

Verb Tenses for Time

Verb tenses as related to time

Present time

Verb forms	Uses	Examples
Present Simple	Habits	He drives to work most mornings.
	General truths / facts	Water freezes at 0 °C.
	States (e.g. Feelings, opinions)	I like coffee.
Present Continuous	Temporary events happening in the present	I'm living in Madrid at the moment.
	Characteristic behaviour (often irritating)	She's always leaving the door open.
Past Simple / Continuous	Unreal states / actions	If I had a video I'd record it for you. It's time we were going .
Will + Base Form	Habits (sometimes irritating)	He'll sometimes work until midnight.

Past Time, as seen from the present

Verb forms	Uses	Examples
Present Perfect Simple	Past experiences or actions with present importance	Have you read that book?
	Unfinished states / habits	I've lived in Edinburgh for ages.
Present Perfect Continuous	Unfinished temporary actions / situations (focus on the actions / situation)	Tom's been working there since 1972.
	Focus on actions in progress leading to present result.	He's been cooking all day. That's why he's so exhausted.

Past Time

Verb forms	Uses	Examples
Past Simple	Completed states / actions / habits (thinking of specific time / period)	I was happy as a child.
Used to + Base Form	Habits / states that no longer exist	Sue used to like living here.
Would + Base Form	Habits that no longer exist (no contrast)	We'd often argue when being married.
Past Continuous	Temporary actions / states / habits in progress	I was talking to her while the tv was on.
Was/Were + going to + Base Form	Future in the past (unfulfilled intention)	They were going to phone but they forgot.
Past Perfect Simple	Past states / actions happening before a specific time in the past.	They'd already gone to bed when he phoned.
	Unreal states / actions	If I'd seen him I would have told you.
Past Perfect Continuous	Temporary actions / situations before a specific time in the past.	They'd been listening to the radio for a while when it stopped working.

Future Time

Verb forms	Uses	Examples
Will + Base Form	Predictions based on personal opinion or conviction	Lucy will pass that exam.
	Spontaneous decisions (offers, promises, etc)	Wait. I'll help you.
Be + going to + Base Form	Predictions based on evidence	Look at those clouds! It's going to rain .
	Plans / Decisions already made	I'm going to buy a new car.
Present Continuous	Arrangements already made	I'm seeing the doctor at six o'clock.
Present Simple	Fixed events in the future, especially timetables	The train leaves at eight thirty.
	After time expressions	When I see him, I'll tell him what you said.
Future Continuous	Temporary events in progress	Next week we'll be sitting on the beach.
	Inevitable events	I'll be seeing you next lesson.
Future Perfect Simple	Actions completed by specific time (the past in the future)	I'll have gone by the time you arrive.
Future Perfect Continuous	Actions / situations continuing up to a future moment	By the end of this year, I'll have been working here for ten years.