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Verb tenses and aspects

63 Summary

A finite verb phrase is present tense or past tense. It can also have perfect aspect (*have* + past participle) or continuous aspect (*be* + ing-form). The tenses and aspects can combine in the following ways.

Present continuous and present simple ▷ 64

We **are playing** cards now.

We **play** in the orchestra every week.

Present perfect and past simple ▷ 65

We **have played** two games already.

We **played** tennis yesterday.

Past continuous ▷ 66

We **were playing** cards at the time.

Present perfect continuous ▷ 67

We **have been playing** cards all evening.

Past perfect and past perfect continuous ▷ 68

We **had played** the game before then.

We **had been playing** for ages.

OVERVIEW: uses of tenses and aspects ▷ 69

Each of the eight forms above has a different meaning, depending on such things as the time and length of an action, and how the speaker sees it.

64 Present continuous and present simple

MACBETH

Andrew: What **are** you **reading**?

Sadie: 'Macbeth'. We're **doing** it in English. Our class **is going** to the theatre to see it next week. Mr Adams **is taking** us.

Andrew: What's it about?

Sadie: Well, Macbeth **murders** the King of Scotland. But it **doesn't do** him any good.

Andrew: Mr Davis **takes** us for English. We **aren't doing** Shakespeare though.

Sadie: Mr Adams **loves** Shakespeare. He's always **quoting** bits at us. Shakespeare **is** England's greatest writer, he **says**.

1 Form

Present continuous: present of <i>be</i> + active participle	Present simple: base form/s-form
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<i>I am reading</i> <i>you/we/they are reading</i> <i>he/she it is reading</i>	<i>If/you/we/they read</i> <i>he/she/it reads</i>
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Negative

<i>I am not reading</i> <i>you/we/they are not reading</i> <i>he/she/it is not reading</i>	<i>If/you/we they do not read</i> <i>he/she/it does not read</i>
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Questions

<i>am I reading?</i> <i>are you/we/they reading?</i> <i>is he/she it reading?</i>	<i>do If/you/we/they read?</i> <i>does he/she/it read?</i>
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In present simple questions and negatives we use *do/does* and the base form of the verb.

NOT *He does-not reads* and NOT *Does he reads?*

NOTE

- There are some spelling rules for the participle.
Leaving out *e*: *lose* → *losing* ▷ 292(1)
Doubling of some consonants: *stop* → *stopping* ▷ 293
- There are some spelling rules for the s-form.
Adding *es* after a sibilant sound: *push* → *pushes* ▷ 290(1)
Y changing to *ie*: *hurry* → *hurries* ▷ 294
- For pronunciation of the *s/es* ending, ▷ 290(3).

2 Use

a An action continuing for a period

We use the present continuous for a present action over a period of time, something that we are in the middle of now. The action has started but it hasn't finished yet.

What are you reading? ~ 'Macbeth'. *It's raining now, look.*

Hurry up. Your friends are waiting for you. I'm just ironing this shirt.

Some typical time expressions with the present continuous are *now, at the moment, at present, just, already* and *still*.

We need not be doing the action at the moment of speaking.

I'm reading an interesting book. I can't remember what it's called.

We'd better get home. We're decorating the living-room at the moment.

b A state

We normally use the present simple for a present state: a feeling, opinion or relation.

Mr Adams loves Shakespeare. I think it's a good idea.

Who knows the answer? This book belongs to my sister.

Silicon is a chemical element. York lies on the River Ouse.

NOTE

We use the present simple for permanent states. With temporary states, states which go on only for a short time, we can sometimes use the present continuous. For details, ▷ 62.

The weather looks/is looking better today.

c Repeated actions

We use the present simple for repeated actions such as routines and habits, things that happen again and again. We see the series of actions as permanent, without end.

*Bob works in Avonmouth. He usually **drives** to work.*

*We **do** lots of things in our spare time.*

*I **don't** often see Sarah.*

*The old man **takes** the dog for a walk every morning.*

Typical time expressions with the present simple are *always, often, usually, sometimes, ever/never, every day/week etc; once/twice a week etc; on Friday(s) etc; in the morning(s)/evening(s), at ten o'clock etc.*

We also use the present simple for permanent facts, things that always happen.

*Food **gives** you energy. Paint **dries** quicker in summer.*

But we use the present continuous when a series of actions is temporary, only for a period of time.

*My car's off the road. I'm **travelling** to work by bus this week.*

*We're **doing** 'Macbeth' in English.*

*Bob's **working** in Avonmouth at the moment. But they may be moving him to head office in Birmingham.*

NOTE

a We use the present simple to talk about a permanent routine, whether or not the action is happening at the moment.

*You're walking today. ~ Yes, I quite often **walk** to work.*

*You're walking today. You usually **drive**, don't you?*

b We use the present continuous to say that we are regularly in the middle of something.

*At seven we're usually **having** supper. (= At seven we're in the middle of supper.)*

Compare the present simple for a complete action.

*At seven we usually **have** supper. (= Seven is our usual time for supper.)*

We can talk about two actions.

*Whenever I see Graham, he's **wearing** a tracksuit.*

*I like to listen to music when I'm **driving**.*

c We can also use the present simple to say what is the right way to do something.

*You **turn** left at the church. You **put** your money in here.*

d The present continuous with *always*

There is a special use of *always* with the continuous.

*They're **always giving** parties, those people next door.*

*I'm **always losing** things. I can never find anything.*

*Mr Adams **is always quoting** bits of Shakespeare.*

In this pattern *always* means 'very often' or 'too often'.

