

The Verb: Form, Tense, Aspect, Voice

Form

Most verbs in English have five forms. These are usually listed in your dictionary.

Base (bare infinitive)	dream	be	have
Present	dream/dreams	am/is	have/has
Past	dreamed	was	had
Present Participle (-ING)	dreaming	being	having
Past Participle (-EN)	dreamed	been	had

Helping verbs or modal auxiliaries are used to create other verb phrases, but are considered incomplete because they have only a present and a past form. Common modal auxiliaries are can/could; will/would, may/might; shall/should.

Tense

Only the simple present and simple past verb forms are finite or complete in themselves without additional words to form a verb phrase.

Aspect

English has 2 aspects: the Continuous or Progressive (BE + -ING)
 the Perfect, Completed or Perfective (HAVE + -EN)

Finite Verb Sequence

The English finite verb sequence must contain a tense marker (T) showing either Present or Past, and a lexical or meaning verb. In addition, it may contain a modal verb and one or two aspect markers. The names of the tense may vary slightly in different grammar texts, but are most often derived from the tense marker and aspect marker used in each case.

Present Simple	She walks.	I have lunch.
Present Continuous/Progressive	She is walking.	I am having lunch.
Present Perfect	She has walked.	I have had lunch.
Present Perfect Continuous	She has been walking.	I have been having lunch.
Past Simple	She walked.	I had lunch.
Past Continuous/Progressive	She was walking.	I was having lunch.
Past Perfect	She had walked.	I had had lunch.
Past Perfect Continuous	She had been walking.	I had been having lunch.

Future Simple	She will walk.	I will have lunch.
Future Continuous	She will be walking.	I will be having lunch.
Future Perfect	She will have walked.	I will have had lunch.
Future Perfect Continuous	She will have been walking.	I will have been having lunch.

Verb Tense and Aspect: Possible Meanings

Present Simple

- **a state that exists now**
Simon thinks that he is silly. He wants to play the piano.
- **a habitual or repeated action**
I wake up at 6:30. Eduardo studies at Capilano University.
- **a single event (such as Sports commentaries, formal declarations)**
He shoots! He scores! I thank-you for this scholarship, and honour you for your commitment to education.
- **a truth, or fact**
The world is round. The sun is the centre of the solar system. Gravity is constant.

Present Progressive or Continuous

- **a temporary activity**
Michelle is feeding the cat. Jake is playing soccer. Smiley is studying.
- **a temporary state**
Carson is learning to programme in C++. Winnie is riding her bike to university while the weather is fine.
- **for future and definite appointments (usually with some time marker).**
I am meeting with Koji tomorrow.
Hoon is seeing the doctor Monday.
Melanie is flying to Victoria with Alex on March 6.

Present Perfect or Completed, Simple

- **a state or habit that lasts up to the present**
Takeyoshi has taught judo for more than 20 years.
He has been unemployed for 6 months.
Have you been in Montreal for the last year?
- **a past action with a present result or focus**
Roshy has lost her pen.
Carol has played that CD five times today.

- **a past experience, state or action with an indefinite time point**
Alireza has lived in Germany.
Joanna and Winnie have taken the time to ready your essay.

Present Perfect or Completed, Progressive

- **a temporary activity, up to the present**
Rex has been waiting half an hour for that bus.
Jacquie and her husband have been saving to buy a house for 6 years.
- **a temporary habit or state up to the present time**
She has been smoking a lot since her biology exam.
They have been complaining about homework since the course started.
- **a temporary or past activity with a present result (often with an explanation of the present)**
Mei has been writing for two hours, so her fingers are aching.
I've been wearing these high heels for 6 hours, so my feet are killing me . . .

Past Simple

- **a state of habit in past defined time**
I liked sweets when I was a child. He lived in Denmark in 1987.
- **a single event in defined time**
Peter phoned me yesterday.
Tommy saw Harold last Friday.

Past Progressive

- **an event that was in progress at a definite point in time (may or may not continue)**
Ivana and Andrew were laughing when Ruysuke entered the room.
Miki was playing the violin while Val was playing rugby.

Past Perfect, Simple

- **a past event that occurred before another past event**
I had been to Park Royal long before New York Fries opened a kiosk in the Food Court.
They had known about the party before the invitation arrived.
- **a past state or action up to a past time**
We had owned a sports car before we had quadruplets.
I had thought that time was constant before I took Physics.

Past Perfect, Progressive or continuous

- **a past temporary state or activity up to a past time**
They had been studying English for four hours before they took a break.

Future Simple will/shall + base

- **a prediction**
She'll graduate this June.
- **a decision made at time of speaking or offers**
I will help you.

