

Tenses

PRESENT SIMPLE (I do)

Main uses:

1. Repeated events, eg, 'I get up early'.
2. General facts, eg, 'Ice melts at zero degrees'.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS (I am doing)

Main uses:

1. Referring to something which has begun and is not finished.

Used when the action is taking place for a limited period of time, which includes the moment of speaking, eg, 'He's sleeping'.

But may also be used with events which are repeated or intermittent in a **FIXED SPACE OF TIME**, and not necessarily happening at the moment of speaking, eg, 'I'm getting up early this week'.

2. It may also be used in a future tense form, eg, 'I'm playing football this afternoon.'

PAST SIMPLE (I did)

Main use:

When the event took place within a finished period of time, eg, 'I rode my horse yesterday'.

PAST CONTINUOUS (I was doing)

Main uses:

1. Actions which began before a particular point in the past and are still in progress after that point, eg, 'I was still working at 6 o' clock and I continued to work after that point'.
2. We can also use past continuous when the action stopped at a key point in the past (interrupted past continuous), eg, 'He was working at his computer when the power cut occurred'.

PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS (I have been doing)

PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE (I have done)

Main use of both tenses:

To measure the duration so far of a present action or to specify when it began, eg, 'We've been driving for hours' / 'We've driven for hours'.

You may find that present perfect continuous and present perfect simple are fairly interchangeable, and it is quite subjective when we use either tense (i.e. it is up to the author). The following is a table suggesting how to choose between these tenses, but, apart from the final clause, these should be used as a useful guide rather than strict rules.

	PRESENT PERFECT	
	CONTINUOUS	SIMPLE
EXPRESSES DURATION UNTIL NOW	X	X
FREQUENTLY USED WITH EXPRESSIONS BEGINNING 'FOR', 'SINCE', 'HOW LONG'	X	X
EMPHASISES SOMETHING IS SHORT LIVED	X	EG. I HAVE BEEN WORKING HERE FOR A FEW DAYS / I HAVE WORKED HERE ALL MY LIFE.

EMPHASISES SOMETHING IS REPEATED	X	EG. I HAVE BEEN USING THE SWIMMING POOL SINCE I MOVED HERE.
SUGGESTS A LIMITED NO OF OCCASSIONS	X	EG. I HAVE USED THE SWIMMING POOL SINCE I MOVED HERE.
USED AFTER 'FIRST / SECOND TIME', ETC.	X	EG. IS THIS THE FIRST TIME YOU HAVE FLOWN.

PAST PERFECT SIMPLE

Main use:

We use the past perfect simple when we want to draw attention to the fact that something took place and finished before something else in the past, eg, 'It had stopped raining so they didn't bother to put the car away'.

It clarifies the order of events more than the past simple tense, so we use the tense more with the conjunction 'when' than 'before' and 'after', eg, 'They had finished eating when I got there', but 'They finished eating before I got there'.

Notice how the author uses 'had' in the following passage to emphasise how some events came before the event which is now taking place in the story. Once the author has used 'had' sufficiently in her list to make the order of events clear, she can change to the past simple, making her writing style more varied.

'The street sign at the entrance to the Close had lost five black metal letters. HELL.....CLOSE it now read. The queen thought, 'Yes, it is hell, because I've never seen anything like it in the whole of my waking life'. She had visited many council estates - had opened community centres, had driven through the bunting and the cheering crowds, alighted from the car, walked on red carpets, been greeted by tongue-tied dignitaries, pulled a cord, revealed a plaque, signed the visitors book.'

PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS

Main use:

When we are concerned with an extended or repeated event or activity which took place before a particular point in the past.

Sometimes the event or activity stops at the specified point of time, eg, 'He'd been driving without a break for several hours when the accident happened'.

Sometimes this event or activity continues beyond the specified point of time, eg, 'The family had been living in the house for years before they noticed the bulge in the wall' (and they still continued to live in the house after they had noticed it).

It is often used with 'for' or 'since' to measure how long an activity lasted.

Prepositions

Places

On/In can be used interchangeably when describing where something is when speaking about a specific street, square or crossroads.

Eg. The market is on/in the Old Town Square.

The bus stop is on/in Medomsley Road.

In is used to suggest that something is in a more general location.

Eg. The university is in Prague. But never, The university is on Edinburgh.

At is used when someone has gone to a specific place. We also usually use *at* with places of education, eg, at school, at college, at university.

Times

In is more general than *at*. We use it to measure a period of time, eg. *in 10 minutes, in 3 hours*.

In is used with general time periods such as morning, afternoon, evening, and the months of the year.

We also use *in* with general observations about time: *in a while*, and, more colloquially, *in a bit*.

We use *in* with 'the end' and 'the beginning' when there is no specific time or event given, eg. I think she enjoyed it in the end.

