other times, the action is *relative*. Actions are sometimes **relative to** other actions.

*For example:*

I *was writing* a report when my client *called*.  
 I *was talking* to my client while I *was reviewing* the report.

Use the *past progressive/continuous tense* to describe action **in progress, in the past**, and the relationship of this action to **another past action**.

**FUNCTION**

The *past progressive/continuous* has **two major functions**. Use it to describe:

- (1) Two past actions which *continued* over the same period of time.  
 (Parallel past actions)

*Examples:*

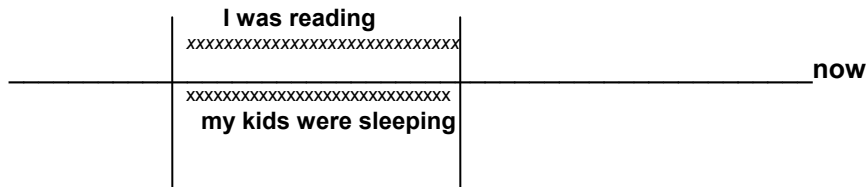
I *was reading* the newspaper while my kids *were sleeping*.  
 They *were trying* to study while he *was playing* loud music.

- (2) One action, in the past, which was in progress when a second action interrupted it.

*Examples:*

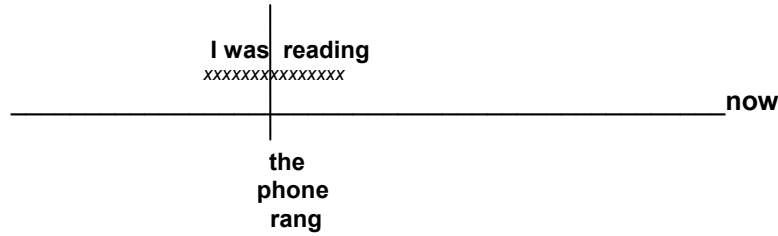
I *was reading* the newspaper when the phone rang.  
 We *were printing* a 50-page document when the printer broke.

The **past progressive** is always used in relationship to **two actions**. In the case of *parallel actions*, [ (1) ] the relationship of the two actions is as follows:



- two actions
- both past
- both continuing over the same period in the past

In the case of an action in progress *interrupted* by a second, single action in the past, [ (2) ] the relationship of the two actions is as follows:



- two actions
- both past
- one action was *in progress* : ***I was reading***
- the second action occurred in the midst of the first : ***the phone rang*** <sup>16</sup>

**FORM**

The *past continuous*, like all the continuous tenses, is formed with **BE + verb/ing**. The **past tense** of the helping word **BE (was/were)** marks the time in the *past continuous/progressive tense*.

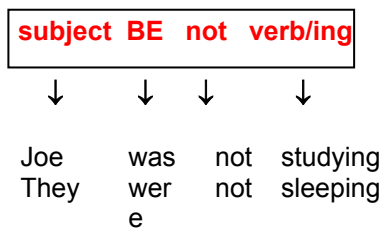
**Examples:**

I was studying English	when my friend came over.
You were studying English	when your friend came over.
He was studying English	when his friend came over.
She was studying English	when her friend came over.
We were studying English	when our friend came over.
They were studying English	when their friend came over.

The **negative** and **interrogative** have the same patterns as the *present continuous*. <sup>17</sup>

**Negative**

Place **not**, or the short form **n't** immediately after the helping words **was** or **were**.



<sup>16</sup> Use the *simple past* to express the single, interrupting action. [ring / rang / rung]

<sup>17</sup> See patterns starting on page 5 of this document for complete outline of continuous patterns.

We wer not working  
e

**Interrogative**

Invert **BE** (**was** or **were**) and the *subject* of the question.

**Examples:**

Was he sleeping?  
Was he sleeping when you called?

Were they studying?  
Were they studying while you were making dinner?

What was Mary doing?  
What was Mary doing when they told her the good news?

If the *subject* of the question is *who*, there is no need to invert.

**Examples:**

*Who* was talking on the phone when you walked in?  
*Who* was embezzling the company's profits while everyone else was working so hard?

**Remember** that the **context** of the past progressive/continuous is always **two actions**.

Use the past progressive/continuous to describe **dependent actions**.

Do not use the past progressive/continuous to describe *independent action*.

Use the **simple past** to describe *simple, completed* action in the past.

**Example:**

I *lived* in New York *from 1993 to 1995*.  
I *lived* in New York *for two years*.

