



## Tenses and Conjugation

Using correct verb forms is crucial to communicating coherently. Understanding how to apply different tenses and properly conjugate verbs will give you the tools with which to craft clear, effective sentences.

### Conjugations

A conjugation is a list of verb forms. It catalogues the person, number, tense, voice, and mood of a verb. Knowing how to conjugate verbs correctly will help you match verbs with their subjects, and give you a firmer grasp on how verbs function in different sentences. Here is a sample conjugation table:

#### Present Tense, Active Voice, Indicative Mood: *Jump*

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	<i>I jump</i>	<i>we jump</i>
2nd Person	<i>you jump</i>	<i>you jump</i>
3rd Person	<i>he/she/it jumps</i>	<i>they jump</i>

**Person:** Person is divided into three categories (first, second, and third person), and tells the reader whether the subject is speaking, is spoken to, or is spoken about. Each person is expressed using different subjects: first person uses *I* or *we*; second person uses *you*; and third person uses *he/she/it* or *they*. Keep in mind that these words are not the only indicators of person; for example in the sentence “Shakespeare uses images of the divine in his sonnets to represent his own delusions of grandeur”, the verb *uses* is in the third person because Shakespeare could be replaced by *he*, an indicator of the third person.

**Number:** Number refers to whether the verb is singular or plural.

**Tense:** Tense tells the reader when the action of a verb takes place. English has six tenses: Present, Past, Future (the Simple Tenses), and Present Perfect, Past Perfect, and Future Perfect (the Perfect Tenses). Each of these tenses has another form, called the Progressive. Tenses will be further discussed below.

**Voice:** The voice of a verb shows whether the subject of the verb is performing an action or is being acted upon. In the active voice, the subject of the verb performs an action; in the passive voice, the subject of the verb is being acted upon. For example:

**Active Voice:** Socrates *asserts* that humans inherently know everything.

**Passive Voice:** The assertion that humans inherently know everything *is made by* Socrates.

Note that the word *by* is not part of the verb; however, *by* often accompanies verbs in the passive voice.

**Mood:** The mood of a verb denotes the attitude of the speaker. English verbs can take one of three moods: indicative, imperative, or subjunctive.

**Indicative:** The indicative mood is used to express questions and statements.

*Example: Approximately 30,000 people speak Irish as their native language.*

**Imperative:** The imperative mood is used to give commands or directions.

*Example: Eat your beets!*

**Subjunctive:** The subjunctive mood is used to express a wish, a request, a requirement, or a condition that is contrary to fact. Often, subjunctives are accompanied by the helping verbs *would*, *could*, or *should*.

*Example: I would ride the bus to school if I lived on the bus line.*

### Tenses

Tenses tell when the action of the verb takes place. Using tenses correctly and consistently improves the readability of your writing. English has six tenses, each of which has a Progressive form. The Simple and Perfect tenses address action as a whole; these actions have a foreseeable beginning and end. The Progressive forms of these tenses convey motion, continuous action, or an action that is currently in progress. Use a form of the verb *to be*, such as *am*, *were*, *been*, etc., and add *-ing* to the main verb to construct the Progressive, e.g. *she cried* (Past tense) becomes *she was crying* (Past Progressive). Definitions and conjugations of all six tenses are on the reverse of this handout.



### Present Tense

Use the Present tense to show actions that happen in the present or are habitual.

**Present (Tense), Active (Voice), Indicative (Mood): Eat**

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I <i>eat</i>	we <i>eat</i>
2nd Person	you <i>eat</i>	you <i>eat</i>
3rd Person	he/she/it <i>eats</i>	they <i>eat</i>

**Present:** The liquid nitrogen *boils* over.

**Present Progressive:** The liquid nitrogen *is boiling* over.

### Past Tense

Use the Past tense to show actions that happened before the present moment.

**Past, Active, Indicative: Eat**

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I <i>ate</i>	we <i>ate</i>
2nd Person	you <i>ate</i>	you <i>ate</i>
3rd Person	he/she/it <i>ate</i>	they <i>ate</i>

**Past:** Castaway Carl *walked* the plank.

**Past Progressive:** Castaway Carl *was walking* the plank.

### Future Tense

Use the Future tense to show actions that will happen in the future.

