Verb Tenses

What's a verb?
Verbs are used to show either of two things: (a) action or (b) a state of being

Main verbs and helping verbs
The last sentence in each set of examples above uses two words: the main verb (read, be) and what’s called a helping verb (will). In some tenses, verbs can stand alone; in others, they are combined with helping verbs.

Main verbs have five forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regular verbs</th>
<th>Irregular verbs</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base form</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>give</td>
<td>These forms indicate tense and can stand alone as the main verb of a sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–s form</td>
<td>walks</td>
<td>gives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–ing form</td>
<td>walking</td>
<td>giving</td>
<td>These do not indicate tense and cannot stand alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participle</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>given</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Helping verbs come two ways. The following change form as they are used for different tenses: have, has, had, be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been

Another type of helping verb, called a modal, does not change form as it is used for different tenses. For example, the future tense makes use of the modal will.

Overview of Tenses
The tense of a verb tells us when a particular action (a) is occurring, (b) has occurred, or (c) will occur.

(a) The sun rises later every morning. (present tense)
(b) The company opened a new office in Seattle. (past tense)
(c) The radio announcer will read a traffic report. (future tense)

--Simple tenses. The main task of the simple tense is to name an action. It is less specific than the other tenses in indicating how or how often the action occurs.

--Progressive tenses. The main task of the progressive tense is to show a continuing or continuous action over a period of time. It shows that an action (a) was occurring, (b) is currently occurring, or (c) will be occurring.

(a) We were watching the game on TV.
(b) I am reading a book on African history.
(c) They will be flying to Australia in June.

--Perfect tenses. The main task of the perfect tense is to show action that occurred once or more than once and has stopped or finished. It shows that an action (a) has been completed, (b) is being completed, or (c) will be complete.
### Tenses used to refer to actions occurring in the past:

--- **Perfect present vs. simple past:**

The simple past refers to an action completed at a specific time in the past.

She went to the market three times (last week).

It is used for past actions when the time of the action is any time before now.

Have you ever gone to the shore (before now)?

The perfect present may also be used to refer to an action that has occurred over an unfinished period of time, such as today, this week, this year, in my life, and so on.

--- **Progressive past vs. simple past:**

The progressive past refers to an action that was in progress at a specific time in the past.

The birds were singing this morning at dawn.

It is also used to show an action that was in progress when something else happened.

I was reading the newspaper when you called.

The progressive past is also used to show two actions that happened at the same time.

The industry was increasing production as the consumer index was rising.

--- **Perfect past vs. simple past:**

The perfect past indicates the end of an action; it can be used to clarify time sequence.

I had read the chapter when the professor asked me the question.