

# Grammar Verb Tenses

A verb can take different tenses (or forms) to tell the reader when the verb's action or state of being takes place. There are twelve active verb tenses: three **simple** tenses, three **perfect** tenses, and six **progressive** tenses.

## SIMPLE TENSE

The **simple tenses** are used to express *basic* time relationships. For these tenses, the writer/ speaker is viewing the action of the sentence from the point in time when the sentence is written.

### SIMPLE PAST

The **simple past** tense portrays an action or state of being that took place *before* the time when the sentence is written. It is often formed by adding *-ed* to the end of the verb.

### SIMPLE PRESENT

The **simple present** tense is used to describe an action or state of being that occurs *at the time* the sentence is written.

### SIMPLE FUTURE

The **simple future** tense portrays an action or state of being that will occur some time *after* the sentence is written. It is often formed with the word *will* followed by the infinitive of the verb.

VERB: To walk

Time	Simple Tense
Past	walked
Present	walk
Future	will walk

## PERFECT TENSE

The **perfect tenses** are used to express more *complex* time relationships. They are created by adding a form of the verb *to have* to the past participle of the main verb. (Past participles are usually formed by adding *-ed* to the verb. See the *Verbals* handout for questions regarding participles.)

### PAST PERFECT

The **past perfect** tense shows that the verb's action was completed at some time *before a second past event*. It consists of the word *had* plus the past participle of the verb.

### PRESENT PERFECT

The **present perfect** tense indicates that the verb's action began in the past and *continued up through the time the sentence is written*. It is formed by adding the past participle of the verb to the word *have*.

### FUTURE PERFECT

The **future perfect tense** indicates that by the time of a specified future event, the verb's action *will have been completed*. It is formed by adding the past participle of the verb to the words *will have*.

VERB: To walk

Time	Perfect Tense
Past	had walked
Present	have walked
Future	will have walked

# Grammar Verb Tenses

## PROGRESSIVE TENSES

There is a **progressive tense** corresponding to each of the simple and perfect tenses. Generally, these progressive forms of a verb indicate the same time relationships between events as do their non-progressive counterparts. However, a progressive verb shows that the action of the verb is still *in progress* at the time the sentence focuses on.

The progressive tenses are created by a form of the word *to be* followed by the present participle form (the *-ing* form) of the main verb. The tense of the verb *to be* indicates whether the overall progressive verb is simple present, simple past, simple future, present perfect, past perfect, or future perfect.

### SIMPLE PAST PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the past tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

### SIMPLE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the present tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

### SIMPLE FUTURE PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the future tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

### PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the past perfect tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

### PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the present perfect tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

### FUTURE PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

Consists of the future perfect tense of the verb *to be* plus the present participle of the main verb

VERB: To walk

Time	Simple Progressive	Perfect Progressive
Past	was walking	had been walking
Present	am walking	have been walking
Future	will be walking	will have been walking

## HELPFUL HINTS ABOUT VERB TENSES

### CONSISTENCY

Be careful not to switch verb tenses inappropriately. A paper should never shift tenses unless there is a reason to do so and that reason is clear to the reader.

### WRITING ABOUT FICTION

When writing about literature or fictional events, use the present tense unless instructed otherwise by your teacher.

EXAMPLE: In Laura's personal narrative, she *describes* several events of her childhood.