

## Verb Tenses with Mode and Aspect

Verb phrases express three things about the action they name in relation to time in the real world: **tense** (when the action occurred), **mode** (mood such as possibility, certainty, obligation or necessity), and **aspect** (whether the action is complete or continuing).

In a verb phrase only the verb with its ending indicating tense are considered the **main verb**. Parts of the verb phrase that express modality and aspect are called **helping verbs or auxiliary verbs**.

**Ex.: She could have helped me.**

In the previous sentence “helped” is the main verb, “could” expresses mode and “have” before “helped” expresses aspect.

### Tense

A verb or verb phrase must always indicate tense, or when the action being named is occurring. Actions occur either in the **past** or **present**. Tense is indicated by adding an ending for regular verbs (+ed, +s) or changing the spelling (eat/ate) of irregular verbs. Refer to the table below entitled “Irregular Verbs” for a list of irregular verbs and their conjugations. When no tense is indicated by the verb’s ending, the verb is in its infinitive form that is expressed with the word “to”. Infinitives do not function as a verbs in sentences but have other functions.

Examples of infinitives: **to go, to eat, to drive**  
I need **to go** to the store today.

In the previous sentence the infinitive “to go” is the object of the verb “need”—*I need what? To go*. The infinitive “to go” does not name the action of the subject “I”; that action is “need”. The infinitive names the “need”.

### Aspect

Aspect of a verb phrase indicates whether the action of the verb is completed or continuous. A verb (action) is described as “**perfect**” if it is completed; “**progressive**” if continuous. To form either the perfect or progressive case of a verb, helping verbs (*the conjugated forms of “have” or “be”*) must be added to form a verb phrase. The following explanations describe when to use a particular form of a verb and how to construct that form. A table containing examples of each form follows these explanations.

### Simple Tenses

**Present (Simple Present):** Formed with the basic form of the verb and expresses the present customary, habitual, or ongoing actions and general truths. Note that for subject-verb agreement, when the subject is third person singular, the present tense verb ends with *s* or *es*.

*Signal words:* often, seldom, never, always, sometimes, usually.

I *work* at a bookstore. (habitual action)

Chris *works* at a restaurant. (habitual action)

The earth *is* round. (general truth)

**Past (Simple Past):** Formed with the addition of *d* or *ed* to regular verbs or according to the principal part chart for irregular verbs, the past tense shows completion before the present—a single past occurrence or a definite past time.

*Signal words:* yesterday, last year, a month ago, when, before.

I *walked* to school when I *lived* in Alabama.  
 I *worked* at a bookstore last summer.

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**Future (Simple Future):** Formed with *will* + the present (base) form of the main verb. Future tense indicates anticipated action, action that is expected to take place after the present.

*Signal words:* tomorrow, later, next week, next year, soon.

John will *work* at a bookstore next summer.

Margaret will *sing* at the concert on Friday.

### Irregular Verbs

The first column is the present tense form, the second column is the past tense form, and the third column is the past participle form.

