

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:

	Regular verbs	Irregular verbs	Note
Base form	walk	give	These forms indicate tense and can stand alone as the main verb of a sentence
-s form	walks	gives	
Past tense	walked	gave	
-ing form	walking	giving	These do not indicate tense and cannot stand alone.
Participle	walked	given	

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

Simple	<i>I walked to work (yesterday/many times last year). She gave me the book.</i>	<i>I walk to work (every day). She gives me the book.</i>	<i>I will walk to work (tomorrow). She will give me the book.</i>
Progressive	<i>I was walking to work (when you saw me). She was giving me the book.</i>	<i>I am walking to work (now). She is giving me the book.</i>	<i>I will be walking to work (next week). She will be giving me the book.</i>
Perfect	<i>I had walked to work (by that time). She had given me the book.</i>	<i>I have walked to work (many times). She has given me the book.</i>	<i>I will have walked to work (by the time you get up). She will have given me the book.</i>
Progressive Perfect	<i>I had been walking to work (at that time). She had been giving me the book.</i>	<i>I have been walking to work (this week). She has been giving me the book.</i>	<i>I will have been walking to work (for a month on Friday). She will have been giving me the book.</i>

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.