Future Simple (variant) going to + base

- **a prediction arising from present evidence**
Younes is going to finish University.
- **an intention decided before speaking with an expectation of fulfilment**
After this afternoon's lecture, John and Alex are going to have coffee at Moja.
Kai is going to be a teacher when he grows up.

Present Progressive + future time adverbial

- **an appointment or plan that has already been established or made**
I'm seeing the dentist in October.
They are running as candidates in the 2002 Provincial election.

Will/shall + be + -ING progressive participle

- **a single event that will be completed at a future point in time**
My cousin will be arriving on Air Canada from Toronto tomorrow at 5:15.
- **a temporary state of activity in progress at a future point in time**
This July, we'll be renting a cabin on Keats Island.
I'll be shopping at Eaton's just before tomorrow's meeting.

Will/Shall + Have + -EN

- **a future claim that will be completed or finished before another future event**
He'll have made supper before I arrive back from Richmond.
We'll have spent all our money on slot machines by the time we leave Las Vegas.

Will/Shall + have been + -ING

- **a future activity in progress when another future event**
We'll have been studying for the exam before you visit.
I'll have been worrying for hours before my daughter gets home.

Note: There are many ways of constructing a future tense in English. For example, you can write "Jen is about to go ice-skating" and the phrase "about + infinitive" indicates the future in the same way as going to, prediction. Or, you can write

“We hope to find a nice puppy at next week’s Dog show” and the phrase “hope + infinitive” is equivalent to the phrase “going to” intention decided.

Exercise 1

Identify the tense and the meaning or real-world time of each of the following sentences. The first one is done for you.

1. I’ve spent 4 months in Bangkok. Tense is Present Perfect, Simple. This is a state or habit in an indefinite past time. I may have spent four months there twenty years ago or I may have just left Bangkok.
2. Chris has been eating chocolate.
3. Our salmon rivers will have died before the new conservation policies come into effect.
4. The cat fell asleep while he was watching the mouse run in its cage.
5. The next flight to Toronto leaves at 23:05.
6. She has played a game of Solitaire before breakfast.
7. I often ski at Whistler during January.
8. I’ll be working at that new job when Spring comes.
9. They hope to be done by the time the hockey game starts.

Voice

English has two voices, active and passive. In a sentence in the active voice, the subject is doing the action of the verb. I/We/You/He/She/It/They/ is the agent or doer. When a verb that carries action or influence from the agent, usually the grammatical subject of the sentence, to a recipient, that verb is called transitive. The recipient, usually called the object of the sentence, receives or is influenced by the action of the verb.

Only transitive verbs can be used to make the passive voice

Order: In statement in the active voice, the agent comes before the verb and the recipient follows. However, in a statement in the passive voice, the order is reversed. The recipient goes before the verb. The agent may or may not be mentioned in a prepositional phrase that follows the verb, now changed in form to create the passive voice.

For example, note the difference between these two sentences.

1. *Kim read the book.* *Kim* (the agent and grammatical subject) *read* (a verb that carries action to a recipient) *the book* (the recipient of the action and the grammatical object).
2. *The book was read by Kim.* *The book* (the recipient of the action and now the grammatical subject) *was read* (a verb in the passive voice which describes an action or influence that has affected the subject) *by Kim* (a prepositional phrase that in this case identifies the agent as the object of the preposition). Note that identifying the agent in the prepositional phrase (as well as the prepositional phrase itself) is optional. The sentence

still makes sense if it is reduced to *The book was read* or if a new kind of prepositional phrase is added to form *The book was read yesterday during the lunch break*.

Form: Passive Voice

The passive voice is formed by **BE + -EN** (past participle of the main or transitive).

All passive voice verbs have some form of the verb **to be** in them.

Tense: Passive Voice

The tense of the passive voice is the tense of the **BE** verb form, the first verb in the sequence of the verb phrase. When you transform a sentence in the active voice to the passive voice, the form of BE retains the tense of the transitive verb.

Exercise 2

For each sentence that follows, do four tasks:

- a. identify the finite verb in the sentence
- b. indicate whether it is in active or passive voice
- c. name the tense
- d. transform the active voice to passive voice OR passive voice to active voice.

Remember, you may have to supply an agent.

The first one is done for you as an example:

1. Alex has eaten spaghetti.
 - a. has eaten
 - b. active
 - c. Present Perfect Simple
 - d. The spaghetti has been eaten by Alex (Note **has been** is also Present Perfect Simple).
2. Later this afternoon, they **will drive** the care to Lighthouse Park.
3. The ball **was hit** to centre field by Jake.
4. May **is kissing** Fluffy's nose.
5. I **have been sewing** a dress.
6. Chris **had swum** the lake last year.
7. The present **will be wrapped** by 6 tonight.