Use the construction **used to + simple verb** describe ***prolonged, completed*** action in the past.

**Examples:**

I **used to live** in New York.<sup>18</sup>  
I **used to drive** to work. Now I take the train.  
My father **used to smoke**. He stopped smoking two years ago.

**Example:**

Pete: Where do you work?  
Doug: At Baker and MacKenzie.  
Pete: Have you always worked there?

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<sup>18</sup> This action is ***independent***; it is not dependent on any other actions. The speaker gives the following information to the listener when he makes this statement: (1) I lived in New York in the past; ***and*** (2) I do not live in New York in the present.

Doug: No, I haven't. I *used to work* at the Internal Revenue Service.

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## **PRESENT PERFECT TENSE**

### FUNCTION

Use the present perfect to describe action which **started in the past** and which is **still occurring in the present**.

#### *Examples:*

I **have worked** in this company for ten years. (present perfect)

I started to work here ten years ago. (past)

I still work here. (present)

Use the present perfect tense to **link** the action through the **past** and into the **present**.

The present perfect supplies the information: **until now**.

The present perfect answers the following questions about actions in time:

- **Since when?**                      **START** of action
- **How long?**                         **DURATION** of action
- **How many times?**                **REPETITION** of action until now

#### *Examples:*

*Since when* have you worked here?

I have worked here *since 1986*.

I have worked here *since I passed the bar*.

*How long* have you worked here?

I have worked here *for 20 years*.

*How many times* have you visited world headquarters in New York?

I have visited world headquarters *three times*.

Use the **negative form** of the *present perfect* to describe action you have not taken until now, but which you hope to take, or intend to take, in the future.

#### *Examples:*

I haven't seen that movie yet.

(I intend to see it.)

He hasn't signed the contract yet.

(We expect him to sign.)

We haven't chosen a new manager.

(We will choose one in the future.)

- **Not yet** is the typical expression used to describe **postponed action**.
- **Not yet** means **not until now**.

## FORM

The **form** of the *present perfect* is just like the function. It *links* the present to the past.

Use a *present* tense form of the helping word <sup>19</sup> **have** and the **past participle** <sup>20</sup> of the action you are describing to create the present perfect tense.

subject + have + past participle  
has

### Examples:

He has gone to Paris twice on business.

We have known Susan for over twenty years.

Susan has been our friend since we were very young.

### Negative

Form the negative as in all English language verb tenses. Place **not** (or other negative word) immediately after the helping word (*have/has*).

### Examples:

Larry hasn't seen the new office.

My parents haven't retired yet.

I have never met a U.S. Supreme Court judge, though I have met two Illinois Supreme Court judges, including a Chief Justice.

If using the word *yet*, to emphasize postponed action, place the word *yet* at the end of the sentence (US). You can also place the word *yet* immediately after the word **not** (UK, and formal/written US).

### Examples:

That court hasn't updated its e-filing system *yet*.

They *haven't yet* updated their e-filing system.

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<sup>19</sup> The helping word is typically called the **auxiliary**. **Have**, like **do**, has two functions in English. First, it functions as a *verb*, or an *action* (*He has a lot of money.*). Secondly, it functions as an *auxiliary* to hold the *time* of actions in the perfect tenses (*He has made a lot of money in the stock market since 1993.*)

<sup>20</sup> The past participle is the **third form** of the verb. In *regular verbs*, the past participle is like the simple past, *verb+ed*. (*For example: file / filed / filed.*) In *irregular verbs*, the past participle must be *memorized*. **Gone** is the past participle of the verb **go** (*go / went / gone*). (*Further examples: run / ran / run; let / let / let; see / saw / seen; BE / was-were / been.*)

**PRESENT PERFECT: USAGE NOTES**

**High-Frequency Verbs**

- Verbs of **decision** are frequently used in the present perfect. Decisions may be made in the past, but their impact is still closely linked to the present.

**Examples:**

I've **decided** to go on a diet.  
 She **has made up her mind** to quit smoking.  
 My client **has changed his mind** about the whole thing recently.

- Verbs of **knowing** (both people and facts) are frequently expressed in the present perfect. We often **start** to know something in the past, but **continue** to know it in the present.

**Examples:**

I **have known** my best friend for over twenty years.<sup>21</sup>  
 We **have been aware** of this problem for quite a while.

**Note:** Do not confuse the *present perfect* with the *simple past*.

Action described in the *present perfect* **started** in the past, but is still true today.  
 Action described in the *simple past* **started and ended** in the past. It is not true today.

