

GRAMMAR
NOTES
and
EXERCISES

Colin Smith

VERBS: THE BASICS

With the exception of 'be', all verbs have either five or four different forms:

verb forms	number of forms
be, am, are, is, was, were, been, being	8
do, does, did, done, doing	5
take, takes, took, taken, taking	5
drive, drives, drove, driven, driving	5
write, writes, wrote, written, writing	5
fall, falls, fell, fallen, falling	5
feel, feels, felt, feeling	4
catch, catches, caught, catching	4
have, has, had, having	4
think, thinks, thought, thinking	4
start, starts, started, starting	4

For all the verbs in the table, the first form on the left (be, do, take ...) is the *base form*.

With the exception of 'be', the second form (does, takes, drives ...) is the *third person singular of the present tense*.

Again with the exception of 'be', the third form (did, took, drove ...) is the *past tense*.

Where a verb has five forms, the fourth one (done, taken, driven ...) is the *past participle*.

Where a verb has only four forms, the past participle is exactly the same as the past tense.

The last form on the right in each list (being, doing, taking ...) is the *present participle*.

The verbs 'be', 'do' and 'have' can be *auxiliaries* which help in constructing verb tenses.

COLOUR CODE

have/has

The auxiliary verb 'have/has' is associated with the present perfect tense.

Examples:

She **has** **been** out of the office all day.

My parents **have** **been** **living** in that apartment since 1980.

Emergency accommodation **has** **been** **provided** for the victims.

present participle

The present participle is associated with continuous verb forms.

Examples:

It is **raining**.

I've been **waiting** for over an hour.

We were **having** dinner when the electricity went off.

past participle

The past participle combines with the auxiliaries 'have/has', 'had', 'is/are' etc to make certain active and passive verb tenses.

Examples:

She has **taken** the day off work.

The party had **finished** before we arrived.

The conference is **held** every July.

In regular verbs, the past participle looks the same as the past tense:

verb	past	past participle
walk	walked	walked

When you learn the parts of *irregular* verbs, the past participle is always the third form. It may or may not be different from the other forms:

verb	past	past participle
eat	ate	eaten
make	made	made
come	came	come

PRESENT TENSES

Very many people start learning English by talking about the present. You look at a picture, and use Present Continuous to say what people in it *are doing*. You learn to use Present Simple to talk about what you *often* do, and do *every* Thursday, or *at the weekend*.

This is basic, but the difficulty of choosing which present tense to use does not disappear, and actually increases as you improve your English. It's much more difficult to think of everything happening now (or approximately now) as a picture than to describe a picture in front of you. Many people with a good level in English are unsure about when they should use Present Continuous, and will say, for example, 'prices go up' when they really mean 'prices are going up'.

Another important point to remember is that we very often use Present Continuous to talk about the future. So we say '*I'm seeing* my family next weekend', '*They're taking* a vacation later this year' etc.

PRESENT SIMPLE

The Present Simple is associated with an idea of something permanent or complete. When it refers to an action, we 'see' the beginning and the end of the action. Some basic uses:

- habitual, repeated or regular activity

She works on Saturday mornings.

I sing in the shower.

- permanent characteristic or condition

Rio de Janeiro lies on the coast

He talks very quickly

- state (see below)

I understand your problem

The model exists in several colours

Other uses:

- action in a series of events (journalistic writing, sports commentary, etc.)

She smiles as she answers my question

He hammers the ball into the net

- 'timetable' future

We get back to London at two in the morning

The next train leaves at 8.32

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

The Present Continuous is associated with something happening at this moment, or more generally around now. Something is temporary, developing or not complete. We don't 'see' its beginning and end. Basic uses:

- at this moment

I'm waiting for a phone call

It's starting to rain

- present development

The pound is falling against the dollar

I'm losing weight

Other uses:

