

# GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE IN FOCUS

## 1.3 Tense and aspect

Tense refers to the time when an action or event takes place: present, past and future.

Aspect refers to how we regard the duration of the action or event being described – whether it is in progress or complete. We have two aspects: the continuous (also known as 'progressive') and the perfect (also known as 'perfective'). There is no simple aspect. Each tense (or time) can be expressed in the continuous and the perfect aspect. The tense forms in each different aspect share common characteristics.

### Continuous aspect

#### Present Continuous/Past Continuous/Future Continuous

The continuous aspect shows that actions or events are in progress during a particular period of time. The actions are temporary and/or of limited duration and occur in present time, past time or future time. The actions are not necessarily completed.

### Perfect aspect

#### Present Perfect/Past Perfect/Future Perfect

The perfect aspect creates a link between two time periods. It shows:

- the connection between an action happening in one time and an action happening in another time.
- the connection between an action happening in one time and another point in time.

The continuous and perfect aspects combine to show that an action has been, was or will be in progress before a point in time. (Present Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect Continuous and Future Perfect Continuous).

### Simple tense forms

#### Present Simple and Past Simple

These tenses perform similar functions when referring to present time (Present Simple) and past time (Past Simple). Both these tenses are used to talk about:

- routines and habits.  
Present Simple: *They walk to college every day.*  
Past Simple: *They walked to college every day.*
- states and permanent situations.  
Present Simple: *He feels angry.*  
Past Simple: *He felt angry.*  
Present Simple: *They live in the USA.*  
Past Simple: *They lived in the USA.*

#### NB

The Present Simple is always used when we refer to general truths.  
*The Earth travels round the Sun.*

#### Future forms

The Future is not expressed by a single tense. Depending on what exactly we want to express about the future we can use:

- the Present Continuous (for agreed arrangements).  
*I'm seeing Jo and Tony at the café later.*

- going to + verb (for intentions and predictions for which there is present evidence).  
*He says he's going to travel for a year before going to university.*  
*Look at their expressions! It's obvious they're not going to be friends!*
- will + verb (for future facts, sudden decisions and general predictions).  
*He'll be eighteen next year.*  
*OK. I'll tell him!*  
*I'm sure they'll get on with each other in the end. Just give them time!*
- the Present Simple (for timetabled events; after certain time adverbials when describing a future event).  
*The party starts at eight.*  
*I'll call you as soon as they arrive.*

### Continuous tense forms

#### The Present Continuous, Past Continuous and Future Continuous

The continuous forms are used to talk about:

- Actions in progress at the time of speaking in the present (NOT repeated actions).  
Present Continuous: *I'm watching the film right now.*
- Actions in progress at a particular time in the past.  
Past Continuous: *I was watching the film then.*
- Actions in progress in the future.  
Future Continuous: *This time tomorrow I'll be flying to Paris!*
- Temporary actions or situations.  
Present Continuous: *He's working for his dad for the time being.*  
Past Continuous: *He was working for his dad when I met him.*  
Future Continuous: *He'll be working for his dad for a while.*

#### NB

The Present and Past Continuous tenses can be used with repeated actions and an adverb of frequency to show annoyance at the repeated action.

*He is/was always forgetting to lock the door!*

#### Stative and dynamic verbs

Verbs expressing emotions (e.g. *hate, like, love*), states of mind (e.g. *believe, know, need, prefer, remember, seem, think, understand, want*) or senses (e.g. *feel, hear, see*) are called **stative** or **state** verbs and are not usually used in any continuous tense (unlike **dynamic** or **action** verbs).

Some verbs can be both stative and dynamic, for example:

- think  
*I think you're wrong.* (= believe, have an opinion – stative verb)  
*I'm thinking about the situation.* (= consider, be involved in the process of thought – dynamic verb)
- have  
*She has three dogs.* (= own, possess – stative verb)  
*She's having lunch now.* (= eat – dynamic verb)

# REFERENCE AND PRACTICE

- see  
I **see** what you mean. (= understand – stative verb)  
I'm **seeing** the director tomorrow. (= meet – dynamic verb)
- be  
Tom **is** a very critical person. (= permanent quality – stative verb)  
Tom **is being** very critical of everything today. (temporary behaviour – dynamic verb)

We sometimes use stative verbs in continuous forms while talking about things/events which last for a short period of time.

- I like my job a lot. (= permanent state – simple form)  
How are you liking your new job? (= short time – continuous form)  
I love rock concerts. (= permanent state – simple form)  
I'm loving this concert. (= short time – continuous form)

Some stative verbs can be used in continuous forms only in certain tenses. For example, *need*, *want* and *mean* can have future or present perfect progressive uses.

- Will you be needing your laptop tomorrow?  
He's been wanting a new phone for a while now.  
I've been meaning to tell you about it since Monday.

## Perfect tense forms

The perfect forms are used to link one time to another time:

- Past → Present  
Past ← Past  
Present → Future

## The Present Perfect, Past Perfect and Future Perfect

The Present Perfect is used to link an action in the past to the present time, or to refer to the present result of that past action.

- We haven't finished the book yet. (We started it in the past and we're still reading it.)  
I've lost my keys (past action) so I can't get into the house. (present result)

The Past Perfect is used to link an action in the past to a previous action in the past.

- They had left by the time we arrived. (We arrived. Previous to our arrival, they left.)

The Future Perfect is used to link a present situation to an action that will be completed in the future.

- Let's start now and we'll have finished by next Tuesday.

