

# 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, go)
- 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

# Present Perfect Tense



Present Perfect Tense: Used when an action began in the past yet is still relevant.

How it is formed: the present tense of have + the past participle.

Examples:

They **have seen** the movie Star Wars.

She **has walked** 20 miles to support breast cancer research.

It **has been** cold and snowy this week.

I **have studied** hard all day.

# Present Perfect Tense



## Examples:

- I have seen that movie twenty times.
- I think I have met him once before.
- There have been many earthquakes in California.
- People have traveled to the Moon.
- People have not traveled to Mars.
- Have you read the book yet?
- Nobody has ever climbed that mountain.
- A: Has there ever been a war in the United States?
- B: Yes, there has been a war in the United States.

# Past Perfect Tense



Past Perfect Tense: Used to show that one action in a sentence finishes before a second action begins.

- Words like before and after are indicators that the past perfect tense may be used; however, there are no strict rules for this situation.
- You must choose the best verb tense for your sentence.

How it is formed: I had, you had, he/she had, we had, you had or they had + past participle.

## Examples:

After **he tied** his shoes, he went for a run.

After **he had tied** his shoes, he went for a run.

The waiter poured the wine, but not until dinner **had been served**.

The child broke the remote control before the mother **had noticed** him playing with it.

# Past Perfect Tense



## Examples:

- I had never seen such a beautiful beach before I went to Kauai.
- I did not have any money because I had lost my wallet.
- Tony knew Istanbul so well because he had visited the city several times.
- Had Susan ever studied Thai before she moved to Thailand?
- She only understood the movie because she had read the book.
- Kristine had never been to an opera before last night.
- We were not able to get a hotel room because we had not booked in advance.



# Future Perfect Tense



Future Perfect Tense: used to talk about an action that will be finished before something else happens in the future.

How it is formed: will + have + the past participle.

Look for key words which suggest the action is in the future, such as later, tomorrow, next week and next year.

Examples:

I promise I **will have** this paper **finished** by the end of today.

Hopefully, the city **will have salted** the roads before the snow arrives.

**Will** you **have taken** the exam by next week?

We **will have eaten** all the food by the time he arrives.

# Future Perfect Tense



## Examples:

- By next November, I will have received my promotion.
- By the time he gets home, she is going to have cleaned the entire house.
- I am not going to have finished this test by 3 o'clock.
- Will she have learned enough Chinese to communicate before she moves to Beijing?
- Sam is probably going to have completed the proposal by the time he leaves this afternoon.
- By the time I finish this course, I will have taken ten tests.
- How many countries are you going to have visited by the time you turn 50?

# Conditional Sentences



Conditional sentences usually include an “if” clause expressing a condition.

Four common types of conditional sentences:

- Present Habitual
- Future
- Present/Future “Unreal”
- Past “Unreal”

Modal verbs may be the key:

- can/could, will/would, might

With “if” clauses, we always use were rather than was, even for third person singular subjects

# Conditional: Present Habitual



Present Habitual: The “if” clause expresses a possible condition in the present (using the simple present tense). The main clause expresses the result (using the simple present tense).

## Examples:

- I **study** every day **if** I have time.
- **If** people are dissatisfied with their lives in their native country, they sometimes **emigrate** to other countries.

# Conditional: Future



Future: the “if” clause expresses a possible condition in the future (using the simple present or present continuous tense). The main clause expresses the result using the future tense with will or a modal verb such as can, may, might, will would.

## Examples:

- I **will study** tonight if I **have** time.
- If people **can find** jobs and earn a good living in their native country, they usually **will not emigrate**.

# Conditional: Present/Future “Unreal”



Present/Future “Unreal”: The “if” clause expresses an imagined or untrue condition in the present or future (using the simple past or past continuous tense). The main clause expresses the result (using the conditional tense with would, could or might).

## Examples:

I **would study** more if I **had** more free time.

You **might want** to move to another country if a lot of your relatives **were living** there.

# Conditional: Past “Unreal”



Past “Unreal”: The “if” clause expresses an imagined or untrue condition in the past (using the past perfect tense). The main clause expresses the result (using the past conditional tense with would have, could have, or might have).