Sometimes confusing the two will only cause a grammatical error, but will not interfere with the listener's or reader's comprehension. Other times, however, such an error can cause you to convey mistaken information.

A statement such as "*I didn't go to Paris*," for example, conveys **very different information** from the statement "*I haven't gone to Paris*." The statement "*I haven't gone to Paris*" tells the reader that you have never been in the city of Paris. The statement "*I didn't go to Paris*" simply tells your listener that within the specific past tense framework of your conversation,<sup>22</sup> you did not take a specific action. It is very possible that you have visited Paris a dozen times, but not within the *specific* context established in your conversation.

**Examples:**

Jerry has been married twice. (until now - Jerry is still alive)  
 Jerry was married twice. (implication: Jerry is dead)

A: Have you ever met Sue?  
 B: No, I haven't.

A: Have you ever met Sue?  
 B: Yes, I have. We met at the annual meeting last spring.

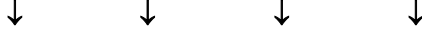
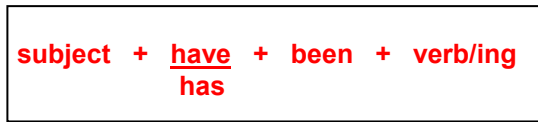
<sup>21</sup> Do not confuse **met** (*meet, met, met*) and **know**. "I *met* my best friend *ten years ago*." The *meeting* took place **one time**, at a fixed moment in the past (*simple past*). "*Knowing*" your best friend *started* in the past, and you *continue* to *know* him/her in the present. "I *have known*. . ."

<sup>22</sup> *For example*, a trip you took last year; or a vacation you took to Europe in 1995. The *context* is whatever you are discussing at that moment.

**PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE/CONTINUOUS**

Use the *present perfect progressive tense* in the same way you would use the *present perfect*.

**FORM**



I	have	been	working	in the Department of Justice for ten years.
We	have	been	traveling	for 14 hours straight!
My kids	have	been	studying	English since they were three years old.

**FUNCTION**

As you can see from the above examples, the function of the *present perfect progressive/continuous* is very similar to the *present perfect*. The time patterns of the action are the same (*until now*). Use this tense, just like the *present perfect*, to discuss action that started in the past, and is still true in the present.

The introduction of **BE** (*progressive*) emphasizes the condition, *continuity*, or link of the action through time (from the past to the present). The following two sentences **mean the same thing**.

*We have been traveling* for 14 hours straight.  
*We have traveled* for 14 hours straight.

The difference is essentially a stylistic one. The first sentence conveys the *continuity* of the travel a bit more than the second. The listener feels the 14 hours a bit more. Natives typically use the *present perfect* and the *present perfect progressive/continuous* interchangeably.

**Examples:**

She *has danced* all night long.  
 She *has been dancing* all night long.

Use the second example to stress (emphasize) the fact that she has not sat down once. Otherwise, the above two sentences mean the same thing: she started hours ago, and is still dancing – as you speak.

**Negative**

The *present perfect progressive tense* uses two auxiliary verbs: **have** and **be**. Place the negative word (**not, never**) **after the FIRST AUXILIARY**.

**Examples:**

He *has not been working* very hard since he got back from vacation.  
 (He *hasn't been working* very hard since he got back from vacation.)

They haven't been considering the issue the way they should.  
 They have not been considering the issue the way they should.

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## PAST PERFECT TENSE

### Examples:

My wife and I *had known* each other for four years when we got married.

Sue had worked at that law firm for seven years before she made partner.

### FUNCTION

Use the *past perfect tense* to describe the **first** of *two* completed actions in the past.

The *past perfect tense* links two completed actions to each other and tells the listener/reader **which action took place first**.

### Example:

Sally had worked in banking and finance law for over ten years when she got a job with the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency in Washington D.C.

- Two actions: *had worked* ; *got*
- 
- **BOTH actions** are completed / in the past
- 
- What happened first?
  - *First* Sally worked in banking and finance for over ten years. (*past perfect: had worked*)
  - *Then* Sally got a job with the OCC (*second action: simple past*)

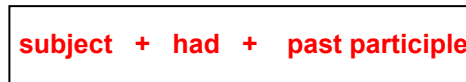
Because the *past perfect* **LINKS** two actions in time, it expresses **dependent action**.

