

Grammar Workshop

Verb Tenses*



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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



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:

- I lived in Washington, DC in 2008.
- 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.

Simple Past Tense

Irregular Verbs



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 a 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.

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 - We recommend that you book an appointment online first:

The screenshot shows the website for the American University Academic Support & Access Center. The header includes the American University logo and navigation links for Admissions, Academics, Research, University Life, Alumni, and About. The main content area features a video player for the Writing Lab, which offers free and individual writing assistance. Below the video, there are sections for 'WHERE TO GET THE HELP YOU NEED IN THE ASAC', 'IMPORTANT DATES', and 'QUICK LINKS'. The 'QUICK LINKS' section includes links for Test Accommodations Request Form, Learning Services Program, Request a Tutor, ASAC Workshop Schedule, Current SI Schedule, Request an Interpreter, Register for Accommodations for the First Time, and Apply to Tutor. The 'WRITING LAB OPEN FOR' section is partially visible at the bottom right.

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/>
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