Compare these sentences.

*Our teacher **always gives** us a test. (= every lesson)*

*Our teacher **is always giving** us tests. (= very often)*

e An instant action

The present simple is also used to describe actions as they happen, for example in a commentary.

*Hacker **passes** the ball to Short. Short **moves** inside, but Burley **wins** it back for United.*

The speaker sees these actions as instant, happening in a moment. For actions over a period, we use the continuous.

*United **are playing** really well now. The crowd **are cheering** them on.*

65 Present perfect and past simple

We can also use the present (instead of the past) to tell a story. It makes the action seem more direct, as if happening now.

I'm standing outside the bank, and a man comes up to me and grabs hold of my arm.

We also use the present for actions in films, plays and books.

Macbeth murders the King of Scotland, who is staying at his castle.

NOTE

a We can also use the present simple with a performative verb, e.g. *promise*. ▷ 16(3)

I promise I won't forget. I suggest we go. Yes, I agree.

b For the present simple after *here/there*, ▷ 49(3b).

c The present simple is used in headlines for a recent action: *Rail fares go up*.
In normal style we use the present perfect: *Rail fares have gone up*.

f Verbs of reporting

We can report the written word with a present simple verb. We see the written statement as existing in the present.

It says/said in the paper that there's going to be a strike.

The notice warns passengers to take care.

The letter explains everything.

We can also do this with reports of spoken words that we have heard recently. ▷ 268(1a)

Shakespeare is England's greatest writer, Mr Adams says/said.

g The future

We can use the present continuous to talk about what someone has arranged to do and the present simple for actions and events which are part of a timetable. ▷ 73

Sadie is coming to stay with us next week.

The ferry gets into Rotterdam at six o'clock tomorrow morning.

We also use the present simple in some sub clauses of future time. ▷ 77

If you need any help tomorrow, let me know.

65 Present perfect and past simple

THE SKI SHOP

Debbie: *Have you seen the ski shop that's just opened in the High Street?*

Nicola: *Yes, it opened last week, didn't it? I haven't been in there yet.*

Debbie: *I went in yesterday. It's really good. I bought some gloves. We're going to Italy next winter, and I can buy clothes there.*

Nicola: *I haven't skied for ages actually. I've got some skis – I've had them for years. I used to ski a lot when I was younger.*

Debbie: *Where did you go?*

Nicola: *We went to Austria a few times.*

Debbie: *I've been to Scotland twice, but I've never done any skiing abroad. I'm really looking forward to Italy.*

1 Form

Present perfect: present of <i>have</i> + past participle	Past simple: past form
<i>I/you/we/they have opened</i> <i>he/she/it has opened</i>	<i>someone opened</i>
Negative <i>I/you/we/they have not opened</i> <i>he/she/it has not opened</i>	<i>someone did not open</i>
Questions <i>have I/you/we/they opened?</i> <i>has he/she/it opened?</i>	<i>did someone open?</i>

Some participles and past forms are irregular, e.g. *seen, bought*. ▷ 300

The perfect auxiliary is always *have*.

NOT *They are opened the shop* and NOT *I am hurt myself*.

In past simple questions and negatives we use *did* and the base form of the verb.

NOT *It did not opened* and NOT *Did it opened?*

NOTE

a There are some spelling rules for the ed-form.

Adding *d* after *e*: *close* → *closed* ▷ 291 (1)

Doubling of some consonants: *stop* → *stopped* ▷ 293

Y changing to *i*: *hurry* → *hurried* ▷ 294

b For pronunciation of the *ed* ending, ▷ 291(2).

2 Use of the present perfect

The present perfect tells us about the past and about the present. We use it for an action in the period leading up to the present.

The shop has just opened. *The visitors have arrived.*

The post hasn't come yet. *Have you ever ridden a horse?*

The visitors have arrived means that the visitors are here *now*.

We can also use the present perfect for repeated actions.

Debbie has been to Scotland twice. *I've ridden lots of times.*

We've often talked about emigrating.

We can also use the present perfect for states.

I've had these skis for years. *The shop has been open a week.*

I've always known about you and Diana.

Some typical **time expressions** with the present perfect are *just, recently, lately, already, before, so far, still, ever/never, today, this morning/evening, for weeks/years, since 1988*. Some of these are also used with the past simple. ▷ (5)

NOTE For *been to* and *gone to*, ▷ 84(6).

3 Use of the past simple

- a We use the past simple for an action in the past.

*The shop **opened** last week. I **bought** some gloves yesterday.*

*The earthquake **happened** in 1905. I **slept** badly.*

*When **did** the first Winter Olympics **take place**?*

The time of the action (*last week*) is over.

The past is the normal tense in stories.

*Once upon a time a Princess **went** into a wood and **sat** down by a stream.*

Some typical **time expressions** with the past simple are *yesterday, this morning/evening, last week/year, a week/month ago, that day/afternoon, the other day/week, at eleven o'clock, on Tuesday, in 1990, just, recently, once, earlier, then, next, after that*. Some of these are also used with the present perfect. ▷ (5)

NOTE

- a With the past simple we often say *when* the action happened.

*I **bought** some gloves **yesterday**.*

*I **went** in the shop **yesterday**. It's really good. I **bought** some gloves.*

It is clear from the context that the action *bought* happened yesterday.

Sometimes there is no phrase of time, but we understand a definite time in the past.

*I **didn't eat** any breakfast. My sister **took** this photo.*

- b A phrase with *ago* means a finished time. It does not include the present, even though we measure it from the present. Compare these sentences.

