Grammar Workshop
Verb Tenses

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*Sources consulted: Purdue OWL and Grammarly Handbook
What is a Verb?

- Every basic sentence in the English language must have a noun and a verb.

- Verbs are action words.

- Verbs describe what the subject of the sentence is doing.

- Verbs can describe physical actions like movement, less concrete actions like thinking and feeling, and a state of being, as explained by the verb to be.
What is a Verb?

There are two specific uses for verbs:
- Put a motionless noun into motion, or to change its motion. If you can do it, it's an action verb. (walk, run, study, learn)
- Link the subject of the sentence to something which describes the subject. If you can’t do it, it’s probably a linking verb. (am, is)

Action Verbs:
- Susie ran a mile around the track.
  - “Ran” gets Susie moving around the track.
- Bob went to the book store.
  - “Went” gets Bob moving out the door and doing the shopping at the bookstore.

Linking Verbs:
- I am bored.
  - It’s difficult to “am,” so this is likely a linking verb. It’s connecting the subject “I” to the state of being bored.
Verb tenses are a way for the writer to express time in the English language.

There are nine basic verb tenses:

- **Simple Present**: They talk
- **Present Continuous**: They are talking
- **Present Perfect**: They have talked
- **Simple Past**: They talked
- **Past Continuous**: They were talking
- **Past Perfect**: They had talked
- **Future**: They will talk
- **Future Continuous**: They will be talking
- **Future Perfect**: They will have talked
Simple Present Tense

**Simple Present**: Used to describe a general state or action that is repeated.

How it is formed: Use the root form or add -s or -es to the end, depending on the person.

Examples:
- I **live** in Washington, DC.
- Marc **lives** in Washington, DC.
- They **live** in Washington, DC.
- I **study** chemistry every night.
- Marc **studies** chemistry every night.
Simple Present Tense
Irregular Verbs

Irregular Present Tense Verbs: “to be” - which changes for each person (am, are, is...)

Examples:
- First person singular: I am
- Second person singular: You are
- Third person singular: He/she/it is
- First person plural: We are
- Second person plural: You are
- Third person plural: They are
- I am 20 years old.
- You are 20 years old.
- He is 20 years old.
Present Continuous Tense

Present Continuous: Used to describe a temporary state or action going on now.

Tip: In English, "now" can mean: this second, today, this month, this year, this century, and so on.

How it is formed: the present tense of be + present participle (the root word + -ing).

Examples:
- I am living in Washington, DC.
- Marc is living in Washington, DC.
- I am studying chemistry every night.
- Marc is studying chemistry every night.

Remember NOT to use the present continuous tense with non-action verbs like seem and know. These verbs should use the simple present.

- She is seeming tense. [INCORRECT]
- She seems tense. [CORRECT]
Present Continuous Tense

Additional Examples:
- They [learn] ____ grammar rules right now.
- They *are learning* grammar rules right now.
- He [watch]_____ television.
- He *is watching* television.
- I [study] _____ to become a lawyer.
- I *am studying* to become a lawyer.
- I [read]_____ the book Harry Potter.
- I *am reading* the book Harry Potter.
Simple Past Tense

**Simple Past:** Used to describe action at a definite time in the past.

**How it is formed:** Add -ed to the end of the root form. If the verb already ends in -e, we just add -d.

**Examples:**

- Marc *lived* in Washington, DC last year.
- I *changed* the baby’s diaper this morning.
- Marc *changed* the car tire last week.
- I *walked* the dog yesterday.
- They *walked* the dog together last week.
Irregular past tense verbs follow no pattern when they change to the simple past tense.

*Tip:* Check a dictionary if you are unsure what the past tense may be!

- See – saw
- Build – built
- Go – went
- Do – did
- Leap – leapt
- Rise – rose
- Dig – dug

Some verbs don’t change from their present form.

- Put – put
- Cut – cut
- Set – set
- Cost – cost
- Hit – hit
Past Continuous Tense

Additional Examples:
- They [learn] ____ grammar rules yesterday.
- They **were learning** grammar rules yesterday.
- He [watch]_____ television last night.
- He **was watching** television last night.
- I [study] _____ to become a lawyer last semester.
- I **was studying** to become a lawyer last semester.
- I [read]_____ the book Harry Potter when you called.
- I **was reading** the book Harry Potter when you called.
Past Continuous Tense

Past continuous: used for long, ongoing action at or during a time in the past.

How it is formed: the past tense of be + the present participle (the root word = -ing).

Examples:
- It was snowing.

When one action is happening at another particular time:
- It was snowing at noon.
- It was snowing during lunch.

When one action is happening at the same time as another:
- It was raining while I was out walking.

Remember NOT to use the past continuous tense with non-action verbs like seem and know. These verbs should use the simple past tense.
- I was knowing my co-worker quite well. [INCORRECT]
- I knew my co-worker quite well. [CORRECT]

Tip: If you find this confusing, stick with the simple past tense!
Simple Future Tense

Simple future: the tense we use when something will begin and end later.

How it is formed: Add will in front of the root word. Going to is also used for actions in the future.

Examples:
- I will learn how to cook.
- Susie will study tonight.
- I am going to sleep all day.
- Will you come to the pool with us?
- Are you going to become the next president?
Future Continuous Tense

Future continuous: relates one action in the future to another specific action or time.

How it is formed: **will** + **be** + **present participle** (root word + -ing).

Examples:
- We **will be going** to the concert after work.
- **Will** you **be joining** us?
- They **will be arriving** at the airport at 9:00pm tonight.
- **I’ll be returning** home next Thursday.

Remember NOT to use the future continuous tense with non-action verbs like seem and know; AND be. These verbs should use the **simple future**.
- She **will be being** here at 3:00. [INCORRECT]
- She **will be** here at 3:00. [CORRECT]
Future Continuous Tense

Additional Examples:
- They [learn] ____ grammar rules tomorrow.
- They *will be learning* grammar rules tomorrow.
- He [watch]______ television tonight.
- He *will be watching* television tonight.
- I [study] _____ to become a lawyer next semester.
- I *will be studying* to become a lawyer next semester.
- I [read]_____ the book Harry Potter after class.
- I *am going to be reading* the book Harry Potter after class.
Need Additional Help?

- Visit the Academic Support and Access Center: Mary Graydon Center, Room 243, 202-885-3360
  - We recommend that you book an appointment online first:
Need Additional Help?

Helpful Online Resources

- **American University Writing Lab Tips:**
  http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/Writing-Lab-Writing-Tips.cfm

- **Purdue Online Writing Lab (Owl):**
  owl.english.purdue.edu

- **UNC Writing Center:**
  writingcenter.unc.edu

- **The George Mason University Writing Center:**
  http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/

- **Grammarly Handbook:**
  http://www.grammarly.com/handbook/