A Review of Verb Tense

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Summary: Describes the four categories of verb tense (simple, perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive) and how present, past, and future function within each category.

Learning Objectives: To define the four categories of verb tense.

The tense of a verb indicates the time of the action or state of being that is expressed by the verb. Each of the six tenses has a basic form. All basic forms are derived from the principal parts: present (base), present participle (be verb plus –ing), past (-ed), and past participle (-en plus have, had, has). Using the correct tense of verbs when you speak and write is essential to understanding in what time period actions took place.

There are four categories of verb tenses: simple, perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive, with a version of the present, past, and future in each category. Each tense has its own meaning. When the actions take place (completed, ongoing, continuing into the future, has yet to occur) determines which tense to use.

Simple Forms
Let’s start with the simple tenses.

Present
First is the present tense, which indicates actions or conditions occurring now. Present tense is often used to state general information as well as thoughts and opinions.

Ex. Water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit.
Ex. They are angry about the decision.

Past
Next is the past tense, which indicates actions or conditions that have occurred already and do not extend into the present.

Ex. She felt better after her test.
Ex. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939.

Future
The last one of the simple tenses is the future that indicates actions that have yet to begin. To form the future tense, you will use will or shall plus the base or the present principal part of the verb.

Ex. I will graduate the year after next.
Ex. The exhibition *will come* to Houston in September.

**The question of when to use *shall* has been asked for many years, for it is often not used here in U.S. *Shall* should be used when discussing legal documents, meetings, and obligations. *Shall* is also often used when the speaker is being polite or offering an invitation. **

**Exercise 1**

Let’s test your knowledge of the information above before moving on. In each blank below, write the tense of the verb in parenthesis.

1. She _________ around the living room. (run-present)
2. We _________ our plans for the weekend. (discuss, past)
3. The boat _________ as soon as the cargo of machinery is loaded. (sail, future)
4. Natasha _________ listening to music. (enjoy, past)
5. He _________ musical comedies. (like-present)
6. I _________ you my new leather jacket. (lend, future)
7. These arguments _________ you that I am right. (convince, future)
8. Although the car is old, it _________ well. (run-present)
9. The shopper _________ to see the manager. (ask, past)
10. The man in the corner _________ lead guitar in the band. (play, present)

**Self-Check: Exercise 1 Answers**

Use the answer key below to check your answers:

1. She **runs** around the living room. (run-present)
2. We **discussed** our plans for the weekend. (discuss, past)
3. The boat **will sail** as soon as the cargo of machinery is loaded. (sail, future)
4. Natasha **enjoys** listening to music. (enjoy, past)
5. He **likes** musical comedies. (like-present)
6. I **will lend** you my new leather jacket. (lend, future)
7. These arguments **will convince** you that I am right. (convince, future)
8. Although the car is old, it **runs** well. (run-present)
9. The shopper **asked** to see the manager. (ask, past)
10. The man in the corner **plays** lead guitar in the band. (play, present)

**Exercise 2**

Identify the tense of the underlined verb in each sentence.

1. She **will attend** a conference in Washington.
2. Barbara and Marie **refused** to sign the petition.
3. The dancers **rehearse** everyday.
4. Storytelling **existed** before written history.
5. Blue jays **have** many unusual habits.
6. A squirrel **drops** its nuts when it gets frightened.
7. A good story **will have** action and drama.
8. We **spotted** a bird with red wings and tail.
9. The animals’ unpleasant shrieks **warn** other animals of danger.
10. We **will practice** our math skills this year.

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Self-Check: Exercise 2 Answers
Use the answer key below to check your answers:

1. She will attend a conference in Washington. Future
2. Barbara and Marie refused to sign the petition. Past
3. The dancers rehearse everyday. Present
4. Storytelling existed before written history. Past
5. Blue jays have many unusual habits. Present
6. A squirrel drops its nuts when it gets frightened. Present
7. A good story will have action and drama. Future
8. We spotted a bird with red wings and tail. Present
9. The animals’ unpleasant shrieks warn other animals of danger. Present
10. We will practice our math skills this year. Future

Perfect Forms
The next tenses to consider are the perfect tenses, which give information about the time frame of an action’s completion. The perfect tenses indicate the action of the verb has been completed by a specific point in the past, present, or future.