**Future, Active, Indicative: Eat**

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I <i>will eat</i>	we <i>will eat</i>
2nd Person	you <i>will eat</i>	you <i>will eat</i>
3rd Person	he/she/it <i>will eat</i>	they <i>will eat</i>

**Future:** I *will explore* animism in John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

**Future Progressive:** I *will be exploring* animism in John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

### Present Perfect Tense

Use the Present Perfect tense to show that the action of the verb has been completed in the past but is linked to the present.

**Present Perfect, Active, Indicative: Eat**

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I <i>have eaten</i>	we <i>have eaten</i>
2nd Person	you <i>have eaten</i>	you <i>have eaten</i>
3rd Person	he/she/it <i>has eaten</i>	they <i>have eaten</i>

**Present Perfect:** She *has called* the doctor.

**Present Perfect Progressive:** She *has been calling* the doctor.

### Past Perfect

Use the Past Perfect tense to show an action that was completed prior to another action that took place in the past.

**Past Perfect, Active, Indicative: Eat**

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I <i>had eaten</i>	we <i>had eaten</i>
2nd Person	you <i>had eaten</i>	you <i>had eaten</i>
3rd Person	he/she/it <i>had eaten</i>	they <i>had eaten</i>

**Past Perfect:** President Lincoln *had attended* the theatre regularly before his assassination.

**Past Perfect Progressive:** President Lincoln *had been attending* the theatre regularly before his assassination.

### Future Perfect

Use the Future Perfect tense to show an action that will be completed prior to another action that will take place in the future.

**Future Perfect, Active, Indicative: Eat**

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I <i>will have eaten</i>	we <i>will have eaten</i>
2nd Person	you <i>will have eaten</i>	you <i>will have eaten</i>
3rd Person	he/she/it <i>will have eaten</i>	they <i>will have eaten</i>

**Future Perfect:** We *will have designed* the poster in three days.

**Future Perfect Progressive:** We *will have been designing* the poster for three days.



Fill in the blanks with the appropriate form of the verb.

**Present, Active, Indicative: *Grow***

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I _____	we _____
2nd Person	you _____	you _____
3rd Person	he/she/it _____	they _____

**Past, Active, Indicative: *Grow***

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I _____	we _____
2nd Person	you _____	you _____
3rd Person	he/she/it _____	they _____

**Present Perfect, Active, Indicative: *Grow***

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I _____	we _____
2nd Person	you _____	you _____
3rd Person	he/she/it _____	they _____

**Future, Active, Indicative: *Grow***

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I _____	we _____
2nd Person	you _____	you _____
3rd Person	he/she/it _____	they _____

**Past Perfect, Active, Indicative: *Grow***

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I _____	we _____
2nd Person	you _____	you _____
3rd Person	he/she/it _____	they _____

**Future Perfect, Active, Indicative: *Grow***

Person	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I _____	we _____
2nd Person	you _____	you _____
3rd Person	he/she/it _____	they _____



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Here is a sample paragraph from a student self-evaluation. Some of the verb tenses are correct; some are incorrect. Find the incorrect verbs and fix their tenses. Remember to consider the tenses of other verbs in the sentence; these may give you clues about the correct tense.

This is the final quarter of my junior year at Evergreen. I enter spring quarter with a deep desire to create. After spending the first two quarters of the year analyzing other people's art, I was more than ready to start making my own. I wanted the opportunity to write creatively and to explore the immediate world around me, not just dusty world of past events. In *Take A Look*, I was afford the opportunity to do this and much more. From the first day of class, I challenge to reawaken my senses, experience the world with an objective and open mind, and, above all, to use these as tools in creating effective art. We will require to write profusely, writing response papers for every day of class, as well as larger synthesis and reflection papers. We had drawing workshops every week, in which we learned useful techniques on how to create convincing art. Perhaps the most influential element of the class, however, is the weekly field site observation, during which we utilized all of our new powers of perception.

For more practice, pick a paragraph from a book, newspaper, or magazine you are reading. Choose a tense and change all verbs in that paragraph to the tense you select.