

# TENSES

## A. Simple and Progressive (continuous) Forms of the Present Tense

### 1. The Simple form of the Present Tense:

- i. He moves,
- ii. It falls,
- iii. I come
- iv. We drink

is used to express:

- a. What is stated as always true, in the nature of things.

**a. What is stated as always true, in the nature of things.**

- i. The earth *moves* round the sun.
- ii. Rain *falls* from the clouds.
- iii. Death *comes* to everyone sooner or later.
- iv. We *see* with our eyes, *hear* with our ears, and *smell* with our nose.

**b. What is habitual or recurrent.**

- i. I *come* to school by bus.
- ii. I *drink* tea, but sister *prefers* coffee.
- iii. The shop *opens* at nine O'clock each morning.

**2.** To express a *specific activity that is happening at the time of speaking*, and is not yet completed, the **Progressive (or Continuous)** form of the present tense is used.

This is formed by the **Present Participle** of the verb in question, preceded by the tense of the verb ***to be*** as an auxiliary.

- i. The clouds *are moving* across the sky.
- ii. The bus *is coming* round the corner.
- iii. The cat *is drinking* the milk

3. Where a **situation** rather than an activity is concerned, if the situation is **temporary** only, the **Progressive** form is used.

- i. Jack is standing by the fire.
- ii. The washing is hanging on the line.

But for the situation of a fact that is **Permanent**, the simple form is used.

- i. London *stands* on the Thames. (not is standing)
- ii. My house *faces* south. (not is facing)
- iii. This road *runs* from London to Dover. (not is running)

- The same applies to **in interrogative sentences**, but the simple form is rendered by *do followed by an infinitive without to*

i. **Do you drink** coffee?

ii. **Does your house** face south?

- The **Progressive form** is given by:

***be + Subject + Present Participle***

i. **Are you drinking** coffee?

ii. **Is Jack standing** by the fire?

4. As exception to or modifications of, what has been said above, the following should be noted.
- a. The simple form used, even for something that is still in progress, if the sentence begins with a demonstrative *here or there*. The chief verb thus effected are come and go.
    - i. Here *comes* the bride.  
(not *Here is coming*)
    - i. There *goes* the bus.  
(not *There is singing*)
    - ii. There she *blows*!  
(Not *There she is blowing*)

b. Verbs denoting **perception** by one of the physical senses (*see, hear, smell, feel, taste*) do not use the progressive form to express an experience on a specific occasion, or one that is in progress. The simple form is sometimes used.

i. I **smell** something burning.

ii. I **see** a train coming.

- But the *more usual* construction is **can + the infinitive**.  
I can smell something burning.

i. I **can see** a train coming.

ii. I **can hear** a dog barking.

- When the Progressive form is used, it refers to something that is continuous over a much longer period.
  - i. I am hearing much better since I had the operation.
- **N.B. :** Some of these verbs are also used with other meanings and then they follow the normal patterns.
  - i. You're seeing things.  
(i.e. suffering from hallucinations)
  - ii. He was smelling at the bottle.  
(i.e., sniffing) to try and find out what had been in it.)



- **Feel, when it means ‘experience a sensation’ (feel cold, feel sick, feel ill, feel better, feel sad) and think when it means ‘be of the opinion’ normally use the simple form of the present even for a specific occasion.**

i. I **feel** tired.

ii. I **am feeling** hungry.

iii. I **did not feel** very well yesterday, but I **am feeling** better today.

- Certain situations which are more or less may sometimes be presented by *a* speaker or writer as though they were **temporary**, because he is thinking of them only from the point of view of the moment when he saw them.
- In that case the **progressive form of the verb** may be used.
  - i. The house is facing south.
  - ii. You can't miss the church; its spire is towering above the other buildings round about.
- In such cases the **-ing** part of the verb has almost the force of a predicative adjective.

5. Both the simple and the progressive forms of the present tense may be used with a future reference if the verb is in the active voice.

i. We *leave* for the Continent on Friday.

ii. We *are leaving* for the Continent on Friday.