*I **saw** that film on Wednesday/two days **ago**.*

*I've **seen** that film.*

- b We can also use the past simple for repeated actions.

*We **went** to Austria a few times. The children always **played** in the garden.*

We can also use the past simple for states.

*I **was** younger then. The Romans **had** a huge Empire.*

*We **stayed** on the Riviera for several weeks.*

NOTE

- a There are other ways of expressing repeated actions in the past. ▷ 100

*We **used to go** to Austria. The children **would** always play in the garden.*

- b For the past tense in a tentative request, e.g. *I **wanted** to ask you something*, ▷ 61(1) Note.

For the past tense expressing something unreal, e.g. *I wish I **had** more money*, ▷ 241(3).

For the past tense expressing a possible future action, e.g. *If I **told** you, you'd laugh*, ▷ 257(4c).

4 Present perfect or past simple?

- a The choice depends on whether the speaker sees the action as related to the present or as in the past.

*The shop **has just opened**.*

*The shop **opened** last week.*

The two sentences can refer to the same action. The present perfect tells us something about the present: the shop is open now. But the past simple means a finished time (*last week*). It does not tell us about the present.

Present: *The shop **has just opened**. (So it's open now.)*

Past: *The shop **opened** last week. It's doing very well.*

*The shop **opened** last week. Then it closed again two days later.*

Present: *The car **has broken down**. (So I have no transport now.)*

Past: *The car **broke down**. It's still off the road.*

*The car **broke down**. But luckily we got it going again.*

- b When we use the present perfect for a state, it means that the state still exists **now**.
If the state is over, we use the past.
I've had these skis for years.
I had those skis for years. (Then I sold them.)
I've been here since three o'clock.
I was there from three o'clock to about five. (Then I left.)
Compare the past simple for an action.
I bought these skis years ago. I arrived here at three o'clock.
- c When we use the present perfect for repeated actions, it means that the action **may** happen again. The past simple means that the series of actions is over.
Gayle has acted in more than fifty films. (Her career has continued up to now.)
Gayle acted in more than fifty films. (She is dead, or her career is over.)
- d Look at this news report.
There has been a serious accident on the M6. It happened at ten o'clock this morning near Preston when a lorry went out of control and collided with a car ...
The present perfect is used to give the fact of the accident and the past simple for details such as when and how it happened. We often use the present perfect to first mention a topic and the past simple for the details.
I've just been on a skiing holiday. ~ Oh, where did you go?
Have you sent in your application? ~ Yes, I sent it in ages ago.

5 Adverbials of time with the present perfect and past simple

Some adverbials used with both forms are *just, recently, already, once/twice* etc, *ever/never, today, this morning/week* etc and phrases with *for* and *since*. For American usage, ▷ 303(6).

- a With *just* and *recently* there is little difference in meaning.
I've just heard the news./I just heard the news.
We've recently moved house./We recently moved house.
Compare these examples with *already*.
I've already heard the news. (before now)
I already knew before you told me. (before then)
- b *Once, twice* etc with the present perfect means the number of times the action has happened up to now.
We've been to Scotland once/lots of times.
This is the third time my car has broken down this month.
With the simple past *once* usually means 'at a time in the past'.
We went to Scotland once.
Ever/never with the present perfect means 'in all the time up to now'. With the simple past it refers to a finished period.
Have you ever visited our showroom?
Did you ever visit our old showroom?
- c We can use *this morning, this afternoon* and *today* with the present perfect when they include the present time. When the time is over, we use the past.
It has been windy this morning. (The morning is not yet over.)
It was windy this morning. (It is afternoon or evening.)

With *today* there is little difference in meaning.

*It **has been** windy today.* (The day is not yet over.)

*It **was** windy today.* (The day is over.)

Both sentences are spoken late in the day. The second must be in the evening. The speaker sees the day as over.

We use the present perfect with *this week/month/year* when we mean the whole period up to now.

*I've seen a lot of television **this week**.*

We use the simple past for one time during the period.

*I **saw** an interesting programme **this week**.*

We might say this on Friday about something two or three days earlier.

We often use the negative with phrases of unfinished time.

*It **hasn't been** very warm today.*

*I **haven't seen** much television **this week**.*

d We often use *for* and *since* with the negative present perfect.

*I **haven't skied for** years./I **haven't skied since** 1988.*

We can also use *since* with a clause.

*I **haven't skied since** I was twelve.*

Compare the past simple.

*I last **skied** years ago/in 1988/when I was twelve.*

We can also use a phrase with *for* with the past simple to say how long something went on.

*I **skied for** hours.*

NOTE

a We can use a pattern with *it* to emphasize the time.

*It's years since I **skied**/I've **skied**. It was in 1988 (that) I last **skied**.*

b *I've been here (for) a month* means that I arrived here a month ago. *I am here for a month* means that I have arranged to stay here for a month in total.

66 Past continuous

AN UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT

*'I **was going** home from the pub at quarter to eleven. There was a full moon. I **was walking** over the bridge when I saw the UFO. It was quite low. It was long and thin, shaped like a cigar. It appeared to be made of aluminium. It **was travelling** east to west, towards Warminster. I didn't know what to do. I didn't have a camera of course. I watched it for a minute and then it went behind a cloud.'*

1 Form

Past of *be* + active participle

*I/he/she/it **was** flying*

*you/we/they **were** flying*

Negative

*I/he/she/it **was not** flying*

*you/we/they **were not** flying*

Questions

***was** I/he/she/it flying?*

***were** you/we/they flying?*

2 Use

a An action over a past period

We use the past continuous for an action over a period of past time, something that we were in the middle of.