- with 'always' to express irritation or criticism

You're always asking me to help you

She's always breaking up with her boyfriends

- future arrangements

We're meeting at six tonight

I'm having a party on Saturday

STATE AND EVENT VERBS

Verbs can be approximately divided into 'state' (S) and 'event' (E) verbs. In general, 'state' verbs do **not** have a continuous form. They are like an on / off switch. However, some verbs can be either 'state' or 'event', depending on the meaning. Some examples:

verb	type	examples
be (exist)	S	<i>It is 200 years old</i>
be (quality / behave)	S / E	<i>He is stupid / You are being stupid now</i>
know	S	<i>I know what you want</i>
belong	S	<i>The money belongs to my parents</i>
have (possess)	S	<i>They have two cars</i>
have (experience)	E	<i>I always have trouble contacting them / I'm having fun</i>
believe	S	<i>She believes she knows who did it</i>
taste (quality)	S	<i>This lobster tastes delicious</i>
taste (experience)	E	<i>The chef always tastes the soup / He's tasting the soup</i>
run	E	<i>I run two miles every day / They're running to break the record</i>

PRESENT SIMPLE SPELLING RULES

verb	ending	third person singular
have	irregular	has
work	consonant	works
lie	two vowels	lies
decide	vowel + consonant + e	decides
wish	sh	wishes
stretch	tch	stretches
veto	o	vetoes
carry	y	carries

PRONUNCIATION

verb ends in	third person singular	examples
ck, f, gh, k, p, t	/s/	looks, stops, puts
(vowel +) b, d, l, m, n, v (+ e)	/z/	robs, phones, loves
o, y	/z/	carries, does, plays
s, x, z, sh, tch	/ɪz/	fixes, wishes, watches

Exercise 1

Put the correct present tense verb forms in the sentences below.

1.

She just outside Paris.

- a) lives
- b) is living

2.

They my flat at the moment, so I with friends for a week.

- a) decorate /stay
- b) are decorating / am staying

3.

Our neighbour chickens in his garden.

- a) has
- b) is having

4.

This is great! I a wonderful time.

- a) have
- b) am having

5.

What's that smell? I something in the kitchen.

- a) think / is burning
- b) am thinking / burns

6.

The polar ice caps with the effect of global warming.

- a) melt
- b) are melting

7.

My brother it difficult to find a job in his area.

- a) says / is becoming
- b) is saying / becomes

8.

This month, we a free gift with every book you

- a) are offering / buy
- b) offer / are buying

9.

I the ladder so that you

- a) hold / are not falling
- b) am holding / don't fall

10.

We problems which a speedy solution.

- a) are experiencing / require
- b) experience /are requiring

Exercise 2

Which verb tense is correct, Present Simple or Present Continuous?

1.

The new plant now over 3,000 people.

- a) employs
- b) is employing

2.

Although Europe important, the company's main markets are now in Asia.

- a) remains
- b) is remaining

3.

We a prototype of the new engine.

- a) currently build
- b) are currently building

4.

The rooftop restaurant a panoramic view of the river.

- a) features
- b) is featuring

5.

The downtown area the city's main financial district.

- a) encompasses
- b) is encompassing

6.

It much less to have the components manufactured abroad.

- a) usually costs
- b) is usually costing

7.

The food extract from the leaves of a tropical plant.

- a) comes
- b) is coming

8.

The director a departmental meeting, so won't be available until later.

a) holds

b) is holding

9.

Presently, the club to attract new members by reducing its subscription fees.

a) tries

b) is trying

10.

Despite the extra work it involves, I we should try to meet the deadline..

a) feel

b) am feeling

Exercise 3

Complete each sentence with Present Simple or Present Continuous, using the given verbs.

1.

After a slow start to the year, business (pick up)

2.

Our new line of beauty products very well. (do)

3.

Mr Richards constantly for his excellent proposals and contributions. (stand out)

4.

We to publicize our activities with this new campaign. (try)

5.

The company to consolidate its position in the market. (need)

6.

Ms Ayala all the skills required to get the job done. (possess)

7.

The waiter to be ignoring us deliberately. (seem)

8.

Manufacturing less labour-intensive as a result of developing technology. (becomes)

9.

The city's film festival an important attraction for visitors. (remain)

10.

More than 80% of the workers permanent contracts. (have)

Exercise 4

Which word has a differently pronounced *ending*?

1.

- a) does b) knows c) reads d) puts

2.