## Examples:

- I **would have studied** yesterday if I **had had** the time.
- More students **would have applied** to college in 2015 if the college **had offered** more financial aid.

# Conditional Sentences: “Should”



“Should” is often used in conditional clauses expressing possibilities. By using “should” in the if-clause you are suggesting that something is unlikely or not particularly probable.

## Examples:

- If she should come, ask her to wait. (She is unlikely to come, but if she COMES, ask her to wait.)
- If they should attack us again, we will give them a warm reception. (They are unlikely to attack us again, but if they DO, we will make it memorable for them as well.)

“Should” can also go at the beginning of the sentence. In this case, “if” is dropped:

- Should she fail the test, she will not get her driver’s license.

Instead of “should” you can also use “happen” in the if clause:

- If you happen to meet Mary, tell her that dinner has been postponed.
- If you should meet Mary tell her that dinner has been postponed.

“Should” and “happen” can be used together:

- If you should happen to lose your job, how will you pay rent?



# Conditional Sentences: “Would”



“Would have” in the “if” clause:

- There are times in real or unreal conditional sentences where the “if” clause, or the condition is implied
- How it is formed: If + would have + past participle
- Examples:
  - “If you would have told me you needed a ride, I would have left earlier.”
  - “If I would have cleaned the house, I could have gone to the movies.”

\*These sentences express a condition that was likely, but did not happen in the past. The speaker in the first sentence was capable of leaving early, but did not. Along these same lines, the speaker in the second sentence is saying they were capable of cleaning the house, but did not. These are all conditions that are likely, but did not happen.

# Conditional Sentences: “Would” is Missing



Missing “would” in conditional sentences:

- It may seem that conditional sentences omitting the word “would” suggest real conditional, as the word “would” generally implies that which is unknown, BUT
- Conditional sentences use modal verbs instead of the word “would”

The following expresses the construction of modal verbs:

- would + can = could
  - If I could find the energy, I will study for my exam.
  - The speaker explains that it is unknown if they will find the energy to study. They can study if it is found.
- would + shall = should
  - If any should call, please take a message.
  - The speaker is requesting for the listener to take a message if someone calls. It is unknown if someone will call.
- would + may + might
  - If I might say, I am going to see the doctor on Monday.
  - Since the words “could”, “should” and “might” indicate conditions, they can not be used with the word “would”

# Active vs. Passive Verbs



- While not technically wrong, it is not considered good style to use too many passive verbs in English.
- Too many passive verbs can make writing overly wordy.
- Active verbs can make your writing strong and more concise.
- Tip: Use active verbs unless you have a special reason to use a passive verb. (e.g., when you want to emphasize the original object of the verb or when you want to omit the original subjects)

# Active Verbs



Active verbs: Used when writing in the active voice.

- The emphasis is on the subject which is doing the action.
- Any tense can be used with active verbs.

Examples:

- The **teacher** taught the students.
- The **woman** walked the dog.
- **You** should write the essay.
- **We** must have walked for three hours.
- There will be **snow** tomorrow.

# Passive Verbs



Passive Verbs: Used when writing in the passive voice.

- The emphasis is on what is being done to the object of the sentence.
- The key word “by” can often be used to identify the passive voice.
- Any tense can be used with passive verbs.

Examples: (Notice the word “by,” which clues us in to the passive voice)

- The **students** were being taught by the teacher.
- The **dog** was being walked by the woman.
- The **essay** should have been written by you, not by your friend.
- The **fire department** has been notified.

# Passive vs. Active



Converting passive voice to active voice:

- The **students** were being taught by the teacher. (Passive)
- The teacher taught the students. (Active)
- The **dog** was being walked by the woman. (Passive)
- The woman walked the dog. (Active)
- The **essay** should have been written by you, not by your friend. (Passive)
- You should have written the essay, not your friend. (Active)
- The **fire department** has been notified. (Passive)
- I notified the fire department. (Active)

# 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:

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](http://owl.english.purdue.edu)
- **UNC Writing Center:** [writingcenter.unc.edu](http://writingcenter.unc.edu)
- **The George Mason University Writing Center:**  
<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>
- **Grammarly Handbook:**  
<http://www.grammarly.com/handbook/>