*At quarter to eleven I **was walking** home.*

*The UFO **was travelling** east to west.*

*I **wasn't sleeping**, so I got up.*

*I looked into the room. All the old people **were watching** television.*

Compare the present continuous and past continuous.

*The UFO **is travelling** west. (It **is** in the middle of its journey.)*

*The UFO **was travelling** west. (It **was** in the middle of its journey.)*

But for a complete action in the past, we use the past simple.

*The UFO **went** behind a cloud.*

In these examples the past continuous means an action over a whole period.

*The salesman **was travelling** from Monday to Friday.*

*We **were watching** for UFOs all night. We **never went** to sleep.*

Here we could also use the past simple.

Period of time: *He **was travelling** all week. He **was** very tired.*

Complete action: *He **travelled** all week. He **drove** a long way.*

b Past continuous and past simple

The period of a past continuous action can include a clock time.

*I **was walking** home **at quarter to eleven**.*

It can also include another action.

*I **was walking** home **when I saw** the UFO.*

Here the speaker sees one action as happening around another. The past continuous is the longer, background action (*walking*), and the past simple is the shorter, complete action (*saw*). The shorter action interrupted the longer one.

Here are some more examples.

*Tim **was washing** his hair **when** the doorbell **rang**.*

*I **had** a sudden idea **when/while/as** I **was waiting** in a traffic queue.*

*The sun **was shining** **when** the campers **woke**.*

When two actions both went on during the same period of time, we use the past continuous for both.

*Tim **was washing** his hair **while** I **was cleaning** up the kitchen.*

When one complete action followed another, we use the past simple for both.

*Tim **got up** **when** the doorbell **rang**. (= The doorbell rang and then Tim got up.)*

c Past states

For a past state we normally use the past simple.

*My grandmother **loved** this house.*

*I **didn't know** what to do.*

*The UFO **appeared** to be made of aluminium. It **had** a shape like a cigar.*

NOTE

With temporary states we can sometimes use the past continuous. For details, ▷ 62.

*I **didn't feel/wasn't feeling** very well.*

Other uses of the past continuous

- a We can use the past continuous for repeated actions which are temporary, only for a period.

*My car was off the road. I **was travelling** to work by bus that week.*

Compare *I'm travelling to work by bus this week.* ▷ 64(2c)

- b We can use the past continuous for a past arrangement.

*I was on my way to the pub. I **was meeting** James there.*

(= I had arranged to meet James there.)

For *I'm meeting James at the pub tonight,* ▷ 73(1).

- c With the continuous, *always* means 'very often' or 'too often'.

*Do you remember Mr Adams? He **was always quoting** Shakespeare.*

For examples with the present continuous, ▷ 64(2d).

67 Present perfect continuous

GOING INTO HOSPITAL

Mrs Webster: *I shall have to go into hospital some time to have an operation on my leg.*

Ted: *Are you on the waiting list?*

Mrs Webster: *Yes, I've been waiting for three years.*

Ted: *Three years! That's awful! You've been suffering all that time.*

Mrs Webster: *Well, I have to use the wheelchair, that's all.*

Ted: *They've been cutting expenditure, trying to save money. It's not right.*

Mrs Webster: *My son David has written to them three times. He's been trying to get me in quicker. I don't know if it'll do any good.*

1 Form

Present of *have + been + active participle*

*If/you/we/they **have been** waiting*

*he/she/it **has been** waiting*

Negative

*If/you/we/they **have not been** waiting*

*he/she/it **has not been** waiting*

Questions

***have** If/you/we/they **been** waiting?*

***has** he/she/it **been** waiting?*

2 Use

- a We use the present perfect continuous for an action over a period of time up to now, the period leading up to the present.

I've been waiting for three years.

The government has been cutting expenditure.

How long have you been using a wheelchair?

The roof has been leaking. The carpet's wet.

The speaker looks back from the present and so uses the perfect.

NOT *I wait for three years.*

We often use *for* and *since*. ▷ 227(5)

We've been living here for six months/since April.

NOTE

The action can end just before the present.

You look hot. ~ Yes, I've been running.

- b We can use the present perfect continuous for repeated actions up to now.
*David **has been writing** letters to the hospital.*
*I've **been going** to evening classes in Arabic.*
 The speaker sees the actions as a continuing series.
 Compare the present perfect for a complete series of actions.
*David **has written** to the hospital three times now.*
- c Compare the present perfect continuous and the present perfect for a single action.
 Period of time: *I've **been washing** the car. I'm rather wet.*
 Complete action: *I've **washed** the car. It looks a lot cleaner now.*
 The continuous here focuses on the action going on. The present perfect focuses on the result of the action. The choice depends on how the speaker sees the action.
 When we say how long, we normally use the continuous form. When we say how many, we do not use the continuous.
*Tina **has been writing** her report since two o'clock. She's **written** twelve pages.*
 Now look at these examples.
*I've **been waiting** here for ages./I've **waited** here for ages.*
*We've **been living** here since April./We've **lived** here since April.*
 The continuous is more usual here, but there is little difference in meaning.
- d We use the present perfect (not the continuous) for a state up to the present.
*She **has been** in a wheelchair for three years. I've always **hated** hospitals.*

68 Past perfect and past perfect continuous

*Miranda lay on her bed and stared at the ceiling. She was depressed. Her boyfriend Max **had gone** on holiday with his brother the day before. He **hadn't invited** Miranda to go with him. He **hadn't even said** goodbye properly. And everything **had been going** so well. What **had** she **done** wrong?*

1 Form

Past perfect: <i>had + past participle</i>	Past perfect continuous: <i>had been + active participle</i>
<i>someone had invited</i>	<i>someone had been going</i>
Negative <i>someone had not invited</i>	<i>someone had not been going</i>
Questions <i>had someone invited?</i>	<i>had someone been going?</i>

2 Use of the past perfect

We use the past perfect for an action before a past time.