The simple form represents the fact as something that is **fixed and is unlikely to be altered**. It is rather **impersonal**.

The progressive form represents it as the present arrangement in respect of the future, and implies a **more personal interest**.

Often there is a suggestion of intention attached to it.

- Thus if we wish to drop a hint to someone who had not been to see us for some time that a visit would be appreciated, we should ask,

i. **When are coming to see us?**

*Not,* When do you come to see us?

If the reference is to a special or exceptional arrangement, applying to a one specific occasion, the progressive form is generally used.

*Thus, I finished work early tomorrow* implies that that is the usual practice on that day of the week.

*But I am finishing work early tomorrow* implies that it is an exception to that the usual rule.

# EXERCISE - 01

1. **Fill in the blanks** in the following sentences with simple or the progressive form (present tense) of the verb given in brackets at the end of each.
  - a. **The Italian .....in Italy. (live)**
  - b. **Mr. Johnson..... To the office in his car each morning. (go)**
  - c. **My aunt .....with us for a few weeks. (stay)**
  - d. **Jack cannot come to play just now, as he .....his homework. (do)**
  - e. **We .....to the seaside for a month every summer. (go)**
  - f. **A vegetarian is a person who never.....meat. (eat)**
  - g. **A honest person always..... the truth. (tell)**

- h.** The workmen ....the road near our house. **(repair)**
- i.** My husband will see you in about quarter of an hour; he .....his lunch at the moment. **(have)**
- j.** There are some birds that..... every year. **(migrate)**
- k.** A person who .....ladies' hats is known as milliner. **(sell)**
- l.** That child .....because it cannot find its mother. **(cry)**
- m.** My sister and I ..... to the cinema every Thursday evening. **(go)**
- n.** The Pyrenees.....France from Spain. **(divide)**
- o.** It was very dull early this morning, but the sun .....now. **(shine)**

2. Complete the following sentences by **supplying the correct form of the verb** given at the end of each. Use the present tense.

- a. ....you .....playing football? (like)
- b. A teetotaler .....not .....wine. (drink)
- c. .... The doctor.....to see your brother every day? (call)
- d. ....you.....tea or coffee? (prefer)
- e. ....your uncle.....that house? (own)
- f. ....the workmen still..... your house? (repair)
- g. ....you.....to read mystery stories? (like)

- h.** .....the floods still..... ? (rise)
- i.** .....anyone.....where Susan has gone? (know)
- j.** How often.....you ..... to the cinema? (go)
- k.** Why .....that child.....? (cry)
- l.** .....you.....or .....you.....it seriously? (joke, mean)
- m.** .....the cinemas.....on Sunday in your town? (open)
- n.** Where.....your friend.....when he goes to London?  
(stay)
- o.** To which station.....I ..... To get a train for Liverpool?  
(go)



## **B. SIMPLE & PROGRESSIVE FORMS OF THE PAST TENSE**

- 1.** The difference between the two forms of the past tense is basically the same as that between the corresponding forms of the present.
  - a) The Progressive Form represents an activity as being in progress at some point of time in the past.
    - i. When we **arrived** they were having lunch.
  - b) The simple form represents something that was recurrent habitual, or general.
    - i. We **had** lunch at 12.30 in those days.
    - ii. In the Middle Ages people **believed** that the earth was flat.

- But there are two other uses of the simple form of the past that form most verbs have no parallel in the present.
  - a) It may represent an activity or occurrence on the particular occasion but view retrospectively.
    - i. We **had** lunch at one O'clock today.
    - ii. As he **entered** the room he **took** off his hat.
    - iii. The train arrived ten minutes late.

a) It may represent an activity which, though progressive in nature, is viewed in its entirety, after its completion.

- i. He **waded** into the middle of the pond to retrieve his hat.
- ii. She **climbed** the stairs very slowly.
- iii. I **slept** for three hours.