Perfect Simple forms also indicate:

- that an action is complete.  
Present Perfect: They have already said that.  
Past Perfect: They had already told them.  
Future Perfect: They will have done that before we arrive.
- that an action is repeated.  
Present Perfect: I have told you not to do that at least five times!  
Past Perfect: It was only after we had phoned several times that someone answered.  
Future Perfect: My granddad will have told Mum and Dad the story at least five times by the time we get there.
- that a situation may be regarded as permanent.  
Present Perfect: Fran and Doug have lived in a small town since they married.

Past Perfect: People had become so dependent on computer friendships that they found it difficult to relate to each other on a face-to-face basis.

Future Perfect: By the end of next year we will have lived here for ten years.

## Perfect continuous forms

### The Present Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect Continuous, Future Perfect Continuous

Perfect continuous forms link one time to another in the same way as the simple forms.

We choose to use a perfect continuous form if we want to emphasise that a situation/action is temporary/in progress at a particular period of time.

Present Perfect Continuous: They've been playing computer games all day today! Tell them to stop.

Past Perfect Continuous: I had been waiting for two hours before he finally arrived!

Future Perfect Continuous: They'll have been sitting there and chatting all morning by the time I get there.

## NB

Since the emphasis is on the duration of the activity we do not specify how many times an action happened.

I've been trying to write my blog all day. NOT ~~I've been trying to write my blog three times.~~

## 1 Complete the sentences with the correct forms of the verbs in brackets. Use any other words provided.

- As children \_\_\_\_\_ (grow up) they tend to lose their dependence on their parents.
- Jack \_\_\_\_\_ (always/fall out) with us over petty things. It's so annoying!
- Supporting friends while they \_\_\_\_\_ (have) a run of bad luck is part of what friendship is.
- Before we got our pet dog we \_\_\_\_\_ (not realise) what a strong bond you can form with an animal.
- While we \_\_\_\_\_ (help) Rose pack, her grandmother was collecting some food for her to take with her.
- At that time people \_\_\_\_\_ (live) in small communities and everyone knew each other.
- Don't worry, by the time you get back, we \_\_\_\_\_ (solve) the problem.
- Mick's irreverent attitude meant he \_\_\_\_\_ (laugh) at people in authority for years.
- I grew up with the kids in the neighbourhood; by the time I leave for university next year I \_\_\_\_\_ (hang out) with them for nearly sixteen years!
- I'm so excited! The plane lands at five p.m. and all my friends \_\_\_\_\_ (wait) at the airport to welcome me back home!
- When I reached the ship's rails the dolphins \_\_\_\_\_ (already/disappear). I was so disappointed!



## 1.4 Future in the past

The future in the past (or 'the future seen from the past') can be expressed by putting any of the forms used to talk about the future into the equivalent past form. The exception is the Present Simple for future.

Future form	Function	Future in the past
Present Continuous	arrangements	Past Continuous
<i>am/is/are going to</i>	intentions/plans/predictions based on observed fact	<i>was/were going to</i>
<i>will (+ infinitive)/have + past participle/be + -ing</i>	predictions/promises	<i>would (+ infinitive)/have + past participle/be + -ing</i>

### The Past Continuous

- To talk about arrangements in the future, we use the Present Continuous.  
*We **are meeting** our friends for lunch tomorrow.*
- To talk about an arrangement made in the past for what was then the future, we use the Past Continuous.  
*We **were meeting** our friends for lunch the following day.*
- If the verb *be* is emphasised in the Past Continuous, this can imply that the arrangement was made but did not happen.  
*We **were meeting** our friends for lunch (but something came up and they couldn't make it).*

### Was/were going to

- To talk about plans/intentions in the future, we use *am/is/are going to*.  
*We're **going to** spend a year travelling around the world.*  
*I'm **going to** tell you your marks in the next lesson.*
- To talk about plans/intentions/decisions made in the past for what was then the future, we use *was/were going to*. This use usually indicates that the event did not happen.  
*We **were going to** spend a year travelling around the world but we changed our minds.*  
*I **was going to** tell you your marks this lesson but I'm not ready yet.*  
However, it is possible to use *was/were going to* when the intention was actually fulfilled.  
*'Thanks for mailing the package.' 'That's fine. I **was going to** mail my letters anyway.'*

### Would

- To make predictions or promises in the future, we usually use *will*.  
*It **will be** a wonderful opportunity to meet the artist in person.*  
*We know they **will be working** when we arrive.*  
*By next week, they **will have bought** all the books they need.*

- To talk about predictions or promises made in the past for what was then the future, we use *would*.

*It **would be** a wonderful opportunity to meet the artist in person.*  
*We knew they **would be working** when we arrived.*  
*By the following week, they **would have bought** all the books they needed.*

### Other ways of expressing the future in the past

- Verbs used to express plans

These verbs are often used to express plans made for the future at a point in the past. We don't necessarily know whether or not the action happened.

*plan to/on*

*We **planned/were planning to leave/on leaving** the following day.*

*intend to*

*Rosie **intended/was intending to meet** us in Italy.*

- was/were to*

This structure is often used to talk about official arrangements, or things destined to happen.

*The meeting **was to** take place in two days' time.*  
(We don't know if it happened or not)

BUT

*The meeting **was to have taken** place. (but it didn't)*

- was/were due to*

This structure is often used to talk about plans that were part of a timetable, or things that were expected to happen at a certain time.

*Our friends **were due to** arrive at ten that night.*  
(we don't know if it happened or not)

BUT

*Our friends **were due to have arrived** at ten that night.*  
(but they didn't)

- was/were supposed to*

This structure is often used to talk about things that were arranged but didn't happen.

*You **were supposed to** give that to me.*

- was/were about to/on the point/verge of*

These structures are often used to talk about things that were to happen very soon.

*I **was on the point/verge of** leaving when he phoned me.*  
*Oh, what a coincidence! I **was just about to** call you.*