- a) watches b) pushes c) arrives d) passes

3.

- a) talks b) plays c) ensures d) says

4.

- a) cites b) breathes c) draws d) pulls

5.

- a) pushes b) announces c) chooses d) behaves

6.

- a) avoids b) identifies c) interprets d) relies

7.

- a) flies b) dreams c) scores d) forces

8.

- a) conceives b) attains c) wipes d) drives

9.

- a) catches b) establishes c) wishes d) bathes

10.

- a) likes b) fails c) wakes d) laughs

a plant – a manufacturing facility, a factory

downtown – the central area of a city

to encompass – geographically, to contain inside itself

abroad – in (or to) another country, not your home country

available – easy to contact or find

presently – currently, at the moment, at the present time

subscription fees – money paid to participate in something or receive something regularly

a deadline – a time or date when work must be completed

PRESENT PERFECT AND PAST TENSES

It is easy to know that something happened in the past, or that it is happening now, but describing this in language is more complex. Different languages have different ways of viewing time, and you have perhaps noticed that English has the two words 'time' (as in 'past time'), and 'tense' (as in 'verb tense').

From this point of view, it is always the Present Perfect which causes the biggest problems. Sometimes it is used where other languages use a present tense: '*I've been living* here for two years', not '*Live*'. It may not be clear why we use Present Perfect instead of the Simple Past: '*I've been* to America'. There are many opportunities to make mistakes by using Present Perfect where you must use the Simple Past: '~~*I have done*~~ it an hour ago'.*

Remember though that in a lot of other cases deciding whether to use the Present Perfect is a question of choice. It may just be the most natural option, not the only correct one.

PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE

active:

subject + have / has + past participle

I have forgotten her name.

My cousin has written to me.

passive:

subject + have / has + been + past participle

The two children have been taken to hospital.

The substance has been found to be toxic.

PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS

active:

subject + have / has + been + present participle

I have been living here for 20 years.

He has been having problems at work lately.

(The passive is not useful, and rarely used.)

BASIC USES OF PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE

1. 'Past to Now'

How long has he had his computer?

I've been learning English for ten years.

2. 'Experience'

She's been to most of the countries in the world.

Have you ever eaten sushi?

3. 'Result'

*He's **broken** his leg, so he can't go on holiday.*
*I can see you've **been running** because your face is red.*

Note that the 'experience' use is not associated with present perfect continuous.

Present perfect is also common in future 'when' clauses, as in:
*I'll tell you when I've **finished** the preparations.*

TYPICAL PRESENT PERFECT PROBLEMS

- wrongly used with past time indicators

wrong: *We **have had** a test yesterday.*

right: *We **had** a test yesterday.*

wrong: *I **have played** a lot of tennis when I was younger.*

right: *I **played** a lot of tennis when I was younger.*

- present wrongly used where present perfect required

wrong: *I **work** here since January.*

right: *I've **been working** here since January.*

wrong: *This is the first time I **meet** her.*

right: *This is the first time I've **met** her.*

- confused use of prepositions and adverbs

wrong: *She's been having driving lessons **since** three months.*

right: *She's been having driving lessons **for** three months.*

wrong: *Have you **already** ridden a camel?*

right: *Have you **ever** ridden a camel?*

wrong: *I've **ever / already** been to America.*

right: *I've **been** to America.*

PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE VS CONTINUOUS

There are several categories:

- either can be used, although continuous is preferred:

*I've **been waiting** / **waited** here for two hours.*

- the verb is not used in the continuous form:

*We've **had** our old car for ten years.*

- there is a difference in meaning:

*You've **damaged** that book. (The damage is done.)*

*You've **been damaging** that book. (There has been continuous, possibly intentional, damage.)*

- the continuous form is not used for quantifying:

*I've **seen** the film more than a dozen times.*

*How much money have you **saved**?*

PROBLEMS WITH 'FOR', 'SINCE' AND 'DURING'

'For' and 'since' are often associated with present perfect; 'during' is not:

They've been on holiday for (not 'during') two weeks.

(A simple rule is: do not use 'during' before a number.)

