

What Are the Simple Tenses? (with Examples)

"Simple tense" is a category of verb tense. It covers the simple past tense, the simple present tense, and the simple future tense.

The three simple tenses express facts or habitual activities. Unlike the other tenses, the simple tenses describe actions without specifically stating whether the actions are completed or ongoing.

Be aware that the "simple present tense" is an oddity. Despite its name, it is not always about activities in the present. The simple present tense can be used for activities that are not currently happening, and it can be used for future events.

The Role of the Simple Tenses

Here is an explanation of how the three simple tenses are used:

The Simple Past Tense. The simple past tense describes a completed activity that happened in the past. In other words, the activity started in the past and ended in the past. For example:

- I went.
- He saw.

The Simple Present Tense. The simple present tense is a complex tense. It is used:

Use	Examples
(1) To describe facts and habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lee loves pies. (Fact)• I play chess on Tuesdays. (Habit) (NB: These activities do not have to be happening right now.)
(2) To describe scheduled events in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The plane arrives at 7 o'clock.• The sun rises at 0530 tomorrow. (I know! It's supposed to be the present tense!)

(3) To tell stories (particularly jokes) to make your listener or reader feel more engaged with the story

- A skeleton walks into a bar and says, "Give me a beer and a mop."

The Simple Future Tense. The simple future tense is used for an action that will occur in the future. For example:

- I will go.
- He will see.

Examples of Verbs in the Simple Tenses

Here are some more examples of verbs in the simple tenses.

In the Past Tense:

- I cleaned the window.
(simple past tense)
- They cleaned the window.
(simple past tense)

In the Present Tense:

- I clean the window.
(simple present tense)
- They clean the window.
(simple present tense)

In the Future Tense:

- I will clean the window.
(simple future tense)
- They will clean the window.
(simple future tense)

Forming Verbs in the Simple Tenses

Here is an overview on how to form the simple tenses:

Forming the Simple Past Tense (for most verbs)

[base form of the verb]

+

"ed"

- They jumped.

This is how the simple past tense is formed with most verbs. However, there are several spelling rules to consider. [Read more about forming the simple past tense.](#) **Forming the Simple Present Tense (for most verbs)**

[base form of the verb by itself]

or (if it's the [third person](#) singular (he, she, or it))

[base form of the verb]

+

"s"

- We jump.
- He jumps.

This is how the simple present tense is formed with most verbs.

However, there are several spelling rules to consider. [Read more about forming the simple present tense.](#) **Forming the [Simple Future Tense](#)**

"will"

+

[base form of the verb]

- He will jump.

The Simple Tenses in the Past, Present, and Future

This table shows how the simple tenses (shaded in yellow) fit with the other tenses. There are 12 tenses in total.

The 4 <u>Past Tenses</u>	Example
simple past tense	I went
past progressive tense	I was going
past perfect tense	I had gone
past perfect progressive tense	I had been going
The 4 <u>Present Tenses</u>	Example
simple present tense	I go
present progressive tense	I am going
present perfect tense	I have gone
present perfect progressive tense	I have been going
The 4 <u>Future Tenses</u>	Example

simple future tense	I will go
future progressive tense	I will be going
future perfect tense	I will have gone
future perfect progressive tense	I will have been going

The "Simple Aspect"

The term [simple aspect](#) is used to group all verbs (past, present, and future) in the simple tenses. (Remember that the [aspect](#) of a verb is determined by whether the verb expresses a fact, an ongoing action, or a completed action. Verbs in the simple aspect express facts.)

Interactive Verb Conjugation Tables

The tables below show **all 12 tenses** so you can see the **simple tenses** among the other tenses. (You can change the verb by clicking one of the green buttons.)

Top 10 Regular Verbs

Top 10 Irregular Verbs

All 4 Past Tenses

Person	Simple Past	Past Progressive Tense	Past Perfect Tense	Past Perfect Progressive Tense
• I	saw	was seeing	had seen	had been seeing
• you	saw	was seeing	had seen	had been seeing
• he/she/it	saw	were seeing	had seen	had been seeing
• we	saw	were seeing	had seen	had been seeing
• you	saw	was seeing	had seen	had been seeing
• they	saw	was seeing	had seen	had been seeing
	saw	were seeing	had seen	had been seeing
	saw	were seeing	had seen	had been seeing
	saw	were seeing	had seen	had been seeing
	saw	were seeing	had seen	had been seeing
	The simple past tense is for a completed activity that happened in the	The past progressive tense is for an ongoing activity in the past. Often, it is used to set the scene for another action.	The past perfect tense is for emphasizing that an action was completed before another took place.	The past perfect progressive tense is for showing that an ongoing action in the past has ended.

	past.		
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All 4 Present Tenses

Person	Simple Present	Present Progressive Tense	Present Perfect Tense	Present Perfect Progressive Tense
• I	see	am seeing	have seen	have been seeing
• you	see	are seeing	have seen	have been seeing
• he/she/it	sees	is seeing	has seen	has been seeing
• we	see	are seeing	have seen	have been seeing
• you	see	are seeing	have seen	have been seeing
• they	see	are seeing	have seen	have been seeing
	The simple present tense is mostly for a fact or a habit.	The present progressive tense is for an ongoing action in the present.	The present perfect tense is for an action that began in the past. (Often, the action continues into the present.)	The present perfect progressive tense is for a continuous activity that began in the past and continues into the present (or finished very recently).

All 4 Future Tenses

Person	Simple Future	Future Progressive Tense	Future Perfect Tense	Future Perfect Progressive Tense
• I	will see	will be seeing	will have seen	will have been seeing
• you	will see	will be seeing	will have seen	will have been seeing
• he/she/it	will see	will be seeing	will have seen	will have been seeing
• we	will see	will be seeing	will have seen	will have been seeing
• you	will see	will be seeing	will have seen	will have been seeing
• they	will see	will be seeing	will have seen	will have been seeing
	The simple future tense is for an action that will occur in the future.	The future progressive tense is for an ongoing action that will occur in the future.	The future perfect tense is for an action that will have been completed at some point in the future.	The future perfect progressive tense is for an ongoing action that will be completed at some specified time in the future.

Why Simple Tenses Are Important

Native English speakers can use all twelve tenses without giving the grammar a second thought. However, if you're learning or teaching English, you must spend time learning the tenses because expressing **when** something occurs is a fundamental communication

skill. The simple tenses are usually the first tenses taught, but, as we've covered, they're not simple at all, and they're not used too often during a natural conversation.

Remember that tenses do not just tell us whether something is a past, present, or future action. They also tell us whether the action is habitual, completed, or ongoing (called the aspects).

The trick to learning tenses is mastering the following:

- The verb "to be" in all its forms (*am, is, are, was, were, will be*)
- The verb "to have" in all its forms (*has, have, had, will have*)
- Present participles, i.e., the "ing" form of verbs (e.g., *playing, thinking, eating*)
- Past participles (e.g., *played, thought, eaten*)