*She **had met** Max six months before. I knew I **had forgotten** something.*

*By midnight they **had come** to an agreement.*

*We ran onto the platform, but the train **had just gone**.*

The paragraph above begins in the past tense. The situation is that Miranda lay on her bed. The writer looks back from the past situation to a time before.

68 Past perfect and past perfect continuous

Compare the present perfect and past perfect.

*The floor **is** clean. I **have** washed it.*

*The floor **was** clean. I **had** washed it.*

We can also use the past perfect for a state.

*They **had been** friends for six months.*

*Everything **had seemed** fine up to then.*

*The gunman **had** previously **been** in prison for three years.*

NOTE For the past perfect in if-clauses, ▷ 257(6).

3 Past simple and past perfect

- a To talk about one action in the past we use the past simple.

*This lamp is a new one. I **bought** it last week. NOT ~~I had bought it last week.~~*

We also use the past simple when one action comes straight after another, when someone reacts quickly.

*When the shot **rang** out, everyone **threw** themselves to the floor.*

To say that someone finished one action and then did something else, we use either *when ... had done* or *after ... did/had done*.

*When Miranda **had written** the letter, she went out to post it.*

*After Miranda **wrote/had written** the letter, she went out to post it.*

NOT ~~When Miranda wrote the letter, she went out to post it.~~

NOTE

For the past perfect with *hardly* and *no sooner*, ▷ 250(5).

*I **had hardly** sat down when the phone rang.*

- b Sometimes the choice of past simple or past perfect can make a difference to the meaning.

*When the boss arrived, the meeting **began**.*

(The boss arrived and then the meeting began.)

*When the boss arrived, the meeting **had begun**.*

(The meeting began before the boss arrived.)

*When Max **spoke**, Miranda put the phone down.*

(= When Max started speaking ...)

*When Max **had spoken**, Miranda put the phone down.*

(= When Max finished speaking ...)

- c We can sometimes use the past perfect after *before* or *until*.

*The toaster went wrong before it **toasted/had toasted** one piece of bread.*

*We didn't want to stop until we **finished/had finished** the job.*

4 Use of the past perfect continuous

We use the past perfect continuous for an action over a period up to a past time.

*Everything **had been going** so well up to then.*

*The driver who died in the accident **had been drinking**.*

*A woman collapsed at the supermarket checkout. She **had been smuggling** out a frozen chicken under her hat.*

Compare the present and past tense.

*My hands **are** wet. I **have been washing** the floor.*

*My hands **were** wet. I **had been washing** the floor.*

5 The past perfect continuous and other past forms

- a Compare the past perfect continuous and past perfect.

Period of time: *I'd been mowing the lawn. I was tired.*

Complete action: *I'd mown the lawn. It looked nice.*

The past perfect continuous (*had been mowing*) focuses on the action going on.

The past perfect (*had mown*) focuses on the result of the action.

When we say how long, we normally use the continuous form. When we say how many, we do not use the continuous.

The volunteers brought in their collecting boxes at lunch time yesterday. They had been collecting money all morning. They had collected hundreds of pounds.

- b Compare the past continuous and past perfect continuous.

When I saw Debbie, she was playing golf. (I saw her in the middle of the game.)

When I saw Debbie, she'd been playing golf. (I saw her after the game.)

69 Overview: uses of tenses and aspects

1 Present continuous ▷ 64

In the middle of an action

I'm watching this comedy.

A temporary routine

I'm working late this week.

Present simple ▷ 64

A present state

I like comedies.

A permanent routine

I work late most days.

2 Present perfect ▷ 65

An action in the period up to the present

I've written the letter.

A series of actions up to the present

I've played basketball a few times.

A state up to the present

I've been here for a week.

Past simple ▷ 65

An action in the past

I wrote the letter yesterday.

A series of past actions

I played basketball years ago.

A past state

I was there for a week.

3 Past continuous ▷ 66

An action over a period of past time

It was raining at the time.

4 Present perfect continuous ▷ 67

An action over a period up to the present

It has been raining all day.

5 Past perfect continuous ▷ 68

An action over a period up to a past time

It had been raining for hours.

Past perfect ▷ 68

An action before a past time

The rain had stopped by then.

A state before a past time

The weather had been awful.

10

The future

Summary

This news item is about something in the future.

CINEMA TO CLOSE

*The Maxime Cinema **is to close** in November, it was announced yesterday. The owner of the building, Mr Charles Peters, has sold it to a firm of builders, who **are going to build** a block of old people's flats on the site. 'The cinema has become uneconomic to run,' said Mr Peters. The last performance **is** on Saturday 17th November, and after that the cinema **will finally close** its doors after sixty years in business. 'This town **won't be** the same again,' said camera operator Bert Dudley, who has worked at the cinema for eighteen years. Mr Dudley (67) **is retiring** when the cinema **closes**. In future, cinema goers **will have to travel** ten miles to the nearest cinema.*

There are different ways of expressing the future.

