

English Tenses

In exams, students are asked to put the verbs in brackets in the correct tense. As all tenses will be mixed up, it becomes harder for the student to know which tense it should be. So, students should look for the signal word first and once they find one, they think of the form. Let's consider these two examples:

1. I (to go) to New York last year. The signal word is "last" and it refers to Simple Past. So, the answer is "went".
2. By 7 O'clock, Smith (to finish).....painting the room. The signal word is "By..." and it refers to Future Perfect Simple. So, the answer is "will have finished".

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SIMPLE PRESENT

Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he, she, it --> verb + s/ + es • I, you, we, they --> + verb • to be --> am/ is/ are • not --> doesn't + verb/ don't + verb
Use	daily routine, habits and repeated actions, and general truths.
Signal words	every..., on Mondays, usually, sometimes, often, rarely,...

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for simple present.

1. Which is a signal word for simple present?
last week – on Mondays – next week
2. Which is **not** a signal word for simple present?
usually – everyday – in 2005

EXERCISE 2 Put these verbs in simple present.

1. He/ to go ...-> _____
2. They / to play ...-> _____
3. Mary/ to wash ...-> _____
4. My children / be ...-> _____
5. She/ not, to study ...-> _____

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- 1- Maria sometimes (to read) _____ Spanish novels.
- 2- David (wash) _____ the family car on Sundays.
- 3- The teacher (wear) _____ a suit and tie every meeting.
- 4- My children (to be) _____ usually sick in Autumn.
- 5- (Jackie, go) _____ to the gym every week?

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SIMPLE PAST

Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regular verbs + ed/ irregular (the list) • to be --> was/ were • not --> didn't + verb
Use	actions happened at a specific time in the past.
Signal words	last..., yesterday,ago, in 2011, the other day

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for simple past.

1. Which is a signal word for simple past?
the other day – tomorrow - rarely
2. Which is **not** a signal word for simple past?
....ago – in 2005 – next week

EXERCISE 2 Put these verbs in simple past.

1. go ...-> _____
2. see ...-> _____
3. play ...-> _____
4. not, come ...-> _____
5. they/ be ...-> _____

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- 1- Mike's parents (arrive) _____ yesterday at 6 O'clock.
- 2- My little brother (see) _____ a nightmare last night.
- 3- Alfred and Dave (to be) _____ in the swimming two hours ago.
- 4- We (not, to like) _____ the party last weekend; it was too noisy.
- 5- (Nancy, go) _____ shopping last night?

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PRESENT CONTINUOUS

Form	am, is, or are + verb + ing
Use	actions happening now, at the moment of speaking.
Signal words	now, at the moment, still, Look! Listen!...

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for present continuous.

- Which is a signal word for present continuous?
last – now – every night
- Which is **not** a signal word for present continuous?
now – already – still

EXERCISE 2 Put these verbs in present continuous.

- They / play → _____
- Sara and Leila/ dance → _____
- I/ not, speak → _____
- He/ to sing → _____
- David / not, to write → _____

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- Now, it (rain) _____ heavily outside.
- She (not, speak) _____ French at the moment.
- Many people (still, fight) _____ against poverty in Africa.
- Mark's children (to play) _____ video games at the moment.
- (Sandra, to do) _____ her homework now?

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PAST CONTINUOUS

Form	was or were + verb + ing
Use	For actions which were in progress in the past.
Signal words	when, while + long action in the past

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for past continuous.

- Which is a signal word for past continuous?
while – by next week – tomorrow
- Which is **not** a signal word for past continuous?
next week – when – while

EXERCISE 2 Put these verbs in past continuous.

- She/ watch → _____
- They/ to play → _____
- It/ rain → _____
- Many students/ to work → _____
- He/ not, to drive → _____

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- Barbara (to do) _____ her homework yesterday when I came in.
- When I (write) _____ the E-mail last time, Mary (to watch) _____ TV.
- I saw my teacher yesterday when I (wait) _____ for the bus.
- When Sandra (arrive) _____ home yesterday, her father (not, to cook) _____ lunch.
- (Your brother, to play) _____ the game when the computer crashed down?

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PRESENT PERFECT

Form	have or has + Past Participle
Use	For actions which started in the past and continued up to the present.
Signal words	just, already, yet, for, since, so far, recently, ever...

NB. We use Present Perfect Continuous (have/has+ been + verb +ing) to give more emphasis on the duration of the action. However, some verbs can't be used in the continuous form such as own, smell, need, belong, cost, agree, contain..., etc.

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for present perfect.

- Which is a signal word for present perfect?
still – usually – since
- Which is **not** a signal word for present perfect?
since – before – for

EXERCISE 2 Put these verbs in present perfect.