3. Sometimes it makes very little difference to the meaning whether we use the simple or the progressive form. This applies mainly to verbs of the following two kinds.

a) Where the *activity is a momentary one*, so that difference between progress and completion is scarcely distinguished.

i. The intruder **was caught** as he **left** (was leaving) the premises.

ii. The shot **was fired** at the train as it **entered** (was entering) the tunnel.

- b) Where the completed activity is a continuance of the same state, process or situation; or where the situation is such that we cannot think of any kind of completion.**
- i. A vase of flowers **stood** (was standing) in the centre of the table.
  - ii. Two men **sat** (were sitting) at the table on our left.

Generally the progressive form is more vivid and descriptive than the simple form. The former presents the situation from the point of view of the speaker, as he appreciated it at the moment. The latter is rather more impersonal and detached.

# EXERCISE

- Fill in the blank spaces in the following sentences with either the simple or the progressive form of the past tense of the verb given at the end of each (whichever you think is appropriate)
  1. He ..... the room and .....down in the chair. (cross, sit)
  2. When we set out early this morning the .....(shine)
  3. As he ..... the road a butts.....him down. (cross, knock)
  4. The passenger in the next seat tome ..... a newspaper. (read)
  5. He .....and .....his leg was he was alighting from a but. (slip, injure)
  6. My grandfather was seventy-five years old when he..... (die)

- 7. When the doctor arrived he realised that the patient..... (die)**
- 8. The sound of their conversation....the baby. (waken)**
- 9. We were told that the manager could not see us at that moment, as he .....some letters to his secretary. (dictate)**
- 10. When he took off his hat I noticed that his hair .....grey. (go)**
- 11. My husband .....quite a lot of money for that picture. (pay)**
- 12. At one time it....several weeks to get from Britain to America by sea. (take)**
- 13. A schoolboy..... A purse full of money lying in the gutter. (find)**
- 14. We .....someone opening the gate. (hear)**
- 15. When we.....he ....the lawn. (arrive, mow)**

# The Perfect Tense:

- **The perfect tense** (made up from the *past participle of a verb* preceded by the present tense of the auxiliary **have**):
  - i. **I have eaten,**
  - ii. **They have gone**
- is the sense that is used when we wish to express the idea that some activity that is used when we wish to express the idea that :
  - i. **Some activity that took place in the past, or**
  - ii. **A situation that originated in the past, and**
  - iii. **Is connected in some way with the present.**



- It may be the recent past that is referred to
  - I **have just finished** my dinner,
- a more distant past, or an indetermined past
  - I **have lived** in the East.
- The *nearness or remoteness* of the time is not material, for
- the **perfect tense** merely states:  
the position at the present moment.

# 1. The Continuitive Use:

This states something that has been continuous from the **past** up to the **present** moment.

- i. We **have known** each other for the past ten years.
- ii. We **have lived** in this house since 1952 (*or have been living*).
- iii. I have never drunk alcoholic liquor.

**Here** the implication is that the **situation still exists:**

- I. we still know each other;*
- II. we still live this house;*
- III. I still don not drink alcoholic liquor.*

## 2. The Inclusive Use:

This represents a completed activity or occurrence falling within a period extending from some point of time in the past up to the present.

- i. There have been two major wars during the present century.
  - ii. My father has seen the Niagara Fall.
  - iii. He has been a teacher, a sales representative, a book-seller, and now he is a journalist.
- This use of the perfect is often employed when we are speaking or writing about the career of a person who is still living.

i. He has held the following offices.

- It also occurs with *before*, when before means:  
‘some time in the past, reckoning back from the present moment’

i. I have seen that fellow somewhere before.

### 3. The Resultative Use

- This represents a activity completed in the past—either recent or more remote, as:
  - a. **Giving rise to a certain result in the present:**

a. Giving rise to a certain **result in the present:**

i. I have had my lunch.

(Implication: so I do not need it now)

ii. You have told us that already.

(Implication : so you do not need to tell us again.)

iii. We have bought the television set.