Will and shall ▷ 71

*The cinema **will close** in November.
We **shall close** the doors for the last time.*

Be going to ▷ 72

*The cinema **is going to close** soon.*

Present tense forms ▷ 73

*The cinema **is closing** in November.
The cinema **closes** on November 17th.*

Will, be going to or the present continuous? ▷ 74

The choice of form depends on whether we are making a prediction about the future, expressing an intention, or talking about a plan for the future, and so on.

The future continuous ▷ 75

*The cinema is sold and **will be closing** in November.*

Be to ▷ 76

*The cinema **is to close** in November, it was announced.*

The present simple in a sub clause ▷ 77

*It will be a sad day when the cinema **closes**.*

Other ways of expressing the future ▷ 78

Mr Dudley **is about to retire**.
 He **might retire** soon.
 He **plans to retire** in November.

The future perfect ▷ 79

The cinema **will have been** in business for sixty years.

Looking forward from the past ▷ 80

Mr Dudley **was going to continue** working, but he lost his job.

OVERVIEW: the future ▷ 81**71 Will and shall****1** We use *will* + base form for the future.

This book **will change** your life. We'll **know** our exam results in August.
 Cinema goers **will have** to travel ten miles to the nearest cinema.
Will you still **love** me tomorrow? This town **won't be** the same again.
Will has a short form 'll, and *will not* has a short form *won't*.

2 In the first person we can use either *will* or *shall* in statements about the future. The meaning is the same.

I **will be/shall be** at home tomorrow.
 We **will have/shall have** another opportunity soon.
Shall is less usual in the USA.

We do not normally use *shall* with other subjects.

NOT *Christine shall be* at home tomorrow.

NOTE

Shall not has a short form *shan't* /ʃɑ:nt/.

I **shan't be** here tomorrow.

3 *Will* often expresses the future as fact, something we cannot control. It expresses a prediction, a definite opinion about the future.

Southern England **will stay** cloudy and windy tonight.
 My father **will probably be** in hospital for at least two weeks.

4 We can sometimes use *I'll/we'll* for an instant decision.

It's raining. I'll **take** an umbrella. I think I'll **have** the soup, please.
 We decide more or less as the words are spoken. Compare *be going to*.
 I'll **buy** some postcards. (I'm deciding now.)
 I'm **going to buy** some postcards. (I've already decided.)

NOTE

Will expresses a definite action in the future, not just a wish.

Action: There's a shop here. I'll **buy** some postcards. ~ OK, I'll **wait** for you.

Wish: I **want to buy** some postcards, but I haven't got any money.

5 *Will* sometimes expresses willingness.

Jim **will translate** it for you. He speaks Italian.
 I'll **sit**/I'm willing to sit on the floor. I don't mind.

Won't can express unwillingness or an emphatic refusal.

*The doctor **won't come** at this time of night.*

*I **won't put up** with this nonsense.*

NOTE

We can also use **won't** when the subject is not a person.

*The car **won't start**. This screw **won't go** in properly.*

We can use **I'll/we'll** and **will/won't you** in offers, promises, etc.

Offer: **I'll hold** the door open for you. ~ Oh, thanks.

Promise: (I promise) **I'll do** my best to help you.

Invitation: **Won't you sit** down?

Request: **Will you do** something for me?

When we can't decide, we use **shall I/we** to ask for advice or suggestions.

*Where **shall I put** these flowers? ~ I'll get a vase.*

*What **shall we do** this weekend?*

We can also use **shall I/we** for an offer.

***Shall I hold** the door open for you? ~ Oh, thanks.*

We can use **you shall** for a promise.

*You **shall be** the first to know, (I promise).*

Will is sometimes used in formal orders. It expresses the order as a definite future action. This emphasizes the authority of the speaker.

*You **will leave** the building immediately. Uniform **will be worn**.*

Shall is sometimes used for formal rules.

*The secretary **shall give** two weeks' notice of such a meeting.*

72 **Be going to**

We use **be going to** + base form for a present situation which points to the future.

*It's ten already. We're **going to be** late. This fence **is going to fall** down soon.*

We can see from the time that we are going to be late, and we can see from the condition of the fence that it is going to fall down. **Be going to** expresses a prediction based on these situations.

NOTE In informal speech **going to** is sometimes pronounced /'gənə/.

We can also use **be going to** for a present intention.

*I'm **going to start** my own business. I'm **not going to live** here all my life.*

*They're **going to build** some old people's flats here.*

Here the intention points to a future action. **I'm going to start** means that I intend to start/I have decided to start.

For a comparison of **be going to** and **will**, ▷ 74.

NOTE

a We can use **be going to** without mentioning the person who has the intention.

*The flats **are going to be** for old people.*

b With verbs of movement, especially **go** and **come**, we often use the present continuous rather than **be going to**.

*I'm **going** out in a minute. I've got some shopping to do.*

*Barbara **is coming** round for a chat tonight.*

I'm going to go out and Barbara is going to come round are possible but less usual.

73 Present tense forms for the future

- 1 We use the present continuous for what someone has arranged to do.
I'm meeting Gavin at the club tonight. What are you doing tomorrow?
Julie is going to Florida.

This suggests that Julie has made arrangements such as buying her ticket.

The meaning is similar to *be going to* for an intention, and in many contexts we use either form.

We're visiting/ We're going to visit friends at the weekend.

NOTE

a An 'arrangement' need not be with another person.

I'm doing some shopping this afternoon. I'm having an early night.

This means that I have arranged my day so that I can do these things.

b We cannot use a state verb in the continuous.