- They/ to do → _____
- Jack / to publish → _____
- He/ not, to have → _____
- She/ to study → _____
- Mike and Lina / to have → _____

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- He (just, phone) _____ Sabrina; she is in Chicago now.
- I (buy, recently) _____ a laptop to Louis.
- The maid (not, cook) _____ the dinner yet.
- She (drive) _____ this car for two hours.
- He (to be) _____ in prison since 2003.
- (you, ever, read) _____ Hemingway's novels?

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PAST PERFECT

Form	had + Past Participle 2 actions in the past 1st action → Past Perfect 2nd action → Simple Past
Use	For actions which happened before the other one in the past.
Signal words	before, after, already, when, never.. as soon as, until...

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for past perfect .

- Which is a signal word for past perfect?
last week - after - now
- Which is **not** a signal word for past perfect?
at the moment - after- already

EXERCISE 2 Find the past perfect to these verbs.

- come →
- not, have →
- see →
- play →
- cut →

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- Before Randa (to take) _____ the test exam yesterday, she (memorize) _____ irregular verbs.
- After she (to do) _____ her homework last night, she (go) _____ to bed.
- When I (arrive) _____ home yesterday, the film (already, start) _____ .
- Last time, I (feel) _____ stressed because I (never, take) _____ the IELTS Test before.
- Jonny (get) _____ the job after he (graduate) _____ from Oxford university.

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SIMPLE FUTURE

Form	will + verb
Use	For actions which will occur in the future.
Signal words	next, tomorrow, soon, later,...

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for simple future.

- Which is a signal word for simple future?
already - next week- in 2017
- Which is **not** a signal word for simple future?
by tomorrow - tomorrow- soon

EXERCISE 2 Find the simple future to the following verbs.

- to work →
- to play →
- to speak →
- not, to come →
- to enjoy →

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- I (to travel) _____ around the world next summer holiday.
- The boss (not, to meet) _____ you tomorrow; he's busy.
- Alberto (marry) _____ Helen next month.
- The Smiths (not, to be) _____ in England next January.
- (James, attend) _____ the conference tomorrow?

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FUTURE PERFECT

Form	will have + Past Participle
Use	For actions that will be finished before some point in the future, also to express certainty that an action was completed.
Signal words	by....., in.....time

EXERCISE 1 Find the signal words for future perfect.

- Which is a signal word for future perfect?
tomorrow- in two days' time - next week-
- Which is **not** a signal word for future perfect?
already - by ... - in three weeks' time

EXERCISE 2 Put these verbs in future perfect.

- to go →
- to play →
- to do →
- to visit →
- to enjoy →

EXERCISE 3 Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- By 9 O'clock, many students (finish) _____ doing their exercises.
- In two days' time, we (go) _____ back home.
- My brother (to return) _____ from the trip by 7 O'clock.
- By November, we (buy) _____ a new apartment in Paris.
- By the end of next year, we (study) _____ English for three years.

Past Perfect Simple:

- Form: 1st action → Past perfect = had + Past Participle 2nd action → Simple past = (ed/list)
- Signal words: before, after, already, when, never, as soon as,

Exercise

Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- My friends (to eat) _____ everything before I (join) _____ them yesterday.
- After he (have) _____ a shower last night, we (go out) _____ with Laura.
- When I (arrive) _____ at the cinema, the film (already, start) _____.
- Sara and Peter (know) _____ each other for three years before they (get) _____ married.
- She (to phone) _____ her friend before she (to go) _____ to New York yesterday.
- As soon as he (finish) _____ his education in Paris in 2009, he (return) _____ to Morocco.

Past Perfect Continuous:

- Form: Past perfect continuous = had been + verb + ing (here more emphasis is put on the duration of the action.)
- Signal words: before, after, when, because, all day, for.....

NB. Some verbs can't be used in the continuous form such as own, smell, need, belong, cost, agree, contain....etc.

Exercise

Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- The police (look for) _____ the thief for 10 days before they (catch) _____ him.
- She (to be) _____ tired because she (work) _____ all day.
- She (drive) _____ for a couple of hours before she (have) _____ the accident.
- He (to work) _____ on the project for three hours before the boss (come in) _____.
- They (play) _____ for two hours when it (begin) _____ to rain.
- I (feel) _____ tired yesterday because I (to drive) _____ all night.

Future Perfect:

- Form: Future Perfect = will have + Past Participle (here, the action will be completed at a point in the future)
- Signal words: by.../ in....s' time.....

Exercise

Put the following verbs in the correct tense.

- By 8 O'clock tomorrow, she (to do) _____ the laundry.
- The Smiths (visit) _____ all Europe by next year.
- By this time tomorrow, we (finish) _____ the project.
- By 10 O'clock, the kids (fall) _____ asleep.
- By next year, Maria (to receive) _____ her promotion.
- The maid (clean) _____ the entire house by dinner.
- Monica and Rosa (to begin) _____ working by this time tomorrow morning.
- By Sunday, you (do) _____ all the homework.
- In three days' time, the school (receive) _____ prizes.
- In five minutes' time, they (to leave) _____ the classroom.