Present Perfect
The present perfect tense describes an event that has already been completed in the present. It is formed using have or has plus the past participle form of the verb (-ed, -en).

Ex. I have walked to school for five years.
Ex. Dad has written many stories of his childhood.

Past Perfect
The next tense is the past perfect, where the action was completed before a specified time in the past. To form the past perfect tense, you will use had plus the past participle form of the verb.

Ex. We had considered several alternative plans.
Ex. Bill had finished packing before the taxi arrived.

Future Perfect
The last one of the perfect tenses is future perfect, which states that the action will have been completed by a specified time in the future. To form the future perfect tense, you need to use will have or shall have plus the past participle form of the verb.

Ex. In ten years the original investment will have doubled.
Ex. The students will have used all their paper by December.

Exercise 3
Again, let’s test your knowledge before we move on. Underline the verb in each of the following sentences. Then identify the tense of each verb.

1. They had notified us of their arrival.
2. Our dogs have bitten no one.
3. The family will have finished dinner by seven.
4. We have seen that movie twice.
5. Tom will have departed before Brain’s arrival.
6. Janet has refused any credit for the team’s success.
7. By this evening, I will have cleaned the whole downstairs.
8. We had avoided each other for 20 years.
9. We had considered several alternate plans.
10. I have memorized two poems by Walt Whitman.

**Self-Check: Exercise 3 Answers**
Use the answer key below to check your answers:

1. They **had notified** us of their arrival. **Past Perfect**
2. Our dogs **have bitten** no one. **Present Perfect**
3. The family **will have finished** dinner by seven. **Future Perfect**
4. We **have seen** that movie twice. **Present Perfect**
5. Tom **will have departed** before Brain’s arrival. **Future Perfect**
6. Janet has **refused** any credit for the team’s success. **Present Perfect**
7. By this evening, I **will have cleaned** the whole downstairs. **Future Perfect**
8. We **had avoided** each other for 20 years. **Past Perfect**
9. We **had considered** several alternate plans. **Past Perfect**
10. I **have memorized** two poems by Walt Whitman. **Present Perfect**

**Exercise 4**
Write the basic form of the verb as directed in parenthesis.

1. The Johnsons ________________ three times in the past year. (move-present perfect)
2. They _______ everything they wanted to by the end of their vacation. (see-past perfect)
3. By the end of their tour, the group ____________ in eleven cities. (perform-future perfect)
4. Sharon ___________ to her counselor earlier in the day. (talk-past perfect)
5. We _______ very fond of our new neighbors. (grow-present perfect)
6. Margie ______________ before the spring semester. (graduate-future perfect)
7. We _______ three times this week. (exercise-present perfect)
8. The manager _____________ to the pitcher twice by that time. (talk-past perfect)
9. I ________ the whole kitchen by the time Mom returns. (clean-future perfect)
10. The rescuers ______________ the area for the past three hours. (search-present perfect)

**Self-Check: Exercise 4 Answers**
Use the answer key below to check your answers:

1. The Johnsons **have moved** three times in the past year. (move-present perfect)
2. They **had seen** everything they wanted to by the end of their vacation. (see-past perfect)
3. By the end of their tour, the group **will have performed** in eleven cities. (perform-future perfect)
4. Sharon **had talked** to her counselor earlier in the day. (talk-past perfect)
5. We **have grown** very fond of our new neighbors. (grow-present perfect)
6. Margie **will have graduated** before the spring semester. (graduate-future perfect)
7. We **have exercised** three times this week. (exercise-present perfect)
8. The manager **had talked** to the pitcher twice by that time. (talk-past perfect)
9. I **will have cleaned** the whole kitchen by the time Mom returns. (clean-future perfect)
10. The rescuers **have searched** the area for the past three hours. (search-present perfect)
Progressive Forms
The next set of tenses is known as the progressive forms, which means the action or conditions are unfinished (ongoing, continuing).