Gavin will be at the club tonight.

NOT *Gavin is being at the club tonight.*

- 2 We can sometimes use the present simple for the future, but only for what we see as part of a timetable.

The Cup Final is on May 7th. The train leaves at 16.40.

We change at Birmingham. What time do you arrive in Helsinki?

We do *not* use the present simple for decisions or intentions.

NOT *I carry that bag for you.*

NOT *They build some flats here soon.*

NOTE For the present simple in sub clauses, ▷ 77.

74 Will, be going to or the present continuous?

- 1 Both *will* and *be going to* can express predictions.

It'll rain, I expect. It always rains at weekends.

It's going to rain. Look at those clouds.

A prediction with *be going to* is based on the present situation.

Sometimes we can use either form with little difference in meaning.

One day the sun will cool down.

One day the sun is going to cool down.

The sentence with *be going to* suggests that there is some present evidence for the prediction.

We often use *will* with *I'm sure, I think, I expect* and *probably*.

I think we'll have time for a coffee.

There'll probably be lots of people at the disco.

We use *be going to* (not *will*) when the future action is very close.

Help! I'm going to fall! I'm going to be sick!

NOTE

Compare the meanings of these verb forms.

The cinema closed last year.

(in the past)

The cinema will close in November.

(in the future)

The cinema has closed.

(past action related to the present)

The cinema is going to close soon.

(future action related to the present)

75 The future continuous: *will be doing*

- 2 When we talk about intentions, plans and arrangements, we use *be going to* or the present continuous, but not *will*.

We're going to eat out tonight. (We have decided to eat out.)

We're eating out tonight. (We have arranged to eat out.)

We use *will* only for an instant decision.

It's hot in here. I'll open a window.

Paul is using the kitchen. He's cooking for some friends. ~ Well, we'll eat out then.

- 3 Look at this conversation at the end of work on Friday afternoon.

A FEW DAYS OFF

Emma: *I'll see you on Monday then.*

Polly: *Oh, I won't be here. Didn't I tell you? I'm taking a few days off. I'm going on holiday. I'll be away for a week.*

Emma: *No, you didn't say. Where are you going?*

Polly: *The Lake District. I'm going to do some walking.*

Emma: *Oh, that'll be nice. Well, I hope you have a good time.*

Polly: *Thanks. I'll see you the week after.*

Polly gives the news of her plans and intentions by using the present continuous and *be going to*.

I'm taking a few days off. I'm going to do some walking.

We cannot use *will* in this context. But after first mentioning a plan or intention, we often use *will* for further details and comments.

I'm going on holiday. I'll be away for a week.

I'm going to do some walking. ~ Oh, that'll be nice.

They're going to build some flats. The work will take about six months.

NOTE

We often use *will* in a sentence with an if-clause. ▷ 257(3)

I'll lose my way if I don't take a map.

Sometimes a condition is understood but not expressed.

I might give up the course. ~ You'll regret it (if you do).

75 The future continuous: *will be doing*

- 1 We use *will + be + active participle* for an action over a period of future time. It means that we will be in the middle of an action.

I can't meet you at four. I'll be working.

How will I recognize you? ~ I'm fair, six feet tall, and I'll be wearing a blue coat.

A huge crowd will be waiting when the Queen arrives later today.

Compare the past and future.

I've just had a holiday. This time last week I was lying in the sun.

I'm going on holiday. This time next week I'll be lying in the sun.

Compare these sentences.

The crowd will cheer when the Queen arrives.

(She will arrive and then the crowd will cheer.)

The crowd will be cheering when the Queen arrives.

(The crowd will start cheering before she arrives.)

NOTE

In the first person we can also use *shall*.

I will/shall be revising all day for the exam.

- 2 We can also use *will be doing* for an action which is the result of a routine or arrangement.

I'll be phoning my mother tonight. I always phone her on Fridays.

The Queen will be arriving in ten minutes' time.

The postman will be coming soon.

The site is to be sold, and so the cinema will be closing in November.

The phone call is the result of my regular routine. The Queen's arrival is part of her schedule. The postman's visit is part of his normal working day.

Compare these sentences.

Decision: *I think I'll have lunch in the canteen today.*

Arrangement: *I'm having lunch with Alex.*

Routine: *I'll be having lunch in the canteen as usual.*

We can use *will be doing* to ask if someone's plans fit in with our wishes.

Will you be going past the post office this morning? ~ Yes, why? ~ Could you post this for me please?

How long will you be using the tennis court? ~ We've booked it until three. You can have it after that.

When will you be marking our test papers? ~ Next week, probably.

76 Be to

- 1 We use *be to* + base form for an official arrangement.

The Prime Minister is to visit Budapest.

The two leaders are to meet for talks on a number of issues.

This pattern is often used in news reports.

NOTE

Be is often left out in headlines.

Prime Minister to visit Budapest.

- 2 *Be to* can also express an order by a person in authority, e.g. a teacher or parent.

The headmaster says you are to come at once.

You're not to stay up late. No one is to leave this building.

This trolley is not to be removed from the station.

77 The present simple in a sub clause

- 1 We often use the present simple for future time in a clause with *if, when, as, while, before, after, until, by the time* and *as soon as*. This happens when both clauses are about the future.

If we meet at seven, we'll have plenty of time.

Mr Dudley is going to move to the seaside when he retires.

Let's wait until the rain stops.

By the time you get this letter, I'll be in Singapore.

Call me as soon as you have any news.

NOT *Call me as soon as you'll have any news.*

The same thing happens in relative clauses and noun clauses.