(Result : so we now have a television set)

iv. You have torn your coat.

(Result: there is a tear in your coat)

b. Deducible from resulting **signs or evidence**:

i. Someone has dropped some crockery.

(Evidence: I have just heard the crash)

ii. It has rained during the night.

(Evidence: the ground is wet)

iii. Someone has called while we have been out.

(Evidence: the gate is open)

In **a.** the *emphasis* is usually on the **resultant position**, in **b.** on the **inference from the result**.

## 4. The Perfect of Experience

- This states what has occurred or what has been the case, within the speaker's or the writer's experience.
  - i. I have known it snow in May.
  - ii. I have seen many a promising career ruined by drink.
- The important thing to remember about all four of uses is that the perfect tense must not be accompanied by an adverb or adverbial expression denoting past time.

- If the activity or the fact is assigned to a definite time in the past, and so cut off from the present, then the simple form of the past tense must be used.

i. I **saw** that film last week.  
(not I *have seen* that film last week.)

Correct Use of the Perfect	
1	I <u>have had</u> my dinner.
2	We <u>have had</u> a very enjoyable holiday.
3	I <u>have had</u> my bicycle repaired.
4	She <u>has slept</u> for eight hours.



	<b>Incorrect Use</b>	<b>Correct Use</b>
1	I <u>have had</u> my dinner <i>an hour ago</i> .	I <u>had</u> my dinner <i>an hour ago</i> .
2	We <u>have had</u> a very enjoyable holiday <i>last summer</i> .	We <u>had</u> a very enjoyable holiday <i>last summer</i> .
3	I <u>have had</u> my bicycle repaired <i>yesterday</i> .	I <u>had</u> my bicycle repaired <i>yesterday</i> .
4	She <u>has slept</u> for eight hours <i>last night</i> .	She <u>slept</u> for eight hours <i>last night</i> .

- Ask yourself why those in the first column are wrong, and why the correction shown in the second column is necessary.
- Words and expressions like **this morning** and **this afternoon**, which denote a particular part of the day, may take either the perfect or the past tense, according to circumstances.

For instance, if it is still morning when we are speaking we should probably say:

- i. I have had so many interruptions *this morning* that I have done scarcely any work.
- But if we are speaking later in the *same day* (about 3:00 pm), when the morning is a past period of time, we should say:
    - i. I had so many interruptions *this morning* that I did scarcely any work.

- Even if it is still morning, however, it does not necessarily follow that we should use the perfect; it depends on whether we feel that the fact we are relating has, or has not, some connection with the moment of speaking.

Thus, if we were speaking immediately on the arrival at work, when the annoyance caused by traffic delays was fresh in our mind, we should probably say:

- I can usually get here in about thirty-five minutes, but it has taken me nearly an hour *this morning*.

- But later in the morning, when we are looking back at it and it has become something that belongs to the past, we should say:
  - It took me nearly an hour to get here *this morning*.

*For similar reason we might say either:*

- I saw your friend Peter *today*.
- *Or*
- I have seen your friend Peter *today*.

- In the *former case* the speaker thinks of the meeting as an isolated occurrence that took place several hours ago, and therefore belongs to the past.

In the *latter case* he thinks of it as something that is included in, and forms part of all that he has done and that has happened to him in a day that is not yet ended.

- Finally, there is the case of the two sentences,

❖ I have come to ask your advice. (Perfect)

*and*

❖ I came to ask your advice. (Past)

- **N.B.** In more *formal English* the simple form of the present tense is sometimes used instead of the *perfect*, when the *verb* is followed by expression *denoting purpose*.
  - i. I **come** to ask your advice.
  - ii. I **come** to bury Cesar, not to praise him
  - iii. Mr Chairman, I **rise** on a point or order.

*In spoken English*, the present tense *hear*, followed by a clause stating the nature of the news, is generally used instead of *have heard* when the speaker implies that he accepts the news as probably true.

- I **hear** that you have got a new car.

