

Tenses

Simple present

Use: For statements characterising a person, thing, etc. as such. For expressing habitual actions and for statements that are always true.

He loves golf. · I work for BMW. · There is no such thing as a unicorn.

Present continuous

Use: For an action that is going on at a present moment in time or during a present period of time. (With always) Expressing annoyance at a repeated or ongoing action that bothers you.

I'm reading a book by Bernard Shaw. · He's always bragging about his job.

Present perfect

Use: For an action that has taken place during a period of time that started in the past and extends right up to the present.

I have known him for five years. · I have never seen anything like that.

Present perfect continuous

Use: For an action that has been going on during a period of time that started in the past and extends right up to the present.

I have been waiting for two hours. · It has been raining the last couple of days.

Simple past

Use: For an action, or successive actions, that took place at a moment in time or period of time that is definitely terminated in the past.

My mother met Queen Victoria. · He had an accident and died a week later.

Past continuous

Use: For an action that was going on at a past moment in time or during a past period of time.

I was watching the telly when you called. · I was living in Berlin during that time.

Past perfect

Use: For an action that had taken place during a period of time that had started before a certain time in the past and extended right up to it.

He had been a local councillor for years before he was elected mayor.

Past perfect continuous

Use: For an action that had been going on during a period of time that had started before a certain time in the past and extended right up to it.

I had been waiting for him for two hours when he finally came home.

Future forms

* [will]

Use: For general predictions whose probability the speaker need not care much about. For spontaneous decisions to do something in the future.

I'll see you tomorrow! · Don't bother calling a taxi, I'll drive you.

* [going to]

Use: For future actions that you can see some evidence for. For actions involving some planning, actual or imaginary.

I'm going to kill that bastard. · The neighbours have bought some building materials, I think they're going to put up a shed.

* Present continuous

Use: For appointments or other arrangements (usually with another person) in the future.

I'm taking my girlfriend to the cinema tonight. · I'm going to the dentist tomorrow.

* Simple present

Use: For future actions that are beyond the control of the speaker, e.g. official or scheduled actions.

My flight leaves at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. · The new shop opens on Monday.