Present	Past	Past Part.	Present	Past	Past Part.	Present	Past	Past Part.
arise	arose	arisen	go	went	gone	sing	sang	sung
awake	awoke	awaken	grind	ground	ground	sink	sank	sunk
bear	bore	born	grow	grew	grown	sit	sat	sat
beat	beat	beaten	hang	hung	hung	sleep	slept	slept
become	became	become	have	had	had	slide	slid	slid
begin	began	begun	hear	heard	heard	slit	slit	slit
bend	bent	bent	hide	hid	hidden	speak	spoke	spoken
bet	bet	bet	hit	hit	hit	speed	sped	sped
bind	bound	bound	hold	held	held	spend	spent	spent
bite	bit	bitten	hurt	hurt	hurt	spin	spun	spun
bleed	bled	bled	keep	kept	kept	split	split	split
blow	blew	blown	know	knew	known	spread	spread	spread
bring	brought	brought	lay	laid	laid	spring	sprang	sprung
build	built	built	lead	led	led	stand	stood	stood
burst	burst	burst	leave	left	left	steal	stole	stolen
cast	cast	cast	lend	lent	lent	stick	stuck	stuck
catch	caught	caught	let	let	let	sting	stung	stung
choose	chose	chosen	lie	lay	lain	strike	struck	struck
cling	clung	clung	light	lit	lit	string	strung	strung
come	came	come	lose	lost	lost	swear	swore	sworn
cost	cost	cost	make	made	made	sweep	swept	swept
creep	crept	crept	mean	meant	meant	swim	swam	swum
cut	cut	cut	meet	met	met	swing	swung	swung
dare	dared	dared	owe	owed	owed	take	took	taken
deal	dealt	dealt	pay	paid	paid	teach	taught	taught
dig	dug	dug	quit	quit	quit	tear	tore	torn
do	did	done	read	read	read	tell	told	told
draw	drew	drawn	ride	rode	ridden	think	thought	thought
drink	drank	drunk	ring	rang	rung	wear	wore	worn
drive	drove	driven	rise	rose	risen	wake	woke	woke
eat	ate	eaten	run	ran	run	weave	wove	woven
fall	fell	fell	see	saw	seen	wed	wed	wed
feed	fed	fed	shave	shaved	shaved	weep	wept	wept
feel	felt	felt	shine	shone	shone	wet	wet	wet
fight	fought	fought	shoot	shot	shot	win	won	won
find	found	found	show	showed	shown	wind	wound	wound
fling	flung	flung	shrink	shrank	shrunk	wring	wrung	wrung
fly	flew	flown	shut	shut	shut	write	wrote	written
forgive	forgave	forgiven	freeze	froze	frozen	give	gave	given

## Progressive Tenses

**Present Progressive (Continuous):** Formed with *am, is, are* (present tense conjugated forms of be) + present participle (*-ing* form of verb) to describe actions occurring at the present time, now, immediately.

Signal words: now, for the time being, at present, at the moment, temporarily.

I am *wearing* my new raincoat.

We are *hoping* that the rain will stop soon.

**Past Progressive (Continuous):** Formed with *was* or *were* (past tense conjugated forms of be) + present participle (*-ing* form of verb) to describe a past action interrupted by another past action.

Signal words: while, as, when.

I was *jogging* in the park when the rain began.

Jane and Roy were *painting* the living room when the phone rang.

**Future Progressive (Continuous):** Formed with *will* + present participle (*-ing form of the verb*) to describe an action that will be in progress in the future.

Signal words: this time next year, by the time that.

Kelly *will be wearing* a new red hat at the concert.

## Perfect Tenses

**Present Perfect:** Formed with the present tense of *have* (choose either have or, if the subject is third person singular, *has*) plus the past participle of the main verb. The present tense is used in several circumstances as described below.

Signal words: since, several times, every, just, recent.

1. Action that began in the past and continues to the present with the sense that it will continue in the future.  
John has *worked* at the bookstore since last summer.
2. Action that occurred more than once or repeatedly in the past.  
Margaret has *sung* at every Friday concert held at the school.
3. Action that happened at an unknown past time.  
Our friends have *traveled* to Paris.
4. A recent occurrence given extra emphasis.  
The boys have just *found* the coins.
5. A completed action given extra emphasis.  
Yes, we have *studied* for the test.

**Past Perfect:** Formed with *had* plus the past participle of the main verb. The past perfect tense emphasizes the earlier of two past actions. Use the *simple past* when two past actions are presented in normal chronological (time) order.

1. Use the *past perfect* when two past actions are presented out of time order, as in the examples below.

Signal words: by the time, after, before, already

*Chronological (normal time) order.* The children *picked* a quart of strawberries and *ate* them for dessert. Note that these two actions appear in normal chronological order in the sentence; therefore, both verbs are in the simple past tense.

*Non-chronological order:* For dessert the children ate the quart of strawberries they *had picked*. Note that the actions are presented here out of chronological order, the action that happened earlier comes later in the sentence. Therefore, the earlier action is emphasized by the past perfect tense.

We *ainted* the house blue after we *had scrubbed* the dirt off.

After he had *stepped* on the nail, his foot *began* to hurt.

