

## Talking about the present

English has two main ways of talking about present time: the simple present and the present progressive.

### THE SIMPLE PRESENT

You make the simple present by using the verb in its basic form. You add **-s** or **-es** to the verb in the third person singular.

The simple present is used in the following ways:

1. You use the simple present to talk about something which is happening now, and which will continue to happen in the future. You often use the simple present in this meaning to talk about things that are true about your life, for example where you live, your job, or the kinds of things you like.

*Martin lives in Canada.*

*I work in a hospital.*

*"What kind of books do you read?" "I mostly read science fiction."*

2. You use the simple present when you talk about something which happens again and again, or when you say that something happens regularly at a particular time. Use words such as **always**, **often**, **sometimes**, **occasionally**, and **never**, or phrases such as **on Tuesdays** or **every day** with the simple present in this meaning.

*They often go out to restaurants.*

*I travel to London twice a month.*

*He gets up at 6 o'clock.*

*She goes to church every Sunday.*

3. You use the simple present to talk about something which stays the same for ever - such as a scientific fact.

*Oil floats on water.*

*Two and two make four.*

4. You use the simple present when you are describing what is happening at the exact moment when you are speaking. This meaning of the simple present is used for example in sports commentaries.

*Shearer gets the ball from Gascoigne. He shoots - and scores!*

! For descriptions of actions that are happening now, you usually use the present progressive rather than the present simple. For example:

*"What are you doing?" "I'm making a poster." NOT "What do you do?" "I make a poster."*

### THE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

You make the present progressive by using a form of the verb **be** in the present tense, followed by the main verb with an **-ing** ending, for example **I am waiting**, **she is coming**.

The present progressive is used in the following ways:

1. You use the present progressive to talk about something which is happening now at the time you are speaking or writing. You often use this meaning with words and phrases that express present time, such as **now**, **at the moment**, and **currently**.

*"What's Bob doing?" "He's watching television."*

*It's raining again.*

*I'm looking for my glasses.*

2. You use the present progressive to say that something is happening now, but will only continue for a limited period of time. Compare these pairs of sentences:

*We live in France.* (= "France" is our permanent home)

*We're living in France.* (= "we" are living there for a limited period of time)

*He cooks his own meals.* (= "he" always does it)

*He's cooking his own meals.* (= "he" does not usually do it)

If you want to talk about the subjects you are studying at school or university, you usually use the present progressive.

*She's studying law at Harvard.* **NOT** *She studies law at Harvard.*

*I'm studying English.* **NOT** *I study English.*

## VERBS THAT CANNOT BE USED IN THE PROGRESSIVE

Verbs which express a situation or process, rather than describing a definite action, are not usually used in the progressive. Do not use the progressive with the following verbs:

<b>be</b>	<b>have</b>	<b>see</b>
<b>believe</b>	<b>like</b>	<b>agree</b>
<b>know</b>	<b>love</b>	<b>disagree</b>
<b>recognize</b>	<b>hate</b>	<b>mean</b>
<b>remember</b>	<b>prefer</b>	<b>need</b>
<b>understand</b>	<b>want</b>	<b>deserve</b>
<b>wish</b>	<b>belong</b>	

*I know the answer.* **NOT** *I am knowing the answer.*

*She understands me.* **NOT** *She is understanding me.*

## Talking about the Past

There are several ways of talking about actions that happened in the past. These include the simple past, the past progressive, the present perfect, the past perfect, and the phrase **used to**.

### THE SIMPLE PAST

You usually make the simple past by adding **-ed** to the end of the verb. For example:

*I walk* → *I walked*  
*we wait* → *we waited*  
*they jump* → *they jumped*

Many common verbs have irregular simple past forms, and so you have to use a special ending, or change the verb in some other way. For example:

*I go* → *I went*  
*we buy* → *we bought*  
*they see* → *they saw*

You use the simple past to talk about an action which happened and finished in the past. There is a space between the time when the action happened, and the time when you are speaking or writing about it.

*He kicked the ball into the net.*  
*I went home early because I had a headache.*  
*The police found a dead body in the river.*

You often use words or phrases such as **at midnight**, **on Tuesday**, **in 1992**, **yesterday**, and **last year** with the simple past, to draw attention to the time when something happened. For example:

*Our visitors arrived yesterday.*  
*Where did you go last week?*  
*The war ended in 1945.*

### THE PAST PROGRESSIVE

You make the past progressive by using **was** or **were**, followed by the main verb with an **-ing** ending, for example **I was looking**, **they were laughing**.

The past progressive is used in the following ways:

**1.** You use the past progressive when you want to talk about something that happened in the past, and continued to happen for only a limited period of time.

*We were living in France at that time.*  
*I was trying to get the waiter's attention.*  
*The man was looking at me in a very strange way.*

**2.** You use the past progressive to talk about something which continued to happen for a period of time, during which another thing happened.

*I was watching TV when the phone rang.  
They met each other while they were staying in London.*

**!** Some verbs are not usually used in the progressive. Don't say, 'I was not believing him'. Say **I did not believe him**.

Do not use the progressive with the following verbs:

<b>be</b>	<b>have</b>	<b>see</b>
<b>believe</b>	<b>like</b>	<b>agree</b>
<b>know</b>	<b>love</b>	<b>disagree</b>
<b>recognize</b>	<b>hate</b>	<b>mean</b>
<b>remember</b>	<b>prefer</b>	<b>need</b>
<b>understand</b>	<b>want</b>	<b>deserve</b>
<b>wish</b>	<b>belong</b>	

## THE PRESENT PERFECT

You make the present perfect by using **has** or **have**, followed by the 'past participle' form of the main verb, for example **I have walked, she has gone, they have seen**.