# EXERCISE

1. Insert in the blank spaces in the sentences below the past or the perfect tense (whichever you think is correct) of the verb given at the end.
  - a. We .....to the theatre last evening. (go)
  - b. My father .....sixty years old last Tuesday. (be)
  - c. Do you know whether the doctor.....yet. (be)
  - d. ....you.....the film that is showing at the Odeon?  
(see)
  - e. We..... To this house in 1935 and .....here ever since.  
(come, live)
  - f. It .....every day this week. (rain)
  - g. No-one .....from him for the past six months. (hear)

- h.** Last Saturday we .....to visit some friends in a neighbouring town. (go)
- i.** We .....all our money, so we shall have to walk home.
- j.** Shakespeare.....from 1564 to 1616. (live)
- k.** .....the postman .....yet? (come)
- l.** We.....you already that we cannot do what you ask. (tell)
- m.** When I .....a boy we .....on a farm. (be, live)
- n.** The weather .....warmer yesterday than it is today. (be)
- o.** Mrs. Smith is not at home; she .....to visit some friends. (go)
- p.** She .....out at ten O'clock, and .....not yet .... (go, return)
- q.** Several books on that subject.....during the present year. (appear)
- r.** I cannot play in the match as I .....my foot. (injure)
- s.** I ..... to him last week, but he ....not..... Yet . (write, reply)
- t.** The accident.....at 10.30 this morning. (occur)



# The Progressive Form of the Perfect

- As the progressive (or Continuous) form of the present is made from the present participle preceded by the present tense of the auxiliary **be**,
  - i. I am studying English.
- So the Progressive (or Continuous) form of the Perfect is made from the present participle preceded by the *perfect form of the auxiliary*
  - i. I have been studying English for three years

- The Progressive form of the present represents only what is in progress at the moment of speaking
  - i. I am writing a letter
  - ii. The doll-bell is ringing.
- If we wish to indicate that the action or occurrence has been going on continuously or repeatedly over a period of time starting in the past and extending right upto the present, then we must use the progressive form of the perfect.
  - i. I have been writing letters since ten o'clock the morning.

- If we wish to indicate that the action or occurrence has been going on continuously or repeatedly over a period of time starting in the past and extending right up to the present, then we must use the progressive form of the perfect.
  - i. I **have been writing** letters since ten o'clock the morning.  
(*not* I **am writing** letter since ten o'clock this morning.)
  - ii. The door-bell **has been ringing** for the past minutes.  
(*not* The door-bell **is ringing** for the past ten minutes)

- **Another use** is to represent as in some way connected with the present, the progressive performance in the past of some activity which is now complete, i.e., which does not itself extend up to the present, but is for some reason felt to fall within the present time-sphere.

i. I have been washing my car.

ii. We have been looking at the pictures.

- This the progressive counterpart of the resultative and the inclusive uses of the perfect.
- **I have washed my car** merely states the *final result*.  
**I have been washing** my car introduces us to the whole process as it was carried out *from start to finish*.

- There is no progressive counterpart of the perfect of experience, for the simple reason that things that form part of our experience are things that we view retrospectively, in the completed state.
- The progressive form is essentially a form denoting duration; and just as the ordinary form of the perfect cannot be accompanied by any adverbial expression denoting a point of time in the past, so the progressive form of the perfect *cannot be accompanied by any adverbial expression denoting duration of time in the past and unconnected with the present.*

# EXERCISE

- Insert the correct form of the auxiliary in the following sentences in order to complete the sense.
  1. It has been fine most of the morning, but it.....raining now.
  2. It .....raining since ten o'clock.
  3. I.....waiting here for almost half an hour.
  4. The doctor.....visiting his patients all the morning.
  5. The Joneses .....coming to dinner this evening.
  6. My son .....going to that school for the past five years.
  7. When I first knew him he .....living in Birmingham.
  8. The sick man.....improving steadily all the week.
  9. The thieves ran away when they learned that the police.....coming.
  10. The baby.....sleeping ever since six o'clock.