(Conversely, we normally use *in* with 'the middle' even when we specify a time or event, eg. He was bored in the middle of the play.)

At is used with more specific time than *in*. We use it with precise times, eg. *at 5 o' clock, at 6pm*.

We use *at* with 'the end' and 'the beginning' when we specify a particular event or time, eg. There was a test at the end of today's lesson, There was a loud noise at the beginning of the speech.

Similarly, if we are being slightly more specific with general time periods we also use *at*, eg. at the end of the afternoon, at dawn, at twilight, at the beginning of August.

On: while *at* usually accompanies a slightly more specific time frame, *on* is used with absolutely precise dates or days, eg. *on Christmas day, on 31st August, on Easter Sunday* (but *in Easter* as Easter lasts for a whole week).

We can also use *on* with the expression 'on the hour', so 'The bus departs on the hour'.

The difference between *by* and *till* (formal) / *until* (informal).

By should be used when we suggest that something must happen before a specific point of time. This event will probably happen only once. Hence, *by* often goes with the phrase 'at the latest' and may be substituted with such phrases as 'no later than'.

Eg. You must hand in your homework by Thursday.

Please send in the application form by the 7th November at the latest.

In contrast *till* and *until* are used with activities which take place over a continuous period of time.

Eg. I was waiting for you until/till 5 o' clock.

I was doing my homework till/until 2am.

The difference therefore lies in the continuity of an action; you must only hand in your homework once by Thursday, but if you were doing your homework *until* 10pm you were doing it continuously from a certain point onwards.

Other Points to Remember

- If a person is 'behind a door' then they are usually in hiding waiting to leap out at you. If people come to see you it is more polite to 'knock on the door' or 'at the door'. Nb. You may say that somebody is 'at the door', but you cannot say somebody is 'on the door', it must be accompanied by the word knocking, tapping or rapping.
- If boats are 'in a river' then they are sinking in UK English, it is far better to say that they are 'on the river'.
- In English, people don't lie 'under the sun', nor 'on the sun' (as this would be very dangerous), people lie 'in the sun'.
- If people study 'in Oxford' this is far less specific than if they study 'at Oxford'. If they study 'in Oxford' they could study anything anywhere in Oxford, if they study 'at Oxford' they are at Oxford University. The same works for all the university towns in Britain, unless a university has a name different to that of the town they are situated in.

Ing/Infinitive

The Infinitive

The infinitive looks exactly like the base form of the verb. If the infinitive follows to, then we sometimes call this the full infinitive.

When do we use the infinitive?

1. After certain adjectives, when describing personal feelings or attitude (eg. anxious, determined, eager, decided).
Eg. I'm sorry to be such a nuisance.
2. After certain noun expressions that describe personal feelings or attitudes (eg. desire, wish).
Eg. I have no desire to hurt you.
3. After certain adjectives when we are using aspects of probability (eg. certain, possible), necessity (eg. necessary) or ability (eg. difficult, easy).
Eg. Is it necessary to make such a noise?
4. After certain noun expressions that describe aspects of probability (eg. possibility, ability).
Eg. There's a great need to improve your English.
5. After a direct object we use infinitives to explain the reason for something or to answer the question 'Why?'
Eg. He borrowed the drill to put up more shelves.
6. After a direct object we also use the infinitive to explain the purpose or function of something.
Eg. I think it must be something to eat.
I need a more substantial table to work at.
(The direct objects in examples 6 and 7 are **drill, something** and **a more substantial table.**)
7. After too + adjective / much or many + noun.
Eg. I'm too old to learn new tricks. (Too + adjective)
There is too much information to digest. (Too + much or many + noun)
8. We usually use the infinitive after expressions of frequency (ie. 'the first person, 'the second man, 'the last place, 'the only'.

-Ing forms.

1. We use the -ing form after certain verbs, the following are some common examples:

avoid, bear, consider, deny, detest, dislike, endure, enjoy, imagine, involve, mention, mind, miss, practise, resent, risk, postpone, stand.

We can also use the -ing form with multi-word verbs:

Give up, look forward to, put off, put up with.

2. When we use a verb after a preposition this has to be an -ing form.
3. We usually use an -ing form when we want to make an activity the subject of a sentence.
Eg. Grumbling is a waste of time.
Lying is sure to get you into trouble.
4. We usually use an -ing form when make a list of activities:
Eg. The following are completely forbidden on school premises:
Spitting
Pushing and shoving
Running in the corridors
Shouting
5. We use -ing when constructing continuous or progressive tense forms.

The Difference Between the Gerund and the Present Participle.

Where the -ing form can be replaced in the sentence by a noun it is a gerund.

Gerund
He likes singing.

Nouns
He likes music.