



The 12 English Tenses — Quick Reference & Practice

🕒 Reference + Practice

Grammar

All 12 Tenses

Self-Study

🎯 Lesson Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- ✓ **Recognise:** Instantly identify which of the 12 tenses a sentence is using, just from its verb form.
- ✓ **Build:** Form a correct sentence in any of the 12 tenses using the right formula.
- ✓ **Apply:** Practise the same verb across all 12 tenses, then repeat the pattern with a verb of your own.

1 Step 1 — Learn the 12 Formulas

These are the 12 “shapes” of English. Once you know them, you can build any tense with any verb.

Present

Present Simple

I do
I go to work every day.

Present Continuous

I'm doing
I'm eating some tomatoes now.

Present Perfect

I have done
I have just arrived at work.

Present Perfect Continuous

I have been doing
I have been studying English for 3 hours this morning.

Past

Simple Past

I did
I went to the shop yesterday.

Past Continuous

I was doing
I was reading a book the whole day.

Past Perfect

I had done
I had eaten breakfast before my mother called.

Past Perfect Continuous

I had been doing
I had been playing basketball when Mary came.

Future

Future (will)

I will do
I will continue with this meeting later today.

Future (going to)

I'm going to do
I'm going to continue with this meeting later today.

Future Continuous

I will be doing
I will be participating in this meeting next week.

Future Perfect

I will have done
I will have studied for my test by 8am tomorrow.

2 Step 2 — 4 Rules to Spot Any Tense in Seconds

Before you even think about the formula, look at the verb itself. These four checks tell you almost everything you need to know:

Quick Checks

Base verb (go, eat, play, run) — Simple tense — check the time word to know present or past (I go / I went).

Verb + -ing — A continuous tense — the action is (or was, or will be) in progress.

have / has + past participle — Present perfect — connects something in the past to right now.

had + past participle — Past perfect — the earlier of two past actions in a story.

will / going to + base verb — A future tense — something that hasn't happened yet.

3 Step 3 — Watch the Pattern: One Verb, All 12 Tenses

This is the fastest way to really learn the tenses: take one verb and say it in every tense, in order. Read this model aloud, then do the same with your own verb in Step 4.

1. Present Simple — I walk to the shops.
2. Present Continuous — I'm walking to the shops.
3. Simple Past — I walked to the shops.
4. Past Continuous — I was walking to the shops.
5. Present Perfect — I have walked to the shops.
6. Present Perfect Continuous — I have been walking to the shops.
7. Past Perfect — I had walked to the shops before my father arrived.
8. Past Perfect Continuous — I had been walking to the shops when my father arrived.
9. Future (will) — I will walk to the shops.
10. Future (going to) — I'm going to walk to the shops.
11. Future Continuous — I will be walking to the shops.
12. Future Perfect — I will have walked to the shops by 5pm this evening.

Remember

...before... — Signals the Past Perfect — the first of two past actions.

...when... — Signals the Past Perfect Continuous — an action interrupted by another.

4 Step 4 — Your Turn: Pick a Verb, Write All 12

Choose one simple verb (for example: cook, drive, study, clean) and write your own sentence in every tense below. Use the same verb all the way through, exactly like the model in Step 3.

1. **Present Simple:** (I do)

2. **Present Continuous:** (I'm doing)

3. **Simple Past:** (I did)

4. **Past Continuous:** (I was doing)

5. **Present Perfect:** (I have done)

6. **Present Perfect Continuous:** (I have been doing)

7. **Past Perfect:** (I had done ... before ...)

8. **Past Perfect Continuous:** (I had been doing ... when ...)

9. **Future (will):** (I will do)

10. **Future (going to):** (I'm going to do)

11. **Future Continuous:** (I will be doing)

12. **Future Perfect:** (I will have done ... by ...)

Key Expressions to Remember

PRESENT

- I do
- I'm doing
- I have done
- I have been doing

PAST

- I did
- I was doing
- I had done
- I had been doing

FUTURE

- I will do
- I'm going to do
- I will be doing
- I will have done