

Verb Tenses: Telling Time

Verb tenses tell when an action takes place. Varying verb tenses increases the depth of your writing and allows you to be more precise in conveying time.

Simple Tenses

There are three simple tenses that help us tell when something is happening:

- **Present tense** indicates actions that take place right now or facts that are always true.
- **Past tense** indicates actions that began and ended in the past.
- **Future tense** indicates actions that will occur in the future.

- **Present:** I walk, sit, stand
- **Past:** I walked, sat, stood
- **Future:** I will walk, will sit, will stand

Complex Verb Forms

Along with each of these simple tenses, there are more complex tenses, which indicate more specific time frames and tell us something about the duration or completion of these complex verb forms.

Showing Duration

- **Present Progressive** conveys ongoing actions in the present.

Form: am/are/is + verb ending in -ing

- Right now, I **am walking** to the bus stop.
- Why **are you sitting** on the ground?

- **Past Progressive** conveys ongoing actions in the past.

Form: was/were + verb ending in -ing

- I **was doing** my homework when my friend walked in.
- We **were sleeping** when the storm rolled in.

- **Future Progressive** conveys ongoing actions in the future.

Form: will/should/shall + verb ending in -ing

- We **will be walking** to school for the next two months.
- I **should be completing** my homework this weekend.

Showing Completion

- **Present Perfect** conveys actions that began in the past and ended at an unknown time in the past or that continue into the present.

Form: has/have + past participle of verb (most end in -ed)

- Lisa **has completed** all the courses in her major.
- We **have been** friends since childhood.

- **Past Perfect** conveys actions completed at a specific time in the past or before another action in the past.

Form: had + past participle of verb (most end in -ed)

- I **had completed** my homework before it was due.
- By the age of 19, he **had earned** his Bachelor's degree.

- **Future Perfect** conveys actions that will be completed by a specific time in the future.

Form: will have + past participle of verb (most end in -ed)

- By the end of next year, I **will have perfected** my cake decorating skills.
- She **will have visited** 30 countries by the year 2016.

Showing both Duration and Completion

- **Present Perfect Progressive** indicates actions that began in the past and are continuing into the present.

Form: has/have + been + verb ending in -ing

- They **have been visiting** this restaurant for several years.
- **Have you been turning** in your homework every day?

- **Past Perfect Progressive** indicates ongoing actions in the past that began before a specific time or action.

Form: had + been + verb ending in -ing

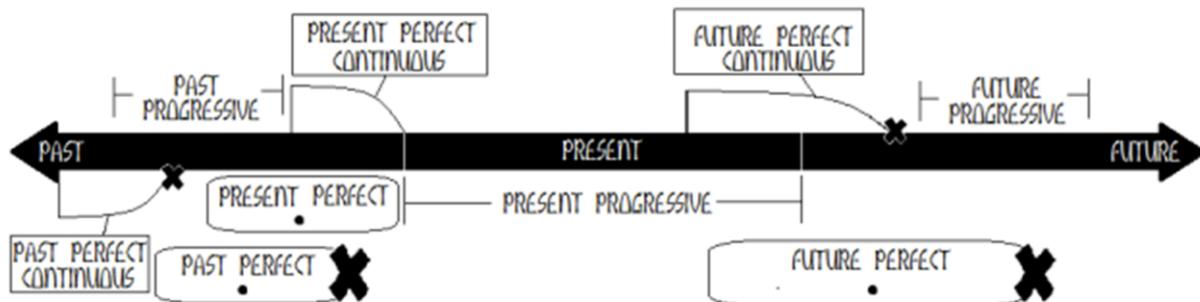
- We **had been living** together for several months until he got married.
- I **had been waiting** for two hours before John finally arrived.

- **Future Perfect Progressive** indicates actions that will be completed by a specific time in the future.

Form: will have been + verb ending in -ing

- In January, I **will have been working** here for three years.
- I **will have been running** for 13.1 miles by the time I reach the finish line.

Diagram of the Tenses



Activity

Use context clues to fill in the correct tense of the verb.

1. Tomorrow, I _____ (eat) a Spanish omelet for breakfast.
As we speak, he _____ (eat) a Spanish omelet.
Until yesterday, he _____ (never eat) a Spanish omelet.
2. She _____ (go) to the same dentist since the age of five.
We _____ (go) to the dentist yesterday.
They _____ (go) to the dentist at 10 a.m. tomorrow.
3. Lily _____ (walk) to the store, when she ran into Marvin.
Lily and Marvin _____ (walk) to the store before.
You _____ (walk) yesterday.
4. I _____ (to be) so sick of carrots; I _____ (eat) them nonstop since last week.

5. By the time I am 30, I _____ (complete) my PhD.
6. Right now, John _____ (teach) Jerry how to cook.
7. Yesterday, we _____ (see) *Insidious 2* in theatres.
8. Currently, I _____ (work) at Starbucks; by next June, I _____ (work) there for one year.
9. Theresa _____ (wait) for two hours before Alan finally _____ (arrive) at the park.
10. Even before I turned 16, I _____ (sprain) my ankle at least three times. From now on, I _____ (to be) more careful.
11. Tomorrow, they _____ (visit) us from 6 p.m. until midnight, so I will not be able to come over.

Answer Key for Activity

1. will eat, is eating, had never eaten
2. has been going, went, will go
3. was walking, have walked, walked
4. am, have been eating
5. will have completed
6. is teaching
7. saw
8. work, will have been working
9. had been waiting, arrived
10. had sprained, will be
11. will be visiting

References

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