

TENSES

Tenses denote the time an action takes place. They show when the work is done. There are three main tenses for verbs to use: **present**, **past** or **future**.

They are further divided into:

A. The Present Tense

1. **The Present Simple Tense** is used
 - a) to talk about repeated actions or habits (often with adverbs of frequency).
She (always) gets up at six o'clock. He (usually) wears smart clothes.
 - b) to describe a permanent state.
He lives in Windhoek. She likes curry.
 - c) to express general truths.
One plus one equals two. Water freezes at 0 degrees Celcius.
 - d) to give instructions and describe procedures.
Then you dial the number.

2. **The Present Continuous Tense** is used
 - a) to describe an action happening now or that is in progress at the time of speaking.
I am phoning from a phone booth.
 - b) to describe a temporary state or activity.
I am taking driving lessons.
 - c) to describe the background to habitual actions or dramatic events.
I listen to the radio while I am having breakfast.

3. **The Present Perfect Tense** is formed with has/have and a past participle. Sentences with the present perfect always connect the past and the present.
We use the Present Perfect Tense
 - a) to talk about something which started in the past and continues up to the present.
She has worked in London for six months.
James and Anna have been married for twenty years.
 - b) for things that have happened during a period of time that continues up to the present.
I have been to London and Spain. (= in my life, up to now)
 - c) to describe recently completed actions or events (with adverbs of time such as just, recently, etc.).
I have just seen a terrible accident.
 - d) with today, this morning, this afternoon, etc. when these periods of time are not finished at the time of speaking.
I have written six letters this morning.
It is already three o'clock and I have not had anything to eat yet this afternoon.

B. The Past Tense

1. The Past Simple Tense is used

- a) to describe actions or events completed at a definite time in the past.
I started the job four months ago.
I went to Cape Town last year.
- b) to describe actions or events completed in the past where the time is understood but not mentioned (typically in narrative).
We flew to Johannesburg and then took a flight to Kenya.
- c) to ask questions about a definite time in the past.
When did you leave school?
- d) to describe a definite period of time in the past.
I spent three years at Windhoek High School.
- e) to describe repeated or habitual actions or behaviour in the past (often with adverbs of frequency).
He wrote to her every day when he was abroad.
Harold never spent any of his money.

2. The Past Continuous Tense is used

- a) to describe a continuous activity during a particular period in the past.
They were living on the farm during the last three years.
- b) to describe a continuous activity in progress at a particular point in time.
When the police arrived I was doing my homework.
At ten o'clock I was sitting in a café.
- c) with **always** to describe repeated actions in the past.
They were always having noisy parties.
- d) to describe simultaneous actions or events in the past.
My mother was cooking while my father was working in the garden.
- e) to describe unfulfilled plans and intentions.
I was hoping to go to university, but my marks were not good enough.

3. The Past Perfect Tense (formed with had + the past participle) is used

- a) to describe the first of two consecutive actions or events.
After they **had written** their exam, they went home.
When they had eaten their breakfast, they left for their first lecture.
- b) to describe a specific event which happened before a particular time in the past.
She had gone to bed before midnight.
He had left home by eight o'clock.

C. The Future Tense

1. The Future Simple Tense is used

- a) to make predictions and to express hopes and fears (often after verbs such as think, expect, suppose, imagine, hope and adverbs such as probably and perhaps).

I expect I'll hear from you soon.
I hope we'll meet again one day.
The flight will probably be delayed.
I suppose it will rain again tomorrow.

- b) for formal announcements, often in news reports.
The Prime Minister will fly to Washington tomorrow.

2. The Future Continuous Tense is used

- a) to express an ongoing or continued action in the future.

He will be handing out samples of his new book in the mall tomorrow.

We use the future continuous tense to talk about something that will be in progress at or around a time in the future.

3. The Future Perfect Tense is used

- a) to indicate that an action will have been completed at some point in the future.

I will have spent all my money by this time next year.

4. The Future Perfect Continuous Tense is used

- a) to talk about actions that will commence at a fixed time in the future and will continue for some time in the future.

In November, I will have been working at this company for three years.

At five o'clock, I will have been waiting for him for thirty minutes.