Present Progressive
Present progressive indicates actions are ongoing even as we speak. It is formed with the present participle with –ing plus is, am, or are.

Ex. The kids are playing outside.
Ex. Sam is attending church.

Past Progressive
With the past progressive, the action was going on during a past period being discussed. It is formed with –ing (the present participle) plus was and were.

Ex. By the 1970s, many Americans were buying smaller cars.
Ex. I was writing to you when you telephoned me.

Future Progressive
The last one of the progressive tenses is future progressive, which indicates that the action will be ongoing during some future time frame. To form the future progressive, you will use will be or shall be plus the present participle form of the verb (-ing).

Ex. A team of observers will be monitoring the elections.
Ex. Clarissa will be studying music at a special camp this summer.

Exercise 5
Supply the progressive form of the verb as directed in parenthesis.

1. Despite her height, Kate __________ to make the basketball team. (hope-present progressive)
2. The rain __________ all of our plans. (ruin-present progressive)
3. The last ferry __________ soon. (leave-future progressive)
4. The workers __________ the building. (repair-future progressive)
5. The architect __________ his plans. (explain-present progressive)
6. They __________ important political issues. (discuss-present progressive)

Self-Check: Exercise 5 Answers
Use the answer key below to check your answers.

1. Despite her height, Kate is hoping to make the basketball team. (hope-present progressive)
2. The rain is ruining all of our plans. (ruin-present progressive)
3. The last ferry will be leaving soon. (leave-future progressive)
4. The workers will be repairing the building. (repair-future progressive)
5. The architect is explaining his plans. (explain-present progressive)
6. They are discussing important political issues. (discuss-present progressive)

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**Perfect Progressive Forms**
There are also perfect progressive tenses that use a combination of perfect and progressive forms. Perfect progressive emphasizes the duration or the continuousness of the action. To write in the perfect progressive tense, you will use a form of *have* (perfect) followed by a *be* verb and *–ing* (progressive).

**Present Perfect Progressive**
The present perfect progressive describes something that began in the past, continues into the present, and may continue into the future. It is formed with *has* or *have* plus *been* and *–ing* form of the verb.

Ex. Kim *has been writing* a novel since she left high school.
Ex. The Smiths *have been breeding* dogs since 2000.

**Past Perfect Progressive**
The past perfect progressive tense describes something that began in the past, continued in the past, and concluded in the past. It is formed with *had* and *been* plus the *–ing* form of the verb.

Ex. I *had been riding* the bus until I got my license.
Ex. Frank *had been leaving* get well notes to his uncle.

**Future Perfect Progressive**
The future perfect progressive describes something that begins in the present and continues into the future. It is formed with *will have* and *been* plus the *–ing* form of the verb.

Ex. By the time the class ends, the students *will have been working* for 10 minutes without a break.
Ex. Hannah *will have been playing* the piano for five years this June.

**Exercise 6**
Write the correct form of the verb as stated in parenthesis.

1. She ___________ all afternoon. (study-past perfect progressive)
2. Susan ___________ for two hours by 9 a.m. (work-future perfect progressive)
3. Diane ___________ us a folk tale. (tell-present perfect progressive)
4. Reggie ___________ a heavy course load this year. (carry-present perfect progressive)
5. I was very relieved because I ___________ a much lower grade. (expect-past perfect progressive)
6. He ___________ for two hours by noon. (swim-future perfect progressive)
7. Nick ___________ second thoughts about the concert. (have-present perfect progressive)
8. We ___________ the dancer carefully all evening (watch-past perfect progressive)