2. Use the *past perfect* when two actions appear in normal chronological order with *special emphasis* on the first action's having been completed before the beginning of the second action.

*Signal words:* after, before, by the time

*No emphasis on completion:* The secretary *typed* the letter, and the boss *signed* it.

*Emphasis on completion:* After the secretary *had typed* the letter, the boss *signed* it.

**Future Perfect:** Formed with *will have* plus the past participle of the main verb. The future perfect shows an action that is expected to occur before another future action or before a specific future time.

The Smiths *will have painted* their house before you arrive.

John *will have worked* at the bookstore for a year by May.

## Mode

Mode indicates **possibility, certainty, obligation and necessity**. Modality is expressed by words such as may, shall, can and must. Determining the appropriate modal for a verb phrase is based on context rather than rule. Most modals are used to express several conditions. Modals also express tense. See the list below for examples of present and past tense modals.

Present Tense Modals	Past Tense Modals	Other Words Used as Modals
can	could	ought to
shall	should	used to
may	might	need to
will	would	happen to
must	must	seem to

### Verb Tense Overview with Examples (Adapted from [www.englishpage.com](http://www.englishpage.com))

Simple Present		Simple Past		Simple Future	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
I study	We study	I studied	We studied	I will study/am going to study	We will study/are going to study
You study	You study	You studied	You studied	You will study/are going to study	You will study/are going to study
He/She/It studies	They study	He/She/It studied	They studied	He/She/It will study/is going to study	They will study/are going to study
The class studies	The classes study	The class studied	The classes studied	The class will study/is going to study	The classes will study/are going to study
I <b>study</b> English everyday.		I <b>studied</b> English last year.		I <b>am going to study</b> English next year. I <b>will study</b> English in New York.	

Present Progressive		Past Progressive		Future Progressive	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
I am studying You are studying He/She/It is studying The class is studying	We are studying You are studying They are studying The classes are studying	I was studying You were studying He/She/It was studying The class was studying	We were studying You were studying They were studying The classes were studying	I will be studying /am going to be studying You will be studying /are going to be studying He/She/It will be studying/is going to be studying The class will be studying/is going to be studying	We will be studying/are going to be studying You will be studying/are going to be studying They will be studying/are going to be studying The classes will be studying /are going to be studying
I <b>am studying</b> English now.		I <b>was studying</b> English last night.		I <b>will be studying</b> English tonight. I <b>am going to be studying</b> English tonight.	

Present Perfect		Past Perfect		Future Perfect	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
I have studied You have studied He/She/It has studied The class has studied	We have studied You have studied They have studied The classes have studied	I had studied You had studied He/She/It had studied The class had studied	We had studied You had studied They had studied The classes had studied	I will have studied /am going to have studied You will have studied /are going to have studied He/She/It will have studied /is going to have studied The class will have studied /is going to have studied	We will have studied/are going to have studied You will have studied/are going to have studied They will have studied/are going to have studied The classes will have studied/are going to have studied
I <b>have studied</b> English for several years.		I <b>had studied</b> English before I moved to the U.S.		I <b>will have studied</b> English for ten years after this semester. I <b>am going to have studied</b> every English verb tense by the end of this semester.	

Present Perfect Progressive		Past Perfect Progressive		Future perfect Progressive	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
I have been studying You have been studying He/She/It has been studying The class has been studying	We have been studying You have been studying They have been studying The classes have been studying	I had been studying You had been studying He/She/It had been studying The class had been studying	We had been studying You had been studying They had been studying The classes had been studying	I will have been studying/am going to have been studying You will have been studying/are going to have been studying He/She/It will have been studying /is going to have been studying The class will have been studying /is going to have been studying	We will have been studying /are going to have been studying You will have been studying /are going to have been studying They will have been studying /are going to have been studying The classes will have been studying /are going to have been studying
I <b>have been studying</b> English everyday for ten years.		I <b>had been studying</b> English to prepare for college.		I <b>will have been studying</b> English for ten years after this semester. I <b>am going to have been studying</b> English for ten years by the end of this semester.	

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