

Tense

Main article: [English verb#Tenses](#)

Changes in tense in English are achieved by the changes in ending and the use of [auxiliary verbs](#) "to be" and "to have" and the use of the auxiliaries "will", "shall" and "would". (These auxiliaries cannot co-occur with other modals like *can*, *may*, and *must*.) The examples below use the regular verb to listen:

- Present tenses
 - Simple present (or simply "present"): "I listen." This tense typically expresses habitual actions. Rarely, it is used to refer to present time in reportative style speech.
 - Present continuous (or "present progressive"): "I am listening." This tense expresses actions in the present taking place as the speaker is speaking or in the future.
 - Present perfect: "I have listened." This tense expresses actions that began in the past but are still true in the present: "I have known her for six years" (and I still know her). This is also used to express a completed action that took place at a non-specific moment in the past. This tense often expresses actions that happen in the past, yet cannot be considered a past tense because it always has a connection to the present.
 - Present perfect continuous: "I have been listening." This is used to express that an event started at some time in the past and continuing to the present.
 - All forms of the present tense are often used in place of their future-tense counterparts. In particular, various kinds of [subordinate clauses](#) — especially *if* and *when* clauses — cannot generally use the future tense, so the present tense is used instead.
- Past tenses
 - Simple past: "I listened." This is used to express a completed action that took place at a specific moment in the past. (Confusingly, in US English, the simple past may sometimes be used for a non-specific moment in the past).
 - Past continuous (otherwise known as the imperfect or past progressive): "I was listening." This is used to express an incomplete action in the past. (Thus an "imperfect" action, as opposed to a completed and therefore "perfect" action.)
 - Past perfect or pluperfect: "I had listened." This expresses an action completed before some other action in the past (often expressed by the simple past). The pluperfect is thus expressing an action *even more* in the past e.g. "He realised *he had lost his way*", "I was going to town because *he had spoken* to me".
 - Past perfect continuous or simply "perfect continuous": "I had been listening." Usually used with an explicit duration, this indicates that an event was ongoing for a specific time, e.g. "When Peter entered my room, I had been listening to music for half an hour."

- **Future tenses**
 - **Simple future: "I shall/will listen."** This is used to express that an event will occur in the future, or that the speaker intends to perform some action.
 - **Future continuous: "I shall/will be listening."** This is used to express an ongoing event that has not yet been initiated.
 - **Future perfect: "I shall/will have listened."** This indicates an action which will occur before some other action in the future: Normally two actions are expressed, and the future perfect indicates an action which will occur in the future but will, at the time of the main future action expressed, be in the past (e.g. "I will know the tune next week because I will have listened to it").
 - **Future perfect continuous or future imperfect: "I shall/will have been listening."** Expresses an ongoing action that occurs in the future, before some other event expressed in the future.
 - **"I am going to listen"** is a construction using "to go" as an auxiliary. It is referred to as **going to future**, futur proche or immediate future, and has the same sense as the simple future, sometimes with an implication of immediacy. It is not strictly a tense, and "to go" is not strictly a tense auxiliary verb, but this construction often is presented as a tense for simplicity. By varying the tense of the auxiliary "to go", various other meanings can be achieved, e.g. "I am going to be listening" (future continuous), and "I was going to listen" (conditional perfect continuous).

- **Conditional tenses**
 - **Present conditional or simply conditional: "I would listen."** This is used to express an event that occurred multiple times or was ongoing in the past (i.e. When I was younger, I would listen. [multiple times]), or something that would be done now or in the future when predicated upon another condition (i.e. "If I had the time, I would listen to you." [This condition could be known from context and omitted from the conditional statement.])
 - **Present continuous conditional: "I would be listening."** This is used to express an ongoing event that had not yet been initiated.
 - **Conditional perfect: "I would have listened."** Indicates that an action would occur after some other event.
 - **Conditional perfect continuous: "I would have been listening":** Expresses an ongoing action that would occur in the future in the past, after some other event.

Auxiliary verbs may be used to define tense, aspect, or mood of a verb phrase.

As mentioned above "**going to**" is used for some future pseudo-tenses:

Forms of "do" are used for some negatives, questions and emphasis of the simple present and simple past:

1. "Do I listen?" "I do not listen." "I do listen!"
2. "Did I listen?" "I did not listen." "I did listen!"

Verb tense chart

Main article: [Grammatical aspect](#)

English verb tenses can be better visualized in the following chart, which shows the times of the English language and its three aspects, namely Prior, Complete and Incomplete. Note that this chart only represents actions truly happening, be it present, past or future. Since unreal conditionals are obviously assumptions, conditional structures with 'would' are not included here.

	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
PRIOR ASPECT	Past Perfect	Present Perfect	Future Perfect
COMPLETE ASPECT	Simple Past	Simple Present	Simple Future
INCOMPLETE ASPECT	Past Continuous	Present Continuous	Future Continuous

Voice

Main article: [English passive voice](#)

English has two voices for verbs: the active and the passive. The basic form is the active verb, and follows the SVO pattern discussed above. The passive voice is derived from the active by using the auxiliary verb "to be" and the *-en* form of the main verb.

Examples of the passive:

Passive voice	Active voice
I am seen by John	<i>John sees me</i>
You will be struck by John	<i>John will strike you</i>
It was stolen by John	<i>John stole it</i>
We were carried by John	<i>John carried us</i>
They have been chosen by John	<i>John has chosen them</i>

Furthermore, the [agent](#) and [patient](#) switch grammatical roles between active and passive voices so that in passive the patient is the subject, and the agent is noted in an optional prepositional phrase using *by*, for example:

1. active: *I heard the music.*
2. passive: *The music was heard (by me).* (Note: *me*, not *I*)

The passive form of the verb is formed by replacing the verb with *to be* in the same tense and aspect, and appending the *-en* form of the original verb. Thus:

Tense	Active voice	The same sense, expressed with the passive voice
Simple present	<i>I hear the music.</i>	<i>The music is heard by me.</i>

Present progressive	<i>I am hearing the music.</i>	<i>The music is being heard by me.</i>
Past progressive	<i>I was hearing the music.</i>	<i>The music was being heard by me.</i>
Past perfect	<i>I had heard the music.</i>	<i>The music had been heard by me.</i>
Simple future	<i>I will hear the music.</i>	<i>The music will be heard by me.</i>

This pattern continues through all the composite tenses as well. The semantic effect of the change from active to passive is the depersonalisation of an action. It is also occasionally used to topicalize the direct object of a sentence, or when the agent is either unknown or unimportant even when included, thus:

1. The plane was shot down.
2. Dozens were killed.
3. Bill was run over by a bus.

Many writing style guides including [Strunk and White](#) recommend minimizing use of the passive voice in English; however, many others do not.

There is a third 'voice' in English, related to the classic "middle" voice. In this, the patient becomes the subject, as in passive, but the verb remains in apparently active voice, no agent can plausibly be supplied, and generally, an adverbial modifies the entire construction. Thus:

1. She does not frighten easily.
2. This bread slices poorly.
3. His novels sell well.