**Self-Check: Exercise 6**
Check your answers using the sentences below.

1. She **had been studying** all afternoon. (study-past perfect progressive)
2. Susan **will have been working** for two hours by 9 a.m. (work-future perfect progressive)
3. Diane **has been telling** us a folk tale. (tell-present perfect progressive)
4. Reggie **has been carrying** a heavy course load this year. (carry-present perfect progressive)
5. I was very relieved because I **had been expecting** a much lower grade. (expect-past perfect progressive)
6. He **will have been swimming** for two hours by noon. (swim-future perfect progressive)
7. Nick **has been having** second thoughts about the concert. (have-present perfect progressive)
8. We **had been watching** the dancer carefully all evening (watch-past perfect progressive)
Verb Tense Final Review

Review 1
Identify the tense of each of the following verbs.

1. will be going
2. ride
3. was bringing
4. had kept
5. had been leaving
6. wrote
7. will have written
8. has given
9. will ride
10. will have been crying

Review 2
Conjugate the following regular and irregular verb using the given pronouns as the subject.

visit (with he)
Ex. He visits

Present:
Past:
Future:
Present Perfect:
Past Perfect:
Future Perfect:
Present Progressive:
Past Progressive:
Future Progressive:
Present Perfect Progressive:
Past Perfect Progressive:
Future Perfect Progressive:

begin (with they)

Present:
Past:
Future:
Present Perfect:
Past Perfect:
Future Perfect:
Present Progressive:
Past Progressive:
Future Progressive:
Present Perfect Progressive:
Past Perfect Progressive:
Future Perfect Progressive:
Review 3
Some of the verbs in this paragraph are in the wrong tense. Decide which verbs must be changed, then rewrite those sentences, correcting those verbs.

1) Last year for my birthday, my parents took me to New York City. 2) We visit the Empire State Building and take a boat to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. 3) I will like best the boat ride through the harbor to the Statue and Ellis Island. 4) It made me think of the boat ride my great-grandfather took to come to Ellis Island as an immigrant. 5) My father says he remembers his grandfather telling him the story of the ocean voyage. 6) When great-grandfather arrives in New York, he sees the statue. 7) I am sure that I had always remembered that story too.

Final Review Answers

Review 1

1. will be going: Future Progressive
2. ride: Present
3. was bringing: Past Progressive
4. had kept: Past Perfect
5. had been leaving: Past Perfect Progressive
6. wrote: Past
7. will have written: Future Perfect
8. has given: Present Perfect
9. will ride: Future
10. will have been crying: Future Perfect Progressive

Review 2

visit (with he)

Present: He visits
Past: He visited
Future: He shall/will visit
Present Perfect: He has visited
Past Perfect: He had visited
Future Perfect: He will have visited
Present Progressive: He is visiting
Past Progressive: He was visiting
Future Progressive: He will/shall be visiting
Present Perfect Progressive: He has been visiting
Past Perfect Progressive: He had been visiting
Future Perfect Progressive: He will have been visiting

begin (with they)

Present: They begin
Past: They began
Future: They will/shall begin
Present Perfect: They have begun
Past Perfect: They had begun
Future Perfect: They will/shall have begun
Present Progressive: They are beginning
Past Progressive: They were beginning
Future Progressive: They will/shall be beginning
Present Perfect Progressive: They have been beginning
Past Perfect Progressive: They had been beginning
Future Perfect Progressive: They will have been beginning

Review 3

1) Last year for my birthday, my parents took me to New York City. 2) We visited the Empire State Building and took a boat to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. 3) I liked best the boat ride through the harbor to the Statue and Ellis Island. 4) It made me think of the boat ride my great-grandfather took to come to Ellis Island as an immigrant. 5) My father says he still remembers his grandfather telling him the story of the ocean voyage. 6) When great-grandfather arrived in New York, he saw the statue. 7) I am sure that I will always remember that story too.