There will be a prize for the person who scores the most points.

I'll see that the place is left tidy.

78 Other ways of expressing the future

- 2 We also use the present continuous and present perfect instead of the forms with *will*.

I'll think of you here when I'm lying on the beach next week.

Let's wait until the rain has stopped. NOT ~~*until the rain will have stopped.*~~

- 3 If the main clause has a present-simple verb (e.g. *I expect*), then we cannot use another present-simple verb for the future.

I expect the rain will stop soon.

I keep reminding myself that I'll be lying on the beach next week.

NOTE

After *hope* we can use either a present or a future form.

I hope you have/you'll have a nice time.

78 Other ways of expressing the future

1 Be about to etc

- a We can use *be about to* + base form for an action in the near future.

The audience are in their seats, and the performance is about to start.

Hurry up. The coach is about to leave.

NOTE

We can use *be just about to/going to* for the very near future.

The coach is just about to leave/just going to leave.

- b We can also use *be on the point of* + gerund.

The company is on the point of signing the contract.

NOTE

Be set to + base form is used in news reports about things likely to happen in the near future.

The company is set to sign the contract.

- c We can use *be due to* + base form for an action which is part of a timetable.

The visitors are due to arrive at two.

2 Modal verbs

Besides *will*, there are other modal verbs which express the future. We use them to say that something is possible or necessary in the future.

I can meet you later. (= I will be able to ...)

There might be a storm. (= There will possibly ...)

We must post the invitations soon. (= We will have to ...)

NOTE

We can use *be sure to/be bound to* + base form to express certainty about the future.

The scheme is sure to fail. (= It will certainly fail.)

There is bound to be trouble. (= There will certainly be trouble.)

3 Ordinary verbs

There are some ordinary verbs that we can use with a to-infinitive to express intentions and plans for the future.

We've decided to sell our flat. *We intend to move soon.*

Helen plans to re-train as a nurse. *We've arranged to visit the area.*

79 The future perfect: *will have done*

We can use *will + have + past participle* to look back from the future, to talk about something that will be over at a future time.

I'll have finished this book soon. I'm nearly at the end.

We don't want to spend all day in the museum. I should think we'll have seen enough by lunch-time.

Sarah won't have completed her studies until she's twenty-five.

Our neighbours are moving soon. They'll have only been here a year.

NOTE

a In the first person we can also use *shall*.

We will/shall have done half the journey by the time we stop for lunch.

b For *until* and *by*, > 227(6).

c We can use *will* with the perfect and the continuous together.

I'll have been reading this book for about six weeks.

Our neighbours are moving soon. They'll have only been living here a year.

80 Looking forward from the past: *was going to etc*

1 We can use *was/were going to* for a past intention or arrangement.

Mr Dudley was going to retire, but then he found another job.

We were going to watch the film, but then we forgot about it.

The bus pulled away just as I was going to get on it.

I was going to means that I intended to.

NOTE

a Sometimes the intended action (Mr Dudley's retirement) actually happens.

He had to retire when the cinema closed. But he was going to retire anyway.

b We can also use the past continuous for a past arrangement.

Joanne went to bed early because she was getting up at five.

2 We can use *would* as a past form of *will*.

They set off at daybreak. They would reach the camp before nightfall.

George Washington was the first President of a nation that would become the richest and most powerful on earth.

Here we look at a past action (reaching the camp) from a time when it was in the future.

We can use *would not* for past unwillingness, a refusal.

The spokesman wouldn't answer any questions.

The car wouldn't start this morning.

3 We can also use *be to, be about to* etc in the past.

It was the last film at the cinema, which was to close the next day.

We had to hurry. The coach was about to leave.

Phil was on the point of leaving when he noticed an attractive girl looking across the room at him.

NOTE

a *The cinema was to close* means that there was an arrangement for the cinema to close. But *was to + perfect* means that what was arranged did not actually happen.

The cinema was to have closed the next day, but they decided to keep it open another week.

- b There is a special use of *was to* where it has a similar meaning to *would*.
George Washington was the first President of a nation that was to become the richest and most powerful on earth.
 Here *was to* means that the future action really did happen.

81 Overview: the future

1	Will ▷ 71 A prediction <i>Scotland will win the game.</i> An instant decision <i>I think I'll buy a ticket.</i> An offer <i>I'll help you.</i>	Be going to ▷ 72 A prediction based on the present <i>Scotland are going to win the game.</i> An intention <i>I'm going to buy a ticket, I've decided.</i>
2	Present simple ▷ 73 A timetable <i>The game starts at 3.00 pm.</i> In a sub clause ▷ 77 <i>We must get there before the game starts.</i>	Present continuous ▷ 73 An arrangement <i>I'm playing in the team tomorrow.</i>
3	Future continuous ▷ 75 An action over a future period <i>I'll be working all day Saturday.</i> The result of a routine or arrangement <i>I've got a job in a shop. I'll be working on Saturday.</i>	
4	Be to ▷ 76 An official arrangement <i>The conference is to take place in November.</i>	Be about to ▷ 78 The near future <i>The players are on the field. The game is about to start.</i>
5	Future perfect ▷ 79 Something that will be over in the future <i>The game will have finished by half past four.</i>	
6	Would ▷ 80 Looking forward from the past <i>At half time we thought Scotland would win.</i>	Was going to ▷ 80 Looking forward from the past <i>At half time we thought Scotland were going to win.</i> Past intention or arrangement <i>I was going to watch the match, but I was ill.</i>