



Academic Writing Centre ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Definition: a single word or phrase used to express actions, conditions, and states of being

- There are 3 basic tenses: *Past*, *Present*, and *Future*.
- These tenses take 4 forms: *Simple*, *Progressive*, *Perfect*, *Perfect- Progressive*.
- *Conditional* sentences express hypothetical situations that might occur if certain conditions are met. These are known as “if...then” statements and feature *modal* verbs such as “can”, “could”, “may”, “might”, “shall”.
- The use of *active* and *passive* voice can sometimes create problems. In the former, the subject does the action; in the latter, the subject receives the action. Try to use the active voice as it is more forceful and less wordy. The passive voice is appropriate in technical writing ie. the process is more important than the agent performing it.
- Make sure that verbs *agree in number* with their subjects Eg. A pack of cigarettes costs [NOT cost] quite a lot these days.
- Pay special attention to compound subjects (verb has 2 or more subjects), indefinite pronouns (one, each, much, other, anyone, both, few) and collective nouns (a flock of birds, a troupe of dancers, packs of wolves).

VERBS & TENSE

SIMPLE

Past: to express an activity that occurred at a *specific time in the past*

Eg. As a teenager she practiced piano for six hours a day.

Present: to express 1) a *general statement/fact/truth* 2) a *habitual or recurring action* 3) a state that *exists now*

Eg. She practices piano for two hours a day.

Future: to express predictions about *future situations*

Eg. She will play the piano at the graduation ceremony tomorrow.

PROGRESSIVE

Past: to express an action in progress at a specific time in the past

Eg. She was playing piano when the doorbell rang.

Present: to express an activity that is happening right now/around this time

Eg. She is playing the piano in the living room.

Future: to express: 1) actions which will be *in progress* at some time in the future 2) future actions which are *already determined*.

Eg. By this time tomorrow, she will be playing piano at Carnegie Hall.

PERFECT

Past: to express an action/state that began in the past and was finished *before another past action*

Eg. She had already performed a sound-check when the promoter announced that the concert could not proceed for security reasons.

Present: to express 1) an action/state that began in the past and *continues in the present* 2) an action/state *in the indefinite past* 3) a *recently completed* action 4) to focus on the *result of an action* rather than the action itself

Eg. She has played the piano for most of her life.

Future: to express an action that will be completed before *another future action*

Eg. She will have practiced her scales for one hour by the time her first pupil arrives.

PERFECT-PROGRESSIVE

Past: to emphasize the *duration* of an activity/state that occurred or started before another past activity/state

Eg. She had been composing her own compositions for ten years by the time she was offered a recording contract.

Present: to emphasize 1) the duration of an activity/state that started *in the past and has continued into the present* 2) that the activity is *still incomplete* 3) to express the *emotional quality* of actions such as anger or frustration

Eg. She has been performing in front of audiences for most of her life.

Future: To express *related and/or continuous* actions

Eg. She will have been studying music for six months by then.