Do not use the past perfect tense alone in a sentence, since it cannot convey a single idea:

- use the *past perfect* in one clause, and
- the *simple past* in the other.

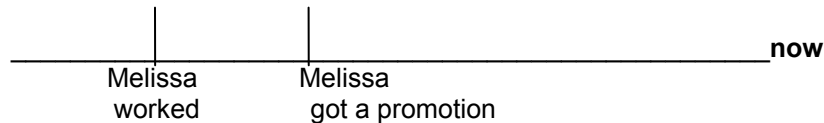
**FORM**

Use the *past tense* of the auxiliary verb *have* (**had**), and the past participle to describe the action.



Melissa	had	worked	there one year when she got a promotion.
The Smiths	had	been	married for three years then they had their first child.
Mary and Paul	hadn't	known	each other very long when they got married.
We	had	had	a Ford before we bought this Buick.

The actions involved with the *past perfect tense* occur as following:



Use the *past perfect tense* when you want to link two past actions *to each other*.

**PAST PERFECT TENSE: USAGE NOTES**

Use the *past perfect tense* when you need to emphasize the *order* of two past actions, or when you want to stress the *time elapsed* between one past action and another.

**Example:**

I had been studying English **for three years** before I visited an English-speaking country.

In everyday conversation, native speakers frequently use the simple past when describing two or more past actions. Like native speakers, you can use time expressions to indicate the order of successive actions when the chronology or the elapsed time are not critically important.

**Examples:**

I tried on four pairs of shoes *before* I bought these.

Our sales increased greatly *after* we changed advertising firms.

*First* I saw the movie. I liked it so much that I read the book *afterwards*.

## FUTURE TENSE and FUTURE TIME

As explained earlier, native speakers use the present progressive, also known as the present continuous tense, to describe one-time action in the specified future.<sup>23</sup>

### ***So what about will?***

You may use “will” in place of the present continuous tense, for example. It is not incorrect. Native speakers use the two forms interchangeably. The following are equivalent sentences:

- She will arrive on Saturday. [She'll arrive on Saturday.]
- She is arriving on Saturday. [She's arriving on Saturday.]

The key to using **will** correctly, however, lies in this rule:

USE **WILL** IN A **MAIN CLAUSE** TO DESCRIBE FUTURE ACTION.

Do not use *will* in a subordinate clause to describe future action!  
Use the simple present in a subordinate clause when describing future action.

**Incorrect:** I will ask him **when he will get back** to the office.

**Correct:** I will ask him **when he gets back** to the office.

- ✓ **I will ask** is a **main clause**. Use **will** to describe future action.
- ✓ **“When he” - when** introduces a **subordinate clause**. **Use the present tense (*he gets*) to describe future action in subordinate clauses.**

Subordinate clauses are also called *dependent* clauses, because the actions described cannot stand alone. Subordinate clauses start with subordinating conjunctions such as:

- if
- when
- unless
- until
- as soon as

Subordinate clauses require a main clause to complete their meaning.

- Use the **present tense** in a subordinate clause
- Use **will** in the main clause that completes the meaning

### ***For example:***

- **If** the other side demands those documents, we will have to produce them.
- **When** he calls, I will be happy to talk to him.
- I won't seek an injunction **unless** there is absolutely no other option.
- We will keep working on this brief **until** he gets here.

---

<sup>23</sup> We are leaving for Boston the day after tomorrow.



**Note** that the order of the clauses is irrelevant. All four of the above sentences can be expressed in “inverse” order.

**For example:**

- We will have to produce those documents if the other side demands them.
- I’ll be happy to talk to him when he calls.
- Unless there’s absolutely no other option, I will not seek an injunction.
- Until he gets here, we’ll keep working on this brief.

Regardless of the order, use will in the main clause and simple present in the subordinate.

MAIN CLAUSE BEFORE SUBORDINATE CLAUSE	SUBORDINATE CLAUSE BEFORE MAIN CLAUSE
She will look into this matter as soon as she has some free time.	As soon as she has some free time, she will look into this matter.
We’ll appeal if we lose.	If we lose, we’ll appeal.
The court will enter a default judgment against him unless he appears to respond to the complaint.	Unless he appears to respond to the complaint, the court will enter a default judgment against him.

*Note* that you must place a comma between the two clauses when the subordinate clause precedes the main clause:

- If we lose, we’ll appeal.

You do not place a comma between the two clauses when the main clause comes first.

- We’ll appeal if we lose.