

The Tense Time Machine

Travel through Past, Present & Future with just one verb!

Every verb you write is a little **time machine**. Change its form, and your reader is instantly carried to *yesterday*, *right now* or *next year*. Today we learn to drive this machine like a pro.

Tense = the form of a verb that shows **WHEN** an action happens.

Aspect = the form that shows **HOW** we see the action: as a single point, in progress, completed, or continuing up to a point.

3 times × 4 aspects = 12 tense forms. That's the whole machine!

1 The Big Grid: one verb, twelve journeys

	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
Simple a fact, a habit, a single event	Riya <i>baked</i> a cake. V2	Riya <i>bakes</i> a cake. V1 / V1+s, es	Riya <i>will bake</i> a cake. will + V1
Continuous in progress	Riya <i>was baking</i> a cake. was/were + V-ing	Riya <i>is baking</i> a cake. am/is/are + V-ing	Riya <i>will be baking</i> a cake. will be + V-ing
Perfect completed before a point	Riya <i>had baked</i> a cake. had + V3	Riya <i>has baked</i> a cake. has/have + V3	Riya <i>will have baked</i> a cake. will have + V3
Perfect Continuous going on up to a point	Riya <i>had been baking</i> for an hour. had been + V-ing	Riya <i>has been baking</i> since 4 p.m. has/have been + V-ing	Riya <i>will have been baking</i> for two hours. will have been + V-ing

Did you know? Mandarin Chinese does not change its verbs for tense at all. Speakers use time words like "yesterday" or "already" instead. English, on the other hand, packs time right *inside* the verb: **bake** → **baked**. Many linguists even say English has only two true tenses by form (present and past), because "will" is a helping verb, not a verb ending!

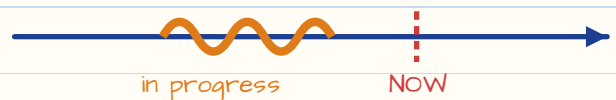
Memory trick: **V1** = base (go) · **V2** = past (went) · **V3** = past participle (gone). Perfect tenses always need **V3**!

2 See the aspects on a timeline

SIMPLE: a dot in time



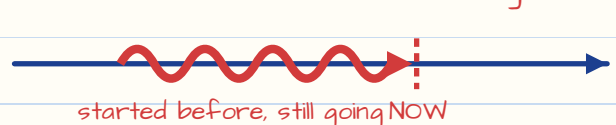
CONTINUOUS: a moving wave



PERFECT: finished, but linked to now



PERFECT CONTINUOUS: still flowing



Slide the red **NOW** line into the past (had...) or the future (will have...) and the same pictures work for all three times!

3 Signal words: the road signs of time

Tense	Look out for...	Example
Present simple	always, usually, every day, often, never	The sun rises in the east.
Present continuous	now, at the moment, Look!, Listen!	Listen! The baby is crying.
Present perfect	just, already, yet, ever, never, so far	I have just finished my homework.
Present perfect continuous	for (a period), since (a point)	It has been raining since morning.
Past simple	yesterday, ago, last week, in 2019	We visited Agra last year.
Past continuous	while, when (interrupted action)	I was reading when the lights went out.
Past perfect	before, after, by the time (two past actions)	The train had left before we reached.
Future	tomorrow, next month, soon, by 2030	By 2030, I will have finished college.

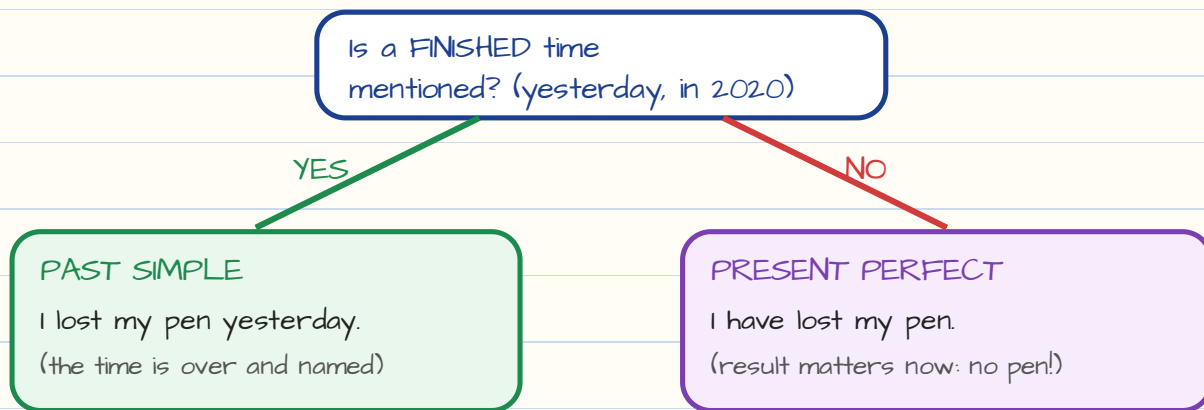
Stative verbs hate "-ing"! Verbs of feeling, thinking, owning, senses: know, believe, like, love, own, belong, seem, understand.
~~I am knowing him.~~ I know him.

FOR VS SINCE
for → a length of time (for two hours, for ten years)
since → a starting point (since Monday, since 2015)

Past perfect = the "earlier past". When two things happened in the past, the one that happened first takes had + V3:

When I reached the station, the train had left. (train left first → then I reached)

4 Past simple or present perfect? Ask one question!



5 Mistake Clinic **red pen zone**

Patient (wrong)	Cure (right)	Why?
I have seen that film last week.	I saw that film last week.	"last week" is a finished time → past simple
She is living here since 2018.	She has been living here since 2018.	began in the past + still true → perfect continuous
When I will grow up, I will be a pilot.	When I grow up, I will be a pilot.	no "will" after when / if / as soon as in time clauses
Did you went to school?	Did you go to school?	did + VI (the past is already in "did")

6 Time-Traveller's Quiz

1. By the time the guests arrived, Mum _____ (cook) dinner.
2. Look! The kite _____ (fly) over our school.
3. We _____ (know) each other for six years.
4. Water _____ (boil) at 100 °C.
5. This time next week, we _____ (travel) to Shimla.

Challenge: Write **three sentences** about your day yesterday, today and tomorrow, using a **different aspect** in each!

Golden rule: First decide **WHEN** (past/present/future), then decide **HOW** (simple, continuous, perfect, perfect continuous). Two questions → the right tense, every time.

Answers: 1. had cooked · 2. is flying · 3. have known · 4. boils · 5. will be travelling

Keep travelling through time!