The present perfect is used in the following ways:

1. You use the present perfect to talk about something that happened in the past and is finished, but which still affects the situation now.

*Someone has broken the window.* (RESULT NOW: it is still broken, and needs to be mended)  
*The taxi has arrived.* (RESULT NOW: someone needs to go and get into the taxi)  
*Jane's hurt her hand, so she can't write.* (RESULT NOW: Jane can't write)

You often use **just** and **recently** with the present perfect in this meaning.

*Jane's just left, but you might catch her in the car park.*

In American English, people often use the simple past instead of the present perfect in this sense.

### British English

*I've just seen Carol.  
You've already told me that.  
Have they come home yet?*

### American English

*I just saw Carol.  
You already told me that.  
Did they come home yet?*

2. You use the present perfect to say that something started to happen in the past, and has continued to happen up to now. There is a clear difference with the past tense, which you use when the action is finished. Compare these sentences:

present perfect: *I have lived in Chicago for many years.* (=I still live there now)  
simple past: *I lived in Chicago for many years.* (= "now" I live somewhere else)

present perfect: *Jim has worked for us since 1992.* (= "he" still works for us now)  
simple past: *Jim worked for us from 1992 to 1996.* (= "he" does not work for us any more)



<b>believe</b>	<b>like</b>	<b>agree</b>
<b>know</b>	<b>love</b>	<b>disagree</b>
<b>recognize</b>	<b>hate</b>	<b>mean</b>
<b>remember</b>	<b>prefer</b>	<b>need</b>
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## THE PAST PERFECT

If you want to talk about a past action which took place before another past action, you can use **had**, followed by the past participle of the main verb.

*After the visitors had left, we watched TV.  
They told me that the taxi had already arrived*

You can also use the past perfect in a 'progressive' form by using **had been**, and putting it in front of a main verb with an **-ing** ending.

*We had only been driving for an hour when the car ran out of petrol.*

## Using the right time phrases with the past tense

If you use words or phrases about time with the simple past, they must have a meaning which shows there has been a space between the time when the action or event happened and the time when you are talking or writing about it. For example:

*I saw John yesterday/a week ago/last Tuesday.*

If you use other words or phrases about time with the present perfect, they must have a meaning which shows that the action has continued up to the present, and may still be going on. For example:

*I haven't seen John since Monday/so far/yet.*

**!** Don't say 'I've seen him a week ago' or 'I didn't see John since Monday'.

## USED TO

You use **used to** when you want to say that something happened in the past over a period of time, but it no longer happens now. It is found only in the past tense. You use **used to** with the basic form of the main verb, for example **used to smoke**, **used to live**, **used to be**.

*I used to play football a lot when I was at school.  
She used to smoke 40 cigarettes a day.  
The club used to be very fashionable.  
They used to live in Los Angeles.*

In negatives, you say **didn't use to**, or **used not to**.

*I didn't use to like spicy food. OR I used not to like spicy food.*

In questions, you say **did (you/she/john etc) use to ... ?**

*Did you use to smoke?*

*What did she use to call him?*

## Talking about the future

There are several ways of talking about the future in English.

### THE FUTURE WITH 'WILL'

You put the verb **will** in front of the main verb. This is the most common way of expressing future time. The short form of **will** is **'ll** and the short form of **will not** is **won't**. You usually use these in spoken English instead of **will** or **will not**. The main verb can be either in its 'simple' form or in its 'progressive' form. For example:

*I will talk to them.*

*We'll have a break at six o'clock.*

*I'll talk to them.*

*He'll be arriving later.*

*Don't worry - I won't break it.*

You use **will** in this meaning in sentences that begin **I'm sure, I think, I expect, I suppose, I doubt** etc, or with words such as **probably, perhaps, certainly** etc.

*"Do you think Carla will pass her test?" "Yes, I'm sure she will."*

*I'll see him again soon.*

*They say it'll probably snow tomorrow.*

*Perhaps things will be better next week.*

### THE FUTURE WITH 'SHALL'

In British English, you often use **shall** in questions when making suggestions about what to do, or when discussing what to do. This use is rare in American English.

*Shall we go now?*

*What shall I tell Mike?*

In formal British English, you can sometimes hear **I shall** used to express future time.

*I shall try to persuade them.*

This is very rare in American English.

### THE FUTURE WITH 'BE GOING TO'

You use a form of **be going to** to say that something will happen soon.

*It's going to rain.*

*Watch out - you're going to hit that tree!*

*I think I'm going to be sick.*

You also use a form of **be going to** to talk about someone's intentions, or what they have decided to do.

*I'm going to ask for my money back.*

*Lucy is going to travel round the world when she leaves school.*

## THE FUTURE WITH 'BE ABOUT TO'

You use **be about to** to say that something will happen almost immediately.

*Take your seats, please. The show is about to begin.  
I was about to go out when the phone rang.*

## THE FUTURE WITH THE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

You use the present progressive (**he's leaving, they're starting** etc) with a word or phrase expressing future time to talk about something that will happen because you have planned or arranged it.

*We're leaving on Saturday morning.  
I'm having a party next week - do you want to come?*

## THE FUTURE WITH THE SIMPLE PRESENT

You use the simple present (it starts, we arrive etc) with a word or phrase expressing future time, to say that something will definitely happen at a particular time, especially because it has been officially arranged.

*The next plane to Los Angeles leaves at 6:25.  
The meeting is on Thursday.  
What time does the show start?*

You use the simple present in subordinate clauses to talk about the future, for example in clauses that begin with **when, if, unless, before, after, and as soon as**. Don't use **will** in this kind of clause.

*I'll call you when I get back. NOT I'll call you when I will get back.  
If the bus leaves now, it will get there by 6. NOT If the bus will leave now, it will get there by 6.*