'Since' is not always followed by present perfect. Compare the sentences:

This is the first good pizza we've had since we've been here.

This is the first good pizza we've had since we lived in Italy.

SIMPLE PAST

active:

subject + past tense form

I saved £500 in two months.

The film finished at 11.30.

We tried to explain.

I found the trip very tiring.

passive:

subject + was / were + **past participle**

She was invited to join the association.

The children were all given presents.

The simple past tense is used for completed states and events in the past:

*We **lived** in that house for ten years.*

*Last summer, I **went** to the USA.*

Certain time adverbs, such as 'ago', are almost exclusively associated with the simple past. With or without a time expression, if you 'view' something as being finished, you should use this tense.

The use of the simple past is determined by whether something is seen as being completed and in the past, not by ideas of duration or repetition:

*I **heard** him come in a minute ago.*

*Dinosaurs **ruled** the earth for 160 million years.*

*I **had** lunch in the canteen every day when I **worked** there.*

PAST CONTINUOUS

active:

subject + was / were + **present participle**

It was raining heavily.

passive:

subject + was / were + being + **past participle**

My car was being repaired.

The past continuous tense is used:

- to talk about what *was happening* at a point in the past

*This time last week, **we were relaxing** on the beach.*

- as a narrative tense to give background information

*Everyone **was laughing** and **singing**, and we **were having** a good time.*

Unlike with the simple past, with past continuous we do not 'see' the start and end of what happened, just a part of it. There is an idea that something was temporary, developing, or in progress.

Reminder:

A number of verbs ('know', 'own', 'exist' etc.) do not usually have continuous forms.

SIMPLE PAST VS PAST CONTINUOUS

When the two tenses are used together, the past continuous is often used for an interrupted state or activity, and the simple past is used for the event which interrupted it:

*He **was driving** through enemy territory when a bomb **exploded** under his jeep.*

*I **cut** myself while I **was decorating** the bedroom.*

The event is not always sudden, but the duration of the simple past verb is always less than that of the past continuous verb:

*I **read** the entire newspaper while I **was waiting** in the queue.*

A verb in the simple past can be a consequence of a verb in the past continuous:

*We **were having** such a good time that we **decided** to stay.*

'WHEN' AND 'WHILE'

'When' is often associated with the simple past, and 'while' is often associated with the past continuous, as in the two previous examples.

'While' can also connect two past continuous verbs:

*She **was singing** while she **was cooking**.*

Or two simple past verbs:

*He **washed** the dishes while I **dried** them.*

(Emphasizing that both jobs were finished.)

PAST PERFECT SIMPLE

active:

subject + had + **past participle**

*The ferry **had just left** the harbour.*

passive:

subject + had + been + **past participle**

*He **had been taken** into hospital the night before.*

Past perfect often 'sets the scene' for an event in the past:

*I **had gone** outside for a few minutes. It was then that I heard the noise from the room.*

There can be a result of the past perfect idea:

*He **had lost** 10 kilos. He **looked** terrible.*

PAST PERFECT VS SIMPLE PAST

There is often an alternative, without much difference in meaning:

*I **hadn't realized** she was your cousin.*

*I **didn't realize** she was your cousin.*

Do not use past perfect unnecessarily if simple past is correct.

When certain 'time' words are used to connect ideas, past perfect is used if it is *necessary* for the first action to be completed before the second one takes place:

*When / After / As soon as I **had set up** the computer, I switched it on.*

*When / After / As soon as he **had cut** the logs, he made a fire.*

Compare with two actions at (almost) the same time:

*When / As soon as I **tasted** the sauce, I **knew** it was too spicy.*

Used with past perfect, 'when' can also mean 'before':

*When she **arrived**, we **had eaten** lunch.*

Compare:

*When she **arrived**, we **ate** lunch.*

Simple past time expressions such as 'yesterday', 'last week', 'ago' become 'the day / week before', 'previously' etc. with past perfect if the reference point is moved from the present to the past:

*We **had a party** last week.*

*We had had a party **the week before**. (not 'a week ago')*
The Johnsons went to live in London two years ago.
*The Johnsons had gone to live in London **two years before** / **previously**.*

PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS

active:

subject + had + been + **present participle**

The temperature had been rising all day.

(The passive is not useful, and rarely used.)

Past perfect continuous is used to describe what **had been happening** before a point in the past:

We finally found a restaurant. We had been getting hungrier and hungrier all day.

There can be a result of the past perfect continuous idea:

He had been working for sixteen hours. He looked terrible.

PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS VS OTHER PAST TENSES

There can sometimes be an alternative, without much difference in meaning:

I had been thinking of buying an OLED TV, until I saw the prices.

I was thinking of buying an OLED TV, until I saw the prices.

Past perfect continuous can suggest that an activity was **interrupted**. Compare:

The kids did their homework in the bedroom.

(They started and finished.)

The kids were doing their homework in the bedroom.

(They were still there working.)

The kids had done their homework in the bedroom.

(The homework was completed.)

The kids had been doing their homework in the bedroom.

(The homework was not completed.)

Exercise 1

Choose either the Present Perfect or the Simple Past to complete the sentences below.

1.

As a faithful customer, you for our latest special offer.

a) have qualified

b) qualified

2.

The exhibition consists of photos which show how the city we live in over the years.

a) has changed

b) changed

3.

The restaurant to make a profit about six months after it opened.

a) has started

b) started

4.

I need to consult the heads of department, but I able to contact them all yet.

a) haven't been

b) wasn't

5.

After finalizing the report, we it published last week.

- a) have had
- b) had

6.

The same team on the project since its beginning.

- a) has worked
- b) worked

7.

The former sales director directly responsible for key accounts.

- a) has been
- b) was

8.

The present economic situation us to increase our prices.

- a) has obliged
- b) obliged

9.

Our guest on today's show three volumes of poetry.

- a) has written
- b) wrote

10.

The company's change in strategy so unexpected that it took its competitors by surprise.

- a) has been
- b) was

Exercise 2

Complete the conversations with the correct verb tenses.

A) Where *1*..... your partner?

B) At a party in London last year. Neither of us *2*..... anybody there. We *3*..... talking, and we *4*..... together ever since.

1.

- a) did you meet
- b) have you met

2.

- a) knew
- b) has known

3.

- a) started
- b) have started

4.

- a) are
- b) have been

- A) How long 5.....the guitar?
B) About six months, although I 6..... this old guitar for years.
A) I 7..... it would be nice to play an instrument.

5.
a) do you play
b) have you been playing
6.
a) had
b) have had
7.
a) have always thought
b) have always been thinking

- A) This is the first good meal we 8.....since we 9..... here.
B) Stop complaining! We 10..... since Monday.

8.
a) had
b) have had
9.
a) arrived
b) have arrived
10.
a) are only here
b) have only been here

Exercise 3

Complete the sentences below with the correct verb tenses.

1.
I went to the theatre yesterday evening. I a play for almost ten years.

- a) wasn't seeing
b) hadn't seen

2.
By the time the food finally arrived, we for more than half an hour.

- a) were waiting
b) had been waiting

3.
When I the bill, I put it in my pocket.

- a) looked at
b) had looked at

4.
When she the accounts, she saw the error immediately.

- a) looked at
- b) had looked at

5.

We for about half an hour, when suddenly there was a loud knock on the door.

- a) danced
- b) had been dancing

6.

The restaurant had only just opened when it by the fire.

- a) was destroyed
- b) had been destroyed

7.

I didn't laugh because I the joke already.

- a) heard
- b) had heard

8.

The city to build near the park, but it subsequently cancelled the project.

- a) has originally decided
- b) had originally decided

9.

The date of this year's award ceremony yet.

- a) hasn't been fixed
- b) wasn't fixed

10.

When Mr Thomas the company, he gave bonuses for exceptional performance.

- a) was running
- b) had been running

a faithful customer – someone who continues to appreciate a product or service

a profit – a financial benefit, the opposite of a loss

to finalize – to finish working on the last details of something

former – previous

an account – an agreement between a supplier and a client

a guest – someone who is invited

competitors – other companies competing in the same market

subsequently – later, at a later moment

a